Australians at War Film Archive

Thomas Wilson (Tom) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Life in a nutshell so to speak?**

Okay. I was born in Crookwell, that's a small town in New South Wales, about twenty-eight miles in them days from Goulburn, and it had a population of about three thousand. I went to the

01:00 public school, started school at the age of six, went to the public school. We moved to, after my father joined the army in 1941, we moved to Goulburn and I attended the Bourke Street Primary School and then to high school. By the time my father got killed, so we was, all had to work, pitch in and …. I then got,

01:30 after I finished school, I got a job at the produce store and it was lumping around hundred and eighty pound bags of wheat and things. I then got sick of that and I went shearing for a while, and my brother also, we went shearing and, I come back from there and by then national service was coming in, so I decided that I wasn't going to wait to

02:00 be put in the army, I wanted to get in the air force, so I joined up in 1952. And first posting was to Darwin to repair all the bomb damage after the war with a works party, from Darwin I was posted to Canberra, from Canberra I was attached to, I was posted to base squadron in Canberra and then from there I was attached to 87 Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron, who was photographing, aerial photographing Australia.

02:30 I returned back to Canberra and I got in a bit of trouble there, in fights and things, and they got rid of me, so they posted me to ACS [Airfield Construction Squadron] and then I went to Number 2 ACS at Townsville. First of all they posted me to Manas Island but Manas Island was finishing so they changed my orders while I was on leave and they sent me to Townsville. I was at Townsville for about eight months and then we embarked for Malaya. I spent

03:00 three years in Malaya and came back from Malaya to East Sale in Victoria, from Sale to Williamtown, building more runways, from Williamtown back to Sale, from Sale to Darwin again. And from Darwin I went to Tindal and finished up at Learmonth and they disbanded, decided they were disbanding

03:30 the squadron at Learmonth. So I went to Perth, I elected discharge at Perth, and I still had four years to go if I wanted to and I was work supervisor, so I could pick virtually any major base I wanted to go to, so I was going to go to Brisbane, but they got flooded in '74, when I was getting out, so I decided to settle in Perth, and I was discharged on the 30th of June, 1974.

04:00 **Excellent, so Thomas, what is your earliest memory as a child?**

My earliest memory as a child was that we used to, there was nine of us in my family and that wasn't a real large family for, as far as families went then, because we had a couple round us with fourteen, thirteen, fourteen. And in the house we was in, it was only a three bedroom one,

04:30 and the kitchen and everything else was combined, everything else was done in the kitchen. Now, it was only, two beds in this house for the lot of us, so there was four boys and five girls. And, the two of the boys slept down the bottom and three of them up the top, and two of them up the top, and the same with the girls, all in the one bed, you know. And we didn't have a stove, we had a

05:00 open fire, everything was done on the open fire then, with a big pot across it. And the ironing was just basic, irons of cast iron that they used to put on the hobs and heat it up, and they had two and they'd heat one up and then you have to use a glove to pick them off because they had steel handles. And they'd wet their finger and touch under the iron to see if it was hot enough, and the women was pretty good at it.

05:30 And then Mum would start ironing and when one of them started to get a bit cool, she'd pick up the other one and put the other one back on the fire. And we used to go to orchards and we, we were surrounded by orchards and things, and I remember when I started school at six, I hadn't worn shoes

until I was six and I hated school because I had to put boots on. And my feet was that tough from running around I could walk on

06:00 glass without cutting them. And I remember when I went to school and the war started and I used to hear people talking, saying, “The guns are firing over the other side,” and things like that, so, and I used to leave school and, instead of heading home, I used to head right out so I could hear these guns and see them, you know I thought they was just over the next hill or something. And after walking about five miles, they’re not there, I don’t know.

Can I just get you to tell us about the beds in the house,

06:30 **what else can you tell us about the house you were in?**

Well we was in, it was always rented, we was in quite a few houses and they was all small but the house had, we had no lights, no electric lights, it was lit by, in the main, the main kitchen room, there was a kitchen dining area, there was a big glass lamp that was lit, lantern. And,

07:00 all the bedrooms, we used candles, and the house, there was no water laid on, we used to get the water from a well, the well was about twenty feet deep and it had a windlass that you’d wind down and up, throw the bucket down and wind it up into the well. Our only refrigeration, we had a meat safe, which we called a meat safe, hanging up outside and it was, had all perforated doors and sides

07:30 in it and everything, and it was covered in Hessian and there was a water bag up the top used to drip on it to keep things, and it used to keep things really cool. We had one cow and we used to milk that every day and us kids had to take it in turns to take it down to the common to where they used to take their cows and Mum, we had a separating machine out in the shed and Mum would make her own butter and everything like that.

08:00 Baked her own bread, and in them days people delivered everything, you had bread delivered and you had, people used to come around, hawkers we used to call them, and they’d have the Rawley’s man with all the medicines and things and then other people would come around delivering biscuits and a pot and pan tinker man would come around to repair all your pots and pans and things like that. So when we went,

08:30 when we’d go to school and that, there was no sewerage in the whole place. Mind you, the night cart used to come round twice a week and we used to reckon that was dreadful and the toilet was a mile down the backyard you know. And they used to get all the newspapers and cut them up into squares for toilet paper, poke a hole through it in the corner, tie a bit of string to it, and tie it to the side of the toilet and that was your toilet paper. And,

09:00 actually, we weren’t, we only got three pieces of bread, this is just after the Depression, and all we lived on for ages was just three pieces of bread each a day, and we’d never have any meat or anything, and three pieces of bread and syrup, golden syrup, it used to come in a seven pound tin of syrup. And so we was constantly hungry and what, myself and my sister, we’d go up the road and eat

09:30 the gravel off the road and I only found out later that the reason why we did was because we was lacking in minerals, you know, we didn’t realise it at that time, that we used to eat this gravel. And …

You were so hungry you’d eat gravel?

Yeah, we’d eat the gravel off the side of the road. And, they said, later on I was told that, “It was because of a mineral deficiency that you had this craving for this gravel,” you know,

10:00 and we was getting our minerals from this gravel.

Did it keep you regular?

Yeah, well I don’t remember actually, we didn’t have much to be regular with. So we used to go up and raid all the orchards around the place and bring back all the dams [damsons] and some things for Mum to make jam. And Dad, at that time, was working on the council, and

10:30 we used to go out and roam for miles around about the place and me and my friends, a couple of friends, we went out this day and up this orchard and this magpie kept swooping me and I said to one of my friend, he had a .22 rifle, we used to all have rifles, and I said, “Fire a shot and keep that magpie away.” So he fired a shot and it hit the branch of a tree and ricocheted and hit me fair up the backside. So by the time I

11:00 got home, Dad was home, and I come in and I had blood streaming down everywhere and he said, “What’s the matter boy?” and I said, “Oh me mate shot me,” and he said, “Give us a look.” And so he had a look and said, “Oh that’s not too bad, it’s only in there a couple of inches, jump up on the table.” So I jumped up on the table, “Roll over on your stomach.” He went over and got out his skinning knife and he held it in the flames of the fire to sterilise it and he come back

11:30 and dug the bullet out. And I’ll tell you what, the bullet didn’t hurt too much when he shot me but by jeez it hurt coming out again. “There you are,” he said, and Mum give it a bit of a bathe and I was right then for two days, I still got a big scar there from his knife. And, so we had a pretty happy childhood even though it was pretty austere and that, we, I don’t remember being unhappy and that.

Besides raiding the orchards, what else

12:00 **would you do for entertainment with your mates?**

Oh, we used to get down the river, build our own canoes, get down the river, and these little canoes, we'd seal them up, we'd build them out of corrugated iron and we'd put a bit of timber in the front, the front and the back of it, and we'd seal it up with bitumen. And, with our one cow, and we used to take

12:30 it down to the common and sometimes there was a lot of clover at the common and cows them days, if they ate too much of this clover they used to get bloated and they'd end up killing them, you know, and we brought the cow home this day and it had, it was bloated, and Dad and a friend got the cow out and laid it down, well it could hardly get up anyway, and he got his knife out and he, they knew exactly where to put it, exactly between their ribs, and let all the air out.

13:00 Then they put, they'd get a stick, a long stick with a rap, a rag around it and dip it in what they called Stockholm tar and then they jam it down the cows throat and next day it was up running around and alright again, you know, so everything was pretty much that blasé them days, oh well, you know. So, but all of us, all of us kids, and when I went to school,

13:30 I wasn't too happy about having to go to school, and they had a classroom, a mixed classroom, when I first started going to school and it had four rows of children and it had them categorised, A, B, C and D and all the top students was in the A, from the front to the rear, and I was in the D. So, there was a little, I was

14:00 about eight at the time and I was really smitten on this young girl that used to live up the road from me and she was in the A class. And so I determined that I was going to get sitting next to her, so in one month I went from D straight up to A class, I worked my way up, and I won the prize for the most advanced student that year. And I finally ended up, we used to walk home hand in hand and we'd make sure no one, none of me mates could see me.

How far was school from home?

14:30 About, originally, when we was in the first house, it was about five mile and, some of the, some of the kids there, four of them on a horse and they'd swim it across the river to get to school. And we was about four or five mile and we'd walk to school every morning. And take a month of time to get home again in the afternoon, we'd have to go through the sale yards and have a look at this and a poke and prod at that.

15:00 And, then, later on when we moved to North Crookwell, even then when I thought it was still about a couple of miles, still thought it was, when I actually went back to Crookwell when I'd grown up, it was only about one mile to this school, anyway this last one we was back but it just felt as kids, you know, it was a lot further.

And what was Crookwell town itself, what did it, that basically consist of?

Crookwell was a farming town,

15:30 It's sheep and, my parents are, were born in Weo [Wee Waa], which is another smaller town. My grand-, I think I'm about the sixth or seventh generation Australian, they come out here as early settlers and settled around the Weo area. All Mum's people were Nolans and Hewitts and all, and she was Irish. And all Dad's people were Scotch,

16:00 from Edinburgh, and when they, when we used to go out to Weo, fairly regular because his mother still lived out there, my father's mother, my grandmother, she still lived out there and she had a property there. And, but the Crookwell and Weo district was mainly sheep and Crookwell used to grow a hell of a lot of potatoes, you know it was probably the leading potato grower

16:30 in the state of New South Wales at the time, but most of the people, most of the things was farms. I think about the only work in town was on the council, the local council and things like that, and when we'd go to school, about twice a week we was given a penny and that was a real treat and we'd go along then for lunch, we'd buy lunch and we'd buy, all the shops had them big, big square biscuit tins, and you'd ask for a penny's worth of broken biscuits,

17:00 and at the bottom the tin, when they'd all used it, there was all these broken, so they'd give you a bag full of these broken biscuits and that was a real treat for us. But the people and everyone knew everyone in the town, you know. And everyone got on well with their neighbours, and if anyone, anyone was, in the family was ill at all, well all the rest of neighbours was there to help out and … Although I don't ever remember Mum being ill but,

17:30 and Dad was on the council, when he come back from the war he intended to buy a truck and he was sending all his deferred pay home for this truck, but when he got home his mother had spent it all, so no truck, so he had to go working on the council again.

What can you tell us about your dad?

He was, he joined up in 1916, he and

18:00 Clyde, my father's number was 2005 and his brother's was 2004 and they joined up together and they went away together. They first of all they went, they were sent to Egypt and they spent about six months in Egypt and they was transferred to the western front in France. They, in 1917,

18:30 Clyde, in the battle of, one of the, in one of the battles for the Hindenburg line there, he got shot through the side and out through his back and so he was repatriated to England and where he was in hospital there for about four months or so. They sent him back to the front again, after he was right, he was only back a month

19:00 and they was in the 2nd Division, in the 19th Battalion, and they were to go into action on the third battle of Ypres, and he'd only been out of hospital a bit, maybe three weeks, and he got killed. He, they went to, they sent a group of them, about ten or twelve of them, out to man a strong point and it was on, named Anzac Bridge, and they sent them

19:30 up to, it was overlooking the whole battlefield, and they sent them up there as observers and they'd only just dug in and settled in and a shell hit them smack in the middle of the hole they was in and it killed most of them outright, but he was died, he was taken to the first aid centre and he died there shortly after. And then, my father was then in the battle of Ipoh,

20:00 the third battle of Ipoh and Passchendaele and a few of them places and in 1918, early, he got shot by a German sniper in the leg so they sent him to England, to repatriation, and he was in the 19th Battalion at the time. Now at that time the, all the battalions, the Australians was having trouble with getting enough reinforcements,

20:30 they'd lost so many men killed and they was, couldn't get enough reinforcements and they had five divisions over there. And each division there's about twelve thousand men and about half the divisions was only half strength so it was decided that they would take one, there used to be four battalions to a brigade, so they decided they'd take one battalion out of each brigade and

21:00 bust them up into all the other battalions to bring up their strength and when he come back, he was, the war was not far off its close then, and he was then sent to the 3rd Battalion in the 1st Division and he was in one more battle there, towards the end of the war. And when the war ended, they didn't' have, like we had so many men over there they didn't have enough transport ships to bring them home

21:30 so they didn't, they had to stay there, most of them stayed there for over a year and they started sending them back and the rate of, those that went over first, was the ones repatriated and while they was there they run all sorts of education courses for the people over there for that twelve months. He didn't come back till late 1919 and that's when he started work again on the council.

22:00 **Did your dad speak of his experiences much to you?**

No, never, never did and I never ever heard him mention the war once. And then, when the Second World War started he was, we was living in Crookwell, in 1941 he rejoined, by then I think he was forty six and they were only taking people overseas at that time that was forty five or under forty five.

22:30 So the, anyone, they took as many veterans as they could from the First World War and they utilised them by looking after the prisoners and the internees in the prisoner of war camps at Cowra which, he was at Cowra when that break out happened. And he served in various areas around Australia at that time and, then he got, we was living, still living at

23:00 Crookwell, and he put in and got a transfer to Goulburn, so we all packed up, now, in, during the war years, in Crookwell, we used to have, they used to have air raid sirens on and every night after six o'clock, everything in town had to be blacked out, you had to have curtains on your windows and they had air raid wardens going around and the slightest little crack of light they could see, they'd come and knock on your door and make you put out the light or put the, pull the blind down further.

23:30 When we went to, moved to Goulburn, it was on a small truck and we had everything packed up right to the top and you had to get permits to travel then, during the war, and on the headlights of all the cars they had a cover over the headlight and there was just one little thin slit in the headlight that shone down, it was hooded, it shone down, it was hooded and it shone down at the road and you could hardly see anything with it. And we loaded all this furniture on and

24:00 Mum got in the front and we all perched up on top of the mattresses and everything up on top of it, the whole nine of us. And we headed off, we was late getting away and we headed off and it was dark, so, and it was only twenty eight mile from Crookwell to Goulburn but it was a shocking road and we couldn't see, anyway the driver couldn't see, so I think we must have got, we would have left Crookwell at about six and I think it took us about three hours to get to Goulburn and when we got there it was

24:30 midnight and so all we did, we unloaded the truck and we got in the main bedroom we got one mattress and then the whole lot of us packed into the one double bed and threw another mattress over us and we slept there for the night. And then the next day we went around, and this house was a huge house and, Mum was paying five pound a week, which was a fair bit of money then for that. Five pound a fortnight, I'm not sure, I think it was

25:00 a fortnight and, it was furnished, or it had a lot of crockery and stuff in it, and it had five, let me, five,

six bedrooms, a cellar, and the cellar was about fifteen feet deep and in the corner of it, it had a cement floor, and in the corner there was a hole and all the water used to come up in a big spring and we used to have to bail it out from time to time, you know.

25:30 And of course we all, from then on we had plenty of room, I slept with, in one of the side rooms, myself and my eldest brother Hector, because myself and the next brother didn't get on too well, we used to fight all the time and he used to protect me against him, see, so …. And we, all the girls then split up and they had, there wouldn't be any more than two to a room and they had their own

26:00 beds then in each room.

So it was a vast improvement.

It was a vast, and there was electric lights and we had a great time exploring everything, you know, for the first, first fortnight or so we was in there, all these things, and it had a great big well out the back, big underground well with a board covering. And, there was a pump station and one of the rooms had been turned into a bedroom, still had the pumps but it had been disconnected and we never used the water in the well, it was pretty

26:30 well just a mosquito breeding area by then. And, we live in, that was Caldwell Street, and, in 1940, lived there because Dad was transferred to the 14th AGH hospital, Australian General Hospital at Goulburn. And he was only there for three weeks

27:00 and he was coming home one night on leave and a car hit him on his pushbike and killed him. And from then on, Goulburn at that time was a railway town and it was full of railway workers and things and Mum took in three boarders from railway blokes that was, they used to transfer and move from all over the place so they was all single, and she used to take in three boarders. Now all of us kids,

27:30 well most of us, my eldest brother, Hector, he'd, he died before, I must say, just about a year before Dad got killed. He got septicaemia and was in hospital and they, it got some system poisoning from, they reckon from the teeth or something, and he died, and not long after my father died, so

28:00 my other eldest brother, he got a job delivering papers and I got a job on a milk run. Now in the milk cart, McAllister brothers had three milk carts and had three milk runs and they had a heap of cows. I used to get up at three in the morning, get up and help milk the cows, and then we'd load, in them days you didn't have pasteurised milk, you just loaded into the urns, hook them up to

28:30 the horse and cart and go around and deliver them, and we wouldn't finish, I was at high school at the time, and we wouldn't finish delivering until about half past nine a lot of mornings and school started at quarter to nine and I was getting there late and getting into trouble all the time so I thought, 'Oh stuff this, I won't go.' So, I used to wag school, I used to wander down the river for miles and miles and miles and, of course, I was getting that far behind by getting there

29:00 late anyway, so. And at that time Legacy [Organisation that looks after families of war veterans] was looking after us, and I used to write my own notes to the teacher and everything, and at that time Legacy was coming up and teaching us kids boxing and the girls ballet and things like that. And they had a club and they, the teachers got onto them and they found, the Legacy mob found out that I'd been truant

29:30 all this time so they had me taken to court as uncontrollable, which I wasn't. But, and when we went to the court, the judge there, this Legacy bloke asked the judge to commit me to a home until I finished school, which the judge did. And

30:00 I only had about four months, mind you, left to go for the school leaving age. They took me out of the court room, they handcuffed me, I was only eleven or twelve at the time, they handcuffed me, and they took me down to the Goulburn lock-up and they put me in there and there was people coming in, criminals coming in to go to court and all in the one cell. And they go over to the side wall they pull out a brick, they all knew where this brick was, and they get two ounces

30:30 of tobacco and roll themself a smoke, and I had a couple of smokes there at the time. And when the police come back there that night, they said, "Righto, we're taking you to Sydney tonight," and they said, "Your mother's here to see you." And I said, "I'm not going to see her," I was really cranky about it, and anyway she was really upset, she wasn't expecting anything like this to happen, you know, she was really upset. So they took me to Sydney and there was a lot of,

31:00 most of the people there was about eighteen, seventeen, eighteen, you know, it was all, under twenty-one was classed as a juvenile, so, and I think the name, but, was Yasmar, and you, we was put in big dormitories. There was guards on you all night and they used to leave the lights on all night and the guards would sit out in the dormitories, out in the hallways, so that anyone come out, had to get their permission to go to the toilet or anything like that.

31:30 And, they used to issue all the juveniles with two cigarettes a day and, they was put there for pre-sentencing. Now, they, I shouldn't have even went there, because I had already been sentenced so they kept me there for a fortnight before they woke up that I didn't need to go to court and so another detective come up and got me, handcuffed me, put me on a train, took me down to a little place outside of Bowral called

32:00 Burradoo and it had a, there was a home there, mostly for truants, and there was a couple of young orphans in there too, at the time, really young. And I was number twenty six, they give everyone a number and that's all you was from then on, I was twenty six. All your clothing was marked with your name and number on it and every Monday they'd bring all the laundry in and they'd call out your number and you'd go up and collect your socks and your linen and your shirts

32:30 and things, and there was about ten tables, there was two parts of this Burradoo, and there was two separate houses, they call them houses, and the one we was in was run, I forget his name now, I know the teacher's name was Glasson, so, and when you went to meals of a morning, there was ten to a table and there was about ten tables in the room, and each table was allocated a

33:00 captain at the end of the table, you had to say grace and everything before you sat down and then you'd eat and they'd march you to school and you'd stay at school until lunchtime, they'd march you back again and you'd come in, you'd have your three sandwiches, they'd march you back to school. In the afternoons, you'd knock off and you'd go up and you'd shower and you'd change and you'd come down, they had a big drawing room there,

33:30 and you'd spend a couple of hours in that and you had to be in bed by eight. Next morning, everyone had a job to do of a morning and it was my job to clean all the staff bathrooms of a morning before we went to school and, my mother used to come and visit me every couple of weeks. They would only allow, once a month was all they'd allow the parents to come and visit you. And I was never ill treated there

34:00 but it made me, it was just the mere fact that I used to be able to wander anywhere, you know, I used to wander for miles when I was a kid and the mere fact of not having my freedom made me convinced that I was never going to lose it again. So, I got out of there after about, after the four months and, which we all knew. When you went to leave the place, while I was there, the teachers

34:30 had me almost pass my intermediate certificate and he said if he had have had me longer, I could have, you know, and, when you was leaving the, principal of the place would call you into his office and he used to, just to test you out, he used to give you a magazine and he'd say "Now when you get home, I want you to post this back." And I thought, 'I'll not [be] posting it back,' we knew what it was meant,

35:00 it was meant to convey to him that you was really trustworthy and all this and I deliberately never posted it back, anyway, you know. And when I got back …

When you reflect on that time, you know, being picked up by Legacy and made to do that, how do you look back on that?

Well I wasn't too happy about it at the time and, as a matter of fact, it was probably one of the worst periods I had, it was

35:30 the mere fact of being numbered and really regimented and, pretty young, you know, at eleven and twelve. And, the leaving age from school, I think then was thirteen years, eight months, so I would have been thirteen actually. And, we used to play soccer, and, the sports and they'd march us into church into Bowral, every Sunday,

36:00 which was about four mile, and they'd march us into church every Sunday and then they'd march us home again after the church service and that's the only time we ever got out of the place. There was no walls around the place and I think the whole time I was there only two people run away and they caught them again pretty quick, but, none of us ever tried to run away and, although there was no walls, and as I say we weren't ill treated

36:30 but it was just the mere fact of being put in there and losing, you know.

Because, I mean, that all really stems back to your father dying. So what effect did that have on the family?

Yeah well it had a pretty large effect actually, because we was in this house that was costing a lot in rent and Mum was only on a war widow's pension and in them days they used to give all the war widows a badge that they used to wear on their dress

37:00 and it was about the size of a twenty cent piece and it had a bar on it hanging off two chains and for every member of their family that got killed, they'd put a star on it. And so Mum, a little gold star, so she'd have this little gold star on and she, all the boarders she had in there, she, it just become one of the family you know, they used to eat with us and

37:30 she used to pack their lunch for them and everything and do their washing and, besides all of us, you know. And we all really had to pitch in and help and, as I say, I was getting, for this, getting up at three in the morning and then doing the milk run, and this was for seven days a week, I was getting two shillings a day. And, out of that fourteen shillings a week, I kept myself. I kept myself in clothing and everything and I'd bought a

38:00 pushbike, I'd saved up and I'd bought a pushbike and I was, get the deposit and I was paying it off. And I only had it for a week and I took it to the pictures and someone flogged it and I never seen it again, that really hurt. I was paying it off for about the next twelve months and I didn't even have a bike. And

so after I left, after I left school, I went to, I worked on that milk run right up until I,

38:30 until they put me away anyway.

Because it seems to me that you were pitching in, trying to do your best, because Dad had died and you almost, it seems you were penalised for it.

Yeah, I was. And, by, you know, and when I tried to tell the judge that, you know, the reason why I hadn't been going to school was that we was getting back later and later on this milk run and that, and that the teachers was giving me a

39:00 hard time about being late all the time and half the time they'd stand me out in the hall for being late. And, so I wasn't learning anything anyway, and the longer this went the further and further I got behind in schooling, so that's when I decided I wasn't going to go and we virtually had to pitch in and help and, as I say, I completely kept myself on that two shillings a week, I don't think Mum ever had to buy me anything from then on except

39:30 food and stuff, you know. And during the wartime, everything was rationed. You had, ration cards was issued for everything, even potatoes, you know, and meat you had, for all meats you had a certain amount of coupons and for every item of clothing, if you went down the shop it'd have the price on one side and the amount of clothing coupons on the other side of it. And, later on, actually they, getting towards the end of the war …

40:00 There was a lot of students that was big, so they was issued, they measured everyone up at school and if you was large size they give you an extra couple of coupons. And they, people used to queue up. Sometimes you'd see a queue of fifty or sixty people queuing up for chewing gum that used to come on the market occasionally, you couldn't get any, you was only allowed two ounces of tobacco a fortnight and there was …

Where would you get that from?

40:30 Mainly from the barber shop, if you happened to be one of his best customers, you'd get that from the barber shop. If you didn't have a barber and get a haircut once a fortnight, you didn't get any. And that was the main place to get your tobacco from.

Tape 2

00:31 **Your dad dying must have had a terrible effect on your mum, particularly with Hector dying.**

Yeah, as a matter of fact, later on, they reckon it was the cause of her getting diabetes. The shock of all of it, you know, and, triggered off diabetes in her, and she had that for about twenty years, diabetes, it eventually killed her.

01:00 But, we, at that time, things was really hard on everyone, you know, and there was vehicles, there was hardly any petrol and the vehicles, if you had a commercial vehicle, cars was hardly given any petrol at all, any rations coupons at all, it was mainly for the commercial people. Now most of the commercial vehicles had on them what they called a gas producer,

01:30 and it was two huge cylinders on the back and they used to start off with petrol then they'd fire them up with coke, put coke in them and it used to run the engine from then on and these cylinders was huge. And it used to sit the back of the vehicle right down, you know, that's how heavy they were, and they was all around us everywhere these gas producers running around and ….

Can you tell us what your mum was like?

My mother was, she was born in Weo in,

02:00 and I'm not quite sure of her birth date, she didn't have any birth certificate. At that time, the women had their kids out, if they lived out in the bush they had them out there and they didn't even bother to go in and register them. So the only, but most of them was really strong church-goers in those days, so the only record of her birth was her baptism certificate so it was taken as a birth certificate.

02:30 My father came back from the war in 1919 and he was about, I think he was about ten years older than her, she was only sixteen at the time, and, when he come back, and their property, and she'd been sent out to the Nolans there with her grandmother and she used to go out there and help them. And she had a sister, Mary,

03:00 and a brother, and Mary was standing by the open fire one morning, one cold morning and her night gown caught alight and she burnt, it burnt her so bad she died. And my mother met my father there and he used to ride down from up on his property and he'd ride down and he'd put all these little notes under the rocks and she'd come down and pick them up. And, of course, she was a

03:30 Catholic, being Irish, and, from Tipperary, all her people used to come from Tipperary. And he was, all the Scottish people were Methodist, see, or Protestants, and, in them days the Catholics, they was adamant, their families was adamant they couldn't marry anyone else but was a Catholic, so their families was dead against them, you know. So they run away to Goulburn and got married, and they got married in

04:00 St Xavier's Cathedral in Goulburn and came back then to live in Crookwell. And I think all of us kids, except for the last boy that was born, the youngest, was born within eleven, or fourteen months was the longest between any of us, there was no contraceptives in them days and it was cold in Crookwell too, and so, so she would, she was pretty well pregnant, you know,

04:30 for ten or eleven or twelve years. And she was a great mother, she used to look after us and when we, of course we all loved her dearly, and when we moved to Goulburn and we used to all always help out and she, when my father died, she really felt it, really hard you know, and especially on the, straight

05:00 away after my brother had died. When my brother died, she used to be, she stayed up the hospital and she stayed by his bedside day and night and on about the sixth day I think the hospital sent her home, said, "Go home and rest," you know, and whilst she was away he died and that effected her, but normally after that she was,

05:30 she coped pretty well, she was a pretty strong woman and she coped pretty well. And, the diabetes never really come onto her until she'd been in her sixties or so and, most of, all of the family had lived in around Crookwell district and Goulburn area, and, other than, I think I was about

06:00 the only one that ever left the place.

Who was the disciplinarian at home, between Mum and Dad?

Oh Dad, yeah, he was, he was a really hard discipliner too. He was, I think it become part of his army training, you know, that his word was law and ….

What would punishment consist of?

A razer strop. Have you ever seen a razor, a cut throat razor strop? They're about that wide and they've got a buckle on them and a handle

06:30 and two hooks that hook around a rail or something so that you could sharpen your razor on it, and we used to cop that. And I don't remember getting too many whacks. One thing I do remember, and it really hurt, my father come home once, and he said, he couldn't find his tobacco, his tin of tobacco was missing, so he went looking for it everywhere and couldn't find it. Eventually he found it under my bed,

07:00 and I hadn't taken it and I didn't find out until about ten years later that it was me brother took it and put it under me [bed], and I got a hiding for that and I was, I could not understand why that they wouldn't believe that I didn't take it, you know, that I was innocent so they must believe me, but that didn't work, he didn't believe me, he reckoned it was under my bed, and that was my fault. And I was really, really pissed off about that for a long time.

07:30 **And what about food at home, what sort of fare would Mum cook up for you?**

Well, of a morning, when I, when we used to go to work, when, even on the milk run, the eldest boy that was up and my brother at that time, was working on the P&G [Procter and Gamble] and then he went to the Snowy when it started, but we would get up and we'd make, and we had a great, giant big teapot about that big. And we'd make the tea and we'd sit that

08:00 on the stove then and that would brew and by the time midday come around, it was strong. And every morning before we went, left the place, we'd take Mum in a cup of tea in bed, every morning, and we used to generally have porridge for breakfast of a day, and of course during the war years it was limited to what you could eat, I mean it didn't matter how affluent you were, you just didn't, couldn't

08:30 get the food anyway and, so we lived on, there was hardly any tinned fruit or things like that around, so we lived on, being a large family probably helped in them days as far as the rations coupons went, so we lived on, we got a fair, to us who was used to, in Crookwell, eating three pieces of bread a day, it wasn't too bad actually, because we used to get meat whenever it was, whenever we could, with our coupons, and whatever

09:00 food the coupons allowed, we ate, and of course she had a huge cook, I mean sometimes there'd be at least two of these railway blokes home for tea and she had all of us and by then the eldest daughter and the second eldest daughter was both working in cafes of an afternoon to help, you know. And so we, with all of us chipping in like that, we got along pretty well actually.

09:30 And she was a really good cook and of course everyone, all the girls, had to jump in and help too and they had to do the washing up and the washing and they helped her out and of course us boys never did any of that. And, I suppose that, during the war years, I can't remember being hungry at all,

10:00 and actually, I mean for some people, it might have been rather frugal but for us it was pretty good.

What do you remember of the war?

My main memories are of not too much about the war. I remember when we was, I was going to school one morning and they said the war in the

10:30 Pacific was over, no the war in Europe was over, VED, VE Day [Victory in Europe Day], and it, we didn't have to go to school that day and everyone in Goulburn turned up in the main street in Auburn Street in Goulburn and there was trucks going up and down, loaded with people cheering and carrying on, all of us kids was in on it too, we was all up and down the streets. And we spent the whole day there, and, other than that, when I was in school,

11:00 every school had to, out in the back of the school, in the back yard, had to, we dig all these slit trenches and they was all L shaped and zigzagged all over the place, and every now and again all the sirens would go off and you'd have to go out and you'd jump on these trenches out in the school yard. And they also was growing vegetables in another spot there, and they also, when all the vegetables

11:30 became like marrows and pumpkins, like that, the kids used to share them and take them home, and we used to have quite a lot of air raid warnings though, and they had towers, even in Crookwell, they had big towers in, mainly for the fire stations, and they had these huge sirens up there and they'd blow these alarms and everyone had to head for the bomb shelters as soon as they was blown, you know. You was in trouble if you was caught.

Did you have a trench at home?

12:00 Yeah we had a trench at home. And we were all sure that we was going to get bombed, all the kids was sure we was going to get bombed, you know. And we didn't, the government kept it almost completely from most of the public that Darwin had been bombed and no, hardly anyone knew in, you know, unless you were in Darwin, that Darwin had been bombed, that also Port Hedland and Broome and places like that was bombed,

12:30 and we never knew that, but we, we'd , when we, all these soldiers kept coming home on leave, and I was walking up the street with my father one day and, with my mother and father, and a couple of us other kids, and he had the top button of his tunic undone and this MP [Military Policeman] come past and said, "Do up that top button, soldier," and I thought, 'Oh, Dad will kill him,'

13:00 but Dad done up his button, but when the army, the army at that time – if you went to go into a lounge bar in the pub, you had to wear a suit and a tie, and in the saloon bar, no women was allowed in the public bars or the saloon bars, they only had to drink in the lounge. Now, during the war, the officers claimed all the saloon bars,

13:30 and no private or other rank was allowed to drink in the saloon bar, they all had to drink in the private bar. They found them in the saloon bar, they'd charge them, you know that's in Australia too. And the streets was full of soldiers that was on leave and there was one particular soldier that come, used to come up to our place and he was trying to win one of my sisters,

14:00 and she went out with him a couple of times. But he come back from New Guinea, and as soon as an aircraft went over, he'd dive under the lounge, he was still shell shocked you know. And a lot of the soldiers had come back and they were really like that. And yet, in, the people that come back from the First World War had suffered far greater than that and yet I never understood, I never heard

14:30 anyone with psychological problems from that time, you know. I think that the people in them days, why Australia made such good soldiers back in them days was that they was born through hardship and they lived hardships, and, they was all pretty big men, strong men, from working on the land and cutting down trees, building their own houses and things. And so they didn't have

15:00 the soft life that people have become accustomed to these days. Everything was hard, and so going over to France and living in trenches and things like that, they coped, seemed to cope pretty well with it, whereas these days, the modern comforts and things for people, and they are, you know, they served over there for four and five years and didn't come back with three medals, now they come back with a swag of them, they, I think that's the reason, they was more attuned to hardship in them days than what the ….

15:30 And the Second World War was much the same, they wasn't too far off, I, the Prime Minister once said, and I agree with him, because I read the complete history of the First World War, that, 'They was Australia's greatest generation, ever,' and they were you know, and yet they all got, sixty thousand of our best men got killed in France and places like that, it was, and when you read through the history and you see the senseless way they was

16:00 killed, like stupid officers and generals that were promoted, not because they was good tacticians or anything but because of birth and bought their commissions, absolutely hopeless at running the war. And it wasn't until, Australian general took over the whole army, five divisions of the army corps, Morshead, and he, he was the first general

16:30 to mount an attack on a place using tanks, aircraft, artillery and troops. And he was so meticulous in his planning that he said, "Righto, we're going to take the town of Hemel," the Germans and the Pommy general said, "Oh yeah, no you won't be able to do it," and he said, planned it and he built special little diagrams

17:00 and little hills and everything and the whole battle scene, and he had every one of his officers go over it for days and he had his troops practicing and he said, “Righto, we’ll take Hemel in ninety minutes.” And it took ninety three minutes and he took it. And from then on they placed, every bit of their tactics was based on what he’d done and there was no more of this charging out over trenches and charging just for the sake of charging, he stopped all that. But by then we’d lost hundreds, thousands of men,

17:30 injured and, well in, when my Uncle Clyde got killed, he was at a, taken to a wounded, to an aid station, now, they would have known where they buried him, you know, and they would have put up some marking, but the battlefields in France and Belgium, they’d push up for a while

18:00 and then the Germans would push them back again, now in between, the whole place was shelled, absolutely, there wasn’t hardly an area in the whole of France or Belgium that wasn’t shelled. And therefore they, none of the bodies was ever found again because they was blown to pieces in these shellings. So he’s one of those ten thousand unknown graves that’s on the Ypres War Memorial

18:30 in Belgium and he was, he would have been, he was, Dad was the second youngest son and Clyde was the next, he had, Dad had another brother, also, Dave, and he didn’t go away because he had to look after the property and the government at the time wanted at least one of them to stay home and run the,

19:00 their properties and things like that.

Well when you were going through school and growing up as a lad, had you started to think about what you might like to do when you got older?

No, I hadn’t actually, I thought that I might go shearing but it was only a certain part of the year and so you had to have virtually another job too, you’d go away with a contractor and …. When I went away with them shearing, I was,

19:30 you started picking up the wool and fleeces and that, then it takes you a fair while before you go, become a shearer. But I had no aspirations in so far as that, you know, and then when I did, I don’t know what made me decide to join the, I think it was, the main reason I did join the air force was because National Service was in and at them times they’d ballot you on your birthday.

20:00 They didn’t want everyone on their eighteen birthday, but they’d put everyone’s birthday, they sent out a list and say everyone born between such and such a date in this month and such and such a date in the next month will be in the next ballot for National Service, they’d put all your names in a hat or a barrel or something and they’d pull out how many they wanted and if your name was pulled out, well in you went.

20:30 Mainly you went in the army, you didn’t have any selection and, I’d been in, I’d already been in the CMF [Citizens’ Military Force], before I joined the air force and I was in the Werriway [training aircraft] Regiment there and we used to conduct exercises. So I was determined not to be a foot slogger.

Can I just go back to VE day and

21:00 **what sort of news were you finding out about the war and how were you finding out the news?**

Well the teachers at school used to give us a bit of news and it was all filtered back through the community, there was a, we didn’t get many newspapers, although the newspapers at that time were full of it. The kids didn’t dwell too much on the war. The grown-

21:30 ups, their whole life was geared by it, but us, kids we still roamed and where I lived, when we didn’t have any television or anything like that, so we used to wander, we’d leave home of a morning and we’d go out, ten mile out, Kingsdale and, and out at Kingsdale there was a lime kiln and they used to mine the lime from there.

22:00 Now, in one forty four gallon drum laying on it’s side was heaps of gelignite. Just out laying under a bunker, you know, and in the other one was all these detonators. So we used to go and help ourselves to this gelignite and these detonators, only young. Anyway, we’d go around and we’d be blowing fish out of the river and taking them home and a foot and a half of plug in here and there, you know. And we went out

22:30 this day and I was out with a mate of mine, there was three of us, there was Colin Harris and this Rusty, and Colin Harris had this dog with us see. So we decided, we caught this rabbit, so we thought, ‘Oh this is alright, we’ll tie this stick of gelignite to its tail and let it run down and blow up the warren and get rid of all the rabbits in it,’ see. Well we got this rabbit and we tied this stick of gelignite to its tail, or half a stick, and it took off,

23:00 and Colin Harris’ dog raced up and caught it. So, and it started coming back towards us and we all bolted, and he was running with me and I said, “Don’t run with me, you go the other way,” you know, and anyway, we was running away and the next minute, ‘boom’, it killed his dog, but jeez, we didn’t use that trick any more. But they, we used to go down, we must have, at different times, we must have taken about forty sticks

23:30 and they, it never ever seemed to worry them, they didn't have no accountancy on them or anything, you know. And we knew every inch of the river for miles and miles and miles and we used to go down, and we used to go in these rodeos at the time, so we'd go down and these blokes would have all these prize bullocks and we'd take our rope down and we'd rope one of these prize bulls of his and start riding it for a bit of practice for the rodeo. He used to come

24:00 out with his 410 shotgun full of saltpetre and shoot at you, or cracking his whip on his horse. And we were down this day and as soon as he chased us we went down, I went in under the bridge, we had pushbikes and Colin Harris had his pushbike and I was riding on the bar of it, and I got him to let me off at the bridge and I ducked under the bridge, and about

24:30 the next place to cross was at about four mile up near the tannery. So I walked all the way up the river and I crossed it, I had a good look around, there was no-one there so I crossed at the tannery and there was this bloke standing there. As soon as I walked across the road he grabbed me, and it was a policeman, this bloke had reported us and he knew that that was the only crossing where we'd come across. When I got up there, up to the police car, they'd had Rusty, he was the other bloke, he was already in the car,

25:00 they put me in one side and he bolted out the other and he was gone. So they took me down to the police station and the policeman said, "Righto, sit here." And he kept me there for about two hours and he said, "Righto, now I'm going to let you go and if I ever hear of you doing that again, you watch out, so he didn't even report me to me parents. And he let me go out the police station and I went home so,

25:30 I never rode that bloke's bullocks again anyway. It must have taught me a lesson.

Can you remember VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day as well?

Yeah, yes I do, I remember VP Day more so, because I was older then, and when we finally had victory in the Pacific, well it was more tumultuous down in the street than ever, you know. And it took

26:00 things, even though people were celebrating like mad, it took things a long, long while after the war to get back to anywhere near normality. I mean, they kept rationing on until 19-, up nearly to 1947, and you still couldn't get much stuff and anything like that. So it took an enormous long time after the war for anything to get back to normal and it wasn't until the

26:30 '60's that Australia really become pretty affluent. And when I first started work in this produce store, it was forty four hours a week at that time and I was getting thirty two shillings a week and that was the rate of pay then, and while I was working there at that, they'd then brought in a forty hour week.

27:00 But, and we used to work that four hours, most everyone done it on a Saturday morning, you worked eight hours a day and then four hours on Saturday. And …

So when the forty hour week came in, did that just mean the Saturday was scrapped?

Yeah, although I still worked because the, except we started a bit later and finished a bit earlier, but the shops were open of a Saturday morning,

27:30 so we still had to work Saturday morning. Most of the other people that worked in other jobs, like carpenters and that, they didn't work on the weekend at all after that. But everything was, in Goulburn at that time was, I think Goulburn had a population of about, it had a bigger population than it's got now because, being a rail town, one of the main rail towns, and it had

28:00 its own Perway shop and it used to repair all their own engines, and I think half the town worked for the railway and they had, they used to bring all the trains there from everywhere to repair them at the round house and they used to have an enormous amount of apprentices from school that would come straight to the railways and learn their apprenticeships as boiler makers and all sorts of things like that to,

28:30 at the school. And most of my friends eventually ended up working somewhere on the railways, you know. And they used to have, in them days they, call boys going around, like firemen, and that used to stay in our house, and the guards. If they was going out at four or three in the morning, these call boys, they used to have to go around, and they used to have to know where everyone lived,

29:00 go around on their pushbikes, knock on their windows and doors, and they all knew which room they was sleeping in at our place, and they'd knock on and wake them up an hour before they was due to go on their trips. They'd go away for a couple of days at a time, they'd, say, they'd go on a train trip and stay there overnight and then they'd change the crews and then they'd probably come back on the next train.

29:30 **So how did you get your first job?**

Actually I don't remember, I think Legacy had something to do with it actually, yeah they did, Legacy knew this Thomas Williams that owned the produce store, and he got, he got me the job there and, when I was,

30:00 they was training me actually. There was another mate of mine, Jimmy McKinnon, that worked there

with me and they was training me to take over this, Gleeson was the manager at the store there, they was training me to take over his job, well he thought he was training me for that, but I didn't intend staying there that long. And he used to, he had his own little office and we was working in the shop and we were mainly making up packages of bran and

30:30 measuring them up and into the smaller packets and things like that to sell. And a train load of wheat or something had come in, I think at that time I weighed about, oh I think it was about ten three, and I was lifting a hundred and eighty pound bag of wheat, lugging around. And what we used to do, you'd make steps right up to the roof of this and you'd cart this bag of wheat all the way up the top, and bags of salt, and they was really heavy.

31:00 And pumpkins, they'd come in on the train and we'd have to unload them all. And of a weekend we used to go out working, people would be chaff cutting and that, so we used to go out working on the chaff cutters and sewing up bags of chaff and feeding the bales and things into the chaff cutter. So we was all, we was pretty well employed around about the place. And my whole aim was to buy a motorbike,

31:30 but I never got around to that, I never quite earned enough for that.

And when did you join the CMF [Citizen's Military Forces]?

I joined, I was at the woollen mills at the time because they had a big woollen mill in Goulburn and I'd left this produce store and I got a job at the woollen mills and while I was there, I decided I'd join, for some reason or another, what my, mate of mine joined the CMF and I joined it also.

32:00 And they had a drill hall, I think just about every small town just about had a what's her name, and you'd go down to the CMF, every Tuesday you'd go down to the CMF, we was kitted out with full army gear, rifles and everything. And we had a Bren gun [machine gun] carrier there that we used to practice on and we used to go out on the firing range now and again, and the,

32:30 every, for one month every year, you'd be sent to Singleton, we'd have a camp where all the different towns, where all their people gathered, so we'd have a full camp there. You got paid for it, it wasn't much, but you got paid for it. While we was at, when you, while we was at the ranges, we went down to the range and they taught you how to strip the Bren guns and had to put them back together

33:00 blindfolded and all this sort of things, and we had exercises where we was using live ammunition. And we'd go down to the range and they had this, what they called a PIAT [Projector, Infantry, Anti-Tank] gun, and it was, it used to fire a bomb about this long and it had a trough in the barrel of it and you had to put this bomb in it and you had to put it in just right. And it had a real long nose on it and the nose was made out of hardness, now it used to penetrate, armour piercing,

33:30 penetrate the tank, and all the explosion used to go through that nozzle and although it didn't destroy the tank, it destroyed everything inside it. And this instructor had us down there this day and he said, "Now, make sure you load this bomb in correctly, because if you don't, it'll drip it out the bottom of the barrel, and this PIAT gun, it was about a metre long and it had a great big padded handle on it, sponge rubber

34:00 padded handle, and it had two other handles further down. Now to load it, it had a huge spring in it, a big long spring, now to load it you had to use all your force with both your feet on the, on the shoulder rest, each side of the shoulder rest, and these two handles, and you'd load it, and this spring. From then on, the recoil loaded it so you can imagine what recoil, and I was the first one up on the mound and the instructor said, "Righto, the range," and we was about, oh, he said

34:30 the maximum range of this was two hundred yards and we was at about a hundred and fifty I think. He said "Righto." He said, "Down there on the butts," they had a flagpole and when the butts was in use they used to fire this red flag from them, and he said, "Righto, aim at the top of that flagpole." And we went using the proper bombs with the ammunition, they had a big cement head on it. I took aim at this thing and blew the top

35:00 straight off the flagpole, flag and all. It was a dead fluke, he said, and this sergeant said, "Oh jeez, I'm in trouble now." Who'd ever [have] thought of that, you know, and he said, "I could give you another two thousand shots and you'd never do that again." And no one ever got within a bull's roar of it for the rest of the day. And he got into trouble for having us aim at it anyway. What a dead fluke, knocked about twenty foot off the top of it.

35:30 And we used to, we'd go out on lots of exercises and we'd sleep out under bridges and everything, bivouacking [camping] out and …

Did you enjoy it?

Yeah I did actually, and we'd go out and we'd, and they'd, we'd have mock attacks and they'd put barbed wire up and we'd get all this gelignite and we'd get water piping and we'd pack it full of gelignite, tamper it full,

36:00 put a cap on the end of it and then put a detonator in it and we used to blow the barbed wire with it, you know, it used to make a real mess with the barbed wire. And, they taught us to throw ourselves across the barbed wire and let everyone else tramp across you. And, but, we all of us seemed to enjoy that, we

used to enjoy going out camping and, when we went to Singleton, on our last camp

36:30 that I went to, they made me battalion runner of the night and that meant that I had to sleep down in this headquarters building and any time someone wanted an officer or something, I had to go and find him and give him the message. Now I, we was all dressed immaculate when we started, but you slept in your clothes all night, and this officer come in the next morning and reckoned I was daggy because I was in creased clothing, you know, after having to sleep in it all night,

37:00 and I said a few things to him, under my breath anyway. And when we went out on a night time training run with, our sergeant had a compass, we went out, we hadn't been out more than about an hour and he was completely lost, hopelessly lost, and we was only supposed to be away for about an hour and a half all told and then back again.

37:30 And when the camp, when we hadn't turned up after about three hours the camp got a bit worried, and they was due to have firing practice, artillery practise on the range. And so they sent out a mob looking for us, but we eventually found, we was camped right in the middle of the artillery range where they was going to fire. We'd only just got off it and the artillery did open up. After they come out and

38:00 they located us, they got us off pretty quick, they radioed back to the artillery and asked them to delay firing. Had they not found us, the artillery would have started anyway, you know, there would have been about, in our company there would have been about a hundred and thirty of us. And he got demoted as soon as we got back, the sergeant and the officer in charge, he got into a lot of trouble too you know. Especially sending us out on a reconnoitre

38:30 that was anywhere near a live range. That was the only exciting time I ever had with the what's her name, with the CMF.

Can you remember the Korean War starting?

Yeah, quite well.

Was that big news or …?

Yeah, it was actually. My brother went to Korea, he joined the, they had at that time what they called a special K Force [Korea Force] and he joined up and

39:00 he went over on the, they flew him over, I think they flew him over, and he was with the 2nd Battalion, Special K Force, they called it, and he spent about eighteen months there and came back on the New Australia, and it was big news at the time, but they didn't really class it as a war.

39:30 They, you know, people just thought, 'That's not much,' after the First World War and after the Second World War, they thought, 'Oh that's not much for a war,' you know. And my brother used to tell me about it and, you know, he said it's so cold over there that they used take their rifles to bed with them to stop the barrels freezing up and their clothing was completely inadequate for the freezing cold of

40:00 Korea, and it was the coldest winter they'd had for seventy five years and, so they used to wear the pyjamas under the uniforms to try and keep warm and they used to buy clothing, articles of clothing, off the Americans to stay warm, and they used to have little kerosene fires for cooking and that in their tents and about four of them got killed with these tents burning down

40:30 from these little fires that they had going, little kerosene fires they had.

Did you correspond with him while he was there?

No, he wasn't a great one for writing, but we had a, be a bit of a conversation on it when, about it when he came back and of course he got out as soon as he came back again. He never, I never ever seen him wear his medals, he didn't even apply for them I don't think. And he'd been working on the Snowy Scheme when he

41:00 joined up there, and when he came back he's worked for the PMG [Postmaster General's Department]. But he, he had a pretty horrific time there, they was in action almost all, a fair bit there, but the biggest part of it was the freezing conditions, cold conditions that they had to suffer and the inadequate clothing for the stuff they had to do, you know.

Tape 3

00:32 **So when your brother got back from Korea, had you joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] by then, or was it after that?**

No, whilst he was in Korea I joined the RAAF, and it was in, January 30th 1952 I joined the RAAF. My friend, Jimmy McKinnon, who worked with me at the produce store, also joined with me and my number is eight, two, five, oh, four, eight and he's eight, two, five, oh, four, nine. We both joined

01:00 up together. Seeing as I had never finished my schooling, when they give you an aptitude test, and

although my aptitude test was fairly high, my education was really lacking, you know, so they said, "Righto, what do you want to do?" they said, "Look, what we suggest you do is join as a general hand and then later on you can remuster to something

01:30 you might think of," because at that time I couldn't, I didn't want to be a motor mechanic or anything like that. So I, we both joined up as general hands and we did our rookies at Richmond which lasted about, I think finished rookies in, went on end of January and finished rookies at the end of April. And Stan Birrel was our DI [Drill Instructor],

02:00 and he was the front page of, while we was on course, of the Truth because he give his wife two black eyes for Mother's Day. And while I was on rookies, we'd get into trouble for the least little thing, you know, and he used to send us down to the mess to, what we used to call pot walloping, we'd bash all the pots that the cooks had messed up.

02:30 So, I used to march them down there and then leave when I was supposed to be going and I used to march them down and pretend I was sent down to march them down. And when we finished our course, I refused to wear those little forage caps they used to wear and I come out, everyone else had their forage cap on and I come out to get the photograph taken with the peaked cap on and he said, "Righto Wilson, there'll be no peaked caps here until you're passed

03:00 out, now get in and change that." And I said, "I'm not wearing that bloody thing." And he said, "Well you can get taken without it," and I'm the only one in the photograph with no hat on. So I passed out there and the first posting I had was to Darwin.

What was, what had been the impetus then to join the RAAF?

Well, it was mainly the, I'd already been in the CMF right,

03:30 and I knew what the army was like and, the, particularly when the infantry hasn't got anything to do, they find all the menial jobs in the world for them to do, and I wasn't going to fall into that, so the RAAF was offering all sorts of different trades and it was a classier outfit. It wanted higher educated people and seeing as National Service was in, that's what swayed me into joining the RAAF. Everyone, when we went down to Rushcutters Bay to join up,

04:00 everyone would go first of all to the RAAF or the navy, and if they got knocked back from them the army would gobble them up, you know, so the army was their last choice. And that was my main reason for joining up, it was just that the National Service was in, I had a good chance of being selected, and I didn't want to take that risk of ending up in the army for two years, and by that time, anyway, I'd decided that, you know, if I liked

04:30 it, I'd probably stay in, instead of just serving two years which was National Service.

What was the situation with National Service when it was brought in?

The situation was that they bring out a list of about, in a two month period, of birthdays that fell between certain dates. Everyone in Australia at the age of eighteen on that birthday was put into a

05:00 ballot and, say, there might have been a hundred thousand names in there and they wanted two thousand, so two thousand was selected out and they was in. You had no choice of what service you went in and it was nearly always army that they put you in, and unless you had a specific trade that was beneficial to the RAAF or the navy or something, or you had sailing experience or

05:30 flying experience, something like that, well that's the only reason you ever got in the other two services. Normally they picked about ninety percent of all the applicants to go in the army.

Was it considered that if you were in the National Service at that point in time, that you would serve overseas, or it was just for home?

No, no that only came in later on and when it first came in, they

06:00 weren't actually, they only asked for volunteers to go to Vietnam at that time. All the National Service was doing it but they asked for volunteers from the National Service to go over there.

I was just curious, like when the National Service was brought in the '50s, being so close to the end of World War 11, I wondered what public opinion of it was at that stage?

They, they brought it in mainly for Korea, see, and that was the reason why it was instigated to start with, but

06:30 the public was all for it, actually, at that time when they did bring it in, it wasn't meant to be anyone to go into action, it was meant to take people in and it was learning them trades and things at the same time that they was in there. And the people was in full favour of it because at that time none of them thought their sons and that would be going over to fight in a war. So at the time,

07:00 when it first come in, it was only, it was later on when they started sending conscripts over to Vietnam, that the public really got up in arms, when it starting getting casualties back, and that's when all the big protests started and they was marching in the streets, then, everywhere, the public then trying to

stop it, because they didn't envisage that their young folk was going to be sent overseas to fight.

So with having a brother overseas at the time, what did Mum have to say about you joining up?

07:30 Well she wasn't too happy about it, she signed because she insisted, and having a look at my brother's records, I'm sure he signed his own, because I know her writing and I know his and, so, it's nowhere near it, you know. So he probably signed his, her name up while he was up the Snowy. But I got her to sign mine, and at that time

08:00 Korea was almost finished, right, and so she didn't really mind me going into the service at that time. And, she knew that I'd join anyway, whether I [she] signed it or not, so. And, so I, Jim and meself, packed ourself off and got a free ticket to Sydney and joined up, and after we'd finished

08:30 our rookies.

Let's talk about rookies. So, you arrived at Richmond?

I arrived at Richmond and they kitted us up, we went down to L Group and they kitted us up. Handed you any old thing, you know, and …

What was in your kit?

Oh we had about three blue shirts and they used to call them, the khaki uniforms, drab, and we had two sets of those. Two shirts,

09:00 two trousers, we had boots, we had shoes, we had the hat, fur felt, the slouch hat, and then we had the forage cap, and when you was in rookies, you wasn't allowed to wear the peaked cap until you had passed out. And we had great coats, ground sheets, underwear, underwear was shocking, oh it was, no one wore it I don't think. And …

Why what was it like?

09:30 It was something along, have you seen these cotton boxer shorts that they wear now, it was something along them lines, only worse, and no one ever wore it, they wore the singlets and the singlets was all that horrible coloured flannelette, so most of the people just never used, never utilised their underwear. That stayed, and when, after you was issued, then they lined everyone up in your huts and your whole kit was laid out on your bed

10:00 and you had to mark it with your number and name on it. And while we was marking these out, there was a bloke alongside my bed named Edwards, and somehow our great coats got mixed up and he put his name, and he was a pretty big bloke too, and he put his name on my coat and I put mine on his. So we had opposite coats and we found out straight after the inspection and we just swapped them over

10:30 again, so I was running around with a great coat, they used to call these overcoats great coats, with Edwards and his name on it and he was running around with Wilson and my name on it. Now that really caused, cost me some trouble later on too. When I was at the, after I come back from Darwin, at that time, the uniforms up there, we bought some polyester uniforms, it was different from the normal cotton gaberdine

11:00 garbs that, the normal what's her name, it was lighter and you didn't have to iron it, so. And I come back to Sydney and it was cold and I had my great coat on and I'm marching down George Street with my great coat on and with these, with these you beaut polyester drabs on and the service police pull me up, and they said, "Righto, young man, where are you from?" and I said, "Canberra."

11:30 He said, "What's that outfit you got on?" and I said, "Oh, we got that up in Darwin." And he said, "You come from Canberra?" and I said, "Yeah." He said, "What's the CO's [Commanding Officer] name?" and I'd only, when I come from Darwin, I'd only went to Canberra to get my leave application signed and left straight away. And he said, "What's the CO's name?" and I said, "I don't know, I was only there for a couple of hours." And he said, "What's the WOD's [Warrant Officer Discipline] name?" I said, "I don't know, I don't know anyone there," I think I said. "You're an impostor," he said. So he took

12:00 me down to the, their dimmock's [?] headquarters. When I took my overcoat off, he said, "What's this, it's got Edwards in it, your name is Wilson." And he was determined he had an impostor. And they kept me there for about four hours till they rang, and I said, "Ask me who the CO is at Darwin." I don't know anyone from Darwin," he said. So he wouldn't listen to anything that from Darwin which I could have told him all about. So he kept me there for about four hours until Canberra

12:30 finally verified that, "Righto my little bird, you can go now," he said, so they let me go after about four hours. So that great coat cost me a great deal of problem.

So you got your kit at Richmond?

Yeah, I got me kit at Richmond and then we used to go out, we'd have drill every day and also lectures, and it was mainly taken up with drill and rifle shooting, and

13:00 at the time, I was a marksman at both rifle and Bren gun and I got selected for the inter-service shoot

by being a marksman. But we used to go out the range and, rookies, you're forever marching, you, everywhere you went you had to march, it didn't matter where you went, you had to be in the whole group and you had to march even if you went to the, to eat, you had to march there, you had to march everywhere.

13:30 If you went to, sometimes the DI would go to headquarters and each course, they'd elect a course orderly for when the DI wasn't there who used to take over, and in our case the course orderly was a ex-World War 11 bloke who was just signing up again, and the course elected who they wanted as course orderly so they, no one knew each other of course so they didn't know who they were selecting, but seeing as he had a few medals up there, they elected him.

14:00 And, we, and as each course passed out, we was on course 251 and I think the senior course when I went to Richmond was 242. And every rookie in Australia for the RAAF was done at Richmond, it was the only place they had, so it was complete nearly rookie station, you know. And we was rostered for guard duty in between all this too.

14:30 And, so, nobody likes rookies, you know they really, what they try and do, they try and hound you so much that the people that can't take it will get out, which about four of them did, and they give you the option after three months, after you've done your rookies, to get out if you want to or not, even though you sign initially for six years, they allow you to get out or not if you want to, which we had about, like this Edwards, the bloke that was next to me,

15:00 had his coat, he got out and, 'cause he couldn't take it, and the biggest of us, I think there was about thirty of us on the course or something like that. And then we, as each course became the senior course for three weeks and then they'd have a big parade at the end of it and all their families was invited to this parade, their passing out parade, and they'd go through a series of drills on the parade ground and

15:30 then they was passed out. We joined up as AC1 [Aircraftman] minors, that was under twenty one, you was classed as minor. And AC1 was the lowest recruit minor, it was sort of the lowest rank you could get, and we weren't getting much money either, but I think it was something like twelve and six or something a day.

After having spent the time in the sort of, youth, juvenile home, where you had sworn to

16:00 **yourself that you would never lose your freedom again, what were you thinking when you got to Richmond and you were marching everywhere and …?**

Oh I expected that. We had a fairly good idea of what was going to happen on rookies because it was well known, you know, and with my brother coming back from the army and that, he'd been all through that too, so we knew that once you got through rookies, it was only a couple of months, that once you got through rookies, that things changed dramatically, and everyone

16:30 knew that, so all you did was to take it and knuckle down and know that it wasn't going to last long.

Did the guys gel well together?

Yeah, most of them did, they're, I think on every course there's a couple of absolutely hopeless dunces and they want, they played up, they was trouble makers, and they couldn't march, they had two left feet, they was, some of them, a couple of them, absolutely hopeless, and we had one of them there, I think his name was Borthistle, and he used to drive the DIs [Drill Instructor] mad,

17:00 you know, and if you got behind him, there, was never in step, you know. But most of the blokes got on pretty well, but you normally, you normally settled on, they gradually paired off into a, couples and groups like that and about three of youse at the most would go out together and we used to go to the dance, they had a big meat works at Rivervale and we used to go to the dances there and all the local blokes hated us,

17:30 reckoned we were coming in and stealing their girls. So they're, every time you went there you had to expect a fight or two, you know. And we used to go there of a Saturday night and of a weekend, we'd have, we wasn't issued with a leave pass of a weekend, you could go to Sydney and stay there of a weekend, you didn't have to be back at camp or anything like that and so we used to go into Sydney and we'd go in by train and the midnight horror, we used to call

18:00 it, was the last train back from Sydney to Richmond. And it used to take about three hours to go from Sydney to Richmond, a steam train. And you'd get back to camp about, oh two in the morning or something and so a lot of us used to stay overnight in Sydney on Saturday instead of jumping on that thing and we'd come back Sunday night and the, we had all our favourite bars and pick up spots in Sydney where we used to go to pick girls and that up.

Where were they ?

18:30 One of them was the Tattersall's Hotel and there was a couple at Kings Cross. And the Tattersall's one was probably the favourite one, where, it was mainly RAAF that used to go in there, you know. And, we, and sometimes we'd go out to Manly, we'd normally pick up a girl somewhere along the way there and we'd go out to Manly and round the parks and things like that and around the fun park.

19:00 **When you were saying you were going to the dances and the local boys would be a bit upset with you and you could expect a fight, what about when you went into Kings Cross and things, was there tension between the different services?**

No, I actually, they, I had about two, I actually broke my hand one time in a fight with an army bloke, they used to call us blue orchids, see, and that used to rile us up something dreadful. So we was in a hotel

19:30 just after we finished rookies, was in a hotel in Goulburn, in, Jim McKinnon and myself, and these army blokes walked in and they started calling Jim a blue orchid and this and that, so we didn't take kindly to that so we declared them on and the barman said, "Not in here you won't, get outside." So when they, they went outside and I went

20:00 to the toilet when I went out, and when I come out, Jim was standing, Jim McKinnon was standing across from the door and he went like to point [at] the two blokes, there was one bloke in each side of the door for me to come out. So I come out with a big leap and a bound and they're both standing there with their fists loaded waiting for me, and I hit one bloke and I broke my thumb and Jim cleaned up the other one and then next day my thumb was enormous, you know, and, "I'll have to get back to base

20:30 and tell them my story, of how I got this broken thumb." And, the MO [Medical Officer] wasn't too pleased about it but he accepted it and I had a great big, they put me in plaster up to my elbow and they had, they put a great big wire ladder out there like that and it had two strips of bandage coming out from it and they tied the thumb, put tension on it and tied the thumb to one of these lattices.

21:00 And it was about that long, you couldn't do anything, you'd poke it in, you couldn't comb your hair, you couldn't do anything with it, and so I got home and I got a pair of pliers and I cut it down to just one ladder on it and hooked her back up again. They didn't even notice.

We all might not have heard the term, can you explain the whole blue orchid taunt?

Well they called us blue orchids because during the war we was all dressed in blue uniform, and

21:30 during the war they reckoned that they, we didn't have to live in trenches and that and we was all dainty orchids, you know. So, the army used to razz [ridicule] us quite regularly about it, you know, the navy didn't, the navy, was a really harsh discipline service, you know, and, even though sometimes we had strife with the army, normally we used to get on quite well together, you know. And it was only the few odd

22:00 ones that you'd end up getting into trouble with and of course we was pretty young and I'd been taught boxing by Legacy and everything by then, so I was always willing to have a fight, you know.

So apart from a good solid fist, did you have any other retaliations for the army guys?

No, everything them days was done with fists, everything. You know, I mean no one ever had a knife in them days, no one ever used a weapon, and

22:30 if there was a fight outside, it was always, anyone around made sure it was conducted fairly, if anyone was knocked to the ground, it was, you wasn't allowed to touch them while they was on the ground. You wasn't allowed to kick them or anything like that and it was all done in the sort of, if you can call it civilised way, if you call fighting civilised. But it had definite rules, that everyone used to enforce, you know, anyone that was watching.

23:00 If anyone went to hit someone who was down, whoever was standing around watching the fight would grab hold of them, and stop them immediately.

So like a gentlemen's code.

Hm, yeah, and, I never ever heard anyone using a knife. And, the knives never used to come into Australia until they started bringing the migrants out, after the war and especially the Yugoslavs and that started the knife gangs. We had the Italians out here, and they was well accepted,

23:30 but the Yugoslavs come out here and they used to be always carrying knives and things like that. And I think that's when the first knives was introduced into Australia.

So did you have names for the army guys?

Yeah, we called the grunts, 'I can't do maths very well but I can lift heavy weights.' We used to give them back as much as they give us.

24:00 **Getting back to rookies, what was the accommodation like for you there?**

The accommodation was a hut of about, with two rows with at least twenty people in the one hut, and, they was still wartime huts. Alongside each bed, there was a wardrobe where you put all your kit and there was a little bedside table at each what's her name, and each

24:30 bed was separated by this wardrobe and, of a Monday night, every Monday night was what they called

panic night and that means that a list would go up, there was a hut corporal for every hut, this is after we finished rookies, and every Monday night there'd be a panic, they'd call it panic and that means that the whole hut had to be cleaned spotless, and if there was lino on the floor, polished with polishers,

25:00 and all the ablutions cleaned out, and everyone had a set job to do, and they changed the jobs, I mean you might be on toilet cleaning this Monday, well next Monday you wouldn't be, you know, and then someone else was allocated to change all the linen, the linen was changed every Monday and taken up to the barracks store and you was issued with fresh sheets and pillowslips. And then he, whoever was allocated that, would come back and throw two sheets on every bed and a pillowslip on

25:30 every bed. In the morning when you got up, no beds was allowed to be made, every blanket and every sheet, so all the sheets and everything had to be folded up at the top of the bed with a pillow on top of them, and, quite regularly, they'd come along and inspect that to make sure it was done. So we was pretty well used to community living by then. And on my first posting

26:00 to Darwin, up there, there was only four to a room, we was in, there was only about five or six rooms to one of the huts up there and no fans when we went there. I went there in, as soon as I finished rookies, and when we got to Darwin, the place was still, all the RAAF camp was still bomb damaged everywhere, the mess was still laying in a heap where it had been bombed, the Airmen's Mess.

26:30 The hospital was completely bombed out. Every hut in the place had bullet holes through the roofs and the floors, and the CO's house was demolished, being hit by a direct hit with a bomb. And nearly all the married quarters there, mainly officers' married quarters, most of them were gone. Now, we had about a hundred and fifty people and it was called a works party and it was

27:00 our job to go up and rebuild the base and to rebuild the messes and to patch up the roofs in the quarters and all the floors, and in the town itself, the town only had about eleven hundred people in it by then, they had taken everyone from Darwin, all the civilian population during the war, and most of them hadn't come back by that stage. It was mainly full of Chinese

27:30 and Aborigines. There was four hotels in the town, the Hot and Cold was the only air conditioned building in the whole town and it had been bombed and there was only one bar of that open, so we used to all go to that and the others we called them blood houses, because there was always fights at them, and that was the Vic Hotel and the Don Hotel was the two worst, and we hardly ever drank there. And we

28:00 worked pretty hard up at Darwin, and a lot of the time we was working up in the roof cavities and the roof cavities was full of asbestos fibre and we was working, and we used to have to start at four o'clock in the morning to work up in these roof cavities because otherwise you couldn't, with the heat up there, you'd never live. So we'd start early and knock off early and we did most of the construction,

28:30 of, the reconstruction of the camp while I was there. And at that stage I thought, 'Now righto,' they sent me to the carpenter's shop when I got up there, and I was working as a carpenter for a while and then I decided I was going to be an electrician. So they put a general hand with every electrician, and I learnt to re-wire houses, I was re-wiring houses and everything by then, and the bloke

29:00 I was with was a real no hoper, I called him Pinocchio, and I used to do most of the work and we went down and was re-wiring the chapel and the chapel was made up, it was, the buildings up there was just asbestos roofs, corrugated roofing, and the whole side of them was covered in that big arc mesh, thick arc mesh. And then there was shutters that used to come out

29:30 to keep the rain and that out. And …

At what point during rookies did you find out that you were going to the works party up there?

When you passed out, that's when you, then you waited for about a week, that's when all your postings come out. And, my friend, Jim McKinnon, first posting was to Korea. Awaken Japan, actually.

30:00 And all the rest of them was based in Australia except Jim and I was the only one that went to Darwin.

So getting to that point of the passing out parade, looking back on rookies, had you sort of breezed through, considering your CMF training?

Yeah. Yeah I had, I didn't have any problems at all and I was pretty good at drill and all that sort of stuff, so I didn't have any problems at all on rookies,

30:30 I found it a piece of cake actually.

And did you have family come to the passing out parade?

They all lived in Goulburn, no they didn't actually. I don't, I probably didn't even tell them we were passing out at the time I don't think. I don't think I even told them.

And did they keep you there at Richmond for that week before the postings came out?

Yeah, they posted us to Base Squadron and they put me in orderly room, helping out the clerical work for

31:00 a while while I was waiting for my posting. After a week the postings came out and they issued me with travel orders and jumped on an aircraft at Mascot and they flew me up to Darwin. I hated Darwin.

At any point during that three months at rookies had you been thinking or had you had any ideas about what you might want to go on to do, other than being a general hand?

No, I hadn't then and I thought

31:30 to meself, by then we'd only been doing drill and things like that, and I thought, 'Now I'll wait.' At that time I was possibly thinking of being a transport driver. I didn't want to be in some trade where I'd be locked inside a building or something, so I completely give clerical and that away, so, and I think that I was more likely to have become a driver, but I thought there was no hurry

32:00 because I had signed up for six years, and after rookies I could have a good look around and then make up my mind what I wanted to be.

And you had mentioned to us before that during the war there wasn't really much news about Darwin having been bombed.

No.

What level of devastation were you expecting when you got there?

Well we thought, seeing as the war ended in '45, we thought that Darwin would have been repaired by then.

32:30 Even then we wasn't expecting the damage. Even though we knew it had been bombed, no-one expected the damage when we got there and found out how extensive the bombing was, they'd had something like a hundred and fifty three raids. There were still boats sticking up, bits of boats sticking up in the harbour, and in the town where the bakery and post office had been bombed, the post office was completely bombed out and it was, the rubble was still there and the big

33:00 steel bolt door was still laying in the street, that was in '52. The post office was still, the rubble was still there, no one had cleaned it up, and there was hardly one part of the RAAF base that wasn't touched, everything had bomb damage all over it.

What were you thinking then when you got there and saw that?

'Look at all the bloody work.' But yeah, it was really unexpected,

33:30 you know, and when they put me in the carpenter's shop and that, and we was kept very busy from then on, and I think in my time there, for about the twelve months I was there, we'd reconstructed the mess, the medical section and the, quite a few married quarters and they were wired, the lot of them, by then.

What was the mood in Darwin by the time you got there?

34:00 Well, the Chinese was mainly running the place, they owned Darwin, mostly the Paspalums, they owned the pubs and the shops, there was no supermarkets or anything, hardly any shops in Darwin. And, there was an RSL [Returned and Services League] and, as I say, the four pubs and just a few shops and, as I say, the street, the main street wasn't really very large. We lived, the

34:30 RAAF camp was about seven or eight miles from town, there was nothing between us and the town. And at the, the people in town, other than a few Aborigines and mostly Chinese, there wasn't many whites in town at all. There was an army barracks there, Larrakia, and there was a naval depot there, so the biggest part of the population at that stage was still military forces.

35:00 And we didn't get to town that often and of course, not having any transport, we didn't venture into town too often and a lot of weekends we still had to work, so, and at that time Darwin was the only wet canteen in the whole air force, and a wet canteen means it served alcohol. And twice a week you was allowed to go down and get two bottles of beer

35:30 and you had to drink it there, at the mess. You was issued with two ounces of tobacco, it was still rationed, every week. And I come home one night, there was no drinking allowed in the huts at all. And if you, there was no such thing as a slab of beer, and if you wanted a carton of beer it'd come in four dozen crates, big large bottles, and, mind you, you had to be pretty strong to carry them, I can tell you.

36:00 So we used to buy, if I was going out to a party or something, we'd get this, in wooden crates they were, and we'd get these four dozen bottles, large bottles, and party for the whole weekend. But in the camp itself we'd go down to the mess and we'd have our two bottles. Now sometimes we used to bring, some of the blokes would bring the bottles back to the hut, now. We didn't have any fans there and it was stinking hot all the time we was in Darwin, no air conditioning, no fans, nothing.

36:30 And you'd pull your mosquito net down and stop you from being eaten alive of a night, and I was in this beer hall, I was in this mess this night. I walked into our hut, and there was about three people drinking in there, see, and I went to the toilet and when I come back I've walked into this hut and I was talking to them, and the SPs [Security Police] raided the place and I got pinched for drinking in the huts and I

hadn’t even had a drink, making me seven, took me up, charged me, giving me seven days CB [Confined to Barracks], and I was completely innocent. I didn’t have

37:00 a drink at all. And, that was me only charge, I think that was probably, oh no, it wasn’t quite the last charge I had in the air force. It was the first one. And, from then on we had, up at the mess itself, we had a lot of Aborigines working for the mess and the Aborigines, they’d bring them over from Bathurst Island, and I thought, ‘I’ve never seen anything so shiny black in all my life as them,’

37:30 first time I’d ever seen a black person. And they were really, really nice people you know and they used to, they’d be in the mess and they’d do all the washing up and cleaning out the floors and the mess, and they’d bring over about thirty from Bathurst Island, and they’d give them flour and tobacco and all sorts of food stuff to take back, that’s how they were paid, back to the island. They’d stay for three months and then they’d change them over

38:00 with another mob. And they all loved it there and they’d all get down into the bush and you’d see them coming back with a stick on their shoulder with a live goanna tied to it and they was taking it back to cook over their fire, you know, quite regularly, and we always, we got on quite well with them, they was always, they was really, they weren’t the usual, they hadn’t been spoilt by urban life or anything and they were still really nice people and we really, we used to look after them too when,

38:30 give them a bit of tobacco now and again and other things, you know.

Did anyone every go and mingle with them outside work, in terms of going to have a meal with them?

No, not with what they used to eat. I think you’d, they used to knock over kangaroos and lizards and snakes, they used to eat a lot of snakes, so we didn’t, went to a couple of corroboree that they had. And it, and most of them was,

39:00 could only speak Pidgin English, not, they weren’t really good at English so it was a bit hard to converse, so we mainly contacted through sign language and got them to understand, and a little bit of Pidgin English that we’d learnt. So, but we never interacted with them otherwise.

What was the corroboree like?

The corroborees, they’d all get around, and all it is, is stamping their feet and turning up a hell of a dust, that’s all.

39:30 They used to paint themselves up and light all these fires and they’d run, get in a circle and stamp their feet and, it, they’d only invite special people that they like to these corroborees. Not just anyone couldn’t go you know, and well, we got on quite, me and my friend got on quite well with them, so went to about two of their corroborees I think, but they offered us food but we didn’t eat any, bit of snake here and

40:00 there, goanna, they usually just throw it in the fire, and that’s it, you know. They wouldn’t cook it any, they’d just throw it in the ashes and pull it out ready and eat it.

And would you just watch the corroboree, or would they ever try and get you to join in?

No, no they never tried to get us in. I think, I don’t think it was even allowed for a white person to be, it was pretty taboo for anyone to even be there to start with, like, but in so far as joining, you never did, you know. They never invited you to,

40:30 and we knew we wouldn’t do it anyway, that they wouldn’t like if we did.

Tape 4

00:33 **When you were talking earlier about climbing up into the roofs with the asbestos fibres, was it known that it was perhaps …?**

No, it wasn’t at that time. I mean, all the roofs was made out of asbestos sheeting too, the outer cladding was all asbestos and inside the roof it was all this asbestos fibre. And then when you were sweating, it’d stick to you and really itch, you know. And the roof, in between the rafters, was just covered in it, loose, it was

01:00 pumped into it, loose. And we worked up there, I must have been up in the roof for at least a month, every morning. At least, while I was doing, and especially in the Officers’ Mess when we was rewiring the Officers’ Mess up. And at that time, no one had an inkling that it was a dangerous substance, you know, so it never worried us really except, what did worry us was the heat and the itchiness

01:30 it used to cause when it got on your skin. But we got, we got the job pretty well done. And I think when I left, I don’t think the works party stayed there much longer after I left, I think they pretty well wound it up about six months or so after I left there. And we, we used to go into town, only

02:00 occasionally, and, as I say, the Paspalums, they owned nearly all of Darwin, and I detested the place for the whole time I was there because of the mosquitoes and the sand flies and the heat and the, no fans, not even a fan in the hut, you know, so you was in a constant sweat all the time. And I was never more pleased to get out of a place, and they posted me from Darwin to Canberra in the winter.

02:30 **In that twelve months or so that you were in Darwin, were you noticing the town sort of coming back to life a bit more?**

No, it wasn't actually, it seemed to be still stagnant. I mean, the RAAF base, we'd just about brought that back to what's her name and there was a mob working out on the runway too, which I wasn't involved in, and then, they was repairing damage out on the runway. And that's the first time I ever run across plant operators, up there, that they was plant operators in the works party. Actually I could have become a plant operator then too, all you had to do was drive a W9

03:00 tractor, you know, and do a few little things. Later on when it become one, it took a two year course. But they, the town, as I say, even when I left there, there was still rubble in town from where the bombed out buildings and the Darwin Hotel still hadn't been rebuilt. It was changed drastically when I went back in '61 though.

So the time that you were there, for that twelve months, were there many sort of stories

03:30 **and folklore going on about what had happened during the bombing?**

No, because most of the people was indigenous and they didn't talk about it much, they was either Chinese or some other, you know. And so we was aware of the amount of damage done, of all the, of how severe the bombing raids were. We still hadn't heard at that time, and it wasn't until long, long after that we found out how many had actually been killed there.

04:00 And you could tell by the damage, just at the RAAF, the RAAF base, they used to raid that nearly every day, you know, that and the harbour, the RAAF base copped the biggest hiding of any place up there because they was trying to damage the airfield. At that time the RAAF only had about six Wirraways, I think, when they attacked, and they sent all the six Wirraways up and they all got shot down.

Did it give you a different perspective on how close the Japanese had come during the war?

Yeah, it did, it really surprised

04:30 us that we'd thought that Darwin had possibly had about one or two bombing raids and a few little bits of damage done, but when we seen the extent of it, we knew that they'd really had a pasting, you know. And the people hadn't at that time, knew there was a lot of raids but hadn't counted them, but I've got an official record there of all the bomb raids and how many aircraft was involved.

05:00 I think there was about forty and fifty aircraft used to come over in a bomb, in bombing raids at a time. It wasn't until the Americans came there with their fighter aircraft that they started downing them in huge numbers and they give it away.

Had you, in that time in Darwin, did you meet anyone that had been there during the raids?

Yeah, all the Chinese had been there, they hadn't left, they refused to leave. The Paspalums and the, and a few

05:30 of the Aborigines and some people in town, they'd been there during all the raids but they didn't talk about it too much. I suppose we never really mixed too much with the people in town and Darwin at that time, because they, there weren't too many there and besides that, we never got to town very often at all, you know, so we didn't really have a lot of things to do with the population,

06:00 the civil population at the time, we was mainly confined to working on the RAAF base and it was too far from town to try and walk in to do anything and the RAAF didn't supply transport in there.

Did you get leave to come home at all during that twelve months or you were in Darwin the whole time?

No, no, normally a tour of Darwin was fifteen months. You went over for twelve months and you had

06:30 three months replacement, which worked out at fifteen months and then you left there and got leave and, but I had, I didn't have any leave until I got back to, and you got extra leave for being up in the tropics, you got less tax to start with, they used to call it an A zone and you only paid a small tax and you all, I think it was north of Townsville, it was the A zone, or B, Townsville was B zone and the Northern

07:00 Territory, right up the top, was A zone. And, so you paid less tax and you got an extra seven days' tropical leave a year on top, your normal recreation leave at, per year was three weeks, twenty seven days, and then we had seven days on top of that. So when I come back I had a year's recreation leave, plus that seven days, which ended up, with weekends, turning it into

07:30 about six weeks or something like that.

That's a good deal.

Hm.

So at the end of that twelve months you got word that you were going to Canberra?

Me posting came out and it was Canberra and I wasn't too happy about that. I'd known the area pretty well, I wanted to go somewhere I hadn't known and living at Goulburn, of course, we knew Canberra pretty well, and especially going to freezing Canberra from Darwin. And, as I say, I went down there and I got,

08:00 at that time you had to, to get cleared onto a base, which I did that time, they give you a list of paper and it had about twenty names and of that twenty names, you had to go to the L Group and you had to get their signature to say that you'd been there. You had to go to your medical section and hand in your inoculation book, get their signature. You had to go to the pay master and get their signature, you had to go to the paymaster and get their signature, and the last, and you had to go to all these different places, the WOD, so he could put you on the guard roster,

08:30 and the last person you went to was orderly room and they'd check the list to see that you'd signed in everything and then they'd, he was cleared on, onto the base, your name was everywhere, so you was cleared on. And it wasn't until later on, after I'd been on for about a year that I worked out that when I went to a base and they'd issue me with this clearance, I'd go to the pay section and I'd hand in me

09:00 pay book, so that I'd be paid, and I went to the medical section and handed in my inoculation book and then I took two days off and tore the paper up, so that no one ever, ever cottoned on to it and of course I never went onto the guard roster. And, so no one ever cottoned on to it, but when you was leaving, then

09:30 you had to get everyone's signature because the last thing that you got to was the paymaster. So that was the last signature there so you couldn't get away with it when you left the base, but coming onto it, it didn't take me long to twig to that after I'd done it the first time, I done that every posting I was on from then on.

And it never caught up with you on the way out?

Never caught up with me, no, I used to take two days off and then go back to work, you know, and I'd report into whatever, the warrant officer in charge of the runway or

10:00 whatever was going on, they'd assign me where to work, and that'd be that.

So at the time that you went from Darwin to Canberra, what was happening politically in the world? Korea was over?

Yeah, Korea had finished by then and Vietnam hadn't really started and so it was all peacetime operations. Well at Canberra they were still flying wartime aircraft, they still had Beaufighters

10:30 and our transport aircraft was still Dakotas, and it was just like having an ordinary job except that at Canberra when I went on, when I got on CB [Confined to Barracks] there for being charged twice.

Twice, what was the second one for?

Oh, that,

11:00 this is two extra ones, that one was at Darwin, that other one. When I went to Canberra I got into, there was, the corporal in charge of our hut was a real officious type and I got into an argument with him one night and give him away and the next day they had me up on a charge for assaulting a superior officer, causing contusions to his eyes, they give me fourteen days CB for that. And what they used to do when you was

11:30 on CB, I was waiting to be charged the day Petrov flew out, I don't know whether you've heard of him, that Russian spy that come over to Australia, and I'm standing on the veranda waiting to be charged when his cavalcade came through. And in them days, when you got fourteen days CB they put you on guard for three successive nights, generally on the midnight shift, then you'd be off one night and then on for another three nights. And the guard at Canberra entailed, it had all these hangars and points

12:00 and there was a Bundy clock on each one of these points, fairly far apart, and you had a key and at twenty minutes to the hour and twenty minutes past the hour you had to put this key in one of these locations, turn the key, and up in the guard room there was a machine up on the wall and it had a tape in it and as you turned the key it'd turn up on the tape and if you didn't turn the key at that time it used to show up a red

12:30 light and the guard commander would come down looking to see what was the matter. So you was constantly on the move all night and hitting these Bundy clocks, you know. And CB was, wasn't very nice at all, so I spent them fourteen days. And when I was at Canberra they employed me working on the gardens. They worked out, they reckoned, the barracks officer who, I may add,

13:00 had the, he had a property in Canberra, he also had the contract for mowing all the grass around the airfield, and Beau Taylor was his name. And they sent me up the Officer's Mess to do some, plant some shrubs or something and everything I touched grew like mad, so they reckoned I had a green thumb,

and I couldn't get away from it, and then I'd only been there for about three months

13:30 and I got in another fight and I was in the, I was on the mess committee on the base at this time and I got in another fight and then they, I went back to my hut and they come up and they said, "You're, there's a mob," the barracks officer said, "There's a mob going to 87 Squadron and they want two GHs [general hands?] from barracks section

14:00 to go over to Port Hedland with them. And, at that time, 87 was a photographic reconnaissance squadron, it was equipped with eight Mosquito aircraft, and it was the only outfit in Australia that was paying for its upkeep, it used to sell all the maps it had done, it had mapped the whole of Australia and New Guinea. And it'd stay in Canberra during the winter months and in the summer months it'd go somewhere else. And, they was

14:30 going over to Perth to, they'd already been there the year previous and they had about three weeks' filming more to do in Perth and then they was going to Port Hedland. And they was the only mob that was self- sufficient, you know, selling all this stuff. So they decided in the barracks section they'd put all the names in a hat. Now my best friend there was Ozzie Porter, who was a Tasmanian. They put, there was about six GHs there at the time, they put all our names in the hat and out popped mine and his,

15:00 both of us, so, at that time I'd been, I'd broken a collar-bone, I was in at a dance one night and I was riding a pushbike and I hit the curb and broke my collar-bone and I was going on leave to Goulburn and the car I was in crashed, and it was nearly healed, and re-broke the collar-bone again. So I had it in a sling and our barracks warden said, "Righto Wilson,

15:30 you're picked but it's only on account if you're cleared by medical, if you're not we'll select someone else." So I took the sling off, took the bandage off my shoulder and said, "Oh it's alright, I've been cleared from there." And so we jumped on a train, they posted me to 87 Squadron, they put us on a troop train in Canberra and it took us five days and nights to get to Perth,

16:00 sitting up all the way mind you, and we stopped at Adelaide, we all went into the pub there and we come back rotten. And while I was in there, I had a, I had me hat on crooked or something and the WOD [Warrant Officer Discipline] said, "Report back to me when you get back on the train." So he was sitting in one of these little box cars with all his senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and that and

16:30 all the windows was up, and he [was] just about to dress me down when someone up the train was sick and it all come in through the window, right inside, "Get out of here," he said, "Get out of here." So he hunted us out, we never heard any more about that. So when we got to Perth, these aircraft used to fly at twenty five thousand feet high and they had cameras mounted in the belly of them and they needed complete clear weather,

17:00 no cloud cover to, while they was photographing. Now, we was in Perth, only three weeks photographing to do, now, we'd, every morning there was just a bit of cloud, the weather was nice but there was a bit of cloud so they'd say, "Righto, youse can go to town today but report back in case there's flying tomorrow morning, be back on parade tomorrow morning," and this went on for three months and we thought this was great, you know, we was in town every day having a great time. All of a sudden the weather cleared up

17:30 and in a fortnight, 'bang', we was on our way. So they said to me, "Righto, you're going on the advance party to Port Hedland to set up the camp there." And there was two pubs in Port Hedland, there was only eleven people in town at the time and it was, the town consisted of manganese ore, you know, and the tankers, the ships used to come in, and the tide was the largest tides in the

18:00 world there and the ships used to come in to load the iron ore at the piers and with the tide out they'd be sitting on the bottom and they'd lean over to the side and sit and they'd have to wait until the next high tide to get out again. There was two pubs there, The Pier and The Esplanade, and they billeted us into, our advance party, into the Esplanade Hotel and we was upstairs sleeping on the balcony, they lined up all the beds on the balcony. We went out and we started erecting the camp, it was all under canvas, we erected the

18:30 main mess tents and we just about had the camp completed and we got a cyclone warning. So they said, "Righto, go out, take all them tents down, and peg them down, we got a cyclone warning." So we took all the tents down that we spent two weeks putting them up, pegged them down, went back into the hotel and the cyclone hit that night and it hit the same time as a king tide and the Esplanade Hotel wasn't too far from

19:00 the pier. We went down to the bar that night and we was in, to have a beer, and we was into water just half way up our legs, at the bar and we were still drinking, they were still serving beer and we were still drinking, and there's bottles floating around, and it never worried us, and we seen out the storm there. And next day we went back to camp and half our tents was gone,

19:30 they'd flown away even though we'd pegged them down so we had to get another, a Dakota to fly us up some more tents. And so we spent another three weeks, the base was kept at Perth till we fixed up the new camp and then they all came up by, flew them up in about four Dakotas. Flew the Mosquitos up there and there was a runway at Port Hedland and they started

20:00 flying operations straight away. Now there was the, the commanding officer was named Brown, and there was, he was a squadron leader, and the second in command was Squadron Leader Mackenzie. They made me squadron leader Mackenzie's back man, and to be his back man all I had to do was make up his bed at night, that's all I had to do, and I thought, 'Oh gee this is a great job.' And in town, there

20:30 was a hospital in town and the only single women in the whole town was three nurses and the matron. And I swung onto one of these nurses and Squadron Leader Mackenzie got onto the matron, so he used to take me in his ute every night and we used to stay at the hospital all night and come home the next morning. And I was at a dance this night, we went to a dance, and we used to have our own band there, and we went to a dance, we used to have these dances, and we went to the dance this night

21:00 and he, the Squadron Leader Mackenzie was there with the matron and, the matron called me over and she said, "Look, we're getting complaints about you blokes leaving the hospital every morning from the nurses' quarters," she said, "so it's got to cease, you're not to stay there any more." And I said, "You'd be a great one to talk, what about yourself?" and she said, "I knew you'd take that attitude." So Mackenzie called me over and said, "Report back to me next morning. You go back to the base,"

21:30 he said, "and report to me next morning." I never reported to him anyway and he was probably pleased that I didn't, but that was the end of me excursions to town, I had to get me own way in and out from then on, but I noticed he kept going back.

I was going to ask.

Yeah, he kept going back. And, we, when we was in Port Hedland, as I say, we had our own band, and we had a really great cricket team and we used to go for hundreds of miles

22:00 and we'd pack up our band on one of our trucks, one of our RAAF trucks, we'd all get in the back of it, we'd load it up with these four dozen crates of beer and we'd head to places like Marble Bar, we'd arranged previously to have a social game of cricket with them and we'd go to all these places, all Broome and Marble Bar, all these places, all over the place, and we'd take our band up and they used to put us up in the Young Women's Association.

22:30 Of course there was no young women there, just us, but all the town would have a, we'd play there on Saturday and the Saturday night we'd have the dance and the whole town used to turn out for the dance. We'd have our band and everything and really popular they were, and we did that quite a few times and come back to camp again next day, sometimes we'd travel four and five hundred miles you know.

23:00 And the Iron Clad Hotel, Marble Bar is the hottest place in Australia, it's generally about forty eight degrees, and they call it the Iron Clad Hotel and it's a tin pub. You can imagine how hot it is in it, he does a great trade selling beer. But I had quite a pleasant stay at Port Hedland and then we, it took us about three and a half months and they finished photographing.

23:30 **So compared to Darwin, it sounds like this was …**

Holiday camp yeah. And, and of course, we was very disappointed when we had to leave actually so they flew us back to Canberra, we didn't have to go back by train this time, they flew us back. They flew us to Perth first and then to Canberra. When I got back to Canberra, now Canberra was a bit unique, it had a pig farm run by the RAAF

24:00 and this pig farm was about two kilometres from the base and the control tower, could see directly in the farm and it was, the pig farm was where the sewerage farm was, the big sewerage purification plant, there was no smell there though. And, being in the ACT [Australian Capital Territory], the health department was very stringent on the

24:30 cleanliness of these sort of places, so they used to come out and inspect the place pretty regular. Now, there was a bloke there that used to run the pig farm from barrack section, a GH, and he used to run the pig farm, and he got posted, so they selected me to go out there. So I went out there, and it was a great job. All the officers used to come out of a weekend and clean the place up and we had about eighty pigs and I started a big breeding program there with them.

25:00 And what we used to do with the pigs, we'd send them to the abattoirs and have them slaughtered when they got about seventy pound, we used to call them porkers and we'd send them to the abattoirs. Once they was inspected, because pigs have a lot of TB [tuberculosis], once they was inspected, and killed at the abattoirs, we weren't allowed to kill them, 5hey would then send them out to our camp butcher, he'd cut them up and take orders from all the married quarters and all the people around the base

25:30 that wanted pork and they'd sell this pork to them and all this money went into our welfare fund to buy sport and equipment and have do's and things like that. So it was a really great set up.

Do you know how it came about that the air force had a pig farm?

No I don't, never did find out, and I used to go out there, we'd go around all the messes of a morning, first thing of a morning, and we'd load all the swill up from the messes in garbage tins, we'd load it up and it had to be cooked, every bit of the food you took out there had to be

26:00 put in big forty four gallon drums with a big furnace under them and it all had to be cooked before it was fed to the pigs. And if the health department came out and found any uncooked stuff in there, they'd threatened to close the place down about four times. This, they had a rabbit ranger there and he had about forty dogs, and we used to call him on the way, doing his job, and they had a bloke there, a civil bloke there looking after the sewerage farm.

26:30 And we had a little hut there and we used to eat in that and it had stove in it and it was nice and warm.

Why did all the food have to be cooked?

To stop any disease from being transferred to the pigs, apparently, and to make sure that they never got TB or, they was very insistent on that, that it had to be cooked. Even though most of it had been, come from the mess, it had been cooked anyway, it had to be recooked.

And how many of you were there?

Me, just me.

27:00 And we used to cut the pigs, get all the male pigs and we'd cut them and hold them by the tail and throw a bit of kerosene on them and let them go again, you know. And of course we only kept one boar in the whole place. And it was all done up in pens, and this rabbit ranger came along and he said, "I bought a new pig dog, cost me forty dollars." He said, "Do you mind if I try it out on your pigs?" and I said, "No, go ahead." So he, see this dog, and there was an old sow there, real cranky old sow that had just had young ones

27:30 and he threw his dog over the fence and it went in and biting at this pig and the pig picked it up with it's snout and belted it up against the fence and then set about eating it, that was his forty pound pig dog, it wasn't much of a pig dog, and so he used to come in every morning. And I worked there for about, and I used to work, you had to work every weekend and everything, and it was a great job because I was me own boss, no-one ever

28:00 worried me and I was doing a good job there because I'd bred up the stock and everything, and we used to feed them all this swill, and six weeks before they was due to be slaughtered we'd only feed them grain, to get all the fat and that off them so that they was pork. And I'd work for seven days or fourteen days or so, like that, and then I'd have seven days leave because of all the weekends

28:30 and that and hooking it to another weekend, and then they'd send another one of the people from barracks, from, while I was away on leave. And I used to go home to Goulburn every, when I had these seven days' leave, and while I was there, at Canberra, I was on the committee of the beer hall. And I'd already been in trouble with this corporal

29:00 that they'd charged me and, I was at, I was on the committee and we had a big do down in the Airmen's Mess, and in the middle of the floor they had the top, big perspex turret off a Dakota aircraft and it was turned into a punch bowl. And, they just, the punch was just a couple of bottles of whisky and a couple of bottles of rum and a couple of bottles of, like it was really potent with a few of, bits of orange floating around on the top

29:30 and it had a ladle in it for ladling out your drink. And I went up to get a drink and there was this drunken airmen alongside of it and he was dipping his hand in and glass and all into the punch and then drinking it and then dipping it back in, and I said to him, "If I see you do that once more, you're out of here sport," and he said, "Is that the case?" and he dipped it in again, so I grabbed him by the scruff of the neck and threw him out and he said, "You haven't heard the last of this."

30:00 And I had, I'd been in a fight and had plaster on me hand from that Goulburn fight, so he made an arrangement where he was going to fight me the next day and when we get out there the next day there was about five people there that had heard it and knew it was going to happen, so we go out the back and he said, "You'll hit me with your plaster." And so, to make sure I wouldn't hit him with me plaster, they got a football lace and they tied it to me belt, my right arm.

30:30 And he was, he tied the knot in the what's her name, so he come charging at me and I hit him with one hit and he dropped. And I was picking up the swill the next morning and one of the blokes come up to me and he said, "Tom, I hear you're having a court of inquiry on you." And a court of inquiry had met and they was gathering evidence for a court martial, and I got the shock of me life and I said, "I haven't heard anything about it." "Oh yeah." He said, "They've been up here inquiring

31:00 to everyone, you know, that was at that beer hall that night." Apparently this Dixon, that was his name, he'd gone to the MO and he told the MO, and he had a broken jaw and he told the MO that I'd struck him with my plaster. And the MO was most indignant and he said, "I didn't put that plaster on you to go around clubbing people with it," and I couldn't say that I had it tied down because that would have been

31:30 I was looking and prepared to have a fight, you know. And I told them the truth in so, the fact that he threw the first punch and I was only defending myself, but I couldn't tell them my arm was tied down. Now all the other people there knew this, that that was the case, so they had this court of enquiry and there was about ten witnesses that come out for me and they couldn't get enough evidence on

32:00 the court to have a, to court martial me. So the CO called me up and he said, "Righto you, we've had enough of you, we're posting you, we're sending you somewhere you can do all the fighting you want,

we're sending you to ACS," and I'd never heard of ACS, so I was posted to Morotai, Manas Island. And, they sent me on pre-embarkation leave and I went home to Goulburn and I was home, I had all me needles,

32:30 seven needles, and I went to Goulburn and I was on leave for about four days and they sent a telegram down and said, "Report back to the base immediately." And I thought, 'Hello, what's this?' so I reported back the base and they said, "Your posting's now been changed, you're going to Townsville, to ACS in Townsville." So, I went back, I was in the Ainslie Hotel that night, that afternoon, and I was going, heading back to Goulburn, and this,

33:00 and I was standing in there and I had a hat off and this, when I went out in the toilet this warrant officer, who was in the bar at the same time, said, "Put your hat on." And when I went back to the bar I completely forgot anyway. Next thing there was two service police there to drag me back to the base and they said, "Report to the WOD when you get back to the base." I said, "I'm on leave, I'm going on back to Goulburn." They said, "No you're not, you're going back to camp and reporting to the WOD." Now it was after stand down

33:30 when I got back to the base and I went and knocked on the Sergeants' Mess door and no-one come out so I thought, 'Oh bugger you.' So I went home and stayed there. Next morning I went down there and they charged me with disobeying a lawful command and not reporting, you know, and the warrant officer, he was the orderly room warrant officer, when they charged me they fined me seven days' pay and the warrant officer was absolutely appalled, he didn't expect anything to happen of it

34:00 and he kept it off my record, he said "I'll make sure this never goes on your record." So that was one charge that never went on it. And, so I got my travel orders and I jumped on a train and I arrived in Townsville, and the 2 ACS was at Townsville, and soon as I got there I was right in me element, you know. They were, they was working on the runway. I was sent out the quarry originally to work in the quarry, we was quarrying all our own materials

34:30 to put into the runway, was extending the runway and, we was really well-liked in town, we had a pretty good mob, and they was as rough as hell this ACS mob, but they was pretty, really good mob, and all the taxi drivers loved them, they used to hire these cabs to go to town and bring them back home, and it was a fair way into town, and they used to allow them to tick up the fare until payday and every payday they'd pay them religiously. We was there,

35:00 I was there for about six months.

Can I just, before we get too far ahead, I just want to go back and ask you, you briefly mentioned the Petrov affair earlier, what was the buzz around that when it was happening?

Oh it was big news all over Australia. This Petrov was a KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvenno Bezopasnosti – [Russian] Committee for State Security] agent and he was working in the embassy and he decided that they'd talked him into defecting or he decided to defect, and when he defected they sent over four Russian

35:30 KGB agents and, to grab his wife and take her back to Russia. Now that was the cavalcade that was coming into the base when I was on the veranda that morning, that was the, Petrov's wife, and they was bundling her onto an aircraft at the RAAF base and of course they had diplomatic immunity and everything. So they put her onto the aircraft and this was one of the biggest stories in Australia at the time because communism

36:00 was a great big deal at that time and Menzies was actually trying to outlaw the Communist Party, and so they put this Mrs Petrov in this aircraft and they flew her to Darwin, now they stopped in Darwin to refuel and all the people was waiting at the airport and dragged her off the aircraft and wouldn't let her take her. The pop-, the, you know, just the civilian population, dragged her off the aircraft and wouldn't, and the Russians was all armed with weapons

36:30 but they wasn't game to shoot into the crowd or anything. So the Russians jumped in their aircraft and left without her and she stayed there.

So what were you thinking when you saw that cavalcade go by in Canberra?

I was thinking, 'Jeez, I wished I was on that instead of standing here waiting to be charged.'

So you saw the …

I didn't even know at that time that they was coming through but then the orderly room bloke, when I said I seen all these official cars coming through, waving their diplomatic

37:00 flags and everything and it was about five cars in the cavalcade, and then the orderly room told me that it was Petrov, Mrs Petrov being flown out by the KGB.

So the whole, you know, the Russians and the KGB, were people scared of them or just …?

Yeah, everyone at that time expected China and Russia to, China in particular, to invade Australia,

37:30 and the communist party was the threat of the day and they had what they called a domino effect, they

didn’t want communism to start up in any other country outside Russia and China, even though the Russians had taken Hungary and all them places, and they reckoned if one country fell, it’d be like a domino effect, they’d get country after country after country. And at that time spies was pretty prevalent, you know.

38:00 But he was the first one ever that turned over all the information from the KGB to the Australian Government.

So you, when you said people were expecting that China would invade Australia, like what was the rumours around that, where was that expected to happen?

They reckoned, with their huge population, they had to expand and the only place they could expand to was Australia. And of course, the governments at the time

38:30 kept this up because they wanted communism completely outlawed, so they actually helped foster that, you know. And of course the Russians had by that time, had blockaded Germany and taken over all these European countries and had the atomic bomb by then and they was considered a real threat, so.

So what was the sort of propaganda going around Australia about it?

39:00 The propaganda was that, there would be very much likelihood, seeing as the Russians was getting the atomic bomb, to be a nuclear war and that the communism had to be stopped at all costs, and that the Russians would probably be the first ones to start it if it started. And the Americans was arming themselves and the Russians was arming themselves, and the Russians had a huge army

39:30 at the time. So people were quite scared about another war breaking out and a worse war than any of the others before, with nuclear weapons, because it was fresh in their minds what happened at Hiroshima and Nagasaki when they dropped the atomic bomb. And there was really no protection against it, you know, if it did happen.

And so who were thought to be the communists within Australia?

We had a big communist party in Australia. It was,

40:00 most of the trade union people was communist. The people that run all the trade unions and, and quite vocal people that used to get out, they didn’t try to hide it, and a lot of influential people was members of the communist party and a lot of press members. And that’s when Menzies tried to outlaw it but it got defeated, he had a referendum on it and it got defeated.

Was the general population, do you think, scared of communists?

40:30 Yeah they were, really were concerned about them, they, there wasn’t one member of the public that wasn’t, I don’t think, at that time. It was in every paper you picked up every day, something about communism and, you know, the Cold War, so people were really concerned and what concerned them mainly was the use of atomic weapons.

Tape 5

00:32 Well after I was posted to Garbutt, I was allocated to the quarry and the quarry, we used to do all our own drilling and blasting and then all the aggregate that, we crushed our own material and it was brought into the runway for an extension of the runway, I think we was doing about two thousand feet extension to the runway at Garbutt.

What sort of drills were you using there?

We was using these

01:00 pneumatic drills and you’d hang off the side of the quarry wall in a harness with these seventy pound pneumatic drills, jack hammers, drilling away at, into the face of the quarry to blast it. And we didn’t have sophisticated blasting materials at that time either, like they’ve got now. So I worked in there for six months and I hadn’t had much to do with any of the runway work and I was still a general hand.

01:30 So I had, we had quite an enjoyable time there while I was there, and later on I came back to the base and I worked around the base in certain jobs with ACS and then we got orders to embark for, the whole squadron was to embark for Malaya. And so the night before we was due to embark, we all went into town and all our regular haunts at the pubs, we celebrated all around

02:00 with them and we come back with a mile of beer, you know, cartons of beer. When we got to the guard gate there was two SPs on duty and they said, “Where do you think you’re going with that?” and we said, “We’re taking it in here, we’re leaving tomorrow.” And he said, “No you’re not, you know there’s no drinking on the base.” And the sergeant MP come out and he said, SP, and he said, “Go on, let them through, there’s five hundred dozen in there now, that won’t make any difference.” So we went in and we partied all night.

02:30 The next morning, the New Australia, the ship which was a migrant ship, it got used on the migrant run and it was built specifically for Atlantic waters, it wasn't meant for tropical, and, the seas were so rough, it couldn't get into the pier and it had to anchor out at sea, outside. So they got the ferries that used to take the people across to the, Magnetic Island, the civil ferries,

03:00 to shunt us out, in certain amount of people at a time, to the ship at sea. Now when we got to the ship at sea, of course we was all feeling no pain by then, we was all, we'd been up all night drinking, when we got to the ship, they threw big ropes over the side and the ferry crew tried to anchor the ferry to the ship. Now, there was a gun port in the side of the vessel

03:30 and they opened the gun port and that's the way we had to enter. Now the sea's swell was dropping the ferry below the gun port by about two metres and then rising about two metres above it, and we had a bloke standing each side of us, and we had our kit bags and our steel helmets and everything, and he was standing each side of us, and he'd say, "Jump." And of course there was a gap of about, over a metre and a half to jump to start with and he'd say, "Jump,"

04:00 when it got level with the gun port, and you'd jump. Well there's lots of kit bags went down, sometimes you'd jump and there'd be a bit higher and you'd land flat on the deck, and miraculously none of us got injured on it but we lost lots of kit bags. And when we got aboard, they finally, it took hours to get the ferry, the whole group across, there was six hundred of us and it took hours to bring us all aboard, as soon as I got aboard, we was all

04:30 ushered to our cabins, way down below, a stinking hot, but I didn't even notice the heat by then and I didn't wake up till next day and we was well out to sea. And we also had a contingent, the advance party of the 3rd Battalion, army, going over to Malaya to fight the terrorists, the communist terrorists. And we had a wing commander in charge of us who was

05:00 equal to lieutenant colonel, and the army had a full bird colonel and so he became the boat commandant, much to our displeasure. And he, after we was at sea for a day, he said, "Well, we're going to ration the beer so you can only have two bottles of beer a day and tickets will be issued to each member." And the crew of the New Australia was crewed by a civilian

05:30 English crew and it had stewardesses on it and captains, and all the officers was merchant navy. And we had four to a cabin and we found out that it was so hot we couldn't sleep in the cabins of a night so we used to take our mattresses up and sleep on the deck. And the army of course, being the army, was up first thing in the morning and there was a certain amount of deck chairs there, and they'd be in the deck chairs,

06:00 but we knew they had to go on parade at six o'clock, we didn't, see, so we used to wait till they went on parade and jump into their chairs and that's the last they'd see of a deck chair all day, we used to run it in shuttles. And, after the second day out, all of a sudden these counterfeit beer tickets started appearing everywhere, you could get as many as you wanted. Now the crew, the girls on the crew, the stewardesses, was acting as prostitutes on

06:30 the run across, so they had a constant heap of traffic going to their quarters of a night. Now the CO heard about this, the boat commandant, so he put guards on their doors and stopped that so no-one could go down there. But we still got as much beer as we wanted and we had inter-service sports all the way across. It took us nine days to get to Penang, which was our destination, and the, we played, I was a pretty good table tennis player then,

07:00 and I'd won the New South Wales colt championships table tennis, and we cleaned up the army on the, on all the sport. And on the ninth day we berthed at Penang, and I've never smelt smells like it in my whole life, it was unbelievable, and we disembarked at,

07:30 in Penang, and we moved out to our camp at Butterworth, and the English had been in Butterworth for ages and they'd been operating aircraft from there, piston built aircraft from there, and the only way they could use jets, by that time Australia had jet aircraft, Venoms and Vampire fighters, and the only way they could operate them, this runway had to be upgraded. And that was our job, to completely upgrade

08:00 the runway. Now …

Can I just ask you there Tom, what did you think when you found out you were going to be posted to Malaya?

I was rapt in it. We, you know our, when we joined the air force, we was all hoping to travel overseas somewhere and so the whole group of us was rapt in it. Now there was two ACS squadrons at that time, there was 5 who was at Darwin, 2 ACS did all the overseas postings, they'd previously done Manas Island, Cocos Island,

08:30 and they'd also been in, well 5 had been in BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force], but they disbanded the ACSs in 1947 and re-formed them again in 1950 and '51. And so 2 ACS was to perform all the overseas postings, so we was rapt in this, we went across there.

And did you know at that time, when you were told you were going to Malaya, exactly what your task would be?

Yes, we was told that we were going to rebuild the runways and put a cross runway in and extend the other ones

09:00 and build hard standings, just a rough what's, we was mainly just told that we was to upgrade the whole Butterworth air force base.

And what did you know of what was going on with the CTs [Communist Terrorists] up there?

Didn't know a thing, didn't know a thing until we got there, we didn't even know there was insurgents over there, not the CTs, were a group that was started in 1948 and they was fighting the British government to replenish Malaya,

09:30 so into their own sovereignty for the English to get out of there. And it really broke out in 1955 into open warfare where they all went to the jungle and started terrorising the, firing and killing people. So we didn't know this and when we got on the ship and went over and when we got over there, at Penang, after we got off this ship, they took us from Penang, we had to catch a ferry from Penang to Butterworth.

10:00 We went to Butterworth and we had an advance party there previously, which we didn't even know about, that had built all our own huts. Now the English side was over on one side of the runway and we was on tho ether side, and we lived in huts constructed of attap, and they was, they had, segregated into four, five rooms

10:30 in each hut and each room had four people in it. And the roof structure come right out over the walls and there was no, the walls only come up to four feet and everything else was open but the rain never came in, no matter how heavy the monsoon rain, it never came in, and they tried to let as much air in as they could. And the ablution blocks and everything was in there and our messes was all set up and so we moved into our huts and we all thought it was great, you know,

11:00 and then the provo [Provost – Military Police] marshal pulled us all in on the first day and said, "Righto you blokes, there's three thousand prostitutes here and they're all foxed." He was wrong anyway, there was about ten thousand of them. And so we started off, when I first started off, they sent me to the carpenter's shop, and at the carpenter's shop, after a little while I was there, they,

11:30 I was passed out on all machinery and I was working as a wood machinist, and we was turning out all the survey pegs and anything else for the buildings and everything around about the place that we had to do. And I was employed in there for six months and then I was, by then I was promoted to a corporal and

12:00 my re-engagement was due.

Was that a coincidence that your promotion came through?

I don't know, but when the re-engagement for another six years come through, I must say that had I not been sent to ACS I would have never engaged for another six years. But I elected to re-engage and apparently there was a problem with that that I didn't find out till later, but they looked at my record and found out that I'd already been charged with striking a superior officer and

12:30 insubordination, which is striking a superior officer which they considered a real serious charge. So they sent a letter, which I've received all me documents back since which, so I was able to read all these things, there's four hundred and eighty pages, and they sent it to the commanding officer to find out whether he thought me suitable for re-engagement. And our commanding officer was Group Captain Nobby Lim and he sent back a glowing report on me

13:00 because after my initial burst in the air force, when I left Canberra I really found my niche in ACS and from then on I never had another charge of a problem, and then he sent back a glowing report, so they re-engaged me, and after they re-engaged me and I became a corporal, they sent me down, at that stage, being in a monsoon area, the airfield, it needed about eighty miles of

13:30 drainage and the drainage was done by pre-casting all the concrete drain segments and we had all these moulds set up that I'd already done the carpentry work on it to do the carpenteringwork.

So you'd made the mould yourself?

Yeah. And then, they had, they was set up in the shape of a drain and all different sizes, some for great huge monsoon drains which were, they'd pour the base then slot these two big huge out-pieces into them.

14:00 So they sent me down in charge of all the pre-casting and there was something like fifty thousand pieces we needed so, and I had two mixers down there, two Miller mixers and a crew of Asians. And we used to start at about, and on the covers on these, you could lift the covers off, the inside, you bent this arc mesh down for reinforcement and put it in there and then at the top of the mould

14:30 there was a slot where you poked down and you prodded down and prodded all the concrete down and around it and then they put two lifting hooks on at the end of it, so we'd pour these every day, we'd grease all the parts that we had to strip, the outside casings of the what's her name, we'd pour them in the morning at about five o'clock, as soon as daylight, then they'd have all day to cure. The next

morning, I'd pick up a crane

15:00 from transport, I had to become a specially approved driver for all this, I'd pick up a crane from transport and I'd go down and we'd strip the moulds and I'd pull out all the segments and I'd take them over and stack them in each one of their individual what's her name, we was making probably three different ones at each time, and then we would re-grease the moulds and start pouring for a new lot again. Now I was left completely on my own by this, no-one

15:30 ever come near me, hardly, you know. The only time I was ever visited was when it was due for what they called 207s, was your assessment for the year, and they used to assess your ability for the next promotion or whatever for the year. And he surprised us by coming down one morning about five o'clock and everything was in full swing when he come down, anyway, so he gave me a pretty good report when he went back and that's the only time I ever seen anyone. But the

16:00 runway itself proved really problems for the, we had to build the runway on paddy fields and the paddy fields had five metres of mud that had to be taken out to start with. Now the runway at Butterworth was only seven feet above sea level, so once you dug down seven feet, the sea started coming up under us, so we had pumps working every day and night. And these terrorists used to come in and infiltrate earlier on into the base

16:30 and they'd sabotage all our pumps, they'd put sand or sugar in the pumps and sabotage them, and into our 'dozers [bulldozers], so we has to put locks on everything and then we had to put guards that were all around the camp of a night and, meanwhile, to get the job completed, we was on twenty four hour shift, our squadron worked around the clock, all day and all night. And we had war dogs roaming everywhere throughout the night. And our quarry was located

17:00 where we was getting all our crushed rock and all that from, it was located at Ipoh, about eighteen kilometres from our base. And at that time they had what they call black areas. Now black areas were commonly being attacked by the terrorists and our quarry was right in the middle of a black area. So when you went out to the quarry, when our people went out there every day, everyone had to carry a Sten gun [machine gun], a

17:30 light sub-machine gun. And there was barbed wire up right around the quarry and there was guards on guard duty all day with Sten guns, right around the perimeter, guarding us and there was a few pot shots taken at people on the quarry, drilling. And, but that, I think that was in about, for about four months, and then the terrorists around our area, after about four months, all surrendered and at that time they had our army

18:00 there, they had the Fijian, the had a Fijian battalion, they had a Gurkha battalion, they had the Australian 3rd Battalion, and al these commonwealth countries, and had an English battalion. Now the government in Malaya put a price on all these terrorists' head, and some of them had thirty thousand on them, and whoever, whichever mob knocked them over, brought them in, that what's her name, they got that reward,

18:30 so their company or their battalion got that reward. And the best ones that had the best tally was the Fijian, and the Gurkhas was next and our 3rd Battalion, when they got over there, had a disastrous start. I think the first day, the first week they was over there they went to go on a patrol fully armed and one of the privates had a fully primed grenade on his belt.

19:00 Now you're not supposed to prime, put the prime fuse in a grenade until you're ready to use it, it's a three second fuse, and sometimes they fire them from a rifle and it's a seven second fuse, but he had put the primer in there and when he went to jump on the truck, the pin got caught in the tail gate of the truck and pulled the pin and killed three of them. The first week they was there the grenade went off,

19:30 then another about a week later, another one of their soldiers got into a truck and his sub-machine gun went off and killed another two. So they lost five blokes in the first fortnight just by accidental death, you know. And we had a bomber squadron at Tanger, Lincoln bombers, and they was bombing day and night, these terrorist outpoints, you know. And

20:00 when you went to town you wasn't allowed to wear uniform, you wasn't allowed to distinguish yourself as a serviceman, so they said, "Righto, all servicemen will wear their sleeves," this is to stop the mosquitoes, "will wear their sleeves buttoned at the wrist, and a long shirt on, long trousers," and it didn't much clarify you as a civilian, you may as well just [have] worn your uniform. And they had these SPs, these Pommy Red Caps, roaming the streets everywhere.

20:30 We arrived there and we had what they called the Piccadilly Corps and the City Lights and they was night clubs cum prostitute parlours, you know, so all the blokes used to congregate at these two places. And they had what they called out of bounds areas. Once you got out of the main city, out of the main streets, they had all of these black areas where people would be accosted and knocked over by the terrorists operating in all these dark streets,

21:00 so you wasn't allowed in them, they was out of bounds, declared out of bounds area. And there was only about three cafes in the whole of Penang that was allowed, that you was allowed to eat [at] because they was the only ones classed as safe by the health department. And they got all their supplies, they had a big firm there called the Australian Cold Storage, and so all of our supplies came from the Cold Storage

21:30 and that's where these, most of this come from, from the cafes we was allowed to frequent. All our supplies we got, we gave what we called plastic spuds and they come in dehydrated, full of Calan's drum. We had etherised eggs, they used to inject the eggs with ether to keep them but, oh, they tasted vile. And then we had constant, reconstituted milk and it was in a solid

22:00 block of ice and you'd thaw that out and that was your milk. And our mess ran twenty four hours a day, you could go to town, come home and have a feed anywhere and the NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute], after we got there, when we first got there the NAAFI was selling this local beer, Tiger and Anchor beer, and it was foul, so we put up a real stink and got them to, eventually after about a year they sent us kegs of Emu over from Western Australia.

22:30 And when yo go into town, they had all these cafes in there and they called them ice cream parlours but they never sold any ice cream, it was all beer. Now when we first got there, the English had been there for ages and we'd go in and we'd ask for a beer and they'd get one of these bottles straight off the rack, these Anchor beers, and pour it out, and you'd say, "Hey, hey, I wanted cold." So they go and get a big heap of ice and throw it in your beer. So it wasn't too long before we educated them that they needed big refrigerators,

23:00 and Australians, and our mob being what they were, they found out it was very profitable to look after them and not the Poms. So, they all ended up with big fridges in their places. Then they built a, what they called a Garrison Club in Penang, it was for servicemen only and they had barbers in there and you could have accommodation in there for the night if you stayed in Penang.

Did that club have a name?

Yeah, the Garrison Club. And the Garrison Club

23:30 was opened in Penang and we used to all stay there when we went to Penang, unless we all stayed somewhere else, and, then they, the army also opened what they called an Australian hostel and all the wives, the army wives, would come over, most of them stayed there till they got married quarters, and that was a big entertainment area there, the Australian Hostel, and they used to have dances and all that sort of thing there. We mainly went to the Garrison Club.

24:00 **Had the RAAF blokes been allowed to bring wives and family with them?**

Yeah, the RAAF, after we'd been over there for about six or eight months, the married people started to arrive. I was single during the whole stay there. Now everyone that went to Malaya in our ACS, you spent three years there until the job was completed, you never got leave or anything until it was done, so. When they, when the married people arrived and it caused all sorts of problems, of course we was working around the clock

24:30 and they was based over at Penang and all the work was forty eight kilometres away at Butterworth. So they used to have to come across on ferries, and the last ferry used to run at midnight from Butterworth, and this was causing all sorts of problems, so the RAAF, ACS mob decided they'd fix the shifts all up so that all the married personnel could work on all these more or less day shifts and they'd bring them across in big buses and they supplied the buses.

25:00 Every married quarter had a gardener supplied, and a maid to do all their work for them.

Did that cause any dissention amongst the single blokes?

No, because we used to go there and party at all, and there was parties every night of the week there, you know. You could, and the married quarters, we all knew the married people and we all used to all congregate there. We had a terrific football team that was undefeated the whole time I was in Malaya and we played everyone, Fijian test side and everyone,

25:30 but it didn't cause any dissention, only because we was all in amongst it ourself, you know. And the concrete, we had to do a lot of concrete work there, and now we had a, problems early on by the runway because the Wesley government, the Wesley commissioner there, the administrator, which was still run by the Poms, they hadn't secured the land properly. For every coconut tree

26:00 we knocked down, the Australian government had to pay the Malays one dollar and we had to knock down thousands of them, and on the centre line of the runway, it held us up for about six months because they never made the land available, once they made the land available, then we really got into action. And the Japanese had been there during the war and there was a runway there but what they'd done is they'd put,

26:30 cut down all these coconut trees and they threw them in the swamps to form a base. Now we couldn't leave them there rotting away so we had to got down, sometimes twelve feet, to dig them out, then bring all this fill in and back fill it, meanwhile pumping out all the water and everything all the time. And it was a huge job and we had to build, extend one runway and build heaps of big concrete hardstand and a complete new cross runway, and the runway used to go directly over the sea.

27:00 And our 'dozer drivers was always getting called on to go and pull their Venoms or something out, they'd overshot the runway and gone into the drink, so we'd hook two 'dozers up and pull them out, we must have pulled about six out while I were there. And, now when I was, when the drainage, I'd finished

the drainage and I done the thirty two thousand pieces and every day every week, every Monday I had to bring up a report on how many I'd done and took

27:30 a stock list up to the barracks officer. When we done ten percent over what they anticipated they'd use for breakages, they sent me out then on the concreting. And on the concreting they put me on saw cutting. Now the concrete crews would go out and they'd pour a ribbon of concrete. We had what they called a, twin batch pavers and they had tow barrels on them and every

28:00 forty five seconds they'd, a big hopper would go up and a truck would go in and he'd dump the bags in, one third of a metre into the hopper and he'd pick it up and throw it in the backwash one, then it'd transfer to the front and it was a continuous operation with a big boom on it, used to take it out and drop it in. Then we had a finisher and a spreader that used to come along and finish it and spread it and then the, hand crews would come along and finish it off completely. So, and this was a continuous operation. Now my job was,

28:30 after they'd poured of a day and finished their pour of a day, I'd start work about two in the morning, after the concrete had settled enough to put a, to go out and put this concrete saw on it to cut the segments into it. Because we'd lay it in one strip with the kainite, we used to put it down each side of the strip, but with the bays itself was longitudinally,

29:00 they was poured in one continuous ribbon. So then I had to come out and cut them into twelve foot squares, and we used to have to cut down, the concrete at that stage was twenty inches thick and I had to cut down four inches with these blades, at that time concrete saws was pretty new, diamond saws, and I used to go through them quite regular. Now I was left completely to meself on that, the surveyors would come out during the, after the concrete pour was done

29:30 and they'd pop rivet everywhere where the, where I had to cut, each side of the form work. The form work was steel and all our plant had sort of railway wheels on it that used to sort of run on these, this steel, and they'd pop that and I'd put a string line across it and put a straight edge on it and then draw a line across it and then operate the saw of a night, and in the end they,

30:00 it was difficult because there was heaps of pop marks, they'd keep using the form work over and over, the days was different so we had to more or less say, "Well it must be that one there, looks about twelve foot six," and I'd cut it up. I had one Asian working on [under] me, whereas the pre-cast, I had about twenty, and I had one Asian working and he was the tanker driver and I operated the saw, and we worked weekends,

30:30 every weekend and everything. Course we poured all the time and I was on that for about or until the concrete was nearly finished, and by that time we'd done all the sawing, then I had to do all the sealing, all these cracks that I'd cut out.

What sort of width are you?

Well the saw blade only had a width about one quarter. Now that wasn't wide enough to put the bitumen sealant compound in,

31:00 so what we did, we put three blades together with thin spaces in between them, so that they cut at least two centimetre path through, and then we had this, you used to fire it up with a fire underneath it and then melt the bitumen, and it didn't go far and then it took us ages to, you'd try and get it just under the top level of the concrete because the concrete

31:30 used to expand and contract and when it contracted it'd push it out too far, you know, and the aircraft would pick it up, but. While we was there, the Poms was, after we'd got a fair bit of the runway done, was flying Venoms there, and we was working on the hardstand this day and this aircraft come in and it had dummy rocket heads on it,

32:00 concrete warheads on it, proper rockets but concrete warheads, and it had come back and hadn't fired them and the armourer got in there and somehow he took the safety off and he fired them and it cut one of the Pommies straight in half and opened another bloke up, the fin of it caught him straight down the back, right. And I, the Poms there was unbelievable, they used to work in overalls buttoned up at the collar, it was stinking hot, buttoned up at the collar

32:30 and buttoned up at the sleeve, we used to work in just a pair of shorts, you know. And they couldn't understand us, we used to have a shower in the morning, we'd come home at lunch time and we'd have a shower then, we'd have another shower in the afternoon then go out and they reckoned we was mad, there was, they'd come home and sprinkle talcum powder and all. And, but it was actually, it was really, it was a pretty good posting there, and I worked on that concreting and other,

33:00 and that convinced me then that I'd found my niche, what I wanted to be, and so there was only one way you could stay with ACS then, and that was to make sure you stayed with them, you became a works mustering and there was only three categories in the works musterings, there was four actually, there was survey draughtsman and then there were works fitters who worked on all the plants, and plant operators and works officers and that was it.

33:30 All the rest of the squadron, the cooks and the equipment and the headquarters staff, was changed

every year or two, after a certain amount of time. Most of them always wanted to come back, and we ended up getting the same sort of transport drivers back time and time again. But, so they was, they decided that when on, in Malay I was on the first aircraft out of there, I'd been there for three years, just on three years.

And no leave at all during that time?

34:00 No leave, no, you couldn't take leave, and so we had a three year deployment and the first aircraft, a DC4, which is, was a Super Constellation, that left there, I was on it, I was one of them, and it was full of married personnel and kids, screaming kids and it took thirteen hours to get across from Malaya, and we landed in Sydney and we was all keen to get back by then,

34:30 after three years over there, you know, even though we enjoyed it over there. And one thing over there, while we was over there, most of the Malays and the Chinese, they'd been going to English schools and they could all, most of them could speak English so you didn't have any linguistic problems, they all was pretty good. They, and of course we was pretty popular there because we used to out-price the Poms on everything we did, you know, the Poms used to be really miserable. And the Red Caps [British Military Police] that used to patrol the street there,

35:00 when we first went there, our blokes would go in and they'd be caught in a black area, in a brothel area or something, so they'd be up before the CO on charges, the Red Caps would charge them, and they'd, every time they'd charge them it'd be 'Being in a black area and assaulting the SP'. Same, there was that many assaults coming through on the Pommy Red Caps that they decided they'd get our own service police over there. And then the Poms were told, "Well don't touch them any more." And we got a warrant officer and a flight sergeant

35:30 over there, and to my mind they never ever went to town once, they stayed at the base. We used to come back in and the Poms was really miserable with their money, you know, they, all the trishaw riders that they'd take you for about seven miles and ask you for a dollar and a dollar in them days, Malay dollar, was two and eleven pence Australian and we used to pay them a lot more than that and they was really crooked at us for inflating the whole area you know.

36:00 And when they, there was no showers in Penang or in Malaya, or if you wanted a shower, if you stayed in a hotel or something overnight, you went out and there was a big round well in it and it had a dipper in it and you used to get the dipper out and pour the water over yourself, and all the toilets, there was no pedestals, they was just a toilet sunk floor level, with two foot pads on it, that you sat on.

36:30 And I never ever got used to the smells there, and when you went into the markets I never ate anywhere except at the health places because when you went into the meat markets, they was big open air and a roof over it but all the walls and all the sides it was uncovered and all the meat was hanging there with all the flies crawling all over it and dried out blood on it so there was no way in the world I was going to eat in the out of bounds restaurants, a lot of our blokes did but I wouldn't.

So, most of the work you did was at night time?

Day and night time.

37:00 We worked constantly, it was full bore, every hour of the day, and it was whoever worked in the day was full and of a night and we worked twenty four hour around the clock for three years. We finished the runway in 1958, we finished all the associated works there one month ahead of schedule. And it's a really great runway and all the facilities and there's all sorts of hard standings we built and we built

37:30 quarters, but we worked really hard the whole time we was there to get these things done, and ACS was pretty good at that. We had some really great sportsmen there too. I was in, at one stage I used to play basketball of a Monday night, I used to go to football training on the Tuesday night, on the

38:00 Wednesday night I used to play cricket, on the Saturday I used to go golfing and on the Sunday we used to have another cricket match on and we'd play rugby on the Saturday plus the cricket match, so I played five sports all in the one season, mind you, in the one week, and now, as I say, we had a great football team there and, played everyone around the place and there was a big competition there too, the Fijians was in it and the Kiwis,

38:30 and the Royalist was a Kiwi cruiser and it had been cruising around the world and it had a football team, big Maoris, and they were undefeated also, so they declared us on, and, at our oval at Butterworth, and we, I played in that and they, we ended up a three all draw, so neither of us won that, and then

39:00 they weren't satisfied with that so they wanted to declare us on the next week but we had that many injuries, we couldn't, so I suppose they had the technical advantage there but, but we still went through undefeated.

Did the Malays have a team?

The Malays had a team and they had a Penang sports club in there, that was, really high class sports club you know, they catered for only the well-to-do Chinese and the well-to-do Malays,

39:30 and the Malays hated the Chinese because the Chinese was running the place, they had all the money

there and they was running the place. We had three hundred Malays working for us and they used to pay them a dollar a day, and in our huts, we had a hut boy allocated to each hut, and that hut boy would make your, well you didn't have to make your bed if we only had a sheet on it all the time, so he'd fold the sheet up and put it under the pillow, then he'd pick up

40:00 all your washing and take it to a laundry and he'd bring it back within two or three days and it was all spotlessly done and ironed. And we all contributed, the whole hut had to contribute a certain amount a week to pay him and most of us used to give him extra anyway, so they was all vying for that job, to be a hut boy, you know. They'd finish their job in a couple of hours and that was it, you know.

Were you able to eat local food when you were there?

Only in these designated places. There was

40:30 a couple of good curry places there, we played one football match, and I used to love hot curries, you know, and we had this Johnny Wilton with us and they called him Satan and I won't tell you how he really got his name, but we used to play golf together and that and every Saturday we'd go out together and play golf, and he used to always, we always had these Malay caddies and

41:00 they'd be all lined up there waiting for you and you'd pay them and they'd grab your bag and away you'd go, and he always insisted on having this one and you'd hit off on the tee, and he'd hit off and you'd swear his ball was there and when he got to where you thought it was, he'd just keep walking. And it took us about two months to wake up that this caddy he had was bare footed, used to walk over the ball, pick it up and just keep walking. Pick it up in his toes and keep walking and drop it down about fifty metres further up.

41:30 And he was really Satan, but …

Tape 6

00:35 **With the locals thinking differently of the Australians and the English, work-wise were you operating completely independently of the English?**

Yeah, absolutely completely independent. We was under our own command, they had no say, influence over us. We hired a lot of the indigenous population there and they all loved their jobs there and we treated them well, but they,

01:00 and we had trouble getting our rocks from the quarry because that was sent out to contract, civil contract, that was part of the Malays demanded that we employ a local force, and so instead of using, utilising our trucks, we was using their trucks. Now the Malays had a law then stating that there was no tip trucks allowed and that everything had

01:30 to be loaded by hand and unloaded by hand, and that really held us up a lot, and the people employed on the trucks was all women, doing the shovelling, and one bloke would stand out in the middle of the road and they'd carry these baskets of crushed rock on their head, and they was all dressed in black from head to foot, you know, there was hardly one part of them visible. And they hand up, walk to him, give him the basket and he'd spread it over the road and then they'd go back and

02:00 shovel the next lot in, so they done all the work. It was also the law that every truck had to have a man stationed on the back and when you was travelling, what they'd do is they'd wave you around, if the road was clear, they'd wave you around, which they was pretty good at too, and none of them tried to kill us by sending us into traffic. And while I was there we had a, we had cause to go over to the

02:30 English side one day in a blitz truck, and one of the people I worked with, a Corporal Wallace, he was driving a truck and I was in the passenger seat. When he went to enter the gate at the English base, this cyclist come out and he hit him and run over him, and he wasn't too badly injured but the police come out and when I come out to investigate and when I looked around there was no sign of him, he'd gone, he'd bolted.

03:00 And it wasn't far from our camp and they reckoned I was driving it so they started questioning me and I assured them that I wasn't, and after all the questioning, and one of the Malays there backed me up and said, "No there was another bloke driving that." And when I went back to the base, here he is sitting in the beer hall having a beer and I said to him, "Hey, you mongrel, what about that Malay you run over." "What Malay?" he said, I said, "You know what."

03:30 And when he finally confessed and they charged him in a civil court and he had to go to this civil court and for some, they got the date or something wrong on the charge so it was dismissed in court. But he left me sitting there, lovely, just bolted. And we was told when we went to Malaya, if you run over a person it doesn't mean much, you know,

04:00 because the locals just don't worry about that but if you run over one of their chickens or one of their cows, you're in real trouble. But we really got on well with all the Malays and the Chinese there and we

never had any problems with them at all, whereas they disliked the English immensely, of course the English was over handed on them, you know, and they used to really clamp down on them where we treated them as equals all the time wherever we went.

What else did you learn

04:30 **about local customs and cultures?**

Oh, at the ice cream bar, one of these so called ice cream bars, they had these Chinese girls there and I was trying to, one of them was really beautiful and I was trying to race her off. And after about three months of trying, she finally consented to go out with me and we went out about twice and then she invited me home to her place, and they had this big banquet on when I got there

05:00 and I couldn't speak a word of Chinese and they was all Chinese and they're handing me this cake and I found out it was my engagement party. So, and it took me about two hours to find that out and when I did I was gone. They give you this special cake, the Chinese give you this special cake and you break it with whoever you're getting engaged to and that's it, you know, you're engaged.

05:30 I soon give that away, I never went to the ice cream bar again, I used to frequent another one. But they're, we used to, particularly in the Penang Sports Club we used to mingle with them a lot and we used to play cricket with the Indian team, the Malay team and the Chinese team, and whenever we played cricket with them, whoever we played in Penang, they'd take us home

06:00 to their place for lunch. So if you played the Chinese, they'd take you home to their place for lunch, if you played the Malays, they'd take you home. And, we played against the Indians this day and the Indian, Indian doctor he was, he took us home, he took me and this Johnny Wilton home, Satan, and Wilton used to like hot curries too and he says, "Do you like hot curries?" and I says, "Yeah." And Wilton said, "Yeah, you can't make them too hot for me." Well brother did he ever give us a hot curry and I hate goats' milk and they, and on the

06:30 table they had all these big glasses of goats' milk and I drank about three glasses of it trying to put out the fire. And I had tears streaming down my eyes and he stopped me and they was sitting up there eating it quite merrily, it stopped Wilton too I may add, he was too hot for him, but we did have a lot to do with them in aspects like that, we visited their homes and we was welcomed into their homes and they used to, and it was mainly through our sporting activities that we were. And I must say that most of them

07:00 were the higher class of the people that could afford to be members of the Penang Sports Club because I think it was rather expensive to join, we had automatic membership of it. And I think for him they had to be especially vetted and I think they was nearly all professional people.

On a day to day basis, going out to work, were you armed?

Yeah, we all had to carry Sten guns all the time. These Sten guns

07:30 was, they was wartime weapons of the English and they had a really bad safety catch on them and it used to hold thirty two bullets in the clip and they'd look like they'd been made out of electrical conduit. I think they cost seven and six during the war to make and they was really cheap and nasty and if you put, jammed the butt down real quick, it'd fire the whole clip off through the roof of the truck which happened quite a bit, so you had to be very careful of them.

08:00 But we had, and everyone had to carry an identity card all the time you was in town and they'd, there was police everywhere to pull you up, checking your identity card, because the communists used to infiltrate into all the villages and things like that and we was, we worked with Sten guns, you know. We, our 'dozer operators and that took them on their 'dozers with them and everything.

Did you ever have cause to fire your weapon?

Only once,

08:30 when the truck taking us out to the quarry was fired at and we got out here and fired back. But we, it was, both sides of the road was covered in jungle and it was impossible to see where the fire was coming from. They put about five shots right through the truck and never hit anyone, which was pretty lucky because we had about ten people lined each side of the truck going to work and it was just an ordinary canvas canopy over a boots truck.

Were there other occasions

09:00 **where people were hit?**

Yeah, there was, actually they shot about two Malays while they was hanging off the cliff wall drilling into the quarry face, they shot two of them. And we only had one fatality the whole time we was over there and it was Johnny O'Donnell, was killed in a road accident, he was riding a scooter back to camp and got hit by a car and killed. But he was our only fatality over there.

It sounds, I mean socially, it sounds

09:30 **like it was a great place to be. Were you ever scared?**

No, when you're young like that you don't get scared, you, it's, we knew that if we went into certain areas we was in danger and all the time but we just ignored that and went in anyway. So, and I mean we knew the Sten guns we carried would be pretty well useless because if someone shot at you, you wouldn't have a chance to use it anyway, so

10:00 in that respect. Sometimes of a night when you was out working by yourself, you got a bit worried when you could hear all the sounds around, and you knew that they'd been infiltrating the base earlier on and sabotaging our equipment. And, it was like in Vietnam, very hard to find them because they used to merge themselves into village life and it was, and then they'd come out of a night with their weapons and start firing and so they, they'd appear from nowhere

10:30 and then disappear into nowhere again and it was hard to identify them.

Did they, did you have the mind-set that they were more a nuisance or an enemy?

No, we had the mind-set they was more a bloody nuisance, they put restrictions on us at work and everything that we disliked and, I suppose had we had a really bad incident

11:00 where we was attacked and people was killed, it would have made things difficult, but the attacks made on our people was all, didn't do any damage. So and the damage to the plant, well we just send that to the workshop and they'd drain the tanks and fix it up, but I think had we had, say, the army took it very serious, because they were going out in patrols into the jungle, up to six weeks,

11:30 I think, on end, on patrols, and they lost about thirty two men there, so they had a different aspect on it to what we had. And they had a lot of trouble with army wives while we was over there because their husbands would go into the jungles for six weeks and a lot of the young army wives would play up and they had to send them home.

Play up how?

Yeah, so they,

12:00 they probably sent about a dozen of them home, in certain stages.

Well how were they playing up?

Well they used to, mainly with the RAAF blokes who were still around town. And we had a, we had blokes build boats there and we had a yacht club. And we used to have, sometimes we'd ski across behind these boats, seven miles across from Butterworth to Penang, water-ski. And we used to run sailing competitions at

12:30 this yacht club and a lot of the army wives used to come out to that and party there and stay all night.

The black areas that you spoke of before, the out of bounds areas, what would happen to you if you were caught in there?

You was brought back to the base immediately and charged, and normally you got seven or fourteen days CB for it, confined to barracks. And if you did it repeatedly, and there was a lot, there was a fair bit of VD [venereal disease], that's the first time I'd

13:00 run into anything like VD or anything and there was a fair bit of VD in Butterworth at the time. It wasn't syphilis or anything like that, it was gonorrhoea, which generally resulted in one shot of penicillin and you was right, but our doctor decided to discourage people and everyone was issued with condoms and what they called blue light outfits to protect themselves.

What's a blue light outfit?

It was a, two tubes that the men used to squirt

13:30 on and put in and the condoms and then mixed them both and that was supposed to protect you. Now whether it worked or not, I don't know because we never used it. But …

It sounds like Araldite.

Yeah, something like that, something similar to Araldite except it wasn't quite that drastic when you used it. But, they, the doctor, our MO decided that, righto, to

14:00 dissuade these people from going in and having sex without a condom, what we'll do is every morning they had to go down to medical section with a bottle of urine and when they had what we called a load, they, this urine would have little wriggly things in it, you know. And they'd have, he used to make them take it down every morning and inspect it, and after the first couple of shots, there was nothing in it anyway, but he done it particularly

14:30 to embarrass them because you'd see all these blokes walking down to medical section with a bottle of urine, you know. You'd see them all at the urinal every the morning, squeezing to see if they had a tear, which they called a tear, or not, you know. But suppose only about three percent of the squadron ever caught anything like that. And a few of the married people did before their wives arrived which would have been rather embarrassing.

15:00 **With those urine tests, did blokes ever sort of substitute for them so they had a clear sample?**

No actually, I never heard of that because you wouldn't know who had a clear sample. You probably was better off using your own. I mean it was, all of us single blokes up there, well the majority of us was in town all the time but the, and they was the ones that

15:30 had to go to the MO, but what it did, it did the exact opposite to what he tried to do, what the MO tried to do, because once they found out that they'd contracted gonorrhoea, they was going to town to these quacks and getting needles from these quacks, they wouldn't even go near medical. So he actually defeated his own purpose because half the time these quacks weren't using the proper medication or anything so, and people was going in

16:00 and buying these, getting these needles for gonorrhoea and that which wasn't really working. So by embarrassing them he actually turned them all away.

And the people going to the quacks to get treated, were there sort of ill effects from that?

No, there was no ill effects but a lot of them never got cured properly and sometimes they didn't give them enough dosage and it'd go into dormancy and come out again later, you know. So, and that's when it can become dangerous if you only half eradicate it.

16:30 **Who were the prostitutes?**

Well, they was, there must have been ten or fifteen thousand of them. I mean, it seemed to be all the young population of Penang. It was, they was a mixture, they was Chinese, they was Malays, they was Indians, they was every race you can name. Mainly those three races, Malays, Chinese and Indians, and the Indians and the Malays and the Chinese was in about, had about equal proportions of their own races up there.

17:00 And so there was no white girl, it was all Asian girls and predominantly those three races.

Was the prostitute expensive or ...?

Two and eleven pence a night, which is rather cheap actually. What, you'd pay, actually they weren't, you'd pay two and eleven pence for a room, which is one Malay dollar for your room for the night.

17:30 And the girls are, they used to, I think they used to ask when we first got there about five dollars, but our blokes was paying them about twenty I think in the end, they'd give it to them anyway, and every, all these beds in these hotels. With the heat up there you sweat all the time, you no sooner have a shower and you look like, you've put your shirt on and you look like you just come out of the shower. And they got these great big pillows, they're big long pillows and you wrap your arms and your legs

18:00 around and everybody sleeps with them of a night to stop your body parts touching so you don't get sweaty and sticky, and they're really effective, I forget the name they call them now but everywhere had them.

What's the process when you go to a, is it a brothel you go to or is it a ...?

No, you go to, it was two main ones and, they was mainly vetted by the SPs and that and was tolerated and they were in bounds, and they was the

18:30 Piccadilly and the City Lights. Now both these clubs had huge dance floors in them and all the girls used to sit around the what's her name, you could take your own drinks in there, so if you took a bottle of rum or a bottle of whisky, you'd take your own drinks in there, everyone would take their own drinks. You could buy them there but really expensive, and all these girls sat around and you'd dance with them and you just took one home. And, there was nothing ever happened at them premises,

19:00 you had to go then and book into a hotel somewhere around about the place.

So at those clubs, would all the girls there be, all be prostitutes?

Yeah, every one of them.

And so then would they all be different prices, or how would you know?

No, they was much the same price, I think they relied on what you offered them actually, most of the time, but the Poms didn't like us because we put it out of their range, out of their cost structure. That was their main complaint actually.

19:30 **Score one for the Aussies. So what would happen, like, so you'd go and ask a girl to dance and then would you sort of dance with her a while and then say, "Would you like to go and get a hotel room?"**

You probably dance with four or five of them and then pick one out and say, yeah, "Would you like?" and they used to say immediately, "Yes." And then you just go to a hotel, which we knew all the hotels anyway, so they'd just go to a hotel and spend the night there. And the last ferry used to leave for

20:00 Butterworth at midnight, and the next one, the earliest one left at six in the morning so if you missed the midnight one, you was on the six o'clock ferry back to Butterworth and from Butterworth, once you landed at the pier there, you had about a seven kilometre run, which we used to get a trishaw rider to take you to the base.

And did the prostitutes all speak English?

Yeah, all good English too.

Did anyone every fall in love with any of them?

Not that I know of.

20:30 I think we had, there was some beautiful Eurasians over there that weren't prostitutes and I think two of our people married them. They're the only two I know of.

And when you were talking before about, that in that three years, no-one was able to take leave, was that just kind of bad luck or did you get to accrue?

No, it was accrued, and what's more we was getting not only our twenty seven days a year

21:00 but we was also getting our seven days tropical leave, and on top of that we had, if we worked weekends, it was called leave in lieu. So that went on your leave card. Now, I come back with six months' leave, I went on leave, oh for actually about seven months. And the RAAF decided that that was no good because then they deployed you somewhere else and most of their squadron's on leave for seven months, so they said, "Well righto, from

21:30 now on, all leave in lieu must be taken in seven days." But it never worked, they had to revert back because they couldn't afford to have them, people off for them seven days. But Malaya was the longest stint we ever went without leave, that three years was the longest deployment we ever had anywhere, for three years you know.

So after three years without leave, were you ready to come home?

Oh yeah, we all wanted to come home by then. Even though we had an enjoyable time there, we was all homesick for Australia still, we all wanted to come home, we all wanted to be on the first aircraft

22:00 out of there and I was.

How did you manage that?

I don't know, they just selected me. And it happened to me quite often actually in my life, I used to be the first in there most of the time. After that, after Malaya, I really went on every advance party that they had.

Was it a culture shock coming back to Australia?

No, no, we settled straight back in.

22:30 I stayed in Sydney for a few days and then went to Goulburn and we got, and our next posting was East Sale, at August we got back, they flew us back at August to East Sale in Victoria. Well I lost my voice, I couldn't talk, I had laryngitis and by then, at Malaya, I'd applied, they was going to hold a plant operators' course before I left there, they said, "Well we going

23:00 to hold a plant operators' course at East Sale when we go there," and I put in an application, because by then I wanted to stay with ACS and be a plant operator, so I put in an application to become a plant operator and do the course at East Sale in Victoria where we had to build a runway and then another cross runway and then build some hardstands, and I was accepted and soon as we arrived at East Sale, I was on the advance party to East Sale.

23:30 The first fourteen of us was on the advance party and we went to Sale. Now most other bases didn't like us on their unit because they reckoned we was rough and used to take over their beer hall and that, we was exempt from guard duties because we was on shift work nearly al the time. Due to the hard work that we done, the nature of the hard work that we done,

24:00 we used to get extra rations and at that time all our catering officers, which were normally warrant officers, were posted in and out of each squadron all the time, but our CO kept ours with him once we got a good one and he found, he realised that the main thing that the squadron ever got upset about was bad food and not enough food and things like that. So he always organised that we had a great caterer.

24:30 And, the caterer used to organise, we was allowed extra rations of meat and eggs and things like that because of the hard physical work we did. So our messing was always better than the rest of them and, but as far as the other bases, didn't like us there very much because we never went on parades and we never, you know, we always slagged around, you know, and we'd come in with dirt and dust, sit down at the mess and shake ourself off and all our dust over their blue uniform.

25:00 And, when we, the first fourteen of us got there, this maintenance squadron was the boss squadron

around there then, they had some pretty tough nuts in them. And there was the first fourteen days I was there, I had thirteen fights, I only had one night off, because they used to come and pick us on purpose, you know. And after that they accepted, they really accepted us, and we didn't have any more fights. From then on we had an alliance and we joined together. But East Sale was freezing cold, and …

25:30 **What was at East Sale?**

There was a RAAF flying school and navigation school there, and air training pilots, and while we was there, we were building this airfield, the Americans sent over two U2 [spy plane] aircraft to go and spy into China, which was supposed to be top secret, and these,

26:00 and they sent over about a hundred Yanks with them, and these two U2 aircraft, spy planes, was all, huge wings on the, huge wingspan, and they was built like a glider and they had a bicycle wheel on each wing tip, and they had one wheel in the centre of the aircraft and a jeep would tow them out and let go of the tow lines to get up speed on the runway and then they'd drop the two bicycles wheels off the wings and take off, and

26:30 they could stay in the air for about thirty six hours. They used to get up so high that they could turn their engines off and glide around. It was over spying on China, and when they come back into land they had no vision, the pilots had very little vision when they was landing these U2s, so a jeep used to run alongside the aircraft when it was coming in, and from fifty feet up they couldn't see so the jeep would be on a radio and talk them down from fifty feet for a touchdown. Of course they had no wheels on the wings,

27:00 only had the one wheel in the centre, when it come to a stop it would just tumble over onto one wing and then all the people would come out, hook the bicycle wheels on and drag it off again. And they was there for about six weeks. And they used to, we was horrified, they used to come in for breakfast of a morning, and they'd have bacon and eggs and they'd get out the honey pot and they'd smear honey all over their bacon and eggs.

Did you have much interaction with the Americans?

Yeah, a fair bit actually.

And how were they?

We all got on pretty well

27:30 with the Americans actually, they, well they was all pretty good you know. And the mission was all supposed to be top secret but I think everyone knew what it was. I mean you can't fly aircraft like that and keep it a secret. The only thing secret was where they was flying, and we found out later it was over China but we didn't know at that time, we knew they was spying somewhere but we didn't know where. And when, when we was working, we worked around the clock there, I was on this plant operators' course and

28:00 only been there for about two months and started the plant operators' course. And the runway at Williamtown, it was putting in new hardstands and overlaying it with bitumen. So our whole plant operators' course, trainees' course was sent to Williamtown, we spend two months down there doing all the work down there, overlaying the runway and everything and that wasn't even counted on our course and I was up on the hot mix plant

28:30 there, running the hot mix plant. After ten months there, when we completed that job, they sent us back to East Sale and we started off in our plant ops' course again. And then we was on that course for another twelve months, we used to have to parade every morning and then we'd, every Monday we'd have an exam and if anyone, there was about thirty on it to start with, and anyone who failed the, any one exam over the year's period on that Monday morning was off the

29:00 course. If you didn't get sixty percent, you was off. And I excelled in that, I topped the course by miles and come number one on the course and the, they picked me out as future works supervisor. By then, I hadn't had another charge by then and I become a really good operator by then, at that stage I was doing all the finish grading. The finish grading

29:30 was a real specialist job by then and it was, when we put all the gravel and crushed rock down on the runway before the bitumen or the concrete went down, they would put the level pegs in, and every ten feet they'd hammer a galvanised roofing nail in and they'd paint it white and we'd always put the material in about two inches higher for compaction, to take it down, the compactor, but it was always about

30:00 half an inch or three quarters of an inch high and sometimes higher where the rail has pushed it. It was [my] job to come along and take the paint off the top of the nails without pulling the nails out, so that they could lay the formwork directly, straight onto the what's her name, so it'd become a real expert on that. I think from, after East Sale I was the finish grader driver on every job we done, even when I was a flight sergeant, I still had me finish grading because no one else could do it properly.

30:30 **Was it at East Sale that you were telling me off camera before about one of the guys getting run over?**

Yeah, we, when we, part of our job at East Sale was that which I was deployed on for a fair while. We was getting all our rock material, we had our crusher set up out at Boisdale and it was, the riverbed we was getting all the rock from and it was all rounded rock. And we'd feed it into these what they called Chinamen, and that'd feed it into the crushers.

31:00 Now we had these turnapulls, and these turnapulls we had was giant scrapers that, self propelled scrapers that had two wheels on the front and big bowl on the back that you opened and it'd feed all the material in and then you had a tail gate to push it all out again once you lifted the apron up. Now there was no, the only steering on it was electric switch, everything was done by electric motors, the tailgates, everything, and to turn left or right you just clicked the switch left or right and it used

31:30 to come around in jerky motions, you had to really get used to it to handle it. Now I was on the midnight till eight shift we was working in the middle of winter, out at Boisdale. The wheels was up level there to your shoulder, almost, and we was working in the river getting all this rock out and the wheels would throw all this water up over you all night, and then you'd take it and empty it all into this Chinaman to go into the crusher.

32:00 Now we had a messing tent there where you'd come in and where you'd have smoko after you'd worked about a four hour shift. And this night, this fox, who was an ex-Luftwaffe [German Air Force] pilot, he walked outside the tent and unbeknownst to the operator on the machine, he walked out, he was standing alongside the wheel relieving himself and the operator come out and jumped on it and took off and hit the switch and turned it, ran straight over his legs and ran over him,

32:30 didn't even know he was there. While I was at Williamtown, another one of our people, it was quite prevalent to pick up when you was going back into the mess at lunchtime, they'd drive their machinery in, and one of their plant operators, while I was down there on this overlay course, he picked up his friend and these turnapulls we had had no cabins, and he picked up his friend and he was standing up inside, we didn't have seatbelts on them or anything,

33:00 and he was standing up, and these things would travel about forty five mile an hour, really quick, and he got bounced out of it and got fed under the wheel and he, the operator, tried to grab his hand but his sleeve ripped off and he went straight under this huge wheel and flattened him out and he got killed immediately. And then the only other fatality that I know of when we was at Darwin, one of the, we went to lunch and we had this batcher site and they had this

33:30 huge conveyor belt on it, it used to go up a hundred feet, over a hundred feet in the air and one of the maintenance staff was under this bill greasing the pullies that took the belt up and the warrant officer come back and didn't know he was there and fed him straight through into the top of the what's her name, he went under a bar about that high, you know. So that was, I think that was, that's the only three I remember being killed in accidents. After

34:00 the amount of plant we operated and the amount of equipment and the way we operated it, it's a wonder there weren't hundreds killed.

Is it surprising when you look back that there was only …?

Because we was always flat out and we used to drive the turnapulls to their maximum and we used to pass that close to each other at forty five in dust where you could hardly see, and on, relying on a little toggle switch to steer it.

When you're in, you know, flat chat work mode like that,

34:30 **where you're doing shift work and things like that, when accidents happen, are they demoralising or do they just sort of become part of life?**

They just sort of become part of it. Actually, you're most surprised that there's not more of them actually, with the sort of work you're doing and the amount of heavy machinery you're using in confined spaces, you think that they're probably light off to get away with them all.

35:00 **So, settling into Sale after Malaya, how was the social life in …?**

Pretty good, had a big 'WAAAFery' [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] there full of WAAAFs, and I think when we left there, by the time we left Sale, was disbanded, ACS was disbanded there, by the time we left there, I think there was about fourteen of our blokes married WAAAFs, including me.

Tell us about that the

35:30 **interaction with the WAAAFs.**

Well course, being over in Malaya, we hadn't seen any white women for ages, so when we came back there we got into this party scene, and all the WAAAFs was in this party scene. There was about forty WAAAFs there and they was doing all the administrative work in offices and buildings and things like that. And of course our blokes hadn't been back long and we took over most of the whole WAAAFery, so, and we, they used to have pyjama parties and all sorts of parties in town and it was much like Malaya, it was,

36:00 you was all, every weekend you was at some party somewhere, you know. And so socially it was great, weather-wise it was shocking but socially it was great.

So where did you meet your wife then?

I met her at one of the, one of their, no, I met her at, at a corporals' ball one night, and I met her at this corporals' ball in the Corporals' Club in East Sale.

36:30 And I'd been going out, I'd already taken out about three WAAAFs, I should be an honorary member there, but when I met her I went with her for about twelve or fifteen months and then they decided they was going to disband 2 ACS at East Sale in 1961 'cos we'd finished the runway and everything and they said there was only enough work for one squadron. So everyone,

37:00 all the works musterings in 2 ACS was reposted to Darwin, and that was in May, I was posted there in June so I got married in May. And so we finished Sale, I got married, she come from Arncliffe in Sydney and I got married in Sydney and all my family and everyone come up from Goulburn. And we had a pretty large wedding and I had a utility

37:30 at that time and we was going to the Gold Coast for a honeymoon. First of all we went to Jenolan Caves and stayed there overnight and then the next night we headed off for the Gold Coast at Raymond Terrace, I put my vehicle in for a oil change and the diff, oil change, and when they, they must have let the vehicle down into oil and the tyres had a lot of oil on them. When we took off in the morning from Raymond Terrace,

38:00 the road was wet and the first corner I got to, the back just went straight out of control and I couldn't control it and it rolled the ute, we had all our luggage in the back of it and it was spread out all along the road, so the police come out and they took us in, they arranged for a tow truck to come out and tow the ute in 'cause the cabin was crushed. And I was more worried about my wife than anything else. And I

38:30 crawled out through the window and she was still in there, and the motor was still, it was upside down but the motor was still roaring, and I was frightened it was going to catch alight so I kicked the back window out and switched the ignition off and got her out. And then the police come and they had it towed into a garage and they took us to the railway station and so we booked into a train. When we got to the Gold Coast, went to pick up our luggage, mine was there but hers was missing, so there

39:00 she is, in just one outfit, no clothes, no nothing, and we stayed at the Mentone Hotel, I've got a photograph of it in there, it was twenty one shillings a night, I think it was in the Gold Coast there, and we spent about five weeks there I think, at the Gold Coast. And when I finished there I was to report to Darwin and she had to stay with her mother at Arncliffe.

So being posted away, would that have been part of the impetus to get married

39:30 **do you think?**

Yeah, probably was the whole catalyst. Of course at that time I was twenty eight and I'd escaped pretty well up until then because I used to get posted just in time. But, that was the catalyst and then I decided, 'Oh yes, I'll get married,' and she, once you, at that time in the air force, once a WAAAF got married, had to be discharged. You could not stay in,

40:00 now they can but then it was a compulsory discharge, so.

What had she been doing?

She was a teletext operator.

Did she mind that?

Mind getting out? No, I think she was happy about it actually and the problem is that there was no married quarters in Darwin and they sent us up there and I had to leave her with her mother in Arncliffe, and

40:30 when I got to Darwin, I immediately set about looking for some quarters, and the only quarters you could get was in town and you had to rent them and it was exorbitant prices. And after I'd been there about two months, and they was really hard to get because there was a lot of RAAF blokes, our squadron, whole squadron was moving up and they needed housing.

And they'd all married WAAAFs?

Yeah, they'd all married WAAAFs, so when I, plus we had a lot of our squadron

41:00 already married, and so I finally got a place and it was no bigger than this room and it was divided into two houses, one of our fellow plant operators and his wife was in the front part and we was in the back. It was built high off the ground, it had big, heaps of steps down onto it. It had no fly wire, no stove except one of them little Vulcan hotplates, you know, to cook on,

41:30 the mosquitoes and the sandflies would eat you alive, so after we'd been there for about ten months, our

son was born there, no, my, the only way we could eat without getting bitten alive with sandflies, the mosquitoes didn't worry so much but the sandflies used to bring up big lumps on the kids, so she got her wedding veil and she turned it into a giant mosquito net and she hung it up over the double bed and that's how we used to eat,

42:00 on the double bed under this big …

Tape 7

00:33 So I threw two fans out of barrack section and used them in, at the flat and as I say, every meal, especially of a night, evening meal, was always had on the double bed, with the three of us on the double bed, with this big white mosquito net over us like a tent. After we'd eaten and the washing up was done, we used to, that was it, you'd stay under the mosquito net then for the rest of the night.

01:00 We was in there for about, oh, about ten months I think, and then I bought a Vauxhall car off one of my friends for seventy eight dollars at that time and I spent more time under it than in it. And by then they started, I was pretty high up on the married quarters list then for the amount of service I'd done and you got certain points for having been overseas and all sorts of things, so they was building married quarters out at the RAAF base in

01:30 Amberley by then and after about ten months I was allocated a married quarters out there and that was fully fly wired and they was really great houses, you know.

What sort of difference did you notice in Darwin from the previous time you'd been?

Oh huge. It had about thirty thousand people and there was lots of major differences. There was a supermarket there, I think, at the time and a couple of banks. There still was, no there wasn't a supermarket, it still only had a

02:00 few shops and things there, and the RSL, but all the pubs had air conditioning in them by then and on the base, we had ceiling fans in all our married quarters in every room. So that was quite pleasant. And when we first, all the 2 ACS personnel went to join 5 ACS and 5 ACS was

02:30 always a bit jealous because we'd done all the overseas deployments and so they give us all the worst jobs they could find when we got there. And, the first job I had there when I got there, they put me in the cement shed and this other bloke who was living in the other end of the house with me, he was in there with me and he was only just, he was still on his honeymoon more or less. And these huge cement trucks used to come in, semi trailers with hundreds of bags of cement on them, and you'd have to unload

03:00 them and put them onto a, stack them into a heap and when the batcher plant started up, you'd have to put, pick them all up off these stacks again and put them on the conveyor belt and you done that for about ten hours straight. And they kept me in there for about, and it was probably one of the worst jobs, and down below on this batcher sight, there was a sand hopper, and you'd pull this lever and it'd allow the amount of sand to go into the next batch of concrete down into this hopper,

03:30 and then you'd wheel it around and drop another one in and then the other one you'd already filled, you'd pull a lever and it'd go up on a conveyor belt up into the what's her name. And it was right down underground and it was dusty and dirty and the bearings was all shot on this thing, you'd, and I spent about three months in that before they'd let me out of there. Finally when they let me out, I got on a grader and from then on I don't think I ever got off a grader from then on.

But you were happy on graders weren't you?

Yeah, I was really happy at that and I'd been, once I got,

04:00 finished this course at East Sale, the plant ops' course, the corporals, I'd lost me rank, once you remuster to a higher grade, you lose your rank, so I reverted back to an AC [aircrafstman]. Took about twelve months I think to get back the LAC [leading aircraftsman], and by then, when they put both the squadrons together, they were so overloaded with NCOs that there was no promotion for the next six, seven years because we was

04:30 too top heavy. The first promotion out, I was in amongst it, but not till that seven years. And Darwin, it was a huge runway, huge undertaking at Darwin. 5 ACS had been there for about four or five years before we even got there and most of the work had been completed and we was building hardstands and things like that, we was building alongside the runways while

05:00 all the aircraft was still taking off and the airfield was so long, the longest in the southern hemisphere, to get drainage on it. When a Boeing 707 come in, it used to disappear from sight because it'd go down to a big dip and you'd think it had gone and then it'd come back up again, and it was, I didn't mind Darwin so much in that period because I was married then and I had married quarters. And we built our, from wherever we went from then on, we didn't use their beer hall or

05:30 anything, we always built our own, and we built our own huts, built our own beer halls and we separated completely from the base squadron. So that was fairly good at Darwin and I spent about, I was, when I got out of the batcher site and I went on the grader, I wasn't on a grader for long because all the earth works was finished. Now what happened when you was a plant operator with ACS,

06:00 when you finished your earth works job you were on, then you'd go onto either concreting and finish the concreting and then go onto the bitumen lay, and you'd have to be able to do them all, so. And they put me in the soils laboratory, they sent me on a course, I did every course I possibly could from then on because I decided I'd rather be giving orders than taking them. So I did all these courses and I did this soils laboratory course and they put me in the soils laboratory, there was

06:30 three civilians, two of us and we had a sergeant, Bill Kingston, in with us. And, I did most of the testing and, as they says in these papers there, I was only an LAC at, all the time, but I was the one in charge of the outfit, so, and we used to go out and when they was, the concrete was pouring, we'd go out and we'd take what they called a beam test, it was twelve inches, eighteen inches long by six inches thick and

07:00 you'd bring it back and put it in a water tank for seven days and you'd mark them seven days, you'd make three of these beams, one seven days, one twenty eight days and one ninety days, and then you'd also get a cylinder and you'd keep that for ninety days, and after these seven days was up you'd put it across these two beams and you'd put pressure on it and have a look at what pressure it cracked at and broke, and it was the flexible reading and how flexible, and it had to be at least six hundred, which it was the whole the time I was there.

07:30 And the beams had, and the cylinders had to take a compression, downward pressure of three thousand pounds per square inch before they shattered, so, and then we used to test all the bitumen and when we was testing bitumen we'd go out to the field to the hot mix plant and we'd take a sample out of the, what they called the pug mill where it was being mixed before it went into the truck and then we'd bring it back into the soils laboratory

08:00 and we would weigh it, then we would up it in carbon tetrachloride overnight and wash all the bitumen off it. The next day we'd pour all the whole thing into a receptacle with a burner under it and evaporate all the carbon tetrachloride off now, and it used to nearly kill you and it was a sealed soils lab because you had all these grams scales

08:30 scaled to within one thousandth of an inch and the least little breeze used to send them berserk, so we had to enclose the place and we, now, see, that carbon tetrachloride is a toxic substance and it's not allowed to be used or even produced, and we worked for years in there doing that, and what we'd do is we'd boil all the carbon tetrachloride off it and then it'd leave just the bitumen there so we

09:00 could tell how much bitumen was in the sample, then we'd put all the aggregates that come out of it through a sieve and pick out all the different sizes and see how they all fitted together, and that was all part of our testing. But, and I stayed in there and meanwhile the RAAF had got a mobile soils lab of their own and they parked it outside the soils laboratory. I worked in that soils lab for about twelve months, and by then the Darwin

09:30 runway was nearing completion. And we'd sent a detachment over to Ubon to build all the quarters over there for deployment of a couple of Sabre aircraft fighter aircraft and the Canberra bomber squadron. I wasn't selected on that, some of the other people went. And in 19, I went there in '61, so I was there for, till '63, and then in 1963 they

10:00 select all our soils lab crew, plus a engineer from Department of Works, the air force decided that they needed an alternative runway to Darwin. And we had strike aircraft that if anything happened on the runway they wanted to divert somewhere else, so they sent us down and during the war there was, there was airfields everywhere in the Northern Territory and I had to go out and resurface about three of them,

10:30 across the years.

So what was the thinking with the old strips that they had here and there all up along the highway, what were they doing with those?

Nothing, and when they decided if anything happened to Darwin, it was, the runway was closed for any reason, they had nowhere, so they sent me out with a crew to resurface the runways, one at Fentons and one at Coomalie Creek, and they was pretty

11:00 long bomber strips too, and they were still in pretty good condition, there was a couple of tufts of grass growing up between them but they were still reusable, so we sealed them. I no sooner sealed them and they said, "Righto, we're sending you down to Katherine with all your soils laboratory crew to investigate, we want to build a runway down at Venn down in Katherine, just outside of, seven kilometres south of Katherine." So we took down, there was myself,

11:30 Bill Kingston and an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] and we took down an MT [Motor Transport] fitter with us and a couple of other blokes, and we dragged, we towed the soils lab down and we started doing the survey on Venn. There was an old wartime strip there and the DAC [Douglas Aircraft Corporation] used to come down and land there once a month, it was still usable, pretty rough though, the strip. And we

wanted to build on Venn because it had huge gravel deposits

12:00 and things and it had everything we wanted to build a runway, so. What we had to do, we had to go out, there was myself and this Gil Smith, who was the two LACs [leading aircraftsman] there, we'd take an axe out and we had to cut all the shrub down, three hundred metres, every hundred feet along the runway a track each side of the runway, the centre line of the runway, and then every fifty feet we had a hand organ and we had to go down

12:30 six feet and every six inches save a soil sample, bring it back, tag it, what depth it was back, what chainage, bring it back to the soils lab that night and do all the tests on it, the amount of clay in it, the amount of particles, the size of them and everything, and we'd been there doing that for about three months, and while we was there, there was our fitter, Finnegan, we had a Diamond T that we, a

13:00 big Diamond T truck, like a Mac, to drag the soils lab down there, so he got in and he hooked, he unhooked the plug in the head block in it and he hooked up a line to it and he fed the hot water coming through into the engine block, straight through up into a shower. So we used to go out and we'd turn this Diamond T on and knew exactly what revs for a perfect shower and we'd stand under it and we all had hot showers and

13:30 every time we knew the bosses was coming down we'd disconnect it, you know. And we allocated one bloke to be a permanent, first of all when we went there they was giving us a couple of days each about being a cook and, oh, we wasn't too rapt in that, so one bloke liked it so we kept him the cook all the time. And we'd almost finished and they decided to send a seismic application down, and when they did, everything was acceptable. As far as all the other tests we done,

14:00 they found there was huge limestone caves underneath the runway, so all that work's for nothing, so they said, "Righto, now we'll go to Tindal and do it all over again." And they didn't like Tindal particularly because it was full of limestone just under the surface, we had to blast every inch of the way and we had to run trucks for about thirty kilometres from Venn to bring in all the gravel with our, we had huge big white trucks with big

14:30 dogs on the back of them bringing in all our gravel, so we had to bring all our aggregates and everything else in for miles away and … Fred Tindal, oh, Fred Dawson was our commanding officer, a real good bloke, and we built a golf course while we was there, he said, "Well righto, youse can have all the plant you want as long as you do it in your own time." So we built this golf course, it didn't have a blade of grass on it, and we put sand on the greens and used to oil them with all the old sump oil and everything.

15:00 And then we'd invite the base squadron down from Darwin for a golf competition, we used to clean them up down there, they couldn't handle our dirt track. And when we went up there they'd clean us up, there on their turf. And then we had half the town was a member of our golf club, we got onto the NAAFI.

What sort of a township was at Tindal?

Oh it wasn't very large. There was, I don't know, there was only, been about five or six hundred people there I suppose, a lot of Aborigines.

15:30 And, that was mainly cattle breeding and when we went down and we tested, we did all the testing on Tindal then went back to Darwin, took all our equipment back to Darwin, then they decided that they was going to move down to Tindal. So they picked out a convoy to go down to Tindal and it had all our plant on it, it had,

16:00 we had graders and all our scrapers with all this queer steering, and they was made to travel in third gear which is only fifteen mile an hour. My grader would do twenty eight, so it was really slow and they had to follow me jeep and they had trucks on a convoy, so the flight sergeant in charge of the convoy, I said to him after the first day, "Listen Neville, how about letting me out in front with my grader,

16:30 because sitting behind these blokes I can do twenty eight and I know the next point we're going to sleep at," which, they had three camping spots, we was to stay at Adelaide River the first night and camp out the next night at Pine Creek and then on to Tindal and I said, "and I'll go and collect all the wood and have the fires going by the time you get there." And he said, "Okay." So the first day, I headed out, headed the convoy ahead of everyone and I was there about an hour before them and I gathered all the wood and had all the fires going, then I, that night

17:00 I grabbed a couple of seats off two graders and slung a mosquito net up and had a real good night's sleep. The next morning, we got up for breakfast about five and we cooked breakfast on these open fires and I led off the convoy again on this grader and when we're, our next stop was to be Pine Creek and I'm driving this grader and every time I got to a rise, I'd put the grader in neutral, so I used to get more speed out of it that way.

17:30 And I come to this hill and it didn't look really steep so I put it in neutral, and it suddenly got steeper and steeper and steeper, and windier. And these graders, once they got speed up they'd start bouncing, they, and they only had brakes on the rear wheels, they didn't have them on the, they had tandem wheels on the back and they swivelled like that but only the two back wheels was brake and it was just ordinary band brakes and they weren't meant to stop anything that was really hiking. And this thing

really started to

18:00 pick up speed and I was really travelling and then it started to bounce. I had the blade up in what they call the travel position, up over the front wheel and facing back, and there was all mud on the back of it where we'd been operating and these great lumps of mud started flying off it and I'm standing up and I've got both arms locked under the steering wheel, and I'm standing with both feet on the foot brake and there's a hand throttle there and I knocked it off and I couldn't get it back into gear, I was going too fast. And with the other hand, with this, I was trying to pull the hand

18:30 brake on full force and I was getting faster and faster and faster, and on these graders, they've got lean wheels to take you around corners and I had to operate the lean wheel to get around the corner, otherwise I wouldn't have got around. And on one side there was a solid wall, stone wall, and on the other side a huge drop and I thought, 'I'll never make this. I'm going faster and faster.' And I come around this corner and this car's ahead of me on the same side of the road that I was on. 'Oh jeez what am I going to do now.'

19:00 And I bounced past it and there was great big heaps of mud flying off the grader everywhere and I was really, I must have been doing sixty when I went down there and I never thought I'd really make it, I, it was really uncontrollable and the more, it kept bouncing, higher and higher and higher. And I got down to the Pine Creek Hotel where we used to stay that night, finally got down there and I was white as a sheet and shaking all over. And I took the grader right around the back and parked it around the back

19:30 and I walked in the bar and I ordered a VB [Victoria Bitter] and he give me a stubby of VB and I drank the VB and ordered another one and this old bloke come wandering in and said, "Have you got a ladies' room here?" and the barman said, "Yeah, yeah, there's one over there." He said, "My wife's had a bit of an accident." He said, "Do you mind if she comes in and uses it." "No, no," he said, and this woman come in with a towel wrapped around her waist and she come over and the bloke come up to the barman. He said,

20:00 "You won't believe this," he said, "but I was just up on that hill and I was doing forty, which I thought was dangerous." And he said, "One of them bloody big yellow earth moving machines went past me at seventy." He said, "And it was showering great lumps of mud," he said, "and this maniac was standing up in it with his shirt billowing out, like a cloak," he said, "with his hair standing on end." And he said, "My wife started screaming and the mud was hitting the windscreen and I swerved to the left and wiped off me side view mirror." He said, "You didn't see him

20:30 come past here did you?" and the barman said, "No, I didn't see him." And he said, "No you bloody wouldn't, he'd be in Adelaide by now." And I never uttered a word, and when the flight sergeant got there I never told him a thing about it, you know. And, but the old bloke he [said], "You bloody wouldn't, he'd be in Adelaide by now." He reckoned I was flying and he said, "And it wasn't driving along, it was jumping along," he said. So I never put it in angel gear again for the rest of the trip. And when I, we took the convoy down

21:00 and then we went back to Tindal, went back to Darwin and then when I was posted down there, we had our married quarters in Darwin, there was none, we had to build our own married quarters at Tindal, and I was sent down with a crew to build the married quarters and get the base ready. And, the first day we went down, we all, we used to come home every weekend, so we used to organised car clubs, there was four of us in a car club. So we're driving down, I was the first elected to drive down and I had a

21:30 Vauxhall Cresta. And I'm driving down and there was two other vehicles of our people in front of me, and we come to this river, this low level river at Katherine, the bridge, and it was really, the water flowing across it like hell and I thought, I said to the blokes, "Well it can't be that deep, the other vehicles are not here, they must have got across." "Oh, it looks to be flowing a bit high." So, and we, that's the first time I'd been there when it was flooded. So

22:00 I said, "Righto, we'll take the fan belt off so it doesn't splash water up over the electrics and we'll have a go at it." And we got about thirty feet into it and the car started to float. So I said to the blokes, "Quick, open all the doors." So they opened up all the four doors of the car and let all the water in, and I said to Pedro Henderson who was sitting in the front with me, "Quick, jump in the back to raise the front up as far as you can," and I had hardly

22:30 no steering because the front was, the car was floating. The blokes at the back had to keep jumping up and down and bouncing and every, and the motor was still going, and every time they'd bounce, the wheels would go down and hit the what's her name and propel me a little bit forward again. And the only thing that saved me was, that we didn't find out until the river subsided, but on each side of the bridge, the concrete bridge, there was about a foot high concrete parapet coming up and it, the car was hitting that and kicking back in again.

23:00 We no sooner got across the other side and I only just got half the car out of the water and the car stalled. Had it stalled in the what's her name we would have no hope. And when I got to, we dried the car out and we had some CRC [brand name] and we dried all the electrics out and we went on our way and I got back there and all the others are back, and I said, "How come you blokes got through there with no problem?" and he said, "Oh, there's an overhead railway bridge up there that you go across when it's flooded." And we didn't know, they all went over that.

23:30 That was real lucky that we didn't get washed away, and to think that the car stalled, you know, just as

it got to the other side, twenty feet further back and we was gone. And when we, we was at Tindal for about, we lived in galvanised accommodation down there, our huts.

How hot is that?

That was really hot, it was all galvanised, and Tindal was really hot, you know,

24:00 and dusty and hot. We had to blast every inch of the way to build the airfield because we had to blast the limestone out to put the surface down.

And all along the wife's still up in Darwin?

Yeah, and we used to travel back and they'd put on a Dakota aircraft, and they had a roster, the Dakota would carry about thirty blokes, and they had a roster that all the married people went on, and about every four

24:30 weeks you could go up on this aircraft and it only took an hour or so to fly up there and the Monday morning they'd bring you back again. And, but mainly it was all done by the car clubs and we used to drive in, two hundred and fifty miles home every Friday and back again every Sunday.

And would the air force give you an allowance for doing it?

No nothing for that, we didn't get any allowance for that. We done that on our own and, as I said, there was four of us in each what's her name, we took

25:00 alternate turns to bring our cars, but no, we never got any reimbursement of that at all. And these married quarters we was sent down there to build, they was pre-fabricated and you put them together and we screwed them all together and they had flat roofs on them which was really a boo-boo because they, a lot of them leaked, but. I knew then, by then what married quarters I was getting down there,

25:30 which one at Tindal, so I made sure it was done pretty good and it didn't leak. And they was pretty basic but we built the camp and put up all the married quarters and everything and I think it was about eight or ten months or so, or a year, before the wives moved down there, and when they got to Tindal there was nothing for them to do, absolutely nothing, there was

26:00 no television, no, the only shop they had really to shop at from where we were out at Tindal was the canteen, which was pretty useless, it didn't stock much. And the women really had a hard time of it there, I mean the men during the day was working so they had something to relieve the monotony but the women had absolutely nothing and it was dusty and dirty and, you know. So they really did a tremendous job, all the wives

26:30 down there. And they never complained, or most of them never. And we was there for about, I was there, I did all the finish grading, every bit of finish grading on the runway. When it come, meanwhile at one stage I'd been sent to, down to Support Command to pick up a bitumen tanker, a new spray bitumen tanker to spray bitumen.

27:00 And so when I finished the, all the finish grading, they put me on this, seeing as I was the only one checked out on it, they put me on this bitumen tanker and we had a kettle there, or two kettles that was like, and we used to pick up with a crane these forty four gallon drums and we'd cut the top open with an axe and we'd fire up these two big kettles. And there was a grid on the top of this, on both these kettles, that you'd

27:30 stand on it, grid with about that thick and we'd turn the drums upside down and it'd slowly melt into the kettles and then we'd transfer it and then there was a big, a square hole, about a foot square, where the suction hose used to go down to transfer it into the tanker. And I used to always keep an empty drum over it because, of course, when you're moving drums around it was easy enough to step down it. So, I done that and I'd already primed most of the taxiways and

28:00 runway and then they posted met to Ubon in Thailand, so the bloke that was going to replace me, Bob Warbrook, I told him, I said, "Look, make sure you keep that empty drum over that, you know, to stop that." And a week after I left there, he didn't do that and he stepped straight down with four hundred degrees bitumen, with his leg into it, and once that bitumen clings to you, you can't get rid of it. I got hit down, right down the side there once,

28:30 I was opening up one of the cocks on the tanker and the pipe blew and sprayed me in the ear and down the side and down the chest, you can't get it off, and it come up in a big blister about that big and they put power kerosene in me ear at medical to get it out. But I, so they sent me to Ubon, and by then my wife, and I had two children by then, I had a daughter also born at Darwin, so they sent me, deployed

29:00 me to Ubon, and when I went over there I was the only ACS bloke there. And we loaded a D6 into a Hercules aircraft and took it across and there was a grader there that they'd used during the previous building when I was there in 1963. And we were sent over there as part of the SEATO force, South East Asia Treaty Organisation, and they was worried about China coming into the war, coming in and infiltrating into Laos and

29:30 Cambodia and then Thailand, and so, and it was the Thai Government that invited us over. And one of our squadron leaders, work supervisor, had been over to pick the site for our camp. And he'd only been

over there for a week and had it allocated, went to the head of the air force, Thai Air Force, and had it allocated, the Australians and a Yank Colonel arrived from America and wanted our site for his base but he had to settle for the second best, the next best.

30:00 So when I went over there my job was to, I had a 'dozer, a D6 'dozer and a grader and I had a roving commission to do as I pleased. What I used to, all the village people was asked to sent in what they'd like done around, like clearing areas for community centres and repairing levee banks in their rice paddy fields and things like that, and they'd send all these applications to our commanding officer,

30:30 and I was come under transport there but I was me own boss, I was a corporal then, a corporal operator then.

So there was no further work to be done on the airbase at Ubon at all?

No, the air base at Ubon, by this time, when I got there, had about five hundred military, American military, and fifteen thousand personnel. And it was a huge base and it was,

31:00 it used to, every five minutes, day and night, non-stop, twenty four hours a day, they'd line up three of these jets, fully laden, these Phantom bomber fighters, they'd loaded them up, they had rockets all up the wings and bombs under them, and they'd load them up and they'd take them off, three at time, and we weren't more than a couple of hundred metres from the runway and if you was on the phone or talking, you stopped and

31:30 waited till the lull came before the next lot took off, you just couldn't hear. And I never thought we'd get used to the noise and it used to go on all night but we did. But, and they flew mission after mission and they were so heavily laden, these Phantoms, that when they got in the air, they used to have to use their after burners to get off, and when they became airborne, they only had fifteen minutes to rendezvous at the tanker, the air refuelling tanker, or they was out of fuel. So they'd rendezvous at this tanker

32:00 and then fifty kilometres out from base again, when they was coming back, they had to rendezvous with the tanker again to get home. And a lot of them missed that second rendezvous getting home and there must have been about sixty aircraft anywhere from about eighty kilometres out to about thirty, just went in, you know, on the way. And I got on really well with the Yanks and I went over to their base there at one stage and

32:30 this master sergeant said, "You've got a grader and a 'dozer haven't you?" and he invited me over to his base because they was putting in a hard standing for more aircraft. When I got over there – as I said, what we used to do when we was preparing the runway for concrete, we'd, if it was fifteen metres long by a thousand metres wide, we'd prepare the whole area in one hit and grade it off dead level and just come along and put the form work on. When I went over there,

33:00 they got this formwork set up in about [a] twelve-foot-six bay, they got this grader in it with a twelve foot blade, they've got the formwork already in there and some of it's up that high off the ground and some of it's about to dig in and there's a grader driver grading this gravel into it. And he had a bloke each side with a string line to measure it and he was measuring down with a tape to see it was level, correct, and I said to the master sergeant,

33:30 I said, "Jeez, why, how much of that have you got to do?" He said, "Oh we're miles behind." He said, "We've got to do this," oh big area it was. And I said, "Why don't you rip that formwork out and do it in one hit." "Oh no, it'll take too long." And he said, and I said, "That's not the way we used to do it." And I told him the way we done it and he said, "You couldn't come over and give us a hand could you?" So the colonel come over, this Colonel Ole who was in charge of the base, and

34:00 I put, the master sergeant and myself put the proposition to him, we said, "Look, rip out that formwork that you've already got in there and we'll start over again and we'll grade the whole area." And they anticipated it'd be going, to be about four months, they didn't have a construction mob there at all. And the colonel was very reluctant to pull out what they'd already done, so in the end we convinced him and in a week I had the whole area graded and level. They sent me all the material on it and I had it all level and put

34:30 the [omission] on it and the master sergeant, I become really good friends with him then and he used to get me to do little jobs for him on the roads and things. And they had an aircraft there and they used to call it Puff, Puff the Magic Dragon, and it was a C-130 Hercules gun ship and it had a twelve barrel Gatling gun slung under the belly of it. And they used to take that up of a night and they used to load these two semi [semi-trailer] loads of ammunition into it and they'd fly over

35:00 the target for about ten minutes and use the whole two semi loads. And I said to the master sergeant, "How about getting me on one of them flights to that?" and he said, "You better get your section commander's permission." So, I went over to the warrant officer in charge of transport and I said, "Look, the Yanks offered me a flight up in one of their Hercs [Hercules transport aircraft]," I didn't tell him it was a gun ship on an operation. "Oh yeah, that'll be alright," he said, "no problem at all." So I went back over and I said to the master sergeant, "Oh yeah, he said that's alright." "Okay," he said. So they give me one

35:30 of their jackets and I got on this aircraft and all I had to do was just sit and observe and it went over the target, and it used to put one of these bullets every three inches over the whole area and spray them

out and the whole aircraft would shake from stem to stern and I couldn't see anything that was happening because I was in the aircraft and you couldn't see out, but I come back from it and we was away for about two hours I suppose.

How long, when they start doing their

36:00 **circuit and they're hammering into an area, how long would that last, how long would the ammunition last?**

About five to seven minutes, and they expend two semi-trailer loads of ammunition, it was on, it was in great big steel containers that they'd roll in, they'd roll them straight off the back of a semi and roll it in the aircraft. And it was a continuous belt, folded backwards and forwards, with all this high calibre ammunition on it and it used to,

36:30 twelve barrels, and it used to belt them out. But the Viet Cong was terrified of it you know, and it'd come in and fly a pattern and anything within that area was gone. The next time I said to him, "Gee, I'd like to see that in daylight." So he got me one of the daylight flights on it and then I went up and then the captain of the aircraft took me up into the cabin and it, when it was flying over this area and spraying it, it was spraying an area of about

37:00 twenty or thirty feet wide and it was cutting down trees, it's fire was so fierce, severe it was, cutting down trees as it went in one swathe, all the way through, and they used to fly, they only had one there and they used to call it Puff the Magic Dragon, but they only had one at Ubon when I was there.

Does the aircraft fill up with cordite, smoke?

No the, it's slung underneath the belly and all the

37:30 workings of it drags the smoke out from behind it so the aircraft was pretty clear of that. You get a little bit in there but not much you know. Hell of a lot of noise and a lot of vibration in the aircraft. And so I didn't tell them at the base that I'd been on an operational mission, and then I used to go out to the villages and they, I'd get all these applications and then I'd, I had an interpreter, Sadca, that used to come with me, and he was a Thai.

38:00 And he used to speak pretty good English and he used to come with me and I'd jump in me jeep and I'd inspect all these villages and they'd say, someone would say, "Oh we got trees there." "Oh how big [are] your trees?" "Oh kitschy trees, that big." You'd get out there and it'd be that round, and [the] D6 [bulldozer] wouldn't even handle them, so. I'd go out and I'd select something suitable for the plant that I had and then we'd pack up the rations and I'd go out and I'd stay in these villages for up to three weeks, doing all the work around the place, and I'd take fuel with me, drums of fuel.

38:30 **So it was really kind of civic action work?**

Yeah, and I used to repair levee banks and the villages was really rapt in it and a couple of times on the levee banks, that was holding all the water in, their paddy fields had washed away and the grader slipped over the side. Within minutes there'd be about two hundred of these Thais there with this huge rope and they'd pull you back out again, because if you went to get out, you'd slip further and bog it, but they'd pull you out. And when you went into these villages,

39:00 they had, in all the villages they had big council centres where all the chiefs gathered all the time and it was set up on sticks and we used to go in there and as soon as you got there, they'd offer you anything in the village, they killed all the chickens for you, they'd do anything you know. But I'd never eat there, I used to, we used to take all our own rations and we used to take about treble what we needed and leave it there when we left. And, but they was really nice and they, and, you know, they were so thankful that they would have done anything for you.

39:30 And we slept in the council hut all the time and we'd work there for about three days and then we'd load up and go back to camp, stay back in camp for about two or three days and head off somewhere else.

And where's the wife and kids at this time?

My wife was back at Tindal, had to stay at Tindal because it was an operational zone, Ubon, so she had to stay at Tindal.

Was she happy at that?

No. And when I, when, at Christmas time,

40:00 my grader by that time was starting to show the wear and it needed maintenance and the 'dozer tracks, I'd been operating in a lot of sand and all the pins was wearing in them so I needed new tracks. So I loaded the grader onto a Hercules and sent it down to a period contractor in Singapore, I stripped the tracks off the D6, broke the pins and laid the tracks out ready for the new tracks to arrive, ordered new tracks,

40:30 and then I've, and it was near Christmas and I said to – , "Look I can't do anything up here now, how about I put in to go home for Christmas?" and he said, "No-one ever goes home from here for

Christmas." And I said, "Well I'm going to try." And he said, I said, "Will you sign out me – ?" "Yeah I'll sign it," he said, "but the CO won't, no one else will." And he signed it and I took it to the CO and the CO said, "Well you've got to put up your return fare,

41:00 a Hercules will take you home but you got to put up your return fare and leave it here," which they called an indulgence passage, "and leave it here in case you can't get back on a RAAF flight and you'll have to pay your way back.

Tape 8

00:32 **So we stopped you mid-story there.**

Okay, righto, after my section commander signed this indulgence passage form, and it was for a week, I took it up to orderly room and I said, "Will you put this in to the CO?" and they said, "You got Buckley's hope of getting that, what do you think it is?" So [I] put it in to the CO and the CO said, "I'll sign it, the department of air won't." So it went to the department of air, come back a week later approved because I put on it

01:00 that I had no plant and that I wanted to go home. So I was the only one, I think, ever left there, and I went home for Christmas, I got on a Hercules, they used to fly Hercs [once] a week into Ubon to supply us and they'd come back through Darwin, and then I got a Herc to Darwin and then I had to pay me own way and Robertsons-Miller [airline] aircraft from Robertson to Tindal in a civil airfield and a civil aircraft. And when I got back to the, to Tindal and took my leave,

01:30 they was calling for works supervisors to sit for a trade test, they needed works supervisors. And so I decided, I went up and seen our CO and said, "How about extending my leave for another week and letting me sit for that trade test?" So he sent that down and they said, "Oh yeah," because I'd, a heap of us already sat for that works supervisors' trade test a couple o' years earlier, but no one passed it, it was really difficult and none of us expected half the things

02:00 that was in it, you had to be an engineer. This time I was prepared for it though and I'd had a lot more experience, so he recommended that I sit for it and I think about ten of us sat and I was the only one that passed it, and one other bloke, Bill Kingston from, who was at Amberley at the time, passed it, and he being a sergeant at the time and me being a corporal, he was senior to me, so they give it to him, but it kept me in Tindal another week and I had eighty one percent pass in it actually.

02:30 And so I flew back to the base at Ubon and when I got back there me grader was ready to be picked up and the new tracks arrived and we got a crane and hooked them on. And I was, had a letter from the villages right out near the Cambodian, Laos and Thai border, to go out there and prepare a community clearing for them so they could build a community hut and everything.

03:00 So I took the 'dozer out, I left the grader back at the base and it was all 'dozer work, clearing shrub and everything. So I took the dozer out and I'd been working out there for about two days, clearing, and this Yankee major, marine major come in there and he said, "Could you, would you mind bringing your dozer with you and doing a job for us?" and I said,

03:30 "Whereabouts?" and he said, "Just up the road." And I said, "What is it?" and he said, "Clearing some shrub and that out." And I said, "Well I only bring enough fuel to last for the job." And he said, "Oh don't worry about fuel, we'll fly it in with a chopper for you." So, I said, "Well I'm supposed to get permission off the RAAF base to go out of the area that I've designated that I'm going into," and the RAAF didn't really know where I was half the time. So he said, "I'll fix that up,"

04:00 and he says, "It's just up the road." So, righto, his just up the road was about forty miles. We loaded the 'dozer on and I realised then, because I'd been operating pretty close to the border, at that stage, in Thailand, and I realised then that we must either be in Laos or Cambodia. And what he wanted me to do, we took the 'dozer in and he

04:30 wanted me to, and I didn't find out until years later that we was deep in Cambodia, and I had to clear these two square areas, about two hundred metres wide for the choppers to land, that they, the Viet Cong was filtering back through Laos and getting into Cambodia, they'd attacked all the air bases at Phan Rang and places like that, and then they'd infiltrate back into Cambodia and then the Yanks wasn't allowed to chase them in there.

05:00 But they decided they was going in there illegally anyway and they put these choppers in there, and I didn't know, I put them down and he said, "It'll only take a couple of days," and it took me four days. And I built them for them and it wasn't until years later that I found out that I'd been part of building all them illegal bases, when I read about it, in Cambodia. And, I went back to the base, I didn't tell them at the base that I'd been doing this work for the Americans, and he hadn't contacted our base anyway, he said

05:30 he was going to but he hadn't contacted them. And I got back to the base and the army was then building a road from, up through the middle of Thailand, towards the Chinese border. And they sent down and asked me could I come up and give them some help, that they had a 'dozer up there that they

couldn't start. So I drove all the way up the crown in the jeep, oh, it was about hundred mile up there and I drove up and they had this little calf 'dozer there,

06:00 weeny little thing that was pretty useless, I thought, and I tested it and it wasn't getting any fuel. So I stripped it, stripped down and had a look at the injectors and pulled the filter out and they'd never serviced it the whole time they'd had it. And the filter had collapsed in the fuel filter and it was blocking it off. So I took that out and threw it away, and I said, "When I go back to Ubon, I'll order you another filter. Meanwhile, you can use it if you use, if you make sure your fuel's clean then you can use it without the filter," which they did,

06:30 and then I got on the radio, I had a radio on the jeep, I got on the radio and radioed them back all the details of the what's her name and they sent to Singapore and had one what's her name sent up. And when I got back to the base, at that time we had a deployment in Vietnam that was at Phan Rang, and they was building all the facilities there, hangars and all sorts of things,

07:00 and hard standings, and they were supposed to be being sent back home. They decided meanwhile that, the RAAF, the head of the RAAF up there in Vietnam, decided that the, that he wanted the ACS blokes, instead of going home, to be sent down to Vung Tau to finish off a lot of work down there at the other RAAF base that they needed for their flight centres down there.

07:30 And by that time there was nineteen of our blokes due to come home, which they sent home, and then three days later another three came home, so, they sent to Ubon and sent me up there for a month. And I flew up there and I was only there for a bit over a month and they'd finished the job and the whole of the Vung Tau mob then disbanded in December

08:00 and I stayed there in Ubon until about, seven months actually I stayed there, instead of the six, then flew back to Tindal, left the 'dozer there. I think I was the last deployment they had of our mob with SEATO that went over there, I don't know what they done with our 'dozer and grader after I left, but I should imagine they sold them.

So all that time you were in Ubon, were you glad not to be in the thick of things in Vietnam?

No, it didn't worry me particularly, I couldn't care less.

08:30 When, we was operating within a base area and every now and then they used to get mortar fired and everything on them, but pretty well protected around a base when you was working, you know. And now and again they'd make a major raid, but none of our people got killed except our flight crews, a few of them got killed, but. It didn't worry me being at Vung Tau and Vung Tau was not as bad

09:00 as being at Phan Rang, one of the big bases further up near North Vietnamese border. Da Nang was probably the biggest base there, the Yanks, and, when we landed there these Yankees, they used to have what they called their toilets, a thunderbox, they just drill a great big hole in the ground and put down these, put a forty four gallon drum on it with the top and the bottom knocked out of it and put a piece of board across it and that was their toilets,

09:30 had them all out in the open, and when ACS went over there they put septic tanks in and we had flushing toilets, the only ones there who had them. And the Yank colonels and everything would come over and be saying, "Hey Aussie, when are you going to invite me over to try out your fancy crappers." We was notorious for having fancy crappers. But then they sent me, I was back, I only went back to Ubon then for a couple of months and I was

10:00 sent back to Tindal.

So being in Vietnam, did that make much of a difference to you or …?

No, none. Actually at that stage I just accepted wherever I went and it didn't worry me.

One thing I wanted to ask you about the time you spent in Ubon was, comparing it to the time you spent in Malaysia, whereas the Aussies and the English, and the locals preferred the Aussies. How did that compare to Ubon in terms of the locals opinion of the Aussies and the Yanks?

10:30 Well the Thai people, we had fifteen thousand men there, that was a huge influx of money into Ubon, in a place like Ubon, and they was, they loved having the Yanks there, and the Yanks hardly employed any Thais or anyone on their bases, you had to go, if you wanted to go over there, they had what they called check point Charlie and you went through the gate and they had a real stringent

11:00 security check on you before you got in there. They used to come across to our base quite often and fraternise, the Yanks, with us and we used to go over and drink in their Sergeants' Mess most of the time. But they, the Americans absolutely amazed me, we went into their mess once, now once you became an NCO in our outfit, say even a corporal or a sergeant it, the only way they could take your rank off you once you become substantive was to court martial you.

11:30 And we was over in their American mess this night and, there was a six stripe master sergeant in there and another five stripe one and they was having an argument at the table where I was sitting and this five striper really told him where to go and he said, "Righto, that's it, I'll have you busted tomorrow and

your posting to Germany cancelled."

12:00 We seen him a week later and he did, he been busted back to a three striper, and, you know, that could never happen in our outfit, especially in a mess, you know. But the Yankees had really hard discipline and they used to work, they used to work up to sixteen hours a day on them flight lines and the pilots there, when we went into their mess, their pilots, all the Yank pilots, was round about the twenty one, twenty two mark and they all looked about thirty or forty,

12:30 you know, from all the strain they was under. And this Colonel Ole who was in charge of the place, Ubon, was a real mongrel. Whereas our mob, we had Sabres stationed at Ubon and our mob was only, it [would] never fly under ninety eight percent serviceable, they weren't allowed, the aircraft had to be at least ninety eight. This colonel was only interested in one thing, keeping up his flights, how many flights he could put in the air, you know. So he used to operate

13:00 sometimes on eighty percent serviceability. And a lot of the aircraft was going in, you know. And, at one stage there, one of the pilots refused to take a Hercules up , he reckoned the brakes and everything on it wasn't working, so the colonel said, "I'll show you whether they're working." He took the aircraft up. When he landed it, the brakes weren't working and so he put the nose up and dragged the

13:30 tail all the way down the runway and scraped the whole bottom, there was flames shooting out about forty feet behind the aircraft. It's a wonder it didn't catch alight, but it wore the whole tail gate out on the aircraft, you know, that's what, the sort of bloke he was. They was all pleased when he left.

How was the mood different in that month you spent in Vung Tau, how was the mood different there to …?

Well everyone was busting to get home, they'd been there longer than they'd been

14:00 promised they'd be there. And it wasn't too bad for me because I only, I hadn't been over there for six or seven months or eight months like they were. And they was only supposed to be there for six, and a lot of them was married, I'd say two thirds of them was married, and they really wanting to get back to, all their families was at Tindal, and they really had enough of the place and wanted to get out of there 'cause it wasn't pleasant working conditions there, you worked all the time, you did nothing else, you didn't got a chance to go out or do anything else, it was just

14:30 flat out work to try and get all this work done in time.

And when you were in Ubon doing the work for the locals, was that a different, kind of reward for you than doing straight military?

Yeah, the Thais was so grateful and the work that you done with the machine in two days would save them twelve months' work, you know. And I used to take explosives

15:00 with me too and, it, when I was at Amberley I done a powder monkeys' course, an explosives course, and I was certified powder monkey to be able to blow, and all the big trees, I used to go up there and I'd blow them out, then I'd move them with a 'dozer, but they was all so grateful, and Thais are really friendly people, you know, and they were so grateful and I used to get great satisfaction out of it. And they used to write back to the CO these glowing letters, you know, of commendation

15:30 for me for all the work that I'd done, so. And the CO used to let me, pass them on to me and they used to come in, in droves, you know, that was pretty satisfying.

How did your interactions differ with the locals in Thailand as compared to in Malaysia?

Well in Ubon itself, most of the people in there, and they had miles of brothels in there too I may add, but it was really full of

16:00 VD with the Americans there so most of our blokes never did get into that but. All the people in around Ubon itself, all the women and that, could all speak English because they was interacting with the Americans and the Australians and everything. But once you got into the villages, there was no-one there to speak English and the only communication you could have with them was through my interpreter. So when we went to the village, all

16:30 the talking was done through him.

How did you find that, working with an interpreter?

It was hard, because you don't know what they're telling them half the time, they could be telling them anything, so. And everything you got to say to him and then he passes it on and then they have a bit of a jabber back and then he only gives you half the story when he gives it back, so it was very difficult working, as far as working with an interpreter all the time we was there.

17:00 The whole time.

Did you have the same interpreter?

Yeah, I always took the same one with me.

And what was your relationship like with him?

Oh really good, he was employed at the base, at the transport section also, and he was mainly there for me to take around anywhere, and I just used to say to the warrant officer in charge of transport, “Oh, I’m going up to such and such village tomorrow to have a look and see if it’s applicable to take the plant up there and do the job.” “Oh okay,” he’d say, and he’d expect me back when I got back.

17:30 I’d take my interpreter with me everywhere I went. He really enjoyed it too because he used to get all this food when we come back.

Do you know what was the locals’ relationship …?

And of course they treated him like a little god when we got to the village too, he really played up on his part.

That’s what I was going to ask, how was he regarded?

Yeah, he was regarded, he was given the run of the village with anything he wanted. He used to really enjoy it.

And where had he come from?

18:00 He had come from in Ubon somewhere, and he was already working for the RAAF when I got there and once I got there and I said, “Well I’ll need an interpreter,” and they, and he could speak pretty good English, then they, from the whole time I was there then, he became my interpreter, he worked with me the whole time I was there.

And how many Aussies were in Ubon when you were there?

About, there was three Sabre aircraft

18:30 and there was about a hundred and fifty. I was the only plant operator, all the rest of them were either transport or orderly room, equipment and people working on the Sabres, the aircraft. Our Sabres, over there, was part of the South East Organisation Treaty [South East Asia Treaty Organisation] and they didn’t go into combat in Vietnam, our Sabres [fighter aircraft],

19:00 they was there just to patrol the borders between Laos and Cambodia and that, to stop the anyone and China from coming in, so that was their primary role, was to do surveillance work. And the base there, it was a pretty big staging place for the Hercs coming into, drop through there and then on to Vietnam. And I suppose

19:30 there would have been, there was a lot of huts there and they was all full of people, see.

So by the time you came back from Ubon, were you disappointed to leave or were you ready?

No, no, I had my family in Tindal and I didn’t want to go over there in the first place. And I, and what they did, when you went over there, everyone when you went over, they [were] issued with a picture of a woman, right. Now it was cut into segments for six months, that was your deployment

20:00 there, and the last day, you know where that was. Everyone couldn’t wait to put that last day there and get home, no, especially when you was married. The single blokes loved it there, but us married people didn’t, we couldn’t get home quick enough.

So back to Tindal?

Yeah, back to Tindal, I’d only been back at Tindal a couple of months and Tindal was finished and so I was sent to

20:30 Amberley in Queensland and I got, almost immediately, married quarters at Amberley in Queensland and it was in Ipswich, where the married quarters were. And I used to go to the base and I was sent back to the soils lab there to run a soils course when I was at Amberley, and I run that for a while and then I was, I did a lot of grading work at Amberley and then when that was finished I went back to the soils lab,

21:00 and while I was there they sent me down to Kingswood to do an explosives course, how to make explosives and everything like that. We spent three months, I was a sergeant by then and they sent me down to do, with about five other sergeants and a couple of warrant officers, to do this explosives course, which we all passed, I passed it with flying colours. And we had three months there, when I come back from there they sent me over Adelaide for another course on

21:30 KVAs [kilo-volt-amps (generators)], big KVAs that we were going to take to Learmonth with us. And we built two big Belmont hangars in Amberley and we built big, huge hardstands there and resurfaced the runway. Finished that and then I was posted on the advance party to Learmonth. And …

So had your family moved to Amberley as well?

My family was all at Amberley, and when, at that time,

22:00 when I got married, my wife had a aunty that was manic depressive, I didn't know what manic depressive really was and apparently it run in her family, and she started to get that way at Amberley. So when I went to, when I was sent on the advance party to Learmonth, I didn't want to leave her by herself because she was showing real odd tendencies by then and they had her on huge doses of valium. And,

22:30 so I sent her home to her mother because I couldn't, there was no married quarters over there at the time, and I drove my car across all the way from Queensland right through to, Amberley right through to Exmouth, took me about five days to get across five thousand kilometres. And, when I got there, all of our stuff, they just, the government decided, in their wisdom,

23:00 that instead of giving all our equipment to one mob to take over, that they'd split it up. So it was loaded onto trucks, loaded on the railhead at Cue in Port Augusta, it was taken off the trucks at Port Augusta, loaded onto the trains at Port Augusta, so the railway would have their go, taken off the trains at Kewdale in Perth and put on transports and sent up to Learmonth. Now

23:30 with the, we, when we sent all this out, this plant out, all our, it was all [a] pretty modern plant by then, and when we sent it out, now, they had big red marks on them, where to hook the slings to on everything at lifting height, the railway and everyone completely ignored all that and they put all our heavy equipment on light equipment and when we got it over there it was wrecked. And my job when I was over there was, first off, I had to go out and knock the top off a mountain so we could put our water storage tank up there.

24:00 We was on all bore water, we had to sink all bores, and pumped into this huge concrete tank that we built. And after that I was on the fifty ton crane, we had a fifty ton crane unloading all the equipment, and to get all, some of this heavy equipment off we had to put a one ton weight on the front of the crane because it used to, the load was so heavy it used to lift the front wheels, I'd end up as

24:30 high as the ceiling with the wheels off the ground and then the only way you could get down again was to lay it on the ground and you'd losen the crane back down. And we done all the unloading there and there was only about fifteen of us there at that time and the camp was already constructed, there was no messes or anything at that time but most of the huts had been done, I don't know who done them, but they'd been done.

25:00 And we were, at first stage we was living in the Pot Shot in, which was a local recreation house and pub in, at Exmouth. The Americans was over there, they was running their big radar stations over there. We was over there for about, oh, five months before the main body of men come over to live at Learmonth.

25:30 And then it put us back by months and months and months because we had to, we spent all the time fixing up all the plant again and getting it all ready again. And so we started on the Learmonth base about six months later than what we should have because of all the plant hold ups. And it was really hot there, it used to get up to forty-eight, our operators in the scrapers and things like that had to put rags around

26:00 their legs to stop getting burnt with the engine because it used to be fifty-four degrees in the cabin of the Turnaloads. And we was kicking up that, it was red powdery dust, like talcum powder, and the pilots leaving Perth could see our dust clouds from two hundred miles out. And we, our job there was to resurface the runway, build huge hardstands on each end, build a

26:30 full length taxiway with eight intersecting taxiways, put out taxiways into the bush to disperse all the aircraft then build aircraft pads, put in underground fuel storage tanks so they couldn't be bombed, and to build a fourteen kilometre levee bank all around the base, which was about fourteen feet high and about forty five foot wide at the bottom. To get the materials –

27:00 in 1941, the base had been hit with a tidal wave and it drowned forty two airmen when it flooded the base, so this was to stop any future tidal waves or cyclones, it's a pretty cyclonic area there and it was to stop any future flooding of the base, so. To build the levee wall, we had to divert a river to get all the fill out of the river, and we had to divert the river around, out to a completely different area.

27:30 And the fill we got out of that diverting that, we used it to build the levee bank. It was my job to, after I'd finished all the grading on the runway, I sent down to Caterpillar, at that time and I had a normal grader with at twelve foot blade on it and I asked Caterpillar could they make extensions for the grader blade to make it wider. They done a bit of work on it and they brought up two eighteen inch extensions for each end of the blade,

28:00 so it turned it into a lot bigger blade. A lot harder to handle, but jeez, it used to do the work quick. And I used to start at four in the morning because it was, I had what they used to call the boning crew and they used to have boning rods and they'd go along and give you the levels and they'd spot the, wipe the nails off the, so I could see them so I could grade them out without pulling the nails, the level nails. And it got too hot for them to work on the day, on this crushed rock surface, so I used to start at four in the morning

28:30 and we'd finish about two , before it got real hot. And I used to, had my own jeep, and I used to drive into town. When I first went there, to Learmonth, they sent me over on this crane and there was no married quarters over there, but I'd already been promised a married quarters and knew which one I was getting. Now there was a hostel at Learmonth that migrants used to use at one stage and

29:00 Commonwealth workers used to use, and they got all these huts and they partitioned them off and turned them into rooms, one long hut, and that was a married quarters. They partitioned it off into two bedrooms, a lounge room and laundry. And I knew the one I was getting, and the contractors were supposed to have them almost completed, which they hadn't done when I went there. Now while I was over there,

29:30 my wife's mother rang up and said, "You got to get her out of here I can't put up with this any longer." Now there was nowhere to rent in town and so that posed real problems, so there was a protestant minister there and he was going on holidays for six weeks. The builders assured me that my married quarters would be finished in a month so I rented out this protestant minister's place and brought, and got special permission off the department of air

30:00 to fly her up there and to move her and I was the first one up there that had a wife up there. We moved into this minister's place and it had upstairs and downstairs, and all the bedrooms was upstairs. We hadn't been there long and a cyclone hit and the whole town got flooded and the base was cut off and I went down the stairs this morning and stepped into water up to me waist in the downstairs, it was completely flooded. So we had to clean all that out,

30:30 and then the minister sent back that he was due back, and when he went to come back, my married quarters still hadn't been completed. And there I was, when I went up there, and I used to try to hurry them along, there was one married quarters a bit further ahead than all the rest and it was allocated to one of our plant operators, Dave Nan, and so I had to get out of this minister's place and the only thing I could do is, this place, I got them to hook the electricity to it, this house.

31:00 And I brought the wife and the two kids up, all my furniture was in storage at that time, and I brought them up, and we had a box for a table with a bit of fibro [fibrous cement sheeting] on it, and I got mattresses from barracks section and we slept on them, and we was in that, no stove, no nothing for three weeks. And till I finally pushed these blokes along so hard and got, they were so aggravated with me, I was on them every day that they

31:30 finished my married quarters, and I moved in, the first one to move into married quarters there. But that was a real trying time and then she had a couple of real turns there and they took her up the hospital up the Learmonth hospital at one stage and they wanted to put her in a strait-jacket and take her to Perth. And she was really a lovely woman when she was, you know, and I wouldn't let them do that, so she stayed there and then I got her a job

32:00 as the post mistress at Learmonth at our RAAF base. And she was, come real good after that, she loved it, she used to go out and work at the RAAF base, she used to take my car and I used to go, because I had me own jeep, and so she used to work out there and she used to run the banking and all the postal work and everything there and she really loved it there. And she, they, we finally got her off all the valium

32:30 and she come really good. And when we finished Learmonth, and meanwhile I went to, in 1973, I went on leave to Perth, we used to go down Perth for leave. And I took the family down, and while I was down there, I was only about forty two at the time, I think, and at that time I was in charge of half the runway, I was a flight sergeant then and I was

33:00 a work supervisor and I was in charge of, one warrant officer had half the men, the force, and I had the other half, and I was in charge of all the taxiways and levee banks and everything like that.

Can I just ask you there, at this point you've been in the RAAF for about twenty years at that stage?

About twenty-two.

At any point, by this stage, were you thinking you wanted to go on and do something else?

No, no I was, really loved it, I loved the life and I loved the work I was doing.

33:30 By that time I was one of the heads around the place anyway, so I was almost running the place, so.

You must have been feeling pretty proud of yourself that you'd gone in as the lowest …

I went in as the lowest and at that time, when I remustered to a works supervisor – when I first joined the air force, it had four groups and it went from one to four, one, four was the lowest group, one was highest. By the time I remustered to a plant op, there was seven groups and plants ops was one,

34:00 a tradesman, one of the highest groups. Now halfway through my service, they then turned the whole structure upside down and they decided to base the pay structure on what civilians, equal to what civilians was getting. Now all the work, all the trades stopped at seven, and there was only two groups outside that trade and they was air traffic controllers and supers and they was group twenty seven,

34:30 so I went from the very lowest group to the very highest group. And I'd already been a, when you got to be a work supervisor, you become an automatic flight sergeant, but I'd already attained flight sergeant ranking in a plant operator so that didn't effect me any.

What did you think of that, when you looked back on the fact that, for a while there, Mum was probably thinking it was a bit touch and go with you being put into a juvenile home for truancy and …?

Yeah, actually I was quite proud of

35:00 all that I achieved, I sat for every course and I topped every course I ever went on. And all them records there all got real glowing reports, you know. And I did every course I could and only for the fact that the two squadron[s] had merged, I would have been promoted a lot earlier than I was, but once it started to thin out, I went up pretty rapidly from a corporal to a flight sergeant. Every time I was due, you had to serve a certain amount of time in the rank, and every time

35:30 I was due, I got promoted nearly to that day, so.

With, considering your uncle's and your dad's service history, you must have sometimes wished Dad had been around to see how far you had gone.

Oh, no not really, we had eighty years consecutive RAAF, consecutive military service, and every generation for eighty years had been in, so. But I was really proud

36:00 of what I accomplished, and my son, without, I didn't, I already had him lined up to go to university and everything, and when I went down on leave to Perth, while I was down there I had a heart attack. And they put me in intensive care, and the ambulance come out that night. And while I was at Learmonth – mind you, I didn't know it at the time – but I had a minor heart attack there. I got this dreadful pain in me left arm

36:30 while I was in bed one night, and the only relief I could get was to hold it up in the air for about an hour, and that was the start of a heart attack. Now I went on leave about two weeks later and that's when I had another heart attack, a worse one, in Perth, so they put me in hospital and I was in intensive care for about a fortnight and when I come out they wouldn't let me fly back to the base, they wouldn't let me up in an aircraft until I'd spent at least six weeks in Pearce.

37:00 And they, when I got out of hospital in Perth, they put me in the base hospital at Pearce for about three weeks and then they let me out, and all I did then was, they wouldn't let me leave back for Learmonth and I had me return ticket from when I flew down on leave, and I wanted to get back anyway, and by that time, there was no reason to keep me there, and the

37:30 administration officer who was in charge was a woman, squadron leader, and I went up and seen her and I said, "Look, I'm going back to Learmonth." She said, "No you're not, you'll go back when I tell you." And I said, "No, I've got news for you, I'm going back to Learmonth, I've got me ticket and I'm going back." and she said, "Flight sergeant, you will do as you're told." So I said, I went back, I booked me aircraft flight, jumped on the aircraft, and flew back to Tindal and she rang up the CO and he just fobbed her off

38:00 because, and when I got back there, he said, "I don't want to see you on the job for three months." And he sent me home for three months. And by then my wife was working on the, at the post office and I become the cook and the bottle washer at home. And, I, after that, the squadron, we was told that this squadron was to disband because they said there was no further work for the squadron to do and it was to disband. We'd worked our

38:30 way out of a job and we'd finished Learmonth almost and they sent Barnard up, who was the Minister of Defence, with a heap of air vice marshals and other parliamentary members to explain to us that they was going to disband us. We had a meeting in the Airmen's Mess with the whole squadron present, and this Barnard told them they was going to be discharged, and a lot of these people, it didn't worry me because I intended to get out

39:00 as soon as my kids turned high school age, I wasn't going to upset their education any more, I intended to get out anyway, which was very close to that time period. So, and I already had enough service up to get out on superannuation and everything. A lot of them had only done twelve and fourteen years and therefore weren't eligible, you didn't, you wasn't eligible for superannuation until you did twenty years, otherwise they just paid you back what you'd paid in. And so a lot of

39:30 them was due for promotion a plant operations, a works musterings, due for promotion, and been to every outlandish place in Australia, we went wherever no-one else would go, the couldn't get anyone else to go, and with all the hardships and everything they'd put up with, and he got up there and made this speech and everything and told them everything was being wound up and he said, 'Had anyone got anything to say?' and I stood up and I said, "Yes Buster, I've got something to say." And he, when I

40:00 called him Buster, he called me Buster back, and after I'd been there and I was laying down the law to him about all these plant operators, where they'd used them unmercifully in all these places and now they were just trying to shovel them off, and most of them would lose their superannuation and no job, no nothing, you know. And, I said, "Well we're not going without a fight." So he said to me after, he said at that meeting, and the whole mob in the whole beer hall all stood up and cheered, you know,

40:30 when I finished, and he said, "You should be on Bob Hawke," Bob Hawke was the ACTU [Australian Council of Trade Unions] President then, he said, "You should be on his committee." The next day, our

commanding officer was in Canberra trying to fight, save us alive and get us another job, and the senior administration officer pulled me up and he said, “That was a disgraceful exhibition yesterday, Flight Sergeant, where you abused the Minister of the Air and all them air vice marshals,

41:00 considering charging you.” Well he had Buckley’s hopes though. The CO come back and the CO applauded me for it, he said, “That’s what they needed.” Now it did do some good because …

Tape 9

00:32 **So you were saying, you standing up and giving …**

Yeah, so after that, when the CO got back and this delegation then moved up, after telling us down at, having this meeting and telling us we were being disbanded because there was no more work, he went up to Derby then and promised them a seven thousand

01:00 feet airfield up there, for the civilian contractors to build it, they just wanted to get rid of the air force, but they, we was, the air force was mainly concerned with flying and they didn’t quite know how to handle the logistics for our mob. And so, after this speech I made to him, they put out the local news and they issued me with the black feather of courage in the news, the local news. And they sent up a big delegation and so they started

01:30 to negotiate with the men, and what they decided on, I was on the committee that was putting all these things to them, what they decided was that all musterings that had the same sort of work ethics, like works fitters could become MT fitters, plant ops [operators] could become drivers, they would retain all their seniority and their rank and they would be able to finish their service career

02:00 in that mustering. All works supervisors, there was only three of us, and we could select what base we wanted to go on in charge of the base maintenance on that squadron, or wherever we base, we were. And I was going to come to Brisbane, but Brisbane was flooded in ’74, so I decided I’d go to Perth and I put in to go to Perth and, for resettlement, and when I went to, I always work out in the field, and

02:30 when I went to Perth they tied me to a desk, I was at this desk in there, and when I first got there the Department of Works had been running the place for ages there and there was people coming up. I was in charge of what they call works orders BMRs [Basic Military Requirements], requisition orders, and people would come up and they’d hand me these requisitions and then I’d have to send them down, write up a burst about whether it was applicable and then send them down to Department of Air to approve or not.

03:00 When I started investigating, all these people was coming through and they said, “Look, I had an application in for a three phase power point in this hangar for eighteen months and we still haven’t got it.” and other people has all these sort of things in and when I went down to the Department of Works and checked it out, I found out that they’d signed them all off as been done and been paid for them. So I caused a hell of a stink down there, they had about, oh, six of their own civil supervisors there at that time. So

03:30 I used to go down and I stirred them up and I made them complete all the jobs that they’d signed off as done and I’d walk in and they all had, in this big room they all had their own desks, and I’d walk in and they’d say, “What’s this mongrel want now?” you know, and …

So what sort of scam were they running there?

Well they wasn’t doing the jobs and they was getting paid for it and using it for their own mobs, you know.

04:00 And I went down and they said, the, where they used to paint all the aircraft in this big hangar, this mob come up, and once they started, found out I was getting these things done, I was getting inundated with work, it was coming from everywhere. And this mob come up where they painted the aircraft and he said, “Look, we’d like you to come down and have a look at our hangar, we’ve been complaining for two years that it fills up with fumes and we can’t breath,” and he said, “We’ve had Department of Works

04:30 in and tested it four or five times and they said it’s okay.” So I went down there and they weren’t spraying at the time so I said, “Call me back again when you’re spraying an aircraft.” So I went down when they were spraying an aircraft and the place was covered in fumes and I had a look up at the exhaust fumes and I noticed that it was coming in instead of blowing out. And when we checked them, there was six exhaust fans in there and four of them had the blades on back to front so they was actually drawing air in. Now the Department of Works had

05:00 inspected this about four times and give it a clearing and it took me about fifteen minutes to figure out what was wrong and we had that changed. And then the mob that used to change all the tyres come up complaining that they’d been complaining for years, and they had a compressor with a pneumatic spanner drill on it for undoing all the drills, and it was located in the same room as them and they was going deaf. And so I used to go down, I’d take the hygiene inspector down

05:30 with me and he'd take his decibel metre down and he'd take all the decibel readings, so. I got all this work but I was forever writing out these letters to the Department of Air. And, I'd been there about twelve month and decided, 'This is not for me anyway,' and so I applied for discharge.

Had you thought about, at this stage, what you would do after?

I had already said that I was going to be discharged when my children was high school age, which they was pretty close to, and I worked out

06:00 that with my DFRB [Defence Forces Retirements Benefits Fund] and my savings, had I stayed in, I was working for next to nothing anyway, if I had have got out and invested that money, and with my DFRB that I was going to get, that I was working for about a quarter of the pay.

What's DFRB?

It's Defence Force Retirement Benefits Fund, and once you've done twenty years, you're entitled to thirty five percent of your, after twenty years, thirty five percent of your current salary when you get out.

06:30 And for every year you've done thereafter, another one and a half percent's added onto it, so I got out with a fairly high percentage after twenty four years. And it's indexed, tied to the, indexed. Now when I got out, in '74, the inflation rate was running at twenty three percent, so my pension almost quadrupled in the couple of years, it was twenty-three percent, twenty percent, seventeen percent and it just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger.

07:00 So, and I made the decision to get out. Now at that time, when I got out, well I'm not taking on a high job that's going, a supervising job or anything like that, that's going to, with my DFRB I don't need that sort of pressure. So I'll just take on, drive a grader or something like that, and so I started work with this, after I got discharged I started work with this Versteeg [?], and they were doing road works for different locations

07:30 around about the place, for all these developments, and they'd build a whole road structure to put the houses on. And I started off with them doing grader work and they were absolutely hopeless, they didn't know what they was doing. I was only there for a week and they made me the foreman, so I was working then a lot harder, and then another three weeks they made me the supervisor in charge of four of their sites and I was working fifty and sixty hours a week again, and they offered me, at that time, fifteen

08:00 hundred dollars a week to stay with them and I said, "No way," so.

Was that big money at the time?

That was really big money then because the average wage probably would have been about four hundred and something. So they offered me a car and fifteen hundred, which I knocked back because I didn't want a job like that, so I, I then bought myself a, I thought, 'I'll take on a security job.' So I bought meself a eleven hundred CC [cubic centimetre] motorbike, and it was a police bike, it had lights, blue lights and

08:30 everything on it, and I started, I was employed by Wormald [security company], and on this motorbike I used to have to do four hundred kilometres a night to get around the round, and you was handed a bunch of keys about that big and it was, allowed you go into all the factories and check them out and you'd leave a card there to say that you'd been there. Now I'd only been with them about three weeks, and you had to get around this run three times a night. The contract was to inspect

09:00 every one of these places three times a night. Now, flat out, you could only get around them twice. Otherwise you, they, most of the blokes was going in and they'd leave two cards there, you know on the first trip, and I refused to do that, so I said, "Well I'm getting out of this, I'm not going to be a conman like that and if I'm doing a job, I'm doing it properly, so." I kept me bike and I left there and I got a mob with Mayne Nickless then,

09:30 in their armoured car division. I used to ride the bike to work, I didn't keep it for that long and then I sold it to one of the other workers there. But when I went to their armoured car division, I started off as an armoured car driver and then they put me on the staff in the office and I become a security officer for them and they used to send me around on government pay weeks and all that, and all I had to do, lot of times, you'd follow the armoured cars around, especially the bank ones that was carrying about ten million dollars.

10:00 And we had what was called a snoopy car and I used to go around with a six-shot shotgun, automatic pump action shotgun, and in that little car behind them, unmarked car. And then I'd go when they had to go and deliver payrolls to certain buildings and I'd go in, I had keys for all the lifts where they was going, and I'd go in and isolate the lifts so no-one else could use it while they was in it. And I stayed there for about

10:30 twelve years with them. And then my wife by then started, all within one week, went completely off, and my daughter was then moved out of home and she was living with her fiancé and my son had joined the air force. She was in constant battles with her daughter and then she, she ended up going over there one night

11:00 and she, and my daughter at that time was doing her nursing course, and she was halfway through her course, and she used to ring up the person operating the course and tell them that Lisa, my daughter, was on drugs and taking all drugs, she never was, and she was on drugs. And the matron said, "If you keep ringing us up, you know, we'll have you charged," she found out it was completely untrue. Then she went over to our,

11:30 they got married meanwhile, she went over to his place and said, "I want to – ,' and he was at work and my daughter was at home and she was really very off by then, you know, you couldn't reason with her at all, and so she went over and she, my daughter got all agitated and her husband rang up and she said, "Oh, Mum's here," so he come home. And she hung, every time he'd ring, she'd hang up on him, so he come home.

12:00 And she took her shoe off and crowned him with it and opened up his eye. And so they, then she took out a restraining order, and he give her a push, when she hit him, so she took out a restraining order on him, and I'd never heard of these things before, and she took out this restraining order and so he took one out on her then. And

12:30 then she started, she had her own car, we had two cars by then, and she had her own car and she started to ring up everyone all over Australia and abuse them, and her mother and her father and my parents, everyone, you know. And I ended up with a six hundred dollar phone bill at one stage so, in the end she was making it unbearable for my daughter so I had to leave Perth. So I sold me house, which I'd bought in Perth,

13:00 and I sold that, and my brother was an undertaker then, young brother at Port Macquarie, and where his, he had his own house up further in Port Macquarie, and there was a house on the premises, his business premises, that he said I could have for rent for nothing and I went to work with him for a while. And I didn't have to do much. I used to do, what I used to do, if someone, person had died in Brisbane and

13:30 they wanted to be buried in Sydney, I just transported them down, I didn't do the funerals, I just take them down and whoever the undertaker was down there would unload them and …. And I did that for a while and then she got into really deep conflict with them so I had to leave there. And I bought a caravan then and started travelling around Australia. Well that was worse, when you're in a caravan like that, so, finally went to Canberra and bought a house there and by then I, the, it was,

14:00 it just couldn't go on, we had to separate, and separated for about three years and got a divorce. And after, when I was in Canberra, I didn't do any work when I was in Canberra, and for about two years, and then I got a job with the, as an inspector with the Urban Affairs mob, inspecting buildings and houses. I done that for a few years

14:30 and then I completely retired then, used to play golf about four days a week and stayed there for about, ten years I was there for and decided, my son was in the air force by then and he'd just about completed his twenty years and was thinking about getting out and we always had the mind that we was going to move to Queensland and so I preceded

15:00 him up here, I thought, 'I'm not waiting that long,' he had about another year to go. So I come up here and we intended to buy two houses together, buy two blocks and build on them, and when I got up here and bought this place, I decided to stay here, and just as well I did because we went all over the place looking for a block of land, and he bought one for about a hundred and twenty thousand dollars out in, or about fifteen kilometres outside of Brisbane,

15:30 and he intended to build a house on it. Meanwhile he got a job at the Gold Coast and sold his block and moved down there. Now he lives at Robina, so I would have been sitting there by myself anyway.

So with your twenty-plus air force service, what is actually classed as active service?

Active service is, they designate it when your life's in danger, when you're working and your life's in danger and it's being threatened and there's, the only places that

16:00 I've got, which I'm dead against this I may add, I, now I've had qualified service in three different places, so it didn't really worry me, now every time there was a deployment somewhere, I was one of the first to go on it. There was other people, like a really good friend of mine that I'd served in the same squadron with for twenty years, Billy Ross. He put in to go everywhere and they never sent him anywhere. Now he got out after the end of twenty two years with no qualifying

16:30 service whatsoever and he's entitled to nothing. He's not entitled to any of the benefits of a gold card or anything, just, and he wasn't called to go anywhere, did all that time, was willing to go but just because they neve sent him, he's classed as not qualified service, and that's ridiculous in my opinion.

So what have they classed as active service for you?

Malaya, Ubon and Vietnam,

17:00 and you only need one of them, any one of them, to qualify and a lot of them never even got that one because they kept sending the same people all the time. They ended up with, like when we was in the

air force, sometimes, which made me dead against it, the people that was hopeless, some of the supervisors and some of the officers get rid of them out of their section and send them somewhere else, and in the end they'd put them in some, no one wanted them and they put them in some hidey hole where they could never be seen

17:30 and they end up getting promoted. And so I could see all this happening when I was a corporal. So I decided that when I got, if I got up to any rank at all, that I never, and I never did. What I used to do is that with all my men, if I used to be watching them of a day while they was working and that, and I had all the good workers, and the other supervisors, when it was knock off time, they'd keep all their good workers because they was

18:00 reliable and they knew they could get the job done. If there was any work, weekend work, they'd get them to do it, and I took the opposite track to that, I said, "That's penalising the good workers." So I got all the blokes that done nothing of a day, any time there was any job to do back, I'd stay back with them and make them stay back, and the same with weekend work, so they soon got the message. And all my men, I had really pretty good relationships with all the men and

18:30 I kept a leave application of everyone in my section signed by them, and it was blank, so that if anything, one day back or something, they was late, and I had to, they had to ring me and let me know because otherwise they could have been in an accident, and I'd sign the leave application and put it in. Now I kept them all in my desk for years and years and I think I only ever had to sign one of them because they all appreciated that, you know, that you wasn't penalising them.

19:00 I reckoned that was really bad, you know, penalising all your good workers because they're good and letting all the bludgers off.

How did you feel on that last day that you spent in the air force, the day you demobbed [demobilised]?

Well I'd become pretty resilient to change all throughout my life, and it didn't worry me at all. You know, the day I stepped, I got discharged that day, and, I stepped out and from then I never give it another thought. I just went straight back into

19:30 civilian life and from then on it just, you know, after all that time it just never worried me.

So how do you look back on your RAAF career?

Oh with great satisfaction. I achieved a great deal, I had, all through my documents is glowing reports of, except for the first two or three years, from then on everything's exemplary. And I achieved everything I set out to do and

20:00 I was well respected within the squadron and even the officers used to, if anyone wanted to go on leave or anything they, the officers in charge of the section would say, "You better go and ask Flight Sergeant Wilson first," you know, so I had great respect and the CO used to back me, anything I did, and we used to get a lot of young officers coming in, straight from university, and they thought they knew everything. And he'd send them out to us supervisors and they'd want to do something some other way and you'd say, "No, we're not doing it that way,"

20:30 and they'd go and complain to him and he said, "You're out there to learn, not try and tell them what to do."

What were you proudest of your time in the air force?

Probably the last job we did at Learmonth because I had huge responsibilities there. I not only did all the finish grading but then I was responsible for building the levee bank and doing most of the taxi-way, so up to that stage the work had been spread between about four

21:00 senior NCOs, flight sergeants, but at Learmonth it was spread between two of us, meself and Warrant Officer Alexander. And we controlled the whole outside work force and everything turned out great so that gave me great satisfaction there.

What was your best posting?

Probably Malaya. I was single at that time and Malaya was probably the best. But after I got married I enjoyed most of the places I was at. Learmonth was,

21:30 all my kids, everyone loved Learmonth, and so did my wife, so that was a pretty good posting, that was in a nice area and, but Malaya at that time, when we was young and the three years didn't seem to worry us too much when we went over. But that was my best, probably the best pick of all the postings I went on.

What about the worst?

The worst would have been Darwin the first time I went up there, and I never did like Darwin anyway, even the second time.

22:00 I went up there and it was stinking hot and humid and full of insects and bitey insects so I never really took to it, although the second time was much more enjoyable than the first, because the conditions had

improved considerably by then because the, least we had fly wire and protection from the insects, and when I first moved in, and my kids, in this unit into town, they was getting prickly heat rash all over them from the sweat and

22:30 the mosquito bites and really uncomfortable for them.

Have you suffered any health related effects from the, your career in the air force?

No, except for the heart attack, and that was caused by smoking I think, heavy smoker I was. I give that away about six years after I had the first heart attack, and then I had a heart operation, had a bypass heart operation. By then I'd already given away smoking for about four years before that even happened, so otherwise I've been fairly

23:00 fit, I've had lots of broken bones from accidents but otherwise I haven't had any serious illness.

Was there a culture of smoking and drinking in the air force?

Yeah, really, and nearly everyone smoked. During my childhood days, I'd say ninety eight percent of all men smoked. And when I joined the RAAF, when we went to Malaya, it got a lot of people to smoke because they used to issue with fifty, a tin of fifty

23:30 cigarettes every fortnight, free, a lot of people took up smoking then, and Lord Nuffield was supplying all the English with these cigarettes free and all his overseas people. And we was getting them and we found out we was getting them and we weren't supposed to and the government got a bill for two million dollars. But we was heavy smokers and the kind of work we did, we most of us was

24:00 used to drink every night when we come off work, we'd pull into the beer hall and have about six or seven beers or something, and so drinking was very, in, particularly in our squadron, with the work they done and always in a hot climate.

What about with the hot bitumen in the air, did that cause any problems?

No it didn't. Actually it was the one, working around all that plant all these years, and at them times we didn't wear earmuffs of anything, you didn't have to have any aural

24:30 protection at all which you have to now, and there's not too many of them that's not wearing hearing aids now, but my hearing's still alright and, but, I didn't, my lungs probably copped a bit from all the carbon tetrachloride fume and all the smoke, and I think if I ever get any further problems, that's where it'll come from.

Considering you were working with that and the asbestos?

Asbestos, yeah, I was pretty lucky. And you know, when I went to Canberra, they, I,

25:00 they was having a big seminar on asbestos-related disease, and that time every house in Canberra that has asbestos in the roof, they used to put a big plastic bubble right around it and it'd take them months to take this stuff out and it'd cost the government hundreds of million. And so at that time they had a special chamber in, at the hospital, at Woden Hospital at Canberra, where you go and they put you through all these series of tests

25:30 for asbestosis. And I went through all them and passed them alright, but asbestosis only attacks you about twenty years after, you know. And not only that but at one stage, the house that I'd bought in Dianella in Perth, it had a, asbestos super six corrugated fencing and, I just,

26:00 and a wooden fence up the back, so I decided to turn it all into corrugation, not, the block was on a slope like that so the sheets was stepped down, so I had to put a string line across, and when it crossed with the saw, head high, and cut them all off, I must have breathed miles of it in then. So suppose, I consider, I'm seventy now, so I can consider that I was pretty lucky to get away with all that.

Plus a pretty large percentage of your work was done out doors

26:30 **with little sun protection.**

Yeah, I still have to get them whacked off quite regular, and most of the time we didn't wear hats, we didn't wear shirts, we only wore a pair of shorts, and seventeen years we was in the tropics. So, and the only place I've ever had to have them removed was off the face, so. I've had pretty olive skin all my life, so that's a help I suppose, some of our people, lots of them have died of skin cancer and since

27:00 I got out, we've had, about four dozen of our people have died of heart, of lung-related illnesses and cancers and skin cancers and things, melanomas.

So if you hadn't have had that heart attack, do you think your career would have been longer in the air force?

No, because I'd already decided that my children's education – when we were moving around, they was both born at

27:30 Darwin, now they was both doing, my son Mark in particular was doing quite well at Darwin, and when we moved to Queensland, and he was, the things, he was really up the Northern Territory, he was down on, down at Queensland, so he had to repeat a class and so I decided, then and there, that once he got to secondary school, the first one that got there,

28:00 which was he, to get there, that I'd get out before he started his high school career, to stop any further what's her name. Now when we got out, I got out at Perth, he was just about to start high school and he won the physics award and the maths award for the whole state in Western Australia, and my daughter won the English literature award, so it was worthwhile for that.

Would you say that's one of the worst things about service life, is the constant moving?

Yeah, and, we must have moved our belongings

28:30 into twenty different houses at times and every one of them you had to replant lawns and start from scratch again and pack things up and half the time you never really got a chance to unpack you know. And, the biggest factor was, although the kids didn't seem to notice it, was their schooling but the curriculum inside Australia is so radically different in every state, you go to that every time you change states, you know, you have all sorts of school problems, so I was pretty lucky they come out so well

29:00 on that, I suppose, and I think it was just because, I decided at that time to get out and let them complete their education in the one spot. I never intended to stay in Perth, I only intended to stay in Perth until my kids had finished school and then I intended to move over to the Eastern States, because Perth is a lovely place, but once you've been living there for a couple of years, there's nothing else to see. And you got

29:30 to drive about five hundred kilometres to the next town and there's nothing in between, you know, and even when you get to the next town there's nothing there, so. And all my relatives is all over this side, so. And my, I really felt for my wife, it was really hard for my wife too and possibly that life had a lot cause to do with her coming under these attacks because she was, I was twenty eight when I got married

30:00 and she was twenty one and she had both her children away from any family whatsoever, up in a foreign place with no one to help. She had to bring up her kids in areas, really outlandish areas, and with no, none of the benefits other people had, so it was really, really hard on our wives too, and that was another factor I was looking at, you know, I, and, we couldn't do much about it while I was in the air force, but soon as I was,

30:30 and especially when they disbanded the squadron, but I would have got out anyway, so.

What are your thoughts on Anzac [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] Day?

Mainly of my father and his, I never think about what I did or anything like that because the things they had to put up with, they went away for four years and they didn't have intermittent skirmishes with what's her names, they was in constant action nearly the whole four years. And the amount of casualties they suffered, and

31:00 not only that, we used to complain about mosquitoes and heat, but they lived in trenches with their feet rotting off in mud and water and so they're the ones I think of mainly on Anzac Day.

Do you march?

Yeah, I march, and when I was in Canberra I used to go to the War Memorial and Clyde's name is up on the war memorial as those killed in action and they have poppies there and in between all their names there's a slight crack and all the people

31:30 go there and put poppies in and I used to go every Anzac Day and put a poppy there, in his name on the 19th Battalion.

What about the RSL, did you join the RSL?

Yeah, I'm a member of the RSL, I don't frequent it very often, but I'm a member of it. I mainly frequent, our squadron, 5 ACS is, probably had the best esprit de corps in the whole lot of the service, and the reason was because, where other squadrons had other people coming in and out

32:00 and moving around and being based, and every two years or so being sent to other areas, all our works musterings for twenty years were the same people, our wives knew each other and that was the only contact they had socially. Our kids grew up, and from little kids, and went to high school at the same, with all the same kids. And it really made us a really close knit community and they really used to care for each other.

32:30 And now, when we have a reunion, even now we have a national reunion every two years, and we hold it in a different capital city every year, the next one's in July in Melbourne, which was a hell of a time for Melbourne to pick to have a, and we get four or five hundred there. All the wives go, the wives are classed as much a part of our squadron as we were, because they put up with all the same things as we did, so there's,

33:00 no, we don't differentiate between the women and the men in our reunions, so.

And besides the reunions, how have you kept in contact with your mates?

Well, a lot of them's on email and that now, and I, and I get regular visits, I keep the national roll of all our members and I've got all of their addresses and people come and toot, travelling around Australia, get me to email this to them so they go and call in on them, and I often get people calling in here.

33:30 And my good friend, one of my best friends I had in the air force, the one I was telling you about was in twenty years, and they were going, he lives at Lennox Head and he comes up here about, he and his wife got a caravan and they come up here about every four or five months and spend a couple of weeks here, and I go down to their place at Lennox Head, regularly down there, and spend time with them. And every year in Queensland, we had a reunion down in Queensland and there's about two hundred ACS people go to that every year, so you keep in constant contact with …

34:00 And once you come back, you got a pocket full of names and email addresses and then you got to think, 'Oh, who's this from?' And everywhere I go, I end up with miles of photographs to put back on this CD [Compact Disc]. Half the time I think, 'Now who did I get them off, did I promise to send them back?' But we still keep in, we're still in pretty close contact you know. And, it was so highly regarded by the men that served in it, and they all loved their job, even, no matter how hard it was, but.

34:30 We had transport drivers that would serve with us for mainly about eighteen months and then they'd be sent out. Soon as they got to the base they was posted at, they tried everything they could to get back to ACS and exchanged [with] anyone they could, and so we ended up with a lot of our transport drivers and people like that constantly rotated back to the squadron all the time. We had drivers who probably spent ten or twelve years with our squadron, they kept sneaking back all the time you know.

35:00 **What's the one thing that you'd like people to know about the sort of work the ACS blokes did?**

Well they never get any publicity, no matter whether it be, I mean, that World of War didn't even give us one mention. We had squadrons that went right through New Guinea. Number 3 ACS was the only squadron MacArthur would take with him to the Philippines because he wanted it to be all American, and he so highly regarded number 3 ACS, that was the only unit

35:30 that he'd take over there, foreign unit, to build his airfield, and they served right through New Guinea and they never get one mention because the air force is obsessed with flying squadrons. And another thing, the records they kept in for ACS was appalling, they never really kept very good records about it or anything, so. And, that's why, when I started on this, when I first started, I had no intentions of doing this history of all the ACS squadrons

36:00 and, as a matter of fact, there was so little know about them that I'd already been in the air force for about fifteen years and I went down to do that course at Kingswood, explosive course. While we was down there, the commanding officer sent down a message and he said, "Number 5 ACS," which was us, he said, "The old members of 5 ACS are having a reunion dinner down there and I'm ordering all you blokes to go along to it."

36:30 And up until then I didn't even know there was a 5 ACS during the war, so there was ten squadrons, that's how little they were publicised, none of us knew about it until we was there.

So even blokes within the ACS didn't know?

No, we didn't know. I was with them for fifteen years before I knew that there was even a wartime squadron, and when I, when my son, I started on computers and I started to get pretty good on them and my son said, "Now Dad, what you should do now Dad," he said, "is get yourself a website and build yourself a website

37:00 just for practise," so. So I got onto some free site, Treeway in America that hosts you for nothing, you know, and I laboriously worked out and done a website off their what's her name, and it had spelling mistakes in it everywhere because you had to do it all online and it was really difficult to operate and I only did it for a bit of a joke and I left it on there, and once I opened the first couple of pages I never went near it again, I left it for ages. And then my friend, Billy Ross, went down to one of their meetings, to these

37:30 Flying Shovels ACS mob in New South Wales, and they said, "Oh Tommy Wilson's got a website," and for something to call it, I called it the Flying Shovels, after the 5 ACS, just for some name to call it, and then he started publicising that I had this website and then, 'Jeez, I better do something about this.' So I got on, that's when the information, after I'd got the website up and running properly, that's when the information started coming in and I, when I went to a couple of these national reunions, I was enquiring about these

38:00 wartime squadrons, and some of their state members brought all their material down and I brought it back and I started off putting it on the computer and over, and then when I discovered all the work that they'd done and no recognition, I decided I'd do something about it. So I thought, 'Oh well, all these future generations of young Australians,' you know that, and I get sometimes forty seven emails a day from

38:30 these young people requesting information, that's how much they're after information now. And most of the people that send me, they say, "My father served with such and such in ACS, in New Guinea in with such and such," and I can tell them what dates they was doing what area in New Guinea with all the records I've got, and most of the time I can even send them back a photograph that they never knew existed. With them five thousand photographs I've spent a lot of time on finding out

39:00 who they are and their names are on all the photographs, so. And that's been, and I've been getting raps from everywhere, historians and everything, for the work I done, even the RAAF historian, and that's given me great satisfaction also, and to do that and to do, I never thought, I got out of the air force because they tied me to a desk and now I tied meself to one.

Give us the web address so that anyone reading this knows the web address.

39:30 Yeah, well the website, the main website, I got two websites and the one that I use for news that tells people that log on, and it's had about ten thousand hits so far, and that tells them the news of when all the information that's coming through. I keep a vale list on there and everyone sends me words when someone died and I publish that on the vale list, and also all

40:00 the information pertaining to reunions and everything like that, and that's on the, the website of that is www.homestead.com/flyingshovels

And the other one is mainly concerned with the histories of most of the squadrons which is their full abbreviated history of where they went and how they served, and that is called www.homestead.raaf.acs

40:30 **So even if people did a Google [internet search engine] search for 'flying shovels' …?**

If you Google it'd pick it straight up, but I had, I first thought about this when I first started it, I wouldn't have named it Flying Shovels, because most people log on and they click in RAAF or 5 ACS see, and that's why I opened the second site, because Google wouldn't pick up a, none of them would think about hooking

41:00 onto Flying Shovels, because a lot of them still didn't even know that they was a name like that, you know. So what I did now was opened up a, and called it RAAF ACS with both them things on there, and so they can log on it and then there's a link back onto the other site, so people get me one way or the other now.

So do you have any further things to say to the archive for future generations while you have the chance?

No, except that all this work I've done,

41:30 it's going into the War Memorial, the War Memorial not only wants me, they don't hardly get any work on CD [Compact Disc] or DVDs [Digital Video Disc]and that'll be a boon to them. It'll make it much easier to put in their archives but they also want a print copy for people that can't access computers, so that's going to be huge. I'm going to have to print about ten thousand pages, so I'll get Officeworks [stationary store] to do that.