

Australians at War Film Archive

Brian Gribble - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:38 **Where were you born, Brian?**

Born in Cottesloe.

Did you grow up in Cottesloe?

Yes, until the age of 8.

What was it like growing up in Cottesloe?

Oh, it's a beachside suburb. I used to go to the beach with my parents, this was when I was very young, and have dinner on the beach at night time, the hot nights.

01:00 I went to Swanbourne Primary School for a couple of years, and then...

What was it like entering primary school?

I am not sure I remember that far. I know that some of the friends I had then I occasionally see some of them. It was quite pleasant experience, I enjoyed going to primary school.

What are your memories of going to primary school?

Well, I was only there for a couple of years. I have seen the school, it's still

01:30 identical to the way I remember it. I remember I got the cane the first time at Swanbourne Primary School.

For doing what?

Me and another boy was playing up in class and we were told to go and report to the headmaster, and we walked up the passage and saw a blackboard leaning up against the wall and hid behind that for a bit, and went back and said I saw him. We were pretty naive, the next break it would have been checked out, and when our story was checked out to be false we got the cane.

What other

02:00 **memories do you have?**

After Swanbourne I was then - my father was a World War II navy veteran, and he got a war service land scheme farm at Northcliffe, down the south-west, a tobacco farm, so from the age of 8 to 12, I went to Northcliffe Primary School. And of course, I have more memories of that because I was older. And I was next to the sons of dairy farmers and timber millers and tobacco

02:30 farmers.

What was it like moving from Cottesloe to the farm?

I loved it. I mean a lot of people find it a big culture shock, but as a young boy a farm had all these wide open spaces. I could explore among the trees, Dad had an old Daisy air rifle and he would let me take that out, and bows and arrows in the dream world of, I don't know what. And later on I was allowed to

03:00 shoot at rabbits and catch rabbits with a trap and we used to eat them, and things like that. It was an adventure type life rather than a city life.

Any adventures that you remember fondly?

Well, we had a horrible one, no I won't tell you.

What was it?

No, it was just about the kangaroo I shot at - I never shot at one after it, it was a bit drastic.

Why was that?

It was a bit gruesome.

03:30 I had a single shot .22 and the kangaroo used to hop in the tobacco, and I shot this particular kangaroo and surprisingly I hit it. I used to shoot at them and they would hop off. Anyway, it was still moving when I got there, and I had used all my bullets up and it was still moving. And I didn't realise that I had actually killed it earlier on, and it was a little joey in the pouch. So what I thought was a live kangaroo was a dead kangaroo with a live joey. And when I looked

04:00 at the kangaroo, I thought it was a bit of a waste shooting like a little innocent dog face. I never shot one after that. But, I was only, 11 years old.

What became of the little joey?

It passed away.

You didn't take it in or try to raise it?

No.

It must have been an interesting experience for a young boy out hunting in the bush?

It was yes. I thought I was pretty

04:30 lucky to be able to be in charge of a .22 rifle at such a young age and it was a long, long way away from the house. No one within a mile or so, no nearby neighbours.

What was life like on a tobacco home?

It was pretty hard. We had a kerosene fridge, we had a bath once a week. Boil the water in the copper and the youngest kids got in first, my younger sister's got in first I think. Then me and my

05:00 parents and we all used the same bath water, because there wasn't much water. Collected your own water in the tank. And because we were remote from shops or anything, we had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s for eggs, cows for our own milk, my mother used to make bread, butter, we had to be self sufficient.

Did you have chores to do?

Yeah. Chop the wood.

What about your brothers and sisters?

Well, sisters but they were younger,

05:30 they were quite a bit younger. One was 3 years younger and the other 5 years younger, they were quite little.

What kind of relationship did you have with them?

Well, they would tell me that I teased them all the time. They would destroy my image a bit. I would go out in the bush with my bow and arrow and my air rifle and have a little sister following me, so I would have to scare them to drive them home so I could continue on my way.

How did you do that?

Just

06:00 hide behind a tree and make scary sounds and throw rocks around the bush and tell them that there was something out there, and off they would run. It was a bit cruel but.

They were spoiling the fantasy were they?

They were, yes.

How was your relationship with your parents?

I got on very well with my parents. They were hardworking, they were poor. They gave us everything they could. I appreciated my parents. I learnt to drive the tractor and the truck and shoot the rifle.

06:30 Things at a young age that city boys would have learnt later. I could drive at 11 years old. And most people don't have lessons until they are 14 or 15 or something.

Were you close to your parents?

Yes very close, they were very caring parents. My mother is still alive. I see her reasonably often.

What sort of a mother was your mother to you when you were growing up?

Fairly,

07:00 very sensitive woman, a very caring mother, she wasn't tough at all. She was tough in the way that she could survive, that she could do everything around the house, but she was a very sensitive caring person. More sensitive than I am. In the end I felt a bit over mothered.

How did she feel about you playing with your father's .22 rifle?

She didn't like that.

07:30 I had strict rules, he taught me how to shoot it. Anyone near me had to stand behind me, and always check in front that I was - there was no one behind the rifle shot near any buildings or anything. He had strict rules. Only after he was happy that I followed those rules that he let me have the rifle.

Was your father rather strict in general?

Yeah, pretty strict.

What were the rules of the house?

They were

08:00 Methodists, so they were anti drinking, no drinking in my house. They were very strict church going people. There was no swearing. I had a fair run on things, but I was just expected to follow the house rules. And when I was a teenager and started to break away a bit it started to create a few problems then, or I created problems for them.

We might

08:30 **explore that shortly. What are your memories of going to school down there?**

Well, one of the things I remember, because there were no high schools, the nearest high schools were either Bunbury or Albany, a lot of the boys once they got to high school age, say 12, couldn't be released to go to high school because they had to help with the milking on the farm. So, they sat in the

09:00 we would have about 3 classes per room. They sat in one room, and when I got to year 6 or something like that, up the back of the class would be all these 12 or 13 year old boys. They would have their name carved in the desk, they sat there all day. I suppose they learnt something, they never seemed to be learning anything to me. They were just marking time because their family couldn't release them to go to high school. I always thought that was a bit different.

So what kind

09:30 **of relationship did you have with these guys?**

Not very much. I knew them a bit, you just kept away from the, they would thump you if you got in their way.

How did they react to you, young boys from the city?

When I arrived in this country, I was top of the class, brilliant. Obviously the education system was higher in the city than it was in the country. I was the best at everything.

10:00 I mean I always pretty good at primary school. But then another boy came from another city, town. He was the smartest in the class, and then another one came, a girl or something, she was the smartest in the class. So obviously the education just dropped back a little bit from the city.

You fell from grace.

There are a lot of life experiences you learn down there you wouldn't get in the city. I mean all the kids had

10:30 to perform some sort of work function when they got home, because their parents were very poor. A lot of the industries there dairying, tobacco farming, were hands on type stuff and everyone had to help, that was it.

What kind of - how did the tobacco farm operate?

Well we - it lasted for about 5 years I think, eventually the scheme was deemed uneconomic and they folded it up. But you would grow

11:00 a bunch of seedlings in a little hot house affair, and they would be planted out in the paddock. The paddocks had been previously cultivated with no rocks or roots, and remember this is karri country, rugged tree country, a lot of clearing had to be done, all the rocks and roots removed, tobacco plants planted out and that was very - needs a lot of people to do it. So we used to get these timber mill people on the week ends to come out and

11:30 plant out tobacco plants, or help us plant it. Then we would get people from England, Holland, Italy, all the migrants, the workman would come out. Then later on in the year it all had to be picked. Once again all the migrants from the timber mill on the week ends would come out to help us. We might have 25

people working there. Whole families of people. We had a Dutch family there, they had 4 boys and a girl, they would all come out and work.

What was it

12:00 **like having...?**

That was the first time I saw yogurt. They would come out in the morning, they would get all the skim milk that we had spare, they would put it on big trays, work in the field until midday and then come back and pick out all the flies and everything and eat this curdled milk. Yogurt, I couldn't stand it.

Plain yogurt?

Plain yogurt, very plain.

What other memories do you have of these people working for you on the farm?

Just all very honest people. A lot of them were displaced persons after World War II. They

12:30 had - their home had been taken or destroyed or something and they all came to Australia to begin a new life. I went to school with their children, their children were all Aussies. I mean these migrants were Aussies but they still had the broad Dutch accent or the Italian accent or English, but their children were just the same as I was. Just hard working people who basically had nothing, who worked in a timber mill, had a little tiny house there, and eventually

13:00 made their way in life and acquired - some of them would buy houses and farms, eventually.

What kind of a position were they held in within the community?

I suppose I was only a child, but we saw them as migrants. But the kids at school, there wasn't any discrimination at school. I don't remember any discrimination. The Italian parents, we were just all kids playing together and fighting together.

13:30 **Was there much of that at school?**

A little bit yeah, I was a little bit of a rebel, I used to wrestle a bit. I remember one incident, it was not wrestling, but we used to have singing lessons in the local hall, and the whole school, I don't know how many, maybe 100 kids all line up, march down to the local town hall, and sing. Some of the boys, me included thought we were a bit good singing with all the girls, so we used to go and - on the way jump in the bush

14:00 and play around. We were in there this particular day, and when the kids finished singing we would join back in with them and march back to school. So this particular day this boy who hadn't - we didn't want to come with us. He followed us and we tried to find us and he was throwing rocks around and he tried to locate us, and one hit me on the head. He hurt me quite bad, he split my head open and blood was pouring, open, and blood's pouring down my face, but we then had to go and say we had wagged school.

14:30 And we had to go to the little community nurse and she stitched me up. The next day at school there was a meeting - like a school assembly and I was out the front. In white bandages. "This is what happens when you wag school, and this is what happens when you throw rocks, everyone be warned. The next person caught throwing rocks will be given 6 canes in front of the whole school." So later that morning I was with the boys playing footy, I couldn't play footy, standing there and I picked up a rock and threw it and I was seen.

15:00 So, later that day me, with my head in white bandages, standing there in front of the whole school getting 6 cuts for throwing rocks. And apparently my mother said the headmaster apologised to her, and said, "Look I would rather have caned anyone but Brian, he was the one who got injured by the rock, but rules are rules."

That's classic.

15:30 **Did you play sport at school?**

Yeah, I think it was mainly Australian Rules. Maybe cricket in summer. I was never much good at cricket, but I was good at Australian Rules.

Did you have sporting competitions with other school?

Yes. Oh, athletics, I was quite good at running. Yeah, we used to play against Shannon Mill which has completely gone now, but it was a full town there, wiped out part of the State Forest. We used to go to Quininup,

16:00 I think was another place. Pemberton and inter school sports. I was a good sprinter.

Is that a bit of a release for you?

I don't know, maybe I was just good at running away, I don't know.

What about subjects at school, did you enjoy any in particular?

Yeah. In primary school I did really well and I got high marks. It was only later at high school that I dropped a bit.

16:30 I always liked mathematical... sorry.

What happened in high school?

Well, most of my close friends left at the age of 14, because that was the age you could leave, they got apprenticeships or jobs. And I was still at school. I was a schoolboy and they were out working, bought cars, I am still at school. And my parents tried really hard, they wanted me to matriculate, go right through, finish year 12. Which I did, but

17:00 I didn't want to, I wagged school a lot. And not do any homework and as a result my grades dropped right down. Eventually I did pass, to the surprise to my teachers.

How did you manage to surprise them?

Well, in those days the school component didn't count anything towards your final marks. We did get an assessment for school. Mine was low because I didn't do the homework and the assignments,

17:30 but the mark you were assessed on and the matriculation score was straight on the result of the examination, and I just managed to get high enough to pass in 5 subjects and matriculate. And only one of my teachers, my English teacher, told me he thought I would pass but the rest said they thought I would fail. I passed chemistry and maths A and history and English. It was my fault.

18:00 I didn't do the work.

Did that cause any conflict with your parents?

Yep, it probably would have been a bit disheartening for them. We had arguments and I wanted to leave school and they wanted me to stay. At one stage I had actually got an apprenticeship lined up, and had a school break, and apparently at the last minute I changed my mind and said I wanted to go back to school. But in hindsight I am glad they did insist that I went to school. I was able to get better jobs and I have had

18:30 reasonably interesting and good jobs throughout my life, because my education standard was at such a level to get those jobs.

What happened after you matriculated?

Well my first job was - I was a medical laboratory assistant at the pathology department at Royal Perth Hospital.

How did you manage to get that position?

Well, because I had passed in chemistry, maths and physics, and

19:00 they interviewed me and thought I was suitable. And it was a 5 year course, which eventually became a medical laboratory technologist. Nowadays it is bachelor of applied science, but I got selected for that and I worked there for a year.

What attracted you to the position?

Well, I always liked chemistry and maths and it was using microscopes, and repairing bits of tissue and making microscope slides out of them - these were for the university students

19:30 in their 4th year, as part of their training. No, it was very interesting.

How did you discover the vacancy?

Well, I was originally trying to get a job in the government laboratory at East Perth, more to do with chemistry and minerals and things like that. I was always interested in geology, and this was along the lines so.

So it was in the area that you were investigating?

So maths and chemistry, I was interested in that area.

So

20:00 **what was it like to work for?**

Oh, it was good. I used to get the bus to work every day. I used to live in North Street, in Swanbourne and get the bus to go to work, walk up Royal Perth Hospital, worked there, got paid, got money. I could eat with the hospital staff. I paid very low amount for a decent meal. Took the bus home at night, on the weekends play rugby, go with my mates, chase girls.

So you had moved back

20:30 **to the city on your own?**

No, what happened, when I got to year 12 to go to high school, a lot of kids didn't go to high school, but I went to high school in Albany, because my mother came from Albany. Other kids went to Bunbury. Matter of fact one of my neighbours was John Sanderson, who is now the Governor of Western Australia, his father was a tobacco farmer on an adjoining farm. I think he was a year or 2 older than me, he went to Bunbury High School and I went to Albany High School. After one year

21:00 there I had to live in a boarding house, that's when the tobacco farm system folded and my parents went back to Perth, and I went back with them.

So you were able to complete high school though?

Yeah, I completed first year of high school at Albany, second year high school at Fremantle Boys, in Fremantle, and the last 3 years of high school at John Curtin High School, which had just opened up. Princess May and Fremantle Boys were all incorporated in John Curtin High School.

So where were you boarding?

I was boarding at

21:30 a place called Norman House, which is a boarding house for boys, run by a Methodist woman. 35 boys 1st to 5th year, most from the country, right opposite the old post office in Albany.

What was that experience like?

Well, I was the, me and another boy were the smallest boys in the group, so you got picked on a bit. Every Saturday they had boxing, the woman that ran it said,

22:00 "Well if you are going to have fights, do it in a boxing ring, sort your problems out." I was small, every kid wanted to box me. They wouldn't let the 4th and 5th year students box the 1st years, but 1st to 3rd could fight each other, so everyone picked me. And I used to get smashed around and beaten up, and in the end I thought I am not taking that anymore. So the next time a big kid decided he wanted to box me, as soon as the bell went, I ran straight at him and hit him full

22:30 bore on the nose as hard as I could. Down he went blood faced, smashed nose. And no one ever wanted to box me again, so I got left alone. I do remember, to get to the showers you had to walk through a row of boys with their towels made into rat tails, whipping as you went to the showers. The things boys did - older boys to junior boys in those days.

Sounds a bit rough?

Well, you had to put up with it.

What about school in Albany?

23:00 It was just a regular high school, yeah, I enjoyed that. High school you get more interesting subjects, woodwork, and metalwork plus all the maths and sciences. Yeah, I enjoyed it.

Did you have much freedom in the boarding house to...?

No, not very much, we could occasionally, on the weekends we could get out to go fishing, but most of the time you are there under supervision. We went to the pictures on a Friday night as a group under supervision. We were only young, I mean I was 12,

23:30 and the oldest boy there was 17.

So you were pleased or happy to see - to move on I suppose?

I didn't mind the boarding house eventually, once I sorted my position out, that I was little and they didn't pick on me, I was right after that. No, I didn't mind it, I could handle it. but the tobacco scheme had failed and my young sisters were coming up

24:00 to go to high school and they didn't want to send them away, so I moved back to Perth.

How did the farm's failure affect your parents?

A fair bit. My father was disappointed; he wanted to be a farmer. He was a fitter and turner - he was in the navy in World War II but, and he later on he did become a farmer, but he had to give it up then and go back to fitting and turning.

So fortunately it was only a setback for a short term?

Well, no for quite a while.

24:30 He later on bought a farm and he used to go there on weekends. At Walpole. They had it for 25 years, until he died. Just before he died.

Just coming back to your schooling, you mentioned that you went to Fremantle Boys and then

John Curtin?

Yeah.

How long were you at Fremantle Boys?

One year. That was my second year at high school. The third year at high school Fremantle Boys closed. And Princess May, which is the adjoining school next, I don't know whether you know Fremantle, but Fremantle Boys

25:00 is now the Institute of Film, a museum. Princess May is now a museum. The Clancy's Tavern is the old Princess May's Home Economics classroom, that's now Clancy's Tavern. Clancy's Restaurant. And there's the museum that used to be the old mental asylum, that had girls in it as well. They closed those three schools down and built a brand new John Curtin High School. I went there the year that it

25:30 opened. I was in 3rd year at high school. Three years there, yes, third, fourth and fifth years.

And you were living with your family were you?

Yes, in Swanbourne.

What was it like being born in Cottesloe, moved to the country and come back to Swanbourne?

Swanbourne, Cottesloe same area. Yeah, it was...it didn't worry me, I was happy to come back to the big city. It was difficult changing schools as a teenage boy and girl.

26:00 Because the peer pressure, I mean there is groups established and it's very hard to break into a group as a new boy. They tend to shun you, but eventually I got in with a group of boys and was accepted.

Now you were the country boy in the big smoke?

Yeah, that's right, the country yokel come to join the city boys.

So you had copped it from both ends.

26:30 **So, completing high school in John Curtin you were able to...?**

Then I went to this job as the medical laboratory assistant. I did that for one year - meanwhile I had joined the army reserve. And I had been in cadets at school too for one year. And I had

27:00 thought at that stage that I wanted to join the military. And I applied for every military force that I could see, but officer type course... I applied for Duntroon, the Royal Australian Navy College, Australian Army Aviation Regiment, Australian Air Force pilot's course, and the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Academy. I applied for all those

27:30 type jobs. And I decided the life in a laboratory, looking down microscopes, was not adventurous enough for me. There wasn't enough action, and I thought to join the military was the only way to get some action. And eventually I was selected. I was selected for the Australian Air Force pilot's training course. And the day I left, the army announced

28:00 I was selected for Duntroon. I had forgotten to tell the army I had applied to the air force, because I had applied for them all at the same time. So, if they had have come up first I probably would have been in the army, not the air force.

Did you have a preference for either?

Not really. A pilot's training course I thought was more exciting, but Duntroon, the army, I actually originally liked the army.

Had you discussed these plans with your parents?

Yeah, yeah, they were happy for me to do that. My father wanted me to join the navy. I applied for the navy

28:30 but never got selected for the navy, was not a navy type. They were happy, for them, because my father was in the navy for seven years or something. It was a stable environment, you worked hard, played hard, got paid. Not too many diversions that people have nowadays; there weren't any drugs or anything like that in the service. It was a good way to

29:00 mature people and get a skill at the same time.

Did your father discuss his experiences with you about the navy?

Yeah, a bit, mainly the camaraderie and the friends he had made and, yep.

Did you say he had World War II experience?

Yeah, he didn't serve overseas, but he was in Darwin, and he was there when they were bombed a few times.

Did he tell you about those experiences?

Yeah, he did a bit.

29:30 He used to talk about the series of forts disguised as big rocks, with submarine nets across the channel, and he was a signaller. He actually took me to show me years later. No, it was part of what probably inspired me to join the military. His experiences.

So what happened when you were accepted into the course?

Just before I joined, I had never been in an aeroplane in my life,

30:00 and the army aviation, they flew me to Adelaide, me and another boy, they flew us to Adelaide for an interview, that was my first flight on a DC6. And when I joined the air force, I trained over there, I went over by train, but I had had one flight in a DC6, where some of the boys on the course, some of the young guys had got pilots' licences. Anyway, I failed part the way through.

Tell me about the interview first, you flew to Adelaide for the interview?

30:30 That was the only aviation interview.

How did that go, good?

Well, they told me they wouldn't give me the results until the results of the Duntroon selection came out. So I never knew if I was selected because I was selected for Duntroon. Maybe I would have been selected for that, but the air force selected me first. So I joined the air force.

What's the army aviation?

Regiment. Yeah, they had helicopters,

31:00 and now of course, they have got the big twin engine helicopters, quite a fleet. It's quite a big force, the Army Aviation Regiment.

It sounds like you were destined to be air borne once you joined the military?

Yes, that was it.

So what happened in that interview?

I remember part of that interview, I mean this was in 1960, over 40 years ago. I remember some of the preliminary things I had to do. I can't remember whether it was

31:30 Duntroon or the Aviation Regiment, but Karrakatta, and a series of situations with supposed mine fields. And you were given bits of wood and some rope and a drum, and a group of you, and you had to work out how to get across this mine field, and negotiate this river. And they were looking for recruits who had leadership qualities, innovative could organise things. I had been in the boy scouts, that's

32:00 another thing I could do, I could tie knots. Organise, a few of us came up with the ideas to organise things and all the rest just followed. They didn't want to make mistakes, so they never sort of said anything, and they never showed any sort of leadership qualities. And I guess, maybe they weren't selected because of that. But I know the year I was there, there were only two of us selected for Duntroon. It was one of the boys that I actually went to school with that year.

32:30 But meanwhile I joined the air force.

What happened when you joined the air force?

I went to Point Cook.

How did you get there?

I went by train. Train to Kalgoorlie, the overnight train and then you change trains and go Kalgoorlie, to Port Pirie, and then you change trains and you go Port Pirie to Adelaide, and Adelaide to Melbourne.

How did your family farewell you?

Perth railway station, they came out to farewell me. It was a big adventure for me. I was 18

33:00 years old.

Were there a few tears?

Probably, but not from me. No, that's where I wanted to go. I was ready to leave home and start my adult life.

Who went on the journey with you?

Well, I can't quite remember that exact journey. While I was single, every Christmas you could get a free trip home, and it was always by train. And

33:30 normally all the military people congregated together, whether you were army, navy or air force, men and women, and just made a party of it. It took several days, it was an overnight trip to Kalgoorlie, and an two nights across to Port Pirie, and a sit up trip to Adelaide, and then another overnight trip. It was quite some days, three days to get there.

You don't remember any incidents along the way?

No, we were - later on we used to buy

34:00 beer and play cards and the navy seemed to have the prettiest looking girls, we used to try and meet them. Try and make a bit of a party of it.

This is once you had joined?

Yep.

What happened on your arrival at Point Cook?

Well, we were just all recruits and you were given heavy initial discipline. You have got to learn to march, you got to learn to salute, you have got to learn the rank structure, you have got to learn all the military law, and all this sort of thing.

34:30 I remember if you made a mistake or did something wrong, you would have to run from the flight room down to the main gate wearing your parachute, which is quite a big parachute, over your back and it was quite difficult. You used to run down there and back with it, for punishment.

How were greeted when you got there?

I can't really remember. I remember a lot of marching, and if you did it wrong you would have to hold your

35:00 rifle up in the air. There was a bit of discipline.

Did they kit you out when you arrived?

Oh yeah, yeah. We got kitted. I remember we got the old boxer shorts, that's what they used to wear, white boxer shorts and string bungee singlets, which is a big wide mesh singlet, and long pantaloons which you had to wear under your flying suit. This was basically in case,

35:30 to inhibit burns. It was made of cotton and if you were in an accident, it lessened the chance of you getting burned. And we got issued with a special watch, either a Jaguar Coulter or a Smith Echo watch, air crew watch, big expensive watch, you have got to have an accurate watch. Our helmets and oxy mask and things like that. It was all quite exciting.

36:00 Flying suit.

And you would have been shown to your barracks?

Yeah, barracks, there were three cadet barracks, two floors; we started off in the top of one of the barracks, the junior floors. We had a room each, tiny little room with a bed, a little wardrobe or locker, a rifle. We had to keep our rifle in our room had to keep

36:30 our 303 rifle clean. Inspection once a week, you had to polish your floor. Fold up your sheets and blankets in a special bed roll, when you have a layer of blanket, sheet, blanket, sheet, and the blanket had to be done just right, if not you had to tip it out and do it again. All your clothes had to be lined up in your drawer, and your underpants this way and your socks that way. Shoes had to be spit polished and lined up in your wardrobe. It was all

37:00 part of discipline. But it didn't really worry me.

How did you adjust to the discipline?

Alright, I was happy with it. I have always been happy with the discipline there, with the military.

So how were the other recruits, what were they like?

Yeah, a pretty interesting bunch of guys. A lot of them went on to make good careers in the air force. air commodores

37:30 a couple of them, group captains. Different range of backgrounds. I have kept friends with a lot of them. I have been to reunions. And even though I was scrubbed off that pilot's course, I have kept friends with some of them, for over 40 years.

What was the daily routine during the course?

I can't remember, but remember after this three or four months pilot's course, I went and did a navigator's course which was the same sort of

38:00 thing. I was a cadet once again. But basically, get up early, shower, shave, get dressed and have your breakfast, and probably out on the parade ground at 7 or 6:30 or something, 7 maybe, very early. And,

of course, in Melbourne it was icy cold and frosty, and cold wind blowing from the South Pole. And coming from Perth, Melbourne is very, very cold. There we would

38:30 be marching around in our great coats getting completely frozen. And, of course, I could march alright, but there were always a few guys who couldn't march very well. They are called square gait, their hand would march with their foot instead of against the leg. And others would be out of step. One person makes a mistake the rest suffer, you just keep marching until that person gets it right. You are basically not to let the team down, so

39:00 you do lots of marching.

Plenty of room for disaster.

39:10 **End of tape**

Tape 2

00:35 **So how did you get out of the pilot's course and into the navigator's?**

Okay, well I failed the pilot's course and I went solo, and the first flying test I failed it. Mainly on forced landings and sight approaches. I just didn't have the skill. Whether I was shown the right way, who knows, but I, later on in my life, got a pilot's licence.

01:00 I still have got one now. Anyway, I failed the course, there are very strict levels, a few guys failed. They expect some to fail.

Were you really disappointed?

I was disappointed, yes. I wanted to be a pilot, but my academic record and military skills were fine, so they offered me a navigator's course. And I basically went from the pilot's course to the navigator's course at East Sale, went from Point Cook to East Sale, and within a couple of weeks I was on a navigator's course.

So this is just

01:30 **within a short distance of location.**

Yeah, a couple of hundred kilometres. You basically go from Melbourne to the east coast of Victoria, to East Sale.

My geography is crap I am sorry.

No, no, it's close to that east coast, it's a very cold place. But yes, so the navigator's course is one year, pilot's course is 15 months. Navigator's course is one year, so

02:00 I took the navigator's course and passed that, I did quite well.

So what sort of things were they training you on?

Well, once again, we went through all the military training, the drill, we have done a lot of that so I was happy with that, rifle issue, and military law, lots of lectures, meteorology, whole lot of military type subjects. And, of course, we had navigation and compass and astro navigation, and all this sort of thing. And

02:30 then we had our flying training. We had to navigate the old Dakota, or DC3, a very slow flying aircraft, so the wind affects it a lot. Out in the middle of Victoria or somewhere, flying along, navigating by visual pinpoints or more often by using navigation aids. You would plot your position as if there is no wind and then you would get fixes

03:00 from navigational aids, and the difference between where you were and where you thought you were was the wind effect, so you would work out the wind. And you would then, you worked out where you wanted to go next, apply the wind to it, work out a heading and hopefully fly along the track you wanted to, and do this all the time. Different ways of getting fixes, either by keeping astro phase, flying at night, sun shots in the day.

03:30 **What is a sun shot?**

A sun shot is a, you can get a shot early in sunset or sunrise or in the middle of the day, you get position lines, but anytime you can get a position line from the sun using a sextant. So that was standard in the aircraft, look through the sextant and do your calculations and do your position line. Normally one position is not enough; you need three position lines for a fix, so you get some position lines some other way.

04:00 Maybe off non directional beacons or distance measuring equipment, or do running fixes as you run

past a beacon, you take positions as you run past it and then transfer them forward and make a three position fix. You do wind drift. Had a drift sight, especially out over the water, but even on the land you could calculate your drift. And you could do a multi drift lift. There were all sorts of techniques working out fixes, and they taught us every

04:30 technique there was.

It sounds quite complex.

It is fairly complex, yeah. It's not really used anymore, because there are so many navigation systems that operate off satellites now, that instantly tells you where you are. And those days it was even more difficult situation, and you had to be able to navigate more accurately, especially later on when you operated more sophisticated military aircraft, to actually get to a target on time via a route where you are not detected.

05:00 That's why they used to have navigators. So that was a year at East Sale. And lots of other military things. You do survival courses, and rifle shooting, and pistol shooting, and you have got to reach a competent level of everything you do. You have to be able to swim, you do swimming tests. You have to be able to do physical fitness things, we used to do the 5BX system, the Canadian system.

Sorry, what's that?

It's called 5BX.

05:30 It's a, pretty well all the time I was in the RAAF I did 5BX. You have to reach a certain level of age and skill level for age, by doing so many sit ups in a certain time, so many push ups, so many running on the spot. You can either walk for five kilometres or something, or run

06:00 for two, run a mile or walk five miles, in a certain time. And if you could reach all those number of targets for your age, you were assessed as - for my age a 5BX is level 5, stay as B and X, well that was the top level. So if you were in your early 20s like I was, air crew, you should be able to reach

06:30 this 5BX. I can't remember what it was, but basically we were able to reach the level we had to reach. All the guys had to go to a lesser level. The type of push ups, we had to do so many push ups and clap your hands in between, well as you got older you didn't have to do that. The sit ups were squats. And things got easier, you didn't have to spring up in the air, you just had to stand up. And I didn't mind that, it was a challenge and I used to be reasonably fit.

So the Canadians are responsible for this

07:00 **torture?**

Yep, the Canadian system. I think it is still used in various places around the world. I don't know whether the Australian military uses it or not.

So you did okay in that area.

Yeah, did alright, some guys could never make it, it was just unfortunate. Same as the swimming test. I am not a great swimmer, but I could swim alright, and I remember one of the tests was every year you had to pass this, you had to swim for 200 metres in your flying suit, any method you like,

07:30 on your back or front, it didn't matter. However, I think it was a two minute break then you would have to swim say, 25 metres underwater and come up under an upturned dinghy, and overturn it get into it, paddle back, one or two minute break, then you would have to swim two metres, rescue someone who was floundering and come back with them, another one or two minute break. Then, at the end you had to dive down so many metres, pick up a brick and

08:00 bring it up. And in the end you had to tread water, I think it was for ten minutes in a one metre square. So you couldn't lie on your back, you were just vertical treading water, paddling your feet and your hands. So to assimilate you with being in an aircraft that was ditched. And you were attached to it by something, like your clothing was caught to it, and you just had to tread water, you were in a confined space or you were trapped inside it. And we had one guy

08:30 who couldn't swim, and he had to pass the course, basically to maintain his status. So, we used to help him, we used to swim next to him and pull him along a bit, and the next guy would come up and pull him along a bit. This guy was petrified, he couldn't swim. He was terrified in a swimming pool, but we used to get him through it. I can't remember what we did when he had to rescue someone. Maybe he floundered out and the rescued person swam back.

Duck diving for a brick.

I don't know

09:00 what we did, we might have gone and got the brick and threw him off with the brick in his hand. I can't remember what we did. He probably shouldn't have been selected, he couldn't swim, but having been selected we thought he should - and he'd had a go at it. We knew he was scared but we all helped him, and he kept on trying so we would help him.

That was a pretty brave thing to do?

Yeah, that was one of the things I liked in the RAAF, where you had camaraderie and you all helped each other. If anyone was down or a

09:30 bit below par or something, everyone helps, and that's one thing the military does. It's a team effort, it's not in isolation. It's like someone being a long distance runner or a rugby team player, you are all team players there, there is no one off individual.

What would an average day be like at East Sale?

I think, looking back, up

10:00 early in the morning, shower shave breakfast. Out on the parade ground and march for half an hour; there was various drills, not just straight marching, but various drills. Back to the classroom environment and you would sit through various lectures on navigation or astro or mathematics, or air force law, writing, air force writing, a lot

10:30 of different reports, and things like that. Afternoon there would be more of that, but every so often there would be an afternoon of say, down at the rifle range. You would have to reach a certain level of skill and marksmanship with your 303 rifle or FN [Belgian Fabrique Nationale] rifle or revolver. They were the weapons you had to be skilful in. Another day some sort of fitness gym work and this type of thing. One day a week you would do that. That was

11:00 When, that was the pre flying phase, once you got the flying phase, I just can't remember, but say it would be twice a week you would go flying, so that may be a whole day, or a night. Something like that. So then there would be preparation, do your flight plan, drop your charts, maps and charts, do your flight plan, pre-calculations and have a briefing before you go, a safety briefing from the pilot. Briefing from the nav instructor.

What would be discussed

11:30 **in those briefings?**

Well, the nav instructor would just make sure you understood the rules, that you had to navigate and use these sort of navigation aids and this sort of thing. And halfway along, a couple of navigators to one aeroplane, the prime navigation person giving instructions to the pilot, and the other one would be a back up, and then you would switch over half way through. And then after flight there would be a post flight briefing, where you went wrong, things you didn't do quite correctly.

Would the instructor be on the plane with you?

12:00 He would be on the plane, yes. He would mark all our charts and calculations, and if you made mistakes you would be written up as being inaccurate. We used to use a calculator or a circular calculator, slide rules, originally we had some of those. Plotting, measuring things with protractors, dividers, yeah, all those calculations. World War II type navigation.

Yeah, the hard way.

Yeah, the hard way.

Pre GPS.

12:30 **Okay, so that was that. One day you might do swimming training or something. There would be just different things just interspersed.**

It sounds like there was quite a diversity even within a day?

Yeah, there was. I mean, you are a cadet, you are a bit of a low form of life, because you are a trainee officer. So the non commissioned officers and airman thought they had all the skills in their jobs and you were

13:00 training and you weren't really an officer, you weren't really anything, you sort of were a bit of a one off identity. But when you got closer to graduation you were allowed to go in the officers' mess occasionally, for dining and have a drink or something. If you made a mistake or stuffed up you... There was the threat there all the time, you would be kicked off course. If you didn't reach any of the benchmarks along the way, or these tests, you might

13:30 have got re-tested once and then got kicked off course. There were several guys failed the course I was on. One guy had a problem with astro navigation. He kept getting his position a long way out, but in all different modes, they would all be to the north one time, and the south the next, or just no rhyme or reason. It must have been something with his eyes, he just couldn't work the sextant properly. It was a shame because he could do everything else pretty well.

14:00 And, of course, it was fairly competitive too, because at the end you knew there were going to be prizes for top of the course, top of the flying aspect and top of the academic.

So everybody was competitive as well?

Yeah, and I think there was about ten guys or a dozen guys started and by the time we finished there were only six. Yeah.

So what were the facilities like at East Sale?

14:30 Well, there were a lot of old buildings, World War II buildings. We had little quarters we called dog boxes, they were like little transportable huts, I don't where it came from, whether it was built from hindsight or whatever. You had a room about two metres wide by about three metres maybe, like a little railway carriage type thing it was. You would just get a bed in there and a little chest of drawers and a little

15:00 wardrobe, and that was basically it. I can't remember, we might have had a table and chair for studying. And, of course, we had communal showers and toilets and all that sort of thing, a bit of a caravan park that way. You go to the communal showers and toilets and go back to your dog box. But at least we had our own room, whereas a lot of servicemen are six to a room, or four to a room, so

15:30 it was good that way, it was good for studying.

Did you find that to be just emotional relief just to get away from fellas?

No, because when you are studying you have to keep talking to guys and it was - a lot of time you didn't study too much you were pretty wrecked after the day. It was freezing cold, you would just go to sleep. You had to get up early anyway.

No heating?

Yeah, we had a room heater. Matter of fact, one of the

16:00 blokes on my course, Clarry, of course he was in the room next to me, we had a little bar heater each. Now the floor was highly polished and I think it was every Tuesday morning, we used to get it inspected, we had our floor polished, we had these big polishers.

Really, polishers?

Yeah, circular polishers. You would polish your floor with this. So the floor was thick with polish, and Clarry, I don't know what happened, but he got into bed and he kicked over his bar heater,

16:30 and it was pointing down to the ground, and it burnt through the polish and started to burn through the floor boards. We had been somewhere, I can't remember where, we had a little mess area there for cadets, and walking back and we saw the smoke coming from under Clarry's door. We couldn't wake him, we knocked on the door. Anyway we forced his door and dragged him out and the room was full of this acid smoke which was vaporised

17:00 floor polish and char burned wood. Like the oxygen had just about got out of his room. It never actually caught on fire, it had smouldered and he was out to it. And we dragged him out, and the floor boards were just a few centimetres/millimetres thick, because if it had have burned right through the air could have got in and his room would have caught fire and he would have burnt to death. He was coughing up black sputum for days and he was sick for quite a while.

17:30 So we did have room heaters, I remember that.

It was very lucky that you noticed. How about summer, what was summer like there?

Summer was, I think there were lots of flies, and I think it got quite hot. We used to go down to a place called Seaspray, that was the nearest beach. We would drive down there on the weekends. It wasn't as good as the Western Australian beaches, but it wasn't too bad.

So that's what you would be doing while you were on leave?

No, leave you went home. So we went home to our home state. The course was one year, and that year I got leave and it would have been around Christmas time. I graduated in March 1963. So Christmas 1962, I would have come home.

What sort of things would you do when you had some time off?

Okay.

18:30 Well, we had a cadets' mess and we were allowed to drink there on a Friday and Saturday night. We could open our bar and we had limited drinks there. We weren't allowed to bring girls into the cadets' mess. I am not saying what was in there. You weren't allowed to have them in your room, you were at the risk of being kicked out of the air force. I am not saying we didn't have girls in our room at different times.

It's all about guard duty really isn't it?

I will tell you one interesting story about East Sale. It was Prince Richard, yep, he was only a young guy, he had an air force assistant with him, he was travelling around Victoria and he came to East Sale mess, he was dining there or something. He was there for two days, he must have been marking time because he wasn't allowed to go into Sale town and meet any locals. Officially

- 19:30 he wasn't there, and even though he came to the cadets' mess this particular Saturday night with his RAF [Royal Air Force] assistant, flying officer, pilot or navigator, I can't remember what he was. So, he came into the mess and we had to entertain him, so we are playing darts and a couple of drinks, and he wasn't a bad bloke, he wasn't much of a darts player, he was a bit gawky really. He hadn't experienced, he hadn't
- 20:00 lived a rough life, he had had everything provided for him. Anyway, comes about 11 o'clock at night, it's a bit boring let's go into the local coffee shop, because we had got quite friendly with the local coffee shop owner in Sale and he used to put songs like The Kingston Trio on the record player for us. And so we took Prince Richard in there, and so he meets the coffee shop owner and we have a night and we go back and then he takes off to wherever he's going.
- 20:30 Well, the next time the local paper comes out there's headlines "Prince Richard snubs Mayor, meets coffee shop owner." So we were all in trouble, confined to barracks. I can't remember what happened to us, but we were in trouble. So we did meet some royalty and did the wrong thing.

That's very funny. Did you get some sort of a punishment for that?

Yeah, it's normally confined to barracks, you couldn't go out the next weekend, you had to hang around the base.

- 21:00 **No more coffee shop. How about the food what was that like there?**

Yeah, it was pretty good. Yeah we got a, I can't remember what we used to eat now, I think we had a cadets' mess attached to the airmen's mess, I can't quite remember, but it was quite good. Air force food was always pretty good, I was always happy with it. Just line up in a big queue and pick out what you wanted and they served it to you.

- 21:30 Plenty of food, substantial, so, I mean I had lived for a year in a boarding house and I had to take what they gave me, and I was happy with that, it didn't worry me.

What do you think was the hardest thing you did about the nav course that you did?

Just the study to reach the level. I can't remember the pass mark. I think it was something like 70-80%. You had to get high marks in everything and

- 22:00 it was just a lot of study. I didn't find anything particularly difficult. The astro-navigational was quite complex, working out the calculations. The military way of life, the marching and all the military drills, and things, I was happy with all that.

So inevitably how did you go by the end of the course?

Yeah, okay. I passed alright. I got something like

- 22:30 third overall. Yeah, I did quite well. There might have been eight of us or ten of us.

Did you have some sort of a passing out parade?

Yeah, we had a passing out parade. My mother flew over I think, from Perth to be there.

Well that's a pretty big thing to do.

Well yeah, for her it was a first flight for her. And Bill Garing, Commodore Garing was the senior officer who presented us our wings, our navigator's wings. We had a special marching

- 23:00 procedure we had to do, and we did all that correctly. I have got photos of me getting my wings, as a matter of fact, I just noticed the other day. Air Commodore Garing, he wasn't a bad bloke. Then I was a pilot officer.

Did you have a celebration too?

I can't quite remember that one particular, but we would have. Quite a few of the guys in my course, a few of us, we used to every now and then, have a celebration,

- 23:30 we would have a good time. We would go into East Sale and go to the hotel. And I had a girlfriend by that time in the local town.

So you managed to find a girlfriend.

Yes. At East Sale yeah, it was okay. I enjoyed East Sale. I remember it being quite cold, but that was - I mean later life in the air force was far more exciting and interesting because I was in a training environment, and from thereon I went to the Canberra bomber

- 24:00 which was what I wanted to do. It was one of our highest performance aircraft in those days. It was a twin jet aeroplane and it flew quite fast and dropped a lot of bombs, and that's what I wanted to do.

So where were these Canberra bombers?

Amberley, near Ipswich in Queensland. There was two squadrons and a training squadron there. And there was another squadron up in Malaya.

So there was only really a handful squadrons you could have gone to for this?

24:30 For that, yeah, I went to the OCU the Operations Command Unit and trained there and I went to 6 Squadron, there was only 1, 2 and 6 Squadron. 3 Squadron are the Canberra bombers.

How did the conversion work?

It was a three month course. I think there were about eight of us, there were four crews on it, four pilots and four navigators. You met up with the pilot and you got crewed with a pilot. And because the pilots course took 15 months and my nav course took 12 months, I ended up graduating about the same time as one of the -

25:00 as the course I was on, so I crewed up with one of the pilots on my original course. I am still friends with him today, he lives in Adelaide.

Oh right, so when you say you had crewed up, could you actually choose the person?

Yeah, you basically got together and sorted out who was going with who. We did have a senior officer on course and a couple of senior guys and they sort of fitted together but there were three junior crews and we all crewed together.

So that was a stroke of luck.

Yeah, and after we

25:30 completed our conversion course, which was basically learning how to navigate a fast aeroplane compared to a slow plane. We flew around at 350 knots and the slow one flew around at 120 knots. You had to learn to, we had a camera on board, you had to learn how to operate the camera. The bomb sight, used that for bombing and the camera, you had to learn how to drop bombs. We learned how to drop bombs, we dropped bombs all the time. We were just constantly practicing to get very accurate.

26:00 **How do you drop a bomb?**

Well, in the Canberra bomber we used to simulate being in an operation situation. You would come in very low level, you know where your target is, this is where your navigator has to plan ahead, so you don't actually see your target when you pull up. And then you pull up to 1000 feet, which is the height that you drop your bomb at, you level out and you target the piers in front of you. You manoeuvre the aeroplane so

26:30 it's lined up with the target. The navigator looks through his bomb sight which you could lay off the drift, it had a cross hair on it which was focused on infinity. So you looked through the glass through this cross hair at the target. As the cross hair approaches the target you gave the pilot controls like left, left steady, right, steady, left steady, steady, bomb doors open, (UNCLEAR) safety on, right steady, bomb gone. Push the button, bomb gone, when the cross hair hits the target.

27:00 You had to position the cross hair on the target by getting the pilot to move the aircraft. We practiced that over and over. And then, if you were dropping a high explosive bomb, you would have to then pull up to 3,300 or 3,000 feet because your own bomb would go out that fast you take a 1% chance of being hit by shrapnel from your own bomb. So you would further pull up to avoid being hit by shrapnel by your own bomb. But mostly we

27:30 dropped practice bombs, so we didn't have to do that second pull up. We used to drop six or eight every second flight we did.

So how did you go with this process?

Quite good, yeah. I was quite accurate, I was skilful. I had a good, above average was my assessment most of the time.

So were you enjoying it up to this stage?

Enjoying it because it was exciting flying, all very low level flying, quite high speed and that is an

28:00 interesting way of seeing the ground. It can be a bit hazardous, with birds you could hit, you keep a lookout for other aircraft. And check on the fuel, you could get into a situation where you get a bit short on fuel, we never did. But aircraft have in the past. Weather, you had to watch out for weather, you had to make sure you could get back to your base or to a suitable aerodrome if the weather closed in. And

28:30 often you were flying around the hills with cloud down to the hills and rain showers, it was a bit tricky.

It sounds like the navigator's got more things to think about than the pilot.

Well, the pilot's got to fly, he has got to look ahead, he's got to fly the aeroplane at the heading and maybe the speed that we give him. So he has got to control the engines and he has got to physically fly it, and he's got to look ahead and avoid hills but stay as low as he can.

29:00 Put the power on at the right time to get over the hills, avoid birds, he's got a lot - the way we used to fly so fast and low to the ground, he didn't have time to navigate as well, so. It was a two man crew and the navigator's job to navigate, the pilot to fly and fly it accurately. And it is an old fashioned aeroplane now, but it served its purpose pretty well.

So after you did the conversion course, you were sent to Queensland, is that right?

Queensland, yeah.

29:30 The conversion course was at Queensland, when I finished the conversion course I went to number 6 Squadron. Some of the guys went to 1 Squadron and some went to 6.

Did you have a preference between 1 or 6?

6, I preferred yes, because the guys in 6 Squadron were the ones I enjoyed the most, they were a good bunch. My party-going guys.

You only met up with them socially?

Well no, we often had to go away and you work odd

30:00 hours and you go away, Darwin and that sort of thing. And if you are with a good group of guys you can socialise as well. Whereas 1 Squadron to me were more formal and staid. That's where I wanted to go and I was happy.

Great.

I got on with the guys in my squadron, 6 Squadron, very well.

So where is 6 Squadron based then?

At Amberley, it's still there. 1 and 6 Squadron with Canberra Squadron,

30:30 at Amberley near Ipswich, they are now F111 squadrons. They have stayed there all this time. They have always been a bomber cum fighter bomber, light bomber squadron. From World War II, 1 Squadron is from World War I. Got a lot of history.

So what were the barracks like?

Well, they were in the officers' quarters, single men's officers' quarters,

31:00 and the officers' mess. Once again, your own room, a little bit bigger, it was a proper brick built, not like the old World War II shack sort of thing. But once again, just a wardrobe, a bedside table and a bed and a chest of drawers. You don't spend much time in your room, you just slept in your room, got dressed and we had communal showers once again. And each floor had its own toilet

31:30 and shower block. So in the morning you would get up and there would be three guys standing shaving at the basin and a couple of guys in the toilet and couple of guys in the shower, and you would hang around and wait until the shower became free. You went and had a shower, real communal type stuff, that's for single men. Married guys had married quarters.

So what was an average day like there?

Every day, well if it was normal flying hours you would

32:00 have breakfast in the mess and the morning briefing was at, I can't remember, say 7.30, something like that. Get down to the crew room there would be a briefing by the meteorologist, a met briefing, air traffic control would give a briefing. Then your flight commander would probably give a briefing on the day's sorties, and we would often have the one or two navigation exercises which were pre planned for us, tell us where we had to go,

32:30 here, there, and here, and there, take a photo of that, drop a bomb and that, and set the bombing range. And then we would all go and plan our missions, there might be 4 or 6 crews all doing the same path, the same navigation exercise. So you would draw up your map, look at your flight plan, your fuel calculations with the pilot, go down to air traffic control and put your flight plan in, get your individual met briefing there, come back to the

33:00 squadron and get changed into your flying suit, flying boots, helmet, this type of thing.

What sort of a uniform was it?

Green cotton flying suit, one piece with a zip down the front, brass zip. You were supposed to wear the cotton underwear underneath, but I always wore cotton underwear not necessarily the string bunge stuff.

String what?

String bunge they called it.

33:30 It was like a big cross pattern like pieces of cord cross pattern, you had a long sleeved singlet thing and a long pantaloons, just open weave cotton. Cotton cord. It kept your flying suit off your skin so if you got fuel on it and was burning it would supposedly keep this cotton, which doesn't melt or anything, before it burned you.

34:00 If you had nylon it would just melt on your skin, you would lose all that piece of skin. I know guys who have burned in bad accidents and where there has been nylon they have been burned badly.

So why did you decide not to?

No, I used to wear cotton. We would never wear nylon. We had a nylon wrist band and they took that off us because someone had an accident and had the wrist band fused

34:30 to their wrist and lost all the skin.

What was with the wrist band?

It was the watch they gave you, it used to have a nylon wrist band.

Gotcha.

And nylon socks. So you get dressed in your flying suit and you go down to the flight line, or the safety equipment room, and pick up your Mae West, which is the little yellow jacket, life jacket. And it had a

35:00 radio and it had shark repellent one side and sea marker dye on the other, and a whistle. You get your helmet, your own helmet, inner helmet and outer helmet.

Inner helmet and outer helmet?

Yeah, you have a cloth inner helmet with ear phones in it and a mask attached to it, and the outer helmet to put over it. Years later it became a one piece helmet, in those days

35:30 it was a two piece helmet. You had your kid leather flying gloves.

Could you do everything that you needed to do with your gloves on?

Yeah, it was beautiful soft leather. Later on when I was in Vietnam, the Americans would try and swap anything for these kid leather gloves. You could have got a jeep if you wanted one for these leather gloves. Okay, so we would go down to the flight line and the pilot would sign for the aircraft

36:00 and a history of its maintenance, a maintenance history, things that have previously failed or some things that may still be carrying a minor fault. Then we would go out to the aircraft and do our pre flight.

What's that?

Basically check out all your equipment. Like a pilot does on a commercial airline, he goes around and checks all the security and flight surfaces, that they all move freely, speedo tubes are not blocked with

36:30 foreign bodies so you get the right indications in flight. Check the tyres, undercarriage, structural things where there might be common cracks the closer you look. Basically checking the integrity of the aircraft and safety. And as navigator, we check a lot of things. We check in the bomb bay, we check the weapons and that the bombs are on properly and the stations you would expect them to be, and that sort of thing. Check the sight, the window that you look

37:00 through was clean so you could see through it properly. Because as you flew along you would always be hitting grasshoppers and little birds and things, and they would smear right across the aircraft and it got quite stained with grasshoppers and birds and whatever. So they would have to be clear so you could look through your bomb sight. The camera lens, check that was all clear. The ground staff had done all this, but we just did a final check to see to our satisfaction.

37:30 And then of course you would have a certain take off time. And if we were all going the same avex we might be 10 minutes apart. You would hop in the right time, start up, get air clearance, taxi out and the time you want to take off, you had planned it that way and off you would go.

And after you have completed your mission to have some sort of a debriefing?

When you come back, you normally have to...

38:00 Say part of the test was to get to the target and either bomb or photograph it at a certain time. So other than the bombing range you couldn't bomb bridges, so we used to photograph them through the bomb sight at the same angle as the bomb would hit it. So, you would take a photograph and on that photograph it would have a time on it as well, and it would have, the middle of the photograph they would calculate where bombing cross hair would have been when you dropped your bomb. In other words, whether you have hit the target or not.

38:30 So that photograph at the end of the flight would be assessed for your accuracy. If you were dropping bombs on a bomb range, you would be controlled by a guy on the ground and after every bomb you drop

he would give you a result. It was 130 22 metres or 22 yards, it might have been metres. So you would have all these results written down, and then you would come back and you would do a short maintenance debrief with the maintenance people to tell them what's wrong.

39:00 Pilot's would fill out a pilot report on the aircraft so it's repaired for the next flight.

You don't really want a lot of things to be wrong with it.

No, but things do go wrong.

Like what?

There might be a hole in the wing where a bird had punched through. Lots of birds, we are flying around in bird tally at 350 knots, the same flight the bird fly at, we are flying at very high speed. Can't avoid every bird we see. We had a few accidents with birds, but we can talk about that later if you like. But,

39:30 okay another piece of equipment might have failed, the radio, something like that might have stopped working, not be performing correctly, and they can repair it. Then we would go back, and normally when you have got your photograph the senior nav [navigation] officer, I can't remember who it was, or the bombing leader, they would check your bombing accuracy, your photographic accuracy and your timing, and there would be a general

40:00 debrief. All the crews would all get together and debrief as well. You could possibly not find your target, or pull up too late, and the target's over there. Or if you are going to pull up next to your target and turn around and go back and bomb it you have probably shot out of the sky before you get there, so. And all these results would be recorded individuals, and you would have a running result on your bombing accuracy and your navigation accuracy. So everyone was constantly being assessed and graded

40:30 against each other, and you had to reach a certain standard, because supposedly we were ready to go to war, and if you didn't reach that standard you couldn't fly a plane in a combat mission.

How competitive were the blokes?

Quite, especially on bombing results. Very competitive.

So almost like a sporting event really isn't it.

You wanted to get it as good as you could, it was a brave type thing really.

41:06 End of tape

Tape 3

00:31 **How many of these bird strikes did you have?**

I had quite a few little ones, but I had two quite severe bird strikes. There was Evans Head in 1964, I think it was. We used to fly down to Ballina to the south or Yenda, to the south of the range, we would do a run in from Ballina, over the water just towards the bombing range. And just before the target we would pull up to 1,000 feet, like I said before, and drop our bomb.

01:00 We were flying in at fairly high speed on the water, and we pulled up. I was lying in the nose while I ditched the bombing range ready to operate my bomb sight. Pilot sitting in his ejection seat. As we pulled up, there was a seagull that we just saw as it hit us. You couldn't avoid it. The seagull hit just in front of the nose cone. I have got some pretty good photographs there. Penetrated the nose cone,

01:30 came back and hit me on the face. Now the nose cone is made of quarter inch Perspex, I think there's two layers of it. Went right through that. I had my visor down on my helmet, smashed the visor off my face, smashed my oxy mask off my face, cut me on the forehead, disintegrated into the aeroplane. So, without my oxy mask I couldn't talk to the pilot. He didn't know what happened. He heard the loud bang, I came scrambling out of the nose, head covered in

02:00 blood, half of it was the bird's blood. I just had a little cut on my forehead but you wouldn't believe how much your forehead bleeds from just a little cut, a lot of blood. Probably to help your brain or something, but a huge amount of blood. Basically he wanted to go to Coolangatta and I said, "Look, I am okay." So we went back to Amberley. The medical staff came to me to the airport and took me to hospital and

02:30 stitched up my forehead, and I mean I had been hit in the face full bore, probably had my neck squashed back a bit. Later on in life I had neck damage. It wasn't too bad. But I had fish scales in my hair, that was the funny thing. They reckon we were flying so low we hit a flying fish, or probably what had happened the seagull had just picked up a fish and that's probably why it couldn't get out of the way. And fish scales in my hair.

03:00 And I cut my arm and nose and I couldn't fly for a few days.

Sounds like a pretty dramatic experience.

Yeah, it all happened so quick, but I was lucky, I could have lost my eyesight or anything. And yeah, but at the end of that, it happened on a Friday, and I got patched up. And every Friday night we used to have drinks with the whole squadron, the officers, the airmen and the whole lot. So,

03:30 one of the airmen, they had to clear the aeroplane out because it got all this bird and blood and my blood in the nose cone they cleaned it all out. They found a piece of Perspex about that big. They think it had penetrated - it cut my forehead. They got this out of the aeroplane in the lining of the aircraft. So they found both the birds claws and some feathers, so they made up a medal for me with a piece of what they called rags cleaner, stripey cloth they cleaned the aircraft with. They cut that down to the shape of a ribbon,

04:00 with a piece of square metal with a claw attached to it and two feathers with little eyelets and a piece of Perspex hanging off it. And they presented me with the Order of the Pulverised Claw. I have some photos in there of all that. And the pilot was presented with one as well. I just spoke to him the other day, and he has still got his. But I think the ants ate all the skin off his whereas mine is mummified. The claw is still there as a claw, a mummified

04:30 claw.

Is it still in one piece?

Yes, I can get it and show it to you, it is an interesting piece.

We'll have to have a look at it, it's interesting.

That was in 1964, so, 40 years ago. That was my first bad bird strike. And then some years later, 1966 I was in Malaya and once again we were doing about 450 knots, quite fast, and we hit an eagle. And I was standing next to the pilot navigating,

05:00 and I saw something black in front of me and a loud bang that took the whole Perspex canopy off the aeroplane except for the direct vision window. I once again lost my visor, my oxy mask ripped off my face, hit in the face, bowled over backwards, knocked out. The pilot thought I was sucked out through the hole where the canopy used to be. He got hit in the face with bits of bird. He lowered his ejection seat so his head was out of the air flow, climbed up ready to eject.

05:30 He thought we had lost the aeroplane, I did too. I was only briefly knocked out. I came too, got in my ejection seat, that was behind the pilot, strapped in, thinking we are going to have to eject. I couldn't talk to him because my mic had broken off. Anyway, eventually I could see he was climbing away. I got out of my ejection seat and went and tapped him in the shoulder. That was the first he knew I was alive, he thought I was killed, been sucked out of the aeroplane. We flew that back to Amberley, put the

06:00 wheels down, we didn't know the damage. Back to Butterworth I should say, RAAF Base Butterworth, and landed. When we checked it later on, pieces of the canopy had gone back and penetrated the tail plane and the vertical fin to such an extent that it was structurally weakened and any severe manoeuvre might have torn the tail off the aeroplane. It was a very lucky escape. Firstly because I could have been killed initially, or the pilot could have been decapitated or whatever, and we would have crashed there and then.

06:30 Secondly, because later on the aircraft could have structurally failed. It could have once again gone. Although we had ejection seats so we would have got out. They were...

Close shaves.

Close shaves, yep.

Were those incidences very common?

Not very. I am only aware of one other in the Canberra, where the navigator was in the nose, the bird came through, hit him in the left arm, broke his arm in a couple of places.

07:00 He's deceased now. Poor bugger, he got his arm severely injured, and I think later in life he had limited rotational movement.

What about another aircraft in the air force?

I mean all over the world they have bird strikes, military aircraft, because you are flying at the level of the birds. But one of the F-111s was lost because of one of these strikes. They hit a large bird; the F-111 is a big aeroplane, stronger than the Canberra,

07:30 but it hit a pelican, light aircraft and the crew lost their lives in that.

When was that?

I can't remember - about 15 years ago probably.

And you can boast two bird strikes.

Yeah, two where I have been hit in the face, got my mask ripped off my face. Smashed, yeah.

What are the chances of that?

Pretty low I would say. Yeah.

08:00 So they are two of the incidents I remember, and I have got photographs and memories of that. I have kept in touch with the pilots of those two incidents.

Coming back to Amberley, what was happening in Amberley?

Well, okay in those days we had a squadron of aircraft in Butterworth, which is part of the Far East Asian Air Force, strategic observer it was. And we had 2 squadrons in Australia, so we were part of Australia's defence,

08:30 the tacking part of our defence. But we also provided top notch crews up to full operational standard. To go to Butterworth to replace squadrons up there, it was a 2 year tour of duty. Once you had done your tour of duty, another crew would replace you, so all the time crews are being fed out of 1 and 6 Squadron to go to 2 in

09:00 Butterworth. So basically we were training for that, and we were doing various exercises with the army, the air force, pitch blacks in Darwin, various other army, and air forces. We went across to New Zealand, we arranged to have flights with them. Quite a few things like that. But after a couple of years at Amberley, I went to Butterworth, I did a tour of Butterworth. You want me to go on with that?

Well what about those flights you just mentioned in Darwin?

Okay yeah,

09:30 pitch black. Well every year or every second year, there would be an exercise in Darwin where there had been an attacking force, which I think was an orange force, and a defending force, a blue force, they still do exercises like that. Canberras, we were normally the attacking force because we were a bomber type and the Sabres or Mirages are fighter type aircraft, they were the defending force. We would try and bomb the targets around Darwin or Katherine or wherever we were, and they would try and shoot us down before we could get there to

10:00 bomb it. So there was a big cat and mouse game. There were certain rules of engagement and rules of exercise, that we had to follow. But we would do our normal strategy which is what we called our high-low exercise. You fly in at high level, the aircraft is efficient at high level, the engines use a lot less fuel, fly as high as you can and then you drop down to avoid the radar lobe.

10:30 They would do a big slow profile descent so it couldn't see you, get the ground low level, high speed, very low level, and once again avoiding the radar. But the people on the ground may see you, and report you. Pull up, bomb your target and get out as far as you can. The fighters used to try and - the radar would try and see us. If it saw us, it would divert a fighter towards us, or direct a fighter towards us to shoot us down. Simulated exercise. So we would try and get in, and instead of dropping our bomb we would take a

11:00 photograph, instead of them shooting, they would give a missile release position, they would take a photograph of us, which would confirm they had shot us before we got there. We would try and avoid them and they would try and find us. We'd have our tactics and they would have theirs. But often they were modified by the exercise planners. There's no point us always avoiding capture and them never finding us because they don't get practice. There's no point

11:30 them just flying straight in for them to practice on us because we don't get any practice, so there was a compromise. We used to think we were the best and they used to think they were the best.

So who do you think was making the bigger compromise?

The bombers of course. We had to expose ourselves so they could see us and shoot us down and we weren't allowed to do evasive tactics. Once they got on us we couldn't evade them, we had to fly straight into our target. There were a few things like that

12:00 we had to compromise on.

That's a bit alarming considering you were the threatening force.

Yeah, well we knew we could do it so. The fighter pilots, well I was a bomber navigator, but the fighter pilots do have a pride type thing as part of their...it makes them perform the best, making them think they are the top gun awards, all these sort of things, they need that to perform at their best. So you don't want a bunch of demoralised

12:30 fighter pilots let the bombers get through all the time, they wouldn't perform too good. So be nice to fighter pilots, okay.

That's being nice is it?

Yes it is. Being kind.

What kind of relationship did you have on the ground?

Well, I got on with them pretty well. There's always antagonism with bomber crews that drink together and fighter crews that drink together, especially when we are half the day flying together and then in the mess together. But because I had been on a pilot's course, some of the guys I knew, and knew personally, I was

13:00 young and single, I could drink, I could play all the fun games they had, like push ups, chin ups always fitness challenges going on all the time, I could do these pretty well. I also accepted that I got on well with most of them.

So you got to fun and games together?

Yep, yep. Play hard and work hard were the rules. Play hard at night in the bar, but drink, but you had to get up on time

13:30 and be clear headed and work hard. You couldn't let your social life affect your working life. But we were all in our early 20s, we were all at our peak fitness, we were all very fit, young healthy testosterone and go, that was life.

And did the social activities clash with the responsibilities the next day?

No, not with me. I mean,

14:00 okay you might have felt a bit fuzzy headed, but we never let it affect us. Never late for work, never slept in.

So how many of these fighter pilots had hangovers during these exercises, that could be their excuse for not detecting you guys?

They need excuses, they reckon they got us. We had a couple of dirty tricks. Like one was we knew they had to operate their gun camera after they theoretically

14:30 shot us down with their (UNCLEAR) missile, they would come up behind us, and when in range they would go beep and fire their gun camera, I think it was, and show a picture of us in the camera. We knew they had got that close to us and someone had put the wheels down. So then in their gun camera picture is a Canberra with its wheels down. We said, "Hang on a minute, we were in the circuit area about to land when you shot us down. We weren't out there where you said we were. We were about to land and you come up behind us when we were landing." "Oh no."

15:00 So that was pulled a few times.

How many times did you see a photograph of your plane to determine if you had been shot down?

There weren't - they were only shown at combined briefings. Normally they would do their debriefings and we'd do ours, but occasionally we would combine them. I was just thinking of something that was quite funny.

An incident on the ground or in the air?

15:30 Okay, it was in the air, that's right. The other thing that the cameras, crews have been known to do, sorry, this is back in the days when the Sabres were the intercepting aircraft. The Sabres would be at the end of the runway waiting to take off to intercept us and they have got their own radar channel with the radio people, and they would be scrambled, they would be given the commands in code. Some of our guys listened on the channel picked up the code

16:00 and gave a false transmission to try and get them airborne. When we were out of range of them, or at a spot where we used to do a manoeuvre called a spoof, where you would come in, radar would pick us up, scramble the jets and we would go out again, so they couldn't catch us. And they would turn around and refuel and we would come in again and they would be refuelling on the ground. But some of the guys would make radio transmissions to get them airborne, and the guys would get confused and they would

16:30 either get airborne or not. So in the end the correct alignment was a ground line to them. One of our guys have sent messages of a scrambled aircraft. Dirty tricks.

How is that seen by your command?

Well certain exercises, they have got the rules of the thing. We felt we were restricted, that we had to conform to help pilots find us. We couldn't do everything that we wanted to do. But every

17:00 now and then there would be one day they would say, "Right, you can plan your own tactics." Then we would use these manoeuvres where we would turn around and come back and get airborne and come in behind them, and come from different directions and all at once. So no, it was fun and games, but it was all to increase your skill level and your professionalism.

Do you think it served its purpose?

Oh yeah. I think we had pretty good crews in our

17:30 air force in those days, with fighters and bombers. And still today, top notch, they win international awards. There are international competitions between Australian aircraft, New Zealand, American, English, Canadian, RAF, and Australians always perform well.

What are those competitions called?

I can't remember now. Look, I left the RAAF at the end of the 70's so I just can't remember. But the Maritime Reconnaissance people have international competitions, certain awards and that,

18:00 and they often win them.

Does that include the manoeuvres that we see the war games that are mentioned in the media sometimes?

Yep. Sometimes yeah, but often they will be done over the UK or somewhere like that, or America, and Canadians, Americans and Australians will compete. Or they will compete in the Philippines or somewhere like that, and the Australians do very well in these international competitions.

So these are essentially national

18:30 **comparisons to what you have been doing?**

Yeah, they are. I believe the Australian Air Force crews are very professional. I have worked with crews from other countries and the Australians are very professional and skilful.

When did you work with crews from other countries?

I was in America for 8 months, you are going ahead a bit on my...

Well, I just thought I would get an idea and maybe we can discuss it later.

I trained on the F-111 in 1968 in America. I was there for 8 months and I was in Butterworth for 2 years and I was in Phan Rang in Vietnam for 6 months, working with the

19:00 Americans, so three different situations.

One was post Vietnam.

One was post Vietnam, yeah.

We'll get there eventually. So why were you posted to 2 Squadron?

Okay. Well, I had a funny - I had two goes at 2 Squadron. First of all I told you there was another bird strike where the navigator had his arm broken. That navigator was in Butterworth when it was broken. I was the single living officer in Amberley in Australia

19:30 and we were in confrontation mode with Indonesia, and we had to have - I can't remember whether it was 8 or 10 crews, all the time, in case that confrontation broke out into a war. We were replaced immediately, so I went up there on a couple of days notice, to replace him. And I was told I was going there for 3 weeks, and I think I was there for nearly 3 months. I left my room in the mess. I didn't have time to wash my

20:00 clothes. I left some dirty clothes in the corner, all my uniform was in there. I told the secretary I am going away for 3 weeks, but if you want to use my room for short term, you can use it for short term but I will be back in 3 weeks. When I came back 3 months later, when this guy had recovered, there was an army bloke living in my room. I came back to the mess and I said, "I am Pilot Officer Gribble back for my room." And the mess secretary had changed, and he said, "I have never heard of you mate."

20:30 And I said, "Well I have got room 33 in A block." He said, "No, there's an army guy in there." I said, "Hold on I only left here for 3 weeks, I was away 3 months." He said, "I don't know anything about you." So I went up there, met this army guy, I said, "This used to be my room. I left my clothes and everything here." He said, "Yeah, there are some clothes here. I pushed the uniforms up to one end, and all the clothes on the floor had gone mouldy so I threw them out." So I got my gear and got another room. But that was my first time in Butterworth.

21:00 **How did you get up to Butterworth?**

I flew up, civil airliner. And then...

What was your first impression of Butterworth?

Butterworth? Actually, of course I had been there before, because we used to do what is called Lone Ranger where we would fly to where the other Canberras were. So even when I was at Amberley, I had been to Ahakia in New Zealand, because New Zealand had Canberras. I went to Butterworth twice. I was up there for 3 days.

21:30 Fly out in their aeroplanes on their bombing range and come back again. Called Lone Rangers. So I had actually been there for a couple of times before.

So what was the purpose of those flights?

Just so that we had international flying skills. We would have to be ready to mobilise at any time to Singapore or Malaya or Darwin or wherever. We had to be a full going concern, so you would practice it. And we used to fly to Darwin, over Indonesia to Butterworth.

22:00 But because of the confrontation we couldn't fly over Indonesia, so we would have to fly from Amberley, Pearce to Cocos overnight and refuel there. Cocos and right around the tip of Sumatra and back into Butterworth, completely avoiding Indonesian land mass anyway.

How long was that flight?

I can't remember, it would be Amberley to Pearce. I think we would have to land at Edinburgh on the way but,

22:30 it would be 6 hours total. And then there would be maybe 4 hours Pearce to Cocos, and maybe about 5 hours Cocos to Butterworth. Canberra has flown for about 7.5 hours. My longest flight has been about 6 hours.

What is the range of the Canberra?

About 2,000 nautical miles, roughly, high level. Low level it's a lot less.

And that's

23:00 **approximately how long?**

Probably about 5 hours.

So you would have to break those flights up into 5 hour legs?

Yeah, you can fly longer if you fly slower. Use less power, but there's a happy medium crew sort of configuration. Power, speed, altitude, to get the maximum range out of it. Depends on whether you want to fly for range or endurance.

23:30 Sometimes you want to stay airborne for a long time, so you pull the power back and slow down, and sometimes you want to get to a place as quickly as possible, so you use more fuel to get there. But there's a happy medium in the middle.

So how did you receive the news that you were going to Butterworth?

I can't remember. I was just told when I got to work in the morning. The senior officer would say, "Been a bad bird strike, navigator's injured, you have got to go to Butterworth in 2 days."

24:00 **Do you remember your reaction?**

Great, terrific. Butterworth was good. I was a singley, a single living officer.

So you were looking forward to Butterworth?

Yep, yeah, because lot of my friends from 6 Squadron had moved - been transferred up there, and they were good blokes.

What had they told you about the place prior to your arrival?

Well, I had actually been there once,

24:30 twice for a visit. They told me that you got extra allowances up there. You are in a foreign country, very interesting. You actually are doing the job that you were trained to do, in other words you are in defence mode in a foreign country. Possibly ready to go to war. Which you had trained to do and it is a

25:00 tropical resort, Penang, people go there for holidays. On the main land, opposite Penang. So when I got posted up there it was great. Everything was cheap, buy cheap watches and cameras, and it was good fun.

What kind of fun did you have?

There was a bit of a shortage of single, young, European men up there.

25:30 There were a couple of guys who worked in the Hong Kong Shanghai Bank, who had large houses. There were a few people that worked on plantations, English guys, young guys, they had big houses, 10 bedroom houses all serviced. And there were a lot of young girls, Eurasian girls, Asian girls who had been educated in England or in

26:00 English schools who wanted to meet young European men. And other than these few bankers and rubber plantation managers, where was the supply of young single European men coming from, but the air force. I was an officer, so I was imminently suitable. I got invited to lots of parties.

What kind of parties?

Oh just at someone's house, you would be dressed up - I have got photos

26:30 of me there dressed in a sort of a loin cloth thing, that was what your wore. No top on.

That was what you wore for social occasions was it, loin cloths?

Yeah. Pool parties, it was good fun.

Was there a fancy dress party?

There might have been I can't remember. We had a good time and just going over there on weekends, and go to the bars for a few drinks or

27:00 something or other, it was good. It was a nice happy relaxed atmosphere there. I mean everyone is trying to sell you stuff all the time, fine, that didn't worry us.

So what were you doing up there in an official capacity?

Official, no we were doing the same thing, doing navigational exercises, flying around Malaya, dropping bombs at the range there, but taking photographs of places where you couldn't drop bombs. But basically being operationally ready to

27:30 attack targets if necessary.

Which targets?

In Indonesia.

Which targets would you have anticipated?

Various targets in Indonesia. We were allocated targets.

You were allocated?

Yes. We had targets.

Whereabouts?

It never came to - just probably shouldn't tell you that, just military targets in Indonesia, but they would have had military targets in Malaysia, if we had gone to war with them, you know, if

28:00 confrontation with Indonesia and the British system had gone to war together. (UNCLEAR) Station Air Force it was called.

So you were assigned targets in Indonesia?

What would happen, each crew would be assigned two targets, a primary target and a secondary target. My second target would be someone else's primary target, or my crew's. And that was the Australian

28:30 Canberras at Butterworth, and the New Zealand Canberras, Tanga would be given the same, the British RAF Tanga, would be given the same. The British RAF Falcons and Victors, all masses and masses of aircraft, all would be assigned targets, the bomber type aircraft in Indonesia, the primary and secondary targets. We had to know the - if we were given my primary target, 2

29:00 Squadron was given that to attack, we probably would send in pairs of aircraft 5 minutes apart, 4 pairs 5 minutes apart. But because it was my primary target I would be in the lead aircraft. It would comprise the pathway to that target without even referring to a map. I would have a map with me but I would have it memorised. I had to know the track, distance, time, levels, everything in my brain,

29:30 sent into the target. We had photography and that. I had to memorise where there would be a mosque, where there would be a river junction, this sort of thing as you went past, and the features you would see, and the escape path. We would come out at very high speed, the maximum speed we could fly. I had to memorise the whole target info on my primary target and the second target. That way somehow going in there I was,

30:00 if something was damaged, I lost my map I would still know my way in there. Just have on crew, expert in each two targets. That target that was selected for the primary one, they would go in first aircraft. So, they military - things like ammunition dumps, military targets, army bases. Our targets were mainly in Sumatra, some down into

30:30 Java. But see, we had so many aircraft in Singapore they would be hitting Java. So our aircraft were mainly in the top end of Sumatra, which was the main threat to Butterworth anyway, and some of the army bases down there anyway. Kuala Lumpur etcetera. So we were hitting the northern targets.

So you were briefed for a full scale attack?

We had aircraft bombed up. I think it was 4 aircraft bombed up with high explosive bombs sitting in the revetments at one stage,

31:00 24 hours a day waiting to go. We had to have 4 crews in the mess on the mainland at the base all the time. And because I was the only single navigator, I was always on duty, it was always me, and the married guys, 3 of them, they would rotate. So there was 3 of them living on the base away from their wives, 24 hours a day. Pilots, there was a mixture of single and married, so the

31:30 single guys wouldn't always have to be on duty. So, because so many married navigators had to be on duty, I was the only single guy, and basically I was on duty all the time. And I had to personally swap with somebody if I wanted to go to the mainland, and that went on for months. I would go about once every 3 weeks to get a hair cut, it was pathetic, confined to base.

It was a bit unfair wasn't it?

It was a bit.

Bit of a handicap.

In a nice holiday

32:00 resort like that?

What was the daily routine?

Much as the same as Australia. We had a crew bus there that would pick us up, had a driver, pick us up, you know, eat in the mess and about 7.30 we'd go to our crew room. Oh no, sorry, we used to go to a big joint crew room, that's right, and there would be a met brief, and an air traffic control brief for the Canberra's' squadron, Sabres, or Mirages later on. There

32:30 were some helicopters, transport aircraft, all had a general briefings together. And then back to our crew room for our own specific briefings by our flight commanders and discuss the day's tactics and maybe a few admin things. Plan our flights and appropriate go flying. Up at Butterworth we had our own cook type of thing and we had flight rations, steak and salad and that,

33:00 and he would cook up the meal in the flight room, it was quite good.

What do you mean by flight rations?

Well, the military works on a series of rations, one ration per man, and for air crew you get an extra fruit juice ration, it's all rations. And one ration might equal a piece of steak and salad or something. If you were going to eat crayfish you would need 3 rations, but we never ate crayfish. It's all in units of

33:30 rations. And I think air crew were allowed to have steak for when they flying, I think, I can't remember. It was pretty good. It was provided for the air force. I never had to pay for it. As a matter of fact, I never had to pay for any meals. I used to pay a supplementary fee, but single living in guys were provisioned. All your food, clothing, it was all provided for you, it was good. We used to pay a supplementary fee just to get a few

34:00 extra goodies in the mess, and everyone paid 2 dollars a week or something and they bought stuff with that.

What were the extra goodies you were after?

We might get some extra fancy vegetables, or have prawns and something like that. Extra courses of entrees and deserts and things.

Just returning to your daily routine, you were briefed and prepped for a full scale

34:30 **attack?**

That was there all the time, but we were still continuing flying local flights to keep our skills up. But a part of every day or every second day or something, you would have to go over to the intelligence area, it was all secured, and study up your map which you had prepared previously. Mine was prepared by someone else, and study it, be intimately knowledgeable with it. We used to have intelligence briefings as well. Intelligence used to give us the state of the game, state of politics and

35:00 military and all this, and various countries around South-East Asia, Asia, always briefed on - had a pretty good idea of who was ruling which country and whether there was a coup, and a pretty good general knowledge.

Given that that you were given that much knowledge, what was the atmosphere like while you were posted at Butterworth?

It was a bit tense as far as - you could have to go to war, but even though that was our job

35:30 anyway. We felt we were, the guys at Butterworth, were the best really. We had reached the level we were the best in our area and we were up there ready to go to war. It was like the pointy edge of the sword, if you like.

What was your attitude towards those orders if they were given?

Yep, it was what I joined the air force after all. If I didn't like that I would have got out and gone into

36:00 something else, got a training job or something. No, that's what I wanted to do and that was it. Because I believe that all the battles we were in we were asked to go into, we weren't being aggressive. Indonesia was attacking Malaysia, they were trying to take Borneo off them, and things like that. They tried to stop the formation of Malaysia. There was Malaya, Singapore and Sarawak and Brunei

36:30 joined like that, to form Malaysia. That was the main grievance they had against it. So we were up there helping them. Same in Vietnam, I felt that we were asked to go there and help them, and I felt I was doing the right thing.

So how many attacks were there done?

We didn't do any. We were on standby, we never attacked Indonesia, thank God, otherwise we wouldn't be so friendly today. It would have been a catastrophe really, if we had

37:00 gone to full scale war. I mean really, our nearest neighbour.

I am just curious about what you meant about the battles that you said the air force were involved in. You mean likely to be involved in?

I meant likely to be involved in. Okay yeah, I call that an incident because it is a war environment. But I mean, there were some the Indonesians did drop paratroopers into Malaysia. There was hand to hand fighting, Australian troops and Indonesians, in Borneo. Indonesian aircraft

37:30 shot down. They killed allied troops and allied troops killed some Indonesians.

We spoke to an infantryman yesterday who was in Borneo.

Yeah, yeah. It was a real war for him. It's just that on Butterworth where I was, air force, we never got to that stage. Our fighters were up there all the time looking for their bombers to come over and their fighters were looking for us. Never quite got there, thank goodness.

38:00 **Did you ever make eye contact with them, what do you call it?**

No. What, in the air? No but we were aware of them following us, like when we were out on manoeuvres, not much air space up there, very close together. Radar reported there were fighters flying just a few kilometres just their side of the border, trailing us. They were there looking for us. If we had done the wrong

38:30 thing we would have been shot down.

What sort of an atmosphere did that create?

Just that you had to be on your toes, be dead accurate, spot on and do the right thing. Oh no, it was -

Did you ever, given the amount of intelligence you were receiving, did you ever suspect that orders may be inevitable?

There was a good chance, yeah. While that was going on there was also

39:00 the Communist terrorists from the previous episode. We had troops there, they were still - a bunch of them on the Thai border. And some of our 2 Squadron. There was C flight with DC-3s, they were dropping supplies on the border to the people fighting the Communist terrorists. So there was a fair bit of action going on up there.

What kind of

39:30 **relationship did you have with the other squadrons at Butterworth?**

Yep, there RAF squadrons there, they had a night fighters there. They had helicopters, rescue helicopters there. We had Australian bombers, fighters, squadrons of RAF transport aircraft for parachuting, supply dropping, just general transport. I even went on a flight in one of them.

40:00 Medivac flight.

What were you doing on the medivac flight?

I had to go to - it was a weekend and there was no navigator there, and so I went down in an RAF aircraft, and go down to this place and bring a guy back who had gone troppo. He was in a straight jacket, an RAF guy - we had to bring him back to the hospital.

Where did you have to bring him from?

A place called Gongketta [?], which is over towards the east coast of Malaya. Bring him back into Malaya. And also I went on a medivac to Vietnam, the first time I went to Vietnam.

40:30 **Why had this guy gone troppo?**

I don't know. He was a British bloke in the army, in a bush camp, away from his family, who knows what it was. A lot of people in the military, and the harsh conditions, every now and then someone snaps a bit, they are put under a lot of pressure. You know, in danger.

So you mediated to Butterworth?

Yeah, I am not sure what happened.

41:00 All I remember is that he was in a stretcher, in a straight jacket, strapped into a stretcher, with a nurse with a needle with a knock-out thing in it, and a service policeman with a big baton to knock him out if necessary. Because in an aeroplane you can't have someone go haywire.

What was your reaction to that?

Poor bloke, glad I am not him. I felt sorry for him; he didn't mean to go off the loose end.

41:33 End of tape

Tape 4

01:30 **You started talking about some of the social aspects of being at Butterworth, did you have some sort of sports clubs or things you could do with the fellas on the week end?**

Yeah, well I was a member of Penang Sports Club and the Straits Trading Sports Club, which we called the Tin Club, because they mainly traded in tin. The Tin Club was on the Butterworth side the mainland side where the air force base was and the Penang Club was - it's still there, it was on the

02:00 Penang Island. So they had, instead of a sports club they had grounds for playing cricket and that sort of thing. They had bars there and we used to go there at night and take girls, meet girls and they'd have social events that we used to go to sometimes. I was a member of them, but as far as actually playing sport, at one stage there the four of us bought a fridge. There was myself, two pilots, no

02:30 myself a pilot and a signaller. And it was put in my room, but it would take about four cartons of beer.

Sorted out the beer?

Yeah. But we decided that rather than when work finished at 4:30 and going into the mess and drinking, we would get a bit fit and play tennis. So, for a year or two there, or a year say, we would finish work and go and change into our tennis gear and play tennis for an hour and

03:00 then we would have some drinks from the fridge. Because we were a bit sweaty, it was a humid climate. And we would go and have a shower and sit in the mess or just sit here and drink a few more drinks and get the room boy to go up and get some bar snacks. The room boy would go up and get the bar snacks, a big tray of sausage rolls and little savoury things and satay sticks, and bring them back. So we were sort of sporty you could say, we played a bit of tennis.

03:30 And drank a bit of beer.

Where did you find the girls?

Over on the island, like I said, they were basically friends of the European bankers and plantation managers and this sort of thing. They all seemed to have a whole lot of educated, English speaking Eurasian and Chinese and Malay girls, who wanted to meet European guys.

04:00 They had the big houses and we only lived in our little quarters in the mess. They had the big houses, they would put on the parties and we would go over there armed. It was sort of shunned on in those days to have an Asian girl, bring her back to the mess, even in the communal rooms and that, it was looked down on. They tried to discourage us from mixing with them.

Gee. Was that an

04:30 **official policy of discouragement?**

Yeah, old fashioned way of looking at it. Some of my friends married Eurasian girls and I think things were hard for them for a while with the military. It's not the same today, we are more open, but in those days I suppose... I mean I was an officer, I wasn't allowed to mix with the airmen or the sergeants and that. I understand that, from a discipline point of view, but there was a sort of class structure they tried to keep in there. All that discipline.

05:00 Not so bad now.

About what year was that?

1965, 66, 67.

Not that long ago.

No, not that long ago. But as well as that we had a military hospital at Butterworth and it was quite big, because the Vietnam War started about that stage. And in that hospital were Australian air force nurses, British army nurses, Royal Air Force nurses, it was quite a big hospital.

05:30 And part way through my tour of Butterworth, they started bringing down some of the injured from Vietnam. Like I said, I did one medivac up there in a DC-3, and went up there and there had been some battle.

Do you remember what the battle was?

No. All I remember is that, we had the seats down the side of the DC-3, there was a bunch of wounded Australian soldiers all bandaged up, and to get in the back of the aeroplane

06:00 you had to walk on the coffins to get to the back of the aeroplane. You could not get past it. You realised you were walking on top of dead guys and they were there with their dead mates in between. They were just glad to get out of Vietnam because they were so badly injured, and we had a really quite a good hospital there which could get them to a certain stage where they could then be transported back to Australia. I think, at times I think the hospital might have got overloaded.

Whereabouts did you land in

06:30 **Vietnam to pick up these fellas?**

Saigon International Airport which is military and international. I only did one of those flights, and that was my first trip to Vietnam during the Vietnam War, it would have been about 1966.

Just while we are on the topic, was there a lot of air activity out there in Saigon when you were...?

Yeah, huge. We lined up about 57 or something. Yeah, it took us a long while to get off, but we had a medical category

07:00 so, we were expedited, but even so, it was difficult. They had several runways operating. Aircraft had to pull off to the side and shut down and cool off and start up again later. It was pretty bad.

So coming back to your time at Butterworth, you said the hospital had expanded because it was starting to take on...?

And the Far East Asian Air Force was larger, it was a big army, green berets, over on Penang Island.

07:30 They needed lots of doctors and nurses. And later on in my tour, in 1967, or New Year's Day 1967, we had a fancy dress party in the officers' mess. I was dressed up as Tarzan, and I had a black, woman's wig on and a loin cloth, and that was all that I had on, underpants.

I am sure you looked delightful.

08:00 Yeah, I was in pretty good shape in those days. But a few of us we were, we knew there was a bunch of nurses on duty down at the hospital, so we said we'll go down and visit them at midnight. And so we got some bottles of champagne and went down to the hospital. I saw this pretty little blond British army nurse, Queen Alexandra Army Nurse, army nursing corps nurse, I was a bit drunk and that, and I went up and sat her on my knee and said, "How are you going." She probably, thought, "If this is an Australian I really don't want to meet one."

08:30 But I must have made some impression on her because we started going out. And I went to Vietnam in April that year, and my whole squadron, 2 Squadron moved to Vietnam, and just before I went I got engaged to her. Such that I married her. So even though I hadn't actually met her before that. But yeah, when I met her I was taken by

09:00 her and that was it, we started a romance.

I am sure you were pretty hard to forget considering the fact you were in fact, dressed up as Tarzan. What sort of places could you take a lady?

There were lots of hospitals with nice restaurants in, the big hotels that Farangi Beach and all that, they are still there, you go out in the day time. I used to take June, the girl I used to

09:30 know, I used to take her to Penang. I would drive up to one of the beachside hotels, I had a car. You could sit on the lawn, you go for a swim, beautiful sandy beach, back to your table, they would bring food and drinks up to you, sunny, warm. We were all brown because we were suntanned, it was just great. Terrific environment, we used to drive up to the top of Penang Hill, drive up some area, I can't remember where now, take some drinks and a

10:00 picnic pack. Another thing we used to do was on the Butterworth side, a couple of the fighter squadrons, they had a speed boat, so they used to go to one of the beaches north of Butterworth, and we would drive off, maybe a dozen cars, from a speed boat. We would drive for about half an hour, stop, we would all have a beer, and then we would eventually get to this beach and we would just lay on the

beach all day and we would have a barbecue,

10:30 cooked food. We would get food from the mess, beer, we would have Eskys. Water skiing out on the bay with the speed boat. The only thing we had to do was get the ski rope and put it around the palm trees on the beach, because all the locals all the Malays would stand there, you would be lying on your towel. Malays, all standing there looking at you, fully clothed, all the women in their full head dress and the men in their long sleeved shirts, standing there just staring at you lying there in your bathers.

11:00 And their women, because they never exposed their bodies. See we had to put the ski rope around the trees so you could get at least 4 or 5 feet away from these people. They would be standing there on the edge of your towel just looking at, for hours, just looking at you. We would be water skiing and drinking, and 100 of them just watching us all day.

That's a bit bizarre.

It is a bit. It is obviously. So, I mean they came from all these little kampongs [villages] and things - our lifestyle is so different from

11:30 theirs. I mean if they found it offensive, why did they stand there and stare at us all day.

So you never figured out why they were doing that?

Not really no. Actually there were some Malaysian pilots at Butterworth, they were quite reasonable blokes.

Where would they have done their training then?

I am not sure, but some of them flew helicopters and some of them flew some light observation aircraft, there were a couple of guys there.

What were they like?

12:00 Pretty good. I will never forget having a discussion with one guy, they are quite culturally different, and I said, "Look, one of the things that I don't like here, is that everyone spits, you walk along the footpath and everyone spits, right in front of you. To us that's really, really bad manners. To hock in front of someone, spit in front of them." He said, "Well yeah, we think you guys are strange because we at least spit it out, what do you do, put it in a piece of

12:30 rag and put it back in your pocket and save it." And when you look at it from his point of view probably it was reasonable wasn't it. I don't like spitting. I think in Singapore actually illegal to spit. But in those days they spat everywhere. You have seen the picture there and the sounds, it's just horrendous, but it's different, different cultures.

What was some of your most

13:00 **enjoyable times at Butterworth?**

Well there were so many things to do, like you could go to the snake temple.

The what?

The snake temple where they had all these poisonous snakes supposedly drugged with the incense burner. These snakes just slowly crawling around. There was, I think the largest golden Buddha in Asia was there, a big reclining gold covered Buddha. You

13:30 could go round the back and underneath it, and there was the ashes of all the people that were put in the crypt there with a photograph of them. You know, Yu Hing Wong, he was a shoemaker and he lived from this to this and he had 5 kids. I have never seen pictures of dead people and their history on their ashes. Things like that it was very interesting. I went to all the temples, buffalo in mud pools and that on the side of the road.

14:00 You could ride round in tri-shaws. Bars were quite good.

What were the bars like?

The bars were quite good. I mean okay, as Europeans we had more money than the Malays, plus we drank - most Malays didn't drink much. So, they wanted the money, we had the money, so they got the money. But there was good atmosphere in the bars, they were all very friendly, they would bring food up to you and just relax.

14:30 Beautiful climate, you would wear shorts and t-shirts.

It doesn't sound very sleazy at all.

No, it wasn't very sleazy. No. There were some sleazy places, but of course, as an officer, we were mostly told that if we were caught in a brothel or anything there, was back to Australia. I am not saying that I didn't ever go there, but it was sort of the rules. They told us.

So, what did the brothels look like?

15:00 I had a few massages, massage parlours. I was young, it was one of those things.

I am not judging you.

I didn't go, we mainly went to bars and I had a Chinese girlfriend for a while, and a Malaysian girlfriend.

How was that?

I had an

15:30 Indian girlfriend, she was Indian and Scottish.

That's a combination?

Yeah. She was black and she spoke very good English and she was a very nice person.

Well how was that for you by some of your mates?

My mates didn't mind, because as I said, one of them married a Eurasian, and some of them had Eurasian girlfriends. There was a shortage of white girls there. Compared to the white guys.

16:00 But no, they didn't mind. The girls that we met up with were normally fairly well off, had their own cars, educated. And just nice. Good. Asian girls are very attractive when they are young. The Eurasian girls seem to get the best of both worlds. That's what I thought anyway.

You might be right.

16:30 **So what sort of training exercises would you have to keep doing in order to keep your skills up while you were at Butterworth?**

The same sort of navigation. I have flown all round Malaysia. As a matter of fact, there were so many aircraft in Malaysia, that they had to allocate us pathways to fly. Like if I wanted to fly from Butterworth east across to Kotabaru or something, I could only fly at, the height we were at, 250 AGL [above ground level].

17:00 I could only fly in this block of time, because 5 minutes later there would be another British Canberra flying in the other direction, or a RAF Vulcan flying at 100 feet higher going in the other direction. So you would be flying along and a Vulcan would go past you this way above the top, something bigger would fly over the other way, few minutes after you go another high speed aircraft would go behind you. Pre planned.

It sounds dangerous.

It could have

17:30 been yeah, such a tiny country to have dozens and dozens of aeroplane all flying around. So we had to do our training low level, because that's how we were going to Indonesia, we were flying low level.

Were there any accidents?

Mid air collisions? I am not aware of any. But there were accidents as much as, we did bombing as well, we did practice bombing at our local bombing range, Song Song. High explosive bombing down at...

18:00 but the one near Singapore. We were down there, was one RAF aircraft disappeared, and they believed he - as he dropped the bomb one of them exploded and blew him out of the sky. So every now and then they would lose an aeroplane, every now and then one would crash. Like, as I said, we had that bad bird strike at high speed and we very nearly lost. It was just one of those things, a statistical fact,

18:30 military high speed aircraft flying at low level, it's dangerous.

Sure, we can see that with air shows can't you.

That's why a lot of people go I think, the chance of something happening. Another thing that used to happen, this Song Song bombing range, I can't remember, say it was 30 mile off the coast or something. Our Canberra's 2 Squadron, Canberras would use. At a certain time of day we would have to book it. RAF aircraft

19:00 would have to use it, our Sabres would use it for dive bombing on, one of the Spits and air to ground gunnery. And while we were using it we had to provide a range safety officer, which had would have to be air crew, so it would have to be a pilot or a navigator. So, in my time there I did a couple of tours to Song Song Island for a week. So you go, so the week you were arranged you go across to the island on a ferry to Penang and you get on this high speed launch to go up there. You would live on one island,

19:30 and when the bombing was on you would sail out to the island with a couple of the guys. Couple of RAF guys. We had a quadrant hut and we had to climb up these wooden stairs, this rickety wooden thing, and we would get in there and we would have a radio and cleared the aircraft on and off. And I had a guy there with a pair of binoculars, and he would sight where the bomb hit. Plotted on his plotting board. Another little hut up the other end of the island and someone sighting it. He would call his

sighting to triangulate the two measure, the distance to the target and tell the aircraft it's 50527 metres or 12

20:00 metres or whatever. So we would give the pilots their results. If the fighters came in to bomb - to air ground their spit, they are supposed to have a fighter pilot but a few times they wouldn't be able to get a guy out in time, so you would have to evacuate the other quadrant hut because often there are bullets left in the sand. They fire their cannon, hits a round in the sand, and goes through the wall of the other quadrant hut. So a few

20:30 times you do that and a few other aircraft would come in and bomb the range. One of the things, here's an interesting fact. On this main island, I can't remember the name of the island where the main quadrant hut was, there were monitor lizards and they were probably 4 metres long, great big Komodo dragon type things. In the jungle underneath it, and over the years crews have poured coloured paint on them. So there was one with orange back, green back, yellow

21:00 back, blue back so we knew each Komodo dragon by the colour of his back, and these things, you would see these things crawling around. You would throw a sandwich down and they would eat it. Giant monitor lizards, huge lizards, and these things would be walking around the jungle all the time. Fascinating.

Were they at all vicious?

If you tied one down on the sand he might come up and nibble a few bits off I don't know. They never attacked us. I don't know what they eat, crabs or.... They eat sandwiches and apples.

21:30 **They eat sandwiches?**

That was something I have only seen there and not anywhere else. These great big Komodo dragons. That was the other thing, at night time we would go back to the main island where we lived, these islands I can't remember, there is a story about them, one is Turtle Island, and one was Pregnant Island because it looked like a pregnant woman lying on the side. Some story about the

22:00 pregnant - the woman went there to get pregnant and the turtles were - and it was all something about virility and fertility these islands, it was sort of a myth, the story they had. I used to know it, I have forgotten it now. But on the mainland we had our quarters and our mess and there would be one officer and probably about 6 RAF British Air Force airmen. One would

22:30 drive the boat and one would be a cook one would be a quadrant hut officer. And they would only be out there for a week like me, but on the other side of the island there was an old temple, a very old temple, and there was a bunch of male fishermen that used to live in thatch huts on the beach. They catch these very tiny little fish, dry them out on the sand, and when they are dried bag them up and

23:00 sell them. They were always back at the island. We had a picture theatre and a 8mm camera that goes brrrrr. And a screen and at night time we would be showing a movie because there was nothing else to do. Sitting there and watching this film. And you would just be aware of something and you would look around and these fishermen would be standing behind you, and as soon as you looked at them they would disappear into the blackness. And, if you had to have a mid week switchover, a

23:30 helicopter would come out on the spit. Well, these fisherman would hear this wocka, wocka of the helicopter, and they would have to go and catch all the fish off the trays, because they would just blow everywhere. They would be cursing. One other thing that used to happen, once a year or something like that, all the married women who hadn't got pregnant used to come over to this island and spend a night in this temple.

24:00 And this fertility thing with the pregnant woman and the turtles and the temple would mean they would get pregnant in the next year.

That's a nice sort of cross over of traditions.

Yes, but you think, there are all these horny fishermen out there that don't have any women and all these women come over to get fertile, I just wonder if maybe - I don't know.

There's something going on.

Maybe, who knows. I won't say anything anti culture.

24:30 Different theory on it.

There is on how the pregnancies sort of happened. Sounds like a short film really doesn't it?

That was the interesting part. I went out there two or three times, just something you wouldn't do in Australia. I don't know any other place that would do that, it is interesting.

It's highly unusual. Can you think of any other things that happened while you were there, that

25:00 **you would like to recall for us?**

Well I remember one morning I - once again single living - navigator, I got woken up about 3 in the morning and said, "There's an aerial search on for an RAF, a couple of RAF blokes." They were fishing and their boat had capsized. They couldn't get a navigator over to the island, because you could only go over by ferry, and the ferries didn't sail at night. So it had to be me. It was on a

25:30 DC-3 which I didn't always fly but I flew the Canberra bomber, but I had trained on it and I knew how to use the drift sight so, I had to go on this search and rescue flight, but it had to be me. I was the only person available. We searched up and down, and that's right, the RAF had a plane dropping flares all night, just dropping flares while they were searching. We couldn't do that in the DC-3. And we searched

26:00 and they found the guy's body, a bit later. He had, actually I think they had both submerged. They found the boat alright, still full of water. They should have stayed with the boat. One guy had paddled off with the drum. The other guy swam to a post in the water and he hung on to that and they rescued him. The guy on the drum, he couldn't swim very much, wanted to paddle off on this drum. He should have sat in the boat up to here in water, would have been rescued. Anyway, it was his body they found,

26:30 he died very quickly. That was the search and rescue flight I did. I have done other ones in different places, the only one I can remember from Butterworth.

Did you have much contact from Australia while you were at Butterworth?

No. I didn't come back - I came back to Australia once in the 2 years I was up there.

27:00 There was a military battle, the battle of Leyte Gulf, which happened in World War II, just south of the Philippines, an island called Leyte, no Leyte Gulf, it's a gulf. Australian and American, might have been other countries, navies and air forces were involved in it, a big battle with the Japanese. And every year there are apparently a whole lot of ceremonies. And this year I was at Butterworth and there was this ceremony

27:30 for the Battle of Leyte Gulf, and we had a fly past, for all these naval ships, probably 30 ships down there you could see them. And they had - the Americans had an aircraft similar to the Canberra called the B-57. They had built them as well, they used them in Vietnam. So we sent two of our Canberras across to the Philippines, so go in this big fly past, because it was joint Australian/American. This was the first time I went to the Philippines, so I went to the Philippines.

28:00 We did a couple of flights in an American aircraft, and we went in this big fly past and I think there were 12 - 10 B-57's and our Canberra's tacked on the end, and they did a big gradual descent down into Leyte Gulf, and you could see all these big aircraft carriers and cruisers and everything, with the big mast sticking up. Anyway, the leader of this formation. If you can imagine, the aircraft are stepped, the leader there next one, then down, down, down. You are flying right behind the tail of the aircraft in front of you.

28:30 The leader - it goes in a big descent - the leader, he decides to fly on top of the biggest ship, on top of the mast. And, of course we are at the end of the thing, we are stepped down quite a way, and we see this mast coming out in front of us, we must have scraped over it by a few feet. It was an interesting fly past. But after that, that aircraft had to come back to Australia so my pilot and I ferried it back via

29:00 Guam, New Guinea and back into Amberley.

You flew it back?

Yeah, we flew it back. Then we had to take another one back to Butterworth. At the time we got there, just before Christmas, I can't remember what - 1965 or 6 or something, Qantas went on strike. That's right, we were supposed to fly back Qantas. They were on strike. So I was stuck in Sydney I think, for about 2.5 weeks.

That's not too bad.

It just so happened I met

29:30 some people I used to know, it was quite good, yeah. So that was the only time I came back to Australia, ferrying this aeroplane back. I was supposed to turn around but I couldn't fly back Qantas.

What was the problem with Qantas?

There was some sort of industrial strike, one of the few strikes they have ever had.

I wonder if it had anything to do with Vietnam?

No, I don't think it had anything to do with Vietnam. I don't think they were ferrying troops to Vietnam.

Had you noticed any changes with Australia

30:00 **concerning the Vietnam war during those times?**

No. I don't know whether I was - we found out we were going to Vietnam from Butterworth. Just a month or two before we left.

Did you suspect that you would end up there?

I didn't know, because our government committed a lot of army troops. The air force had Caribous and helicopters in there. The navy had small ships

30:30 and larger ships bombarding the coast. Our air force contingent was a flight of Caribous and a flight of helicopters, plus other liaison officers and things like that. We hadn't send any attack aircraft in there. I believe they wanted to send - I think we had Mirages then. I believe they wanted to send Mirages in there. The French wouldn't let us and, even though we, they wouldn't give us

31:00 tools, ammunition or stuff like that if we flew them in there. The Bofors gun, made by the Swedes, couldn't use that in Vietnam because the Swedes were against it and they said we won't give you any spare parts or ammunition. So various bits of our equipment we couldn't use in Vietnam because of the political bias of the people that designed that equipment. I think it was round about then that the Australian government decided that we were going to buy American stuff because they won't stop you going anywhere, and we were probably going to be in there with Americans anyway. No point

31:30 buying Turkish tanks or something if you can't use them in Iraq. This is the power the country that provides military equipment has over you. But they make the tools and they won't provide you with the tools, or they make the ammunition and they won't provide the ammunition. But I thought if anything, it would be fighters, but I didn't think they would send the Mirages in there. But when they found out the French

32:00 wouldn't let them the Canberras were probably the second choice. I think, I am not 100% sure. So we found out at very short notice before we went there.

So it came as a big surprise then?

Yeah, surprise yeah. And not only that, about this time we find out we are going to buy the F-111. And they decided any crew that went on the F-111 had to have done a tour of Vietnam. Because just about all the Americans going on it, it was their top bomber, had all done a tour of Vietnam. We were

32:30 going to have to do a tour of Vietnam. Plus you have got all those extra skills and who knows, maybe the F-111 might have been used in Vietnam, that was their plan. So even though the Canberras went from 2 Squadron in Butterworth to Vietnam, only the crews that were going to go on to F-111s plus a few others went with it, and they supplemented it with extra crews from Australia who were going on F-111s. So, in

33:00 April 67... Do you want me to go on to Vietnam?

Yeah sure.

Okay. April 67, 2 Squadron basically packed up and flew up to Phan Rang in Vietnam and away from the Australian bases, there was an American base up there. Up near Cam Ranh Bay, away from the rest of the Australians. Before that, well they must have known months before that, because the airfield construction squad went up there and built our huts and did a few things for us.

33:30 Our parking bays and all that, and built hangars for us.

Did you have any preparation as far as briefing was concerned about the situation in Vietnam before you?

I think yeah, no we got that all the time anyway. We were constantly updated with political and military situations around the world. I think we did modify our training a bit to train more to the type of sortie we might have to do up there. We did more high explosive bombing training, and pull this thing up to get away from the bombs and things.

34:00 You used to be only able to drop a couple of high explosive bombs a year because they were quite expensive and we dropped quite a few before we left. I can check my log book.

So that was the extra special part of the training for Vietnam?

Yeah, there were probably other things. I can't just quite remember, it's a long way back.

Did you have any leave at all before you went to Vietnam?

No, you didn't normally take leave in Malaya, you saved it up until you came back to Australia.

34:30 If you wanted leave I suppose you could have it, but I don't recall taking any leave up there. I might have had the odd day here and there.

So what was your pilot's reaction to you guys going to Vietnam?

Well, the pilot I was crewed with was... the pilot I was crewed with in Butterworth didn't go to Vietnam, he was one of the ones that didn't go.

Okay well what happened there?

Because he wasn't destined to go on the F-111, I think he was more than halfway through his tour and

they wanted someone who could do

35:00 a full year in Vietnam, so they only got guys that had just arrived, or guys that were going on F-111. Now I was halfway through my tour but to get two F-111 squadrons of crews with operation experience of Vietnam we only did 6 months in Vietnam, and that's what I did. I did a 6 months tour of Vietnam. Those guys who went on the F-111 did a full 1 year tour. I was there for 6 months and another bunch came from Australia,

35:30 did 6 months, and all went straight on to the F-111 after I left Butterworth. So, after I left Phan Rang, I went up there with the first lot, but my tour was 6 months.

And you knew before you got involved in it?

Yeah. And I knew that I had been selected to go on the F-111. Not only that.

Is there anything that you did to get selected to the F-111?

Well basically you had to

36:00 perform to a certain level. You had to basically, I think you had to have a permanent commission. I was offered - I had a short service commission, while I was at Butterworth, 8 year short service commission. After my training I had to return service for 8 years. That was it, I could either sign on for another 8 years or leave. The guys on the F-111s, they wanted to stay so, they offered me a permanent commission, so I was basically in there until I hit retirement age.

36:30 Or whatever it was. And no short service commission guys, close to the end of their short service commission were selected to go on the F-111. Either permanent commission or just - and they didn't have any very, very junior guys either, they all had done several years on Canberra bombers or fighters. No one straight out of graduation went on to F-111s. They had to have done operational tours or several tours. The

37:00 right experience level and age - it was great, the best aeroplane in the world.

That must have been pretty exciting you were going into a war zone and you were going to end up on F-111s?

I just felt I was really lucky.

So was there any sort of departing party to be had?

Probably, I was engaged at that time, I got engaged before I left. Decided this girl was too good, this nurse, we

37:30 were getting married, so we got engaged before I left. I was only going a couple of countries away, but I might not be coming back, who knows. Yeah, so there were some parties, we had parties. I just can't quite remember, I was pretty tied up with going up there, and there was a lot of stuff to do, packing up and sending stuff back to Australia.

So the packing up was difficult?

Well I mean, I had

38:00 my stuff in my room. I had my tape recorder, I took that with me, my Akai tape recorder and tapes, and personal effects and other stuff I sent back to Australia. Didn't have much up there really. Married guys at Butterworth, their wives stayed at Butterworth. Other guys who came from Australia their wives stayed in Australia.

Sorry, did you fly in?

Yes, I flew

38:30 in. I was on a Canberra, I flew with the first group. Some photos over there, I think there were 8 Canberras flew in, 8 crews.

And where did you actually fly to?

Butterworth straight to Phan Rang. Which is near Cam Ranh Bay. Landed at an American base. First time in Vietnam and landed there taxied to our special parking area our airfield construction squad had made for us, got out of the aeroplane had a bit of a ceremony there

39:00 with the Americans welcoming us. Went to the huts that were built for us, allocated us two to a room. There was a bed and mattress and bare walls.

Did you wonder what you had got yourself into?

No. no. I was happy that was the way it was. Pretty new. It was all new procedures. I mean working with Americans I hadn't really worked much with Americans before. They had different techniques and things, but that was alright.

Were you

39:30 **looking forward to that?**

Yep. Yeah we were all fired up, all enthusiastic.

And who was your new pilot?

Mine was Bob, a guy called Bob, he came from Australia, I mean I knew him for years.

Oh, you had actually known him before?

He used to be a navigator and then he did the pilots course. I had known him when he was a navigator on Hercules. So I crewed with Bob, he's a good bloke, Bob. Experienced. Partway through I got re-crewed with the CO [Commanding Officer] of the squadron,

40:00 wing commander, so his navigator left after about a month, I don't know why. So I got crewed with the CO. I would have rather stayed with Bob.

I suppose there's more pressure being navigator to your CO?

Oh, yep. Someone like me, a bit of a party man, didn't want to be with the CO.

So how long were you settling in for before you went on your first mission?

40:30 I think only a few days, a couple of days, we got lots of briefings from the Americans. I got issued with personal weapons, revolver and stuff like that. We had extra gear at that stage. Little extension butt for our revolver. We had to get a little thing called a treescape which you used to carry, which was - there is a lot of jungle areas there. If you ejected out and landed in the jungle, your parachute would hang from a tree, and you are hanging from the parachute. The VC [Viet Cong] found you, they would shoot you. Hanging in the parachute.

41:00 So you had to get out of the parachute. So I had this thing, like a parachute cord, around the back of our Mae West, and the other end I think, was attached to your Mae West. Hooked on to yourself. You hook this on to your parachute cord and then you would release yourself out of your parachute. And then you would be hanging off your parachute cord by this other thing, and had a deadman switch on it, that if you pulled it too fast it

41:30 locked, if you let it go it locked, if you set it for the right amount and you could slowly slide down this cord to the ground and get away. Called a treescape. If you went too fast you would melt the parachute cord, so you just had to do it right. But that was an extra piece of equipment we had. And we had to carry a UHF [ultra high frequency] radio and we had a gun and you could take survival rations. If you ejected out you had stuff in your pockets they would all be torn out anyway, so you carried a few extra things.

42:03 End of tape

Tape 5

00:33 **So you have arrived?**

Yeah.

And how were you greeted?

There was an American contingent there to greet us. I think there might have been some Australian guys - the senior Australian guys in Vietnam came up to greet us. Like we weren't on an Australian base. Basically we took a couple of days to get organised with accommodation and intelligence briefings

01:00 and equipping ourselves out with weapons and this type of thing. Then we were in operational mode.

Can you describe the base?

Yes. Mainly flat base. Had two runways, one was a concrete runway, asphalt concrete asphalt. The other was a PSP [pier steel planking] runway, a

01:30 pier steel planking, or Marsden matting they used in World War II, all around the islands and New Guinea. Basically big sheets of steel with holes cut in it and you just lay it down on the dirt or the mud and land on top of it. I mean, you wouldn't see it today, but it was used then. More in outposts and they used to land high speed sophisticated aeroplanes on this bloody Marsden matting.

What was it like to

02:00 **take off and land on?**

It was noisy, clunk, clunk, clunk. As a matter of fact, I saw an aeroplane land on it once and the nose wheel collapsed. I just happened to be looking out the crew room window before I went off on my mission, a F-100 Super Sabre, pretty high speed aircraft, landed and the nose wheel collapsed. Just as I looked at it I saw a train of sparks and of course it pulled up very quickly. He's grinding away at the nose, so pretty spectacular.

Would have been a little alarming I imagine?

02:30 Yeah.

So, can you describe the rooms on the base?

Okay. Well we had our work area, our revetted parking for the aeroplanes, they were steel barriers put up, so if mortars came in or if anyone threw bombs in there or hand grenades or anything, they would be contained within that revetted area which had one aeroplane in it. So it wouldn't have an aeroplane that blew up as well as the next one and the next one.

03:00 That happened in Vietnam a few times. So each aircraft were individually revetted. We had a big hangar down there where the ground crew worked to maintain them. Because they are alarmed and everything while we are working there. And then adjacent to that we had our admin area and our briefing area. One building, the bottom floor - all the buildings we got there were transportable, two storey buildings. I think the air crew construction squad went up there and put them up.

03:30 The ground was all the admin people with all the records and everything. The crew room, intelligence, briefing, this type of thing, so we used to go up there and, initially we were flying at night, and we got our briefings, flight planning. You didn't have to put in a flight plan, it was a minimal type flight planning. Because you were all controlled in the air. That was that building and

04:00 the other building was, our accommodation was in another building some distance away and up a hill. I think we had say, there was one block of office accommodation, one of NCO [non commissioned officer] and one or two of airmen accommodation, two floors. We had two guys to a room. I think the senior guys up the top had their own room. Couple of wing commanders there, I think they had their own room each. Then there was a single

04:30 storey building which was our mess. Everything was just erected and put up in a basic state and left. It wasn't painted or anything like that. So with time we actually painted our rooms ourselves. Put air conditioners in. When we weren't flying at night and trying to sleep in the day, it was almost impossible. So we managed to swap... Remember I mentioned before we swapped cartons of beer, well we swapped cartons of beer for air conditioners with the Americans.

05:00 So.

Sounds like a good trade.

Well yes it was. I mean they basically got unlimited stuff, the Yanks.

Can you describe the accommodation in a bit more detail?

Well, it was just a room with slatted sides on it, so the air could come in it through there and light, one door, pretty narrow. Took two beds, and a walkway between the two, and I think we had one cupboard we shared.

05:30 And the wall didn't go right to the roof, it was about a foot and a half off the floor and that was the next room, so you could just talk to the guy next door. It was like a room divider. And that went all the way up the block.

What cubicles or something?

Yeah, and I think we dropped black paper or something down there because we used to fly at night and try and sleep during the day, and part of the day anyway, and you would all fly at different times. The first flight was -

06:00 we had a call sign of Magpie, which is the symbol on the 2 Squadron piping (UNCLEAR) it's a white magpie on a black background. 2 Squadron symbol. So our call sign was Magpie, "First aircraft Magpie one one. Second aircraft Magpie two two." That was our tactical call sign. One one might take off at 6.30, Magpie one two might take off at 7.30 and Magpie one three at 8.30, and the first one would come back at 11, 12, 1 in the morning and 2 in the

06:30 morning, and this sort of thing. So there would be comings and going through the night from the block as guys went out and come home from flying.

What was the routine?

Well, we were on night missions, we'd say starting from the evening meal, we would have our evening meal. And we would go to bed and try to sleep, if you were first off you wouldn't have time, but if you were off at 1 in the morning,

07:00 try and sleep for a couple of hours or you could sit up and read and the crew would turn up maybe an

hour or two hours before your flight, take you down for a briefing. Getting weapons out of your locker, getting kitted up to go flying. Do your pre flight. Then you would do your mission and then when you came back, depending on what time of day it was, still dark you would try and have a sleep. But if it was daylight,

07:30 we would normally have to front down at the crew room at about 9 or 10 or something and do work there for several hours in the day. So you just didn't fly at night and have a day off, perform other duties during the day.

Can you describe what would happen in the crew room?

I can remember you did - it was upstairs, you would go upstairs and you would go to your locker and get out of

08:00 your... no I think we were in our flying suits already. You change into your flying suit in your room, go to your locker you get your revolver out Browning 9 mil automatic revolver, automatic pistol not a revolver. Fit that on, we had a stock extender we would put that on, if you wore that. Some people had a holster, some had an underarm holder and some an around the waist holster. Get your Mae West and all that sort of thing.

08:30 You get your map, your map bag, your torch, your knife you had in your locker, you took flying with you. Maybe spare ammo. Then you would go to the briefing room and you would be briefed on the state of the war in South Vietnam. Enemy air activity, whether there's any aircraft, ground fire and different areas because we never... We were targeted for an area before we took off,

09:00 normally bomb that but sometimes the flight would change, so you would be briefed on the amount of ground to air, any aircraft fire, missiles, that could be fired at where the enemy troops were, the friendly troops were. So a full intelligence briefing. I can't quite remember the flight planning phase, but I think - I don't think we did much on the flight phase, but I knew where we were going, I knew the call sign. And that was it.

09:30 So at an appropriate time before you are due to go flying, you go downstairs, go across on the tarmac, once again check out the maintenance report with the crew chief and get the status of the aeroplane. Go across to the aeroplane and do your pre flight. It was more involved with the high explosive bomb, so you would give them a thorough going over and check where things were and the security of the bombs and the pistols and the wires and things like that.

10:00 And then start up at the appointed time and take off. Sometimes the base was in blackout conditions, there were no lights, so it was difficult negotiating your way around. Runway lights might be on when you take off and as soon as you take off they turn them off again. Because they didn't want the VC to see the actual position of a runway at night because they would come - sometimes they would come creeping in to mortar attack the aerodrome.

10:30 **How often?**

Just occasionally. They seemed to hit the American side a lot more than our side.

Why?

Maybe Aussies were nicer or something, or maybe we were - the base was defended by Americans for one third, South Vietnamese Army for one third and South Korean Army the other third.

11:00 Now the American side they had mine fields, they had barbed wire with tin cans hanging on the barbed wire. So it would rattle if anyone came past it. Machine gun nests. Mortar bases. They would be firing very, illuminating flares through the night. It would always be go on their side. Our side guarded by the South Koreans, which had a ring lock fence,

11:30 6 foot high fence, 8 foot high fence. South Koreans were further into the jungle or the bush. And the VC, virtually they stopped them before they got to the edge of the base. Ours was all quiet. The American side was a bloody World War III going on all the time over there. Every night with flares going up and machine guns firing. Our side was just dead quiet. Which makes me think they are sort of maybe overreacted a bit.

12:00 **The Americans?**

Yeah, they were seeing shadows. Or maybe the VC kept on attacking them and not us. I don't know why that was.

Was it geographical at all?

No, it was the edge of the base I don't think there was much difference. We had a couple of hills on the edge of ours. They denuded all the hills of all the bush and everything and cleared it back it a bit, they couldn't run in and hide behind the bushes and trees, it was pretty

12:30 denuded of vegetation.

What was the atmosphere like then if it was World War III going on, on the American side?

It was just the Yanks, that's just the way they were. We used to drive down from our huts in the crew van to get in an aeroplane and go flying and you would see all these flares going up and guns going off. I mean we were mortared, and after I left the base was mortared a lot more than when I was there but we had bunkers. We had to build our own bunkers.

What happened in the case of a mortar attack?

You just go to your bunker,

13:00 get in your bunker. Proceed wherever you were to the bunkers, workstations, bunkers are messes. The officers built their bunker, everyone built their own bunker.

Can you describe a bunker?

It's made of sand bags full of sand, probably to about 8 foot high where they - like an offset doorway to get in, so unless a mortar landed inside

13:30 it the shrapnel and shock wouldn't come inside the bunker. You come in the door and then another barrier and around the door like that. So once you were in there you were shielded from everything except a direct hit on top.

Do you recall sheltering from a mortar attack?

Yeah, I think a couple of times we had to get in there.

What was that experience like?

It was often just precautionary. You would hear something go off, you wouldn't know - it didn't land next to me or anything.

14:00 Just one of those things you expect in a war zone. I mean we were a bit lucky there weren't guys right there trying to bayonet us and shoot us. We were a bit more secure than the army guys who were out in the bush.

Did you feel secure?

I felt reasonably secure yeah. We had contingency plans if something happened. We would get an alert, we had a DC-3 fitted out with

14:30 machine guns, mini guns, puff the magic dragon. It was there it could take off and just obliterate an area with a 7.62 machine gun fire, light machine gun. There were plenty of troops around, and we all had weapons, all our ground staff had weapons. If necessary we would have pulled back and defended our area. But while I was there they didn't have to do that.

15:00 What was day to day life like at the base?

Well much the same as any air force base, we had one big mess. Normally there was the officers' mess, the sergeants' mess and NCOs' mess. We had a great big mess with dividers. The kitchen area was all the same at the back, all the food was prepared together, just the officers sat together. You lined up and got your food like any mess. It wasn't much different.

15:30 If we had a movie, an indoor movie, the dividers would be moved and we would end up with one big room, and we would all sit there together and watch a movie, which we had movies up there.

Do you remember what sort of movies you were seeing?

No. No way, just movies. We had an outdoor movie theatre as well. And, now this is - a couple of times we had Australian groups come up to entertain us. And there was a stage at the picture theatre and they would get up on the stage and sing.

16:00 The only one I can really remember is the Copper Kettles. I have got some photos there. The Copper Kettles was the one group I can remember coming to entertain us. And we would sit outside on chairs, take all the chairs outside and sit there and watch the entertainment or a movie if it was a movie at night time.

What kind of profile did the Copper Kettles have at the time?

I had never heard much of them until then, but they were a pretty entertaining group, they were really good.

What sort of music did they play?

16:30 I don't know, 60s music. It was pop music, it was good. Maybe a bit ballad-ey sort of thing. I liked it, I wasn't a rock'n'roll fan, I mean I followed them but I preferred the folk music. No, they were good.

So, what would happen on operation, what kind of operation?

Okay, that's the other thing. Just one thing I will tell you about, the outdoor theatre.

17:00 We would be sitting out there, I only found this out later, we did have a mosquito problem and they

bombed it and sprayed it and tried to kill them. But quite often they would spray from the air. And we had this squadron, I think it was 2 or 3 of C123 providers, which were jungle defoliators, the big array of sprays, put agent orange into them and various other chemicals, spray the jungle, kill all the leaves on the trees so the army could go in there and see, or from the air they could observe and

17:30 make sure there were no ground troops in there. A few times we were sprayed with fly spray, anti insect spray, by these same airplanes with their big array of sprays. I found out later that they didn't used to drain the tanks and clean them out, they used to pour the fly spray, the DDT or whatever it was, in with the agent orange and they would spray us, and you would be sitting there and this stuff would be running down your face with a cocktail of agent orange and fly spray.

18:00 Not that we knew, it didn't worry us, but it was quite interesting when you think back on it. I particularly remember it running down my face and it was always running into the V of your neck.

Alarming in retrospect.

Yes it is. In operation, right, we would take off you talk to various air traffic control agencies in the tower and that and then you would revert to

18:30 some enroute control unit. There was some sort of military unit that wouldn't separate you but they would just direct you to an area. So we would be directed from one TACAN - which is tactical air navigation aid. Anyway, gives you a bearing distance from a point, so they would say go to the bearing

19:00 TACAN 19042, which is a bearing of 190 degrees at 42 miles. You go there and they would direct you somewhere else. So we used to move around the country from bearing distance from TACAN to another TACAN and eventually they would direct you to a bearing distance of a TACAN that was in range of a combat sky spot unit. This is while we were doing night bombing. Combat sky spot. And they - these were radars

19:30 that were developed for the B-52 B-47, big American strategic bombers, in America. When they test they would scramble them and tell them go and bomb this target, simulated bombing and they would have these big radars on trains and they would drive them around America and position the radar there, and then would come in the B-52s. And I would talk to this radar and I would say, "Right, I am running on target no. 7. I have got this bomb load so and so." The ground radar

20:00 would look at them coming in and it would say, "Okay, we know where they are, we've got the top bomb sight, we've got the terminal velocity time of 4. We know the average weather, the flight of the bomb." And the navigator, or whoever dropped the bomb, would press the button and then at bomb release it would release it, so a tone would come out and the tone come off. The ground radar would look at that position and say, "Right, was at this position, flying at that heading, and that track with a back ground speed,

20:30 wind velocity - " Or that bomb with that terminal velocity therefore his bomb should have hit plonk. If you work it out with a computer it should have hit there. Back plot that to the target. You missed your target by 100 metres or 20 metres or whatever. This is how they test their strategic air command bombers in America. Or they did in those days. These radars would be moved around the country on the train to check out the accuracy of the bombers. They took them to Vietnam and

21:00 used them in reverse. We used to call them and they would identify us and they would guide us in to release point, knowing our height, our ground speed at track, our type of bomb with wind velocity, the average - we used to give them the wind at altitude on the ground and they would average it out. And they would tell us when to release them and it would land on some target in the jungle that we couldn't even see, it was black, no lights there, no one on the ground, no forward air controller to tell us where it was.

21:30 But they, intelligence had worked out during the day there was a VC concentration or a camp or something like that and we would bomb them all. We work up on them during the day so they could not evade us at night. The Ho Chi Minh trail, we used bomb up the edge of the Ho Chi Minh trail at night using combat sky spot radar. And that was our night type mission. Medium level, I can't remember 10 or 15,000 feet or somewhere near there. Out of the

22:00 effective ground fire but still within missile fire.

So what danger was there on those operations?

We could have been shot down by anti aircraft guns or missiles. We could collide with some other aeroplane because some nights you would be flying with your lights off, because if you flew with your lights on they would see you. At night time, I was told if you saw the flash, a muzzle flash from a rifle, it was pointed at you. You would often see muzzle

22:30 flashes and when you came lower you saw a lot of muzzle flashes. They were guessing as to where you are because if you have got your lights off, they could hear a noise, hear an aeroplane. Normally the aeroplane is in front of the noise and they are trying to lead and shoot at you. Occasionally they would hit the aeroplane.

Was yours hit?

Mine wasn't. No. But several aircraft were hit while I was there and later on they had a lot of hits, like a bullet hole through the tail, the wing, that sort of thing.

Any planes were lost?

Two.

23:00 **While you were there?**

No, after I left. We had 8 Canberras, bombers. 9 crews and we lost two of those Canberras. I went there in 62 and I think I pulled out in 72, so in 5 years they lost two of their 9 aircraft. One crew ejected safely and the other crew still up there they never got their bodies. But we did lose a fair proportion of our fleet.

23:30 2 out of 8.

How long were the flights in those operations?

I think they were about 2.5 to 3 hours.

How would you occupy yourself during that time?

Well, you are always doing something. We would always have - we would have one mission but we would have two targets. We might have a target - the country was divided up into corps 1 to 4. One corps was on the demilitarised zone between north and South Vietnam. Two corps,

24:00 three corps was south of that and four corps was the Delta, the southern part of Vietnam. We might have a target in 1 corps, we might have to drop 5 x 500 lb bombs on that, so we would go all the way up there and we would bomb that. Then we would have another target, maybe 4 corps and go all the way down there and bomb that. Or we might have two targets in one corps. I don't know, it varied. And occasionally the target would be cancelled.

24:30 They would tell us it was wrong or that someone else had bombed it or they wanted to change it. They would say, "There is only one target, we only want those bombs. The second target is cancelled, jettison your bombs and go home." We never jettisoned bombs. We would say, "Then give us another target to drop our bombs on." "We haven't got any." "We'll just orbit and wait." Orbit maybe half an hour, three quarters of an hour, they would always come up with another target, to go out to the different... I believe they used to go out to the different units, the American units and that and say,

25:00 "We've got a Canberra up here with 4 or 5 bombs on it, 500 lb bombs, do you have a target?" "Yes, we want to bomb that hill. Because we know the enemy is just sitting over there." So we often - while I was there we never took any bombs back that I am aware of. We always bombed them on target.

What bomb loads were you carrying?

Initially we

25:30 just dropped Australian bombs, World War II bombs. The HMAS Sydney, one of our old aircraft carriers, I think it might have been a helicopter carrier at that stage. But the Sydney was used to transport all the bombs to Vietnam for 2 Squadron. Very old World War II bombs, about 22 years old or older. We would either carry 6 1000 lb

26:00 bombs, or between 8 and 10 x 500 lb bombs. And then later on when we used up all the World War II stocks of bombs, dropped the whole lot. We dropped a huge bomb load up there, 2 Squadron. 8 aeroplanes every day dropping 8 to 10 bombs, a huge number of bombs. I personally dropped 840 something bombs in 6 months. We dropped a lot of bombs. After

26:30 that we reverted to American bombs, 750 lb bombs.

So does your total tally include the American bombs?

I might have dropped some of the American bombs, but it was only a few at the end there. I worked out once years ago, I think it was 840 something bombs.

Did you bomb Laos at all?

Everything in South Vietnam. We had no defensive measures on our aeroplane. We couldn't see behind us,

27:00 we didn't have any tail warning radar, we didn't have any radar homing warning system like they have got on the aeroplanes now. We had nothing, so someone fired a missile at us, or someone come up behind us to shoot at us, we didn't know. So we were kept in South Vietnam where we supposedly had air superiority. I am not saying some aircraft when they were out near the Ho Chi Minh trail on the Laotian border, Cambodian border,

27:30 North Vietnamese border, did not respond to some emergency. But our brief was to never bomb outside South Vietnam. So often we were on the border, but we were supposedly not put in an area where there was enemy aircraft. The Americans had South Vietnam - by the time we got there they had the North Vietnamese Air Force kept at bay.

28:00 **What was the atmosphere like when you would embark on a mission?**

It was serious and pretty tense I suppose, you did not want to do one thing wrong. Not only were we - when it was our own safety fine, but we were carrying such huge bomb loads

28:30 and you do something wrong you don't want to drop bombs on your own troops. So we had to be as professional as we could, as accurate as we could. We were given co-ordinates for most of our targets and we had maps and we checked them and a couple of times we queried them, "Hang on. I'm not sure we are in the exact place." They would hold us off and check again. We did not want to drop a bomb in the wrong place.

29:00 And as far as I know we didn't. I definitely know I didn't and my crew didn't. Never in the whole time did we ever bomb friendlies. I am pretty sure we didn't.

What about other squadrons?

Well, I can't say much about them, but I know artillery and enemy aircraft, there were incidents where friendlies were bombed. Or mortared or something.

What would you do when you returned from an operation?

29:30 Well, maybe I should tell you about when we got the bombs how we did it. Do you want to hear about that?

Yeah, sure.

When we were on this bombing run, we would have the target and they would tell us we are all set up. We had 5 bombs and I could select the number of bombs where they all drop from. We had a special sequence to keep the aircraft at the centre of gravity. I would select, say they wanted 5 bombs or 6 bombs. Start to run and they would say, "You've got 1 minute to go." "Right."

30:00 They might give us a 30 second mark. At this stage we would probably open the bomb doors. We had a master safety switch, because all the bombs are internal inside the aeroplane and you had to open the bomb doors to release them. Bomb doors came out, two shell type things came out halfway. The bombs were exposed to the air flow just inside the aeroplane. Stacked up in threes, one on the bottom and two above it, like

30:30 three groups of three, maybe one on each wing tip or something like that. The bomb doors go open, the pilot can have to select the master safety switch on, without that switch on pressing the bomb release button would not release the bombs. Another safety area. The navigator would be lying in the nose, that's where we always bomb from, he had a bomb release button up there. The sky spot would say something like, "5, 4, 3, 2, 1 hack." When they said the word 'hack',

31:00 you released the bomb. You couldn't anticipate or anything, so you had to drop on hack. They would be on the radar picture watching us with things caught up in computers and everything. So when you dropped the bombs, no, night time you couldn't see them all, but day time, when you drop them during the day you would see all your bombs fall out, you could count them.

31:30 We would then just deviate off course 10 degrees or something, I just can't remember. I knew the fall of the bombs depending on the height, might be 6 seconds or something like that. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and he would roll the aeroplane on the side, he could look through his nose cone, he could look through the canopy we had to count every bomb. We dropped 6 bombs we want to see 6 splashes. If one didn't go off we would have to report back because the Viet Cong would be down there and they would

32:00 hear the bombs hitting - bang, bang, bang, bang, and they would know there's one in the middle that that hasn't gone off. Now we could drop delayed fuse bombs, they might go off an hour later, but what they would do is they would tunnel down, dig the bomb out, set it up as a booby trap and get ground troops. And it's a bloody big bomb. Inch and a half of steel around an explosive, like half the weight of the bomb was the

32:30 bomb, so 500 lb bomb might be 250 lb of steel the rest is charge and tail and fuses. And that steel would just break up into pieces, to hand size pieces and fly supersonic and just slice everything in half. So we couldn't afford to have our bombs being used as booby traps. So we would count them, and if one didn't go off I didn't have one go off, tell them to send an SAS [Special Air Service] team to detonate

33:00 it. Our bombs were pretty good, we had nose and tail fuses. So the if the nose fuse didn't go off the tail fuse would. Or visa versa. So you roll on the side and count them and come up and tell them, ground agency, you have seen them all go off. Then they would send you on your way to your next target. Daylight bombing was different that was for the night type bombing. And then when you had finished they would say RTB, return to base.

33:30 You would go home and call up and often the aerodrome would be in blackness. Because they didn't want the VC to see them and mortar them, so you would come in and they would put a strobe on for a short period of time which was a - do you know what a strobe light is? It is a very bright light that pulsates and they would have sequential strobe that would go brrrt like that and point at the runway. They put them on you

34:00 so you could see which runway to land on and then it would go off again and you would position yourself, and they would... The good, big, let down from a 12 mile radius around a two drop let down, so we weren't flying close to the runway until we were ready to land. Then they put the lights on you for you to land and turn them off again.

So approaching the runway were you a bit anxious?

Well, when you come in there you come down low.

34:30 I remember one flight I was with Ron, I think it was Ron, we were like a beam on the runway dropping down to, I think about 1000 feet above the ground or something, and the next thing this almighty whoosh and a big unguided rocket was sent at us from the ground. They must have been sitting there listening to the aeroplanes going around and working out when they go over from the noise, and fired this unguided missile. Went whoosh and just missed the aeroplane, a huge great flame and this rocket went shooting up in the air, but they

35:00 missed us. When we landed we reported that and they sent a gun check out there and just blasted the area. You would never know if you got the rocket or not.

It makes you wonder why that area wasn't more secure?

The thing is this is 5 k away from the runway in the middle of the night. Mate, everyone comes back and gets on the perimeter night time, some of the SAS troops and that sort of

35:30 thing, but an aerodrome is a big piece of land. And to go out 5 or 10 k around the whole thing at night and secure it it's almost impossible. The VC comes sneaking in at night, fire their rockets shoot their mortars, fire at the aeroplanes and then sneaks out again. There's nothing there. They were fighting their war and they had their techniques and we were fighting ours. We were more sophisticated but not necessarily more successful.

36:00 How did you unwind when you got back from an operation?

We had a debrief, we would take our flying gear off and our weapons put them back. This crew room that we went to was upstairs. Remember I said the room down stairs was the admin area, the floors were made of pine. With this browning 9 mm pistol, it had 15 shots or something in it, it was quite a few shots.

36:30 What you do is you come back, and of course you put a loaded magazine into it. So on a gun if you pull the action back and let it go, it picks up a round and pushes it up into the chamber. And you have to check that your gun has no bullets left in it when you hand it back. You open the action, you physically look down the barrel, if it's clear you fire the action and it sends the firing mechanism forward, but there is no

37:00 bullet there so close, and that's it, hand your gun in, your magazine and your spare ammunition, whatever you got. This particular guy, pilot, I don't know how he did it, but apparently he came back and he must have not pulled the magazine out and pulled the action back, and he couldn't have looked down the, there would be no round in the barrel, but there would be a magazine there, just sitting there.

37:30 Released the action and pulled it forward, bang, fired it, a bullet fired out of it and slammed into one of the desks down stairs. Couldn't believe his eyes, pulled it back again and looked at it, let it go and fired it and another bullet went through the floor and then someone took the gun off him. So, lucky it was night time there was no one downstairs, someone got a shot, two slugs right into his desk.

38:00 There were a few other incidents where someone fired a machine gun in the hangar, and I don't know whether you have ever fired a machine gun or a military weapon, once they start firing they tend to - they move away from you and to hold on to them you have got to hold the nose down or it will try and lift up in the air. So you are holding it tight and if you are holding the trigger you are probably holding it tighter. This guy couldn't believe he had done it, accidentally done it, and it's pulling it up on the air, and he fired the whole magazine off into the hangar roof.

38:30 Everyone's lying on the floor holding their head. There were lots of accidents like that, but they didn't injure anyone.

Was he disciplined?

Well, no one wanted to work with him after that, did they. He would have been retrained, it would have been part of his training so they would have taken him out on the range and trained him until he knew that gun back to front. Remember all these guys have all got a technical job to do, they have got to service the aeroplane, load up the bombs, that's

39:00 lots of jobs to do.

What sort of relationship did you have with the ground crew?

Good, yeah, good. We had worked with them before at Butterworth, and in Australia.

The same ground crews?

A lot of them were, yes. I had been on Canberras since early 1963, and it was early 1967, so I had been on Canberras for 4 years. I had been on them quite a while, I had quite a few hours up, and knew all the ground crew personally. I always got on well with the ground crew.

What kind of relationship did you have with them?

39:30 Well, we were officers and there were some NCOs and there were others. Airmen, we are not supposed to have a close personal relationship with them, but I mean we always rely on them, they are professional and keep us up in the air. You didn't want to have a bad relationship with them, you trusted them. I mean, I admired their job that they did and respected them, and they respected me and they knew that I

40:00 wouldn't - we worked together as a team. No, it was good. They were good workers. I have still got friends now that are Vietnam veterans. I am in ex 2 Squadron who worked on the aeroplanes.

What kind of things would you do when you were on the ground?

You would hand all your gear back, clean your weapon hand it in. Hand back all your maps, because a lot of the stuff that you had was classified and to go back to

40:30 intelligence people, and then you would go up to the mess to see if you could get a drink. But if you came back and the CO we had then, at 11 o'clock he would say, "Okay." We'd get in about 11 o'clock and he'd say, "Right, close the mess." The next crew would be walking in the door and couldn't get a beer. Got a good story to tell about that.

41:02 End of tape

Tape 6

00:30 You were going to tell us about some sort of amusing story?

Okay, on the post flight, night flying, back to the mess for a drink, after the first few months I was crewed with the CO, first flight out, call sign Magpie one one. We'd get back to the mess at say quarter eleven or something like that, get a beer and the CO, who was my pilot would say, "Okay 11 o'clock

01:00 we'll close the mess, no more drinks." And there would be one crew that wouldn't be flying. So there would be 8 Canberras 9 crews, so you fly 8 days and have 1 day off. There'd be other members there, like the doctor and the engineers and accountants and a few other people. They could drink, and as he shut the mess the next bomber crew would be walking in the mess, they have shut, no beer.

01:30 So we didn't think this was very fair. So he would close the mess and go up to his room and have a shower, and before he would go to bed he would come and have a look to make sure it was shut. He'd lift up all the Eskys, he would lift up all the soft drink, we had soft drink in Eskys, look under them to make sure we didn't have any beer under them for the crew. I mean we were officers, so it was a bit childish. So what we would do, I would feel guilty, I would get a beer or two beers and these guys would get none. One of the airmen we used to employ as our barman, we used to pay him

02:00 money or beer or something and he would serve us.

It's all about the beer isn't it?

Yeah, it's all about the beer. All life's about beer, all through, yes. So what we used to do, a couple of us, was climb into the big fridge, it was quite a big stainless steel freezer, we'd climb in there, the barman, me and a couple of other guys. And when old Rolf, the CO, would come round checking, the doors were shut, there was no beer, we'd hold on to the inside of the door, and you could feel him trying to pull it

02:30 open. He'd say, "Yes, that's locked." Turn all the lights off, go up to his room. We'd wait a few minutes, shivering, lights on and beer again. Next crew would come in, sometimes 4 o'clock in the morning, yo, the full party, 3 or 4 crews there. It was good, and then Rolf would wake up for a pee. And come down. So sprung again, so the punishment was painting out the CO's office.

03:00 I must have painted it about a half a dozen times I suppose. Ground crew would be there and you would see all these flying officers painting out the office. It got painted 20 times. It was a bit childish but in the end he weakened and he said, "Alright, you can have 4 cans each in the crew room." So when we came back we would sit down and have a couple of beers. Which was all the guys wanted really, but. So he tried to operate it on

03:30 Australian 9-5 type hours, operate the mess in those hours in a war environment, and it was completely unreasonable. He got the nickname 'Old Mother'.

How did that affect your relationship with him considering the fact that you were in the fridge holding the door shut and he was out...?

He never held it against me. I saw him years later, he always said he fondly remembered me and said I was a good navigator and all this sort of thing. So, maybe in his younger days

04:00 he was a bit wild, I don't know, but you would think he - and when I think back I thought he was an old man. A silly man, old woman, but he was probably only 45. And I am 61 now and I can't ever imagine acting like him, but that was the way it was, I was 24. He was probably 45.

But he was twice your ageish?

Yeah, but I worked with guys 20 years younger than me

04:30 and I have never acted like that to them. But anyway, that was the way he was.

What did your area look like because I understand you had to build your area from the ground up, literally?

Yep. That's true, yep. We had just the basic huts and the mess there. And it was just red dirt. We would fly at night and try and sleep for a few hours in the morning. There would be a bloody grader going up the side grading a road or something. You'd be lying there hot and sweaty,

05:00 didn't have fans, nothing in those days. And all this red dust would come in through the slats in the walls, and settle on your chest and be red mud dripping down your chest and you were trying to sleep, and it was just impossible. So what we did then, we swapped beer, with the Yanks and other things, and we got...

Could they not get hold of beer?

Yeah, but the Aussie beer is better. They have a funny system. Their officers could drink

05:30 spirits and beer in their mess, and the airmen were not allowed to drink spirits. In Vietnam, the Americans, unless they were commissioned or non commissioned, could not get a bourbon or scotch or a gin or anything like that, they could only get beer. They liked Aussie beer, that's what we traded, we got it quite cheap. So we traded for the sound proofing blocks, you know, the stuff they put on the roof of buildings, and

06:00 air conditioners. And two guys to a hut and we got in there and nailed all these things on the wall and someone put in the air conditioner in for us, we painted it out and made it quite nice. Dark and soundproof so we were trying to sleep during the day, you could sleep. The graders could be going outside and the mortars could be going off and you didn't really worry too much. And you would be fit to fly the next night. So that was the thing. But apart from that, just walking from one

06:30 block like to the toilet block, you would be walking through the mud, so we put in concrete paths. We made all the formants ourself and then concrete trucks. I guess they were runway concrete trucks would come up and we'd pour it and all the officers did theirs, the NCOs did theirs and the airmen did theirs. We had paths to our mess, shower block ourselves and put in some grass and a few plants at one stage.

07:00 A couple of the guys were keen on - cut the grass with scissors, because it was just dry, and barren and hopeless. You might as well say it was a miserable place I am going to be miserable for 6 months to a year, or you can try and make something of it. So yeah, so I have got pictures of everyone there. Matter of fact one of the guys in one of the pictures, he took his shirt off when he was shovelling sand or it might have been when we were building the bunkers, was Darryl

07:30 McCormack who later became chief of the air staff. Air Marshall Darryl McCormack, he was there with the rest of us shovelling sand into the bunkers.

What were the ablutions like, the showers and the toilets?

That was one thing that we got, the Air Field Construction Squadron came up to Phan Rang, put in a proper shower block, push button toilets, showers and concrete floor. And an area there for a washing machine. We

08:00 had basic accommodation and nice hygienic toilet block. You go to the American area where some of us used to go up there, they had an air conditioned bar with poker machines, sometimes singers in there singing. And you walk outside and they are living in tents, they have got duck boards in the mud for having showers and a long drop toilet, just a hole in the ground. Their whole concentration was on, their

08:30 effort was on entertainment and then hygiene. Ours was hygiene not on entertainment. We got it right, I reckon they got it wrong.

That was a pretty big cultural difference.

You think so for supposedly sophisticated country, yeah. No, our planners did it right. And we set our mess up ourselves, and eventually we painted it and we added bits and pieces and a bar.

Bits and pieces, like what?

Extended

09:00 the bar and put some chairs in and some shelves and stuff like that. Basic things. Yeah.

How far away were you from the Americans?

Long way. Basically they were on the other side of the runway of the aerodrome. Some of their living quarters were near ours. The officers' club, I think we could walk there. It's just so far back now, but you could walk to that, but the rest of the area

09:30 was miles away.

How did they treat the Aussies?

Yep, they liked us. They liked us. They wanted as many partners in that war as they could get. Like they have in the recent Iraqi war, the more friendly countries they can get the better they feel. We were the only ones with attack aircraft. Because they had the South Koreans,

10:00 Philipinos, Thai, New Zealand, Australia at least countries supporting them. Australia, I think, were the only ones supplying the attack aircraft for them. And they actually had the equivalent aircraft, they had the B-57s like I said before, similar to our Canberra, for the first few months I was there, and then they were flying over North Vietnam, they were losing lots of aircraft, all the crews were getting killed.

10:30 They gave the last remaining few to the South Vietnamese Air Force and most of them were written off on mortar bomb attacks, Bien Hoa, something like that. But the Americans continued with the Super Sabres and the fighter bomber and C-213s and a whole bunch of aircraft at our base.

What do you think about the training that the American pilots and navigators had in comparison to your own?

11:00 Look I - after this I went to America and trained on the F-111 with the Americans, it was a very sophisticated aircraft. I personally reckon the Americans are a very slack air crew. We always had Americans in our squadron exchange officers on Canberras.

Exchange officers so you would be swapping?

Yeah, so we would have Australian officers in America. Exchange officers with Pakistan, we would have Pakistan pilots and different countries. But I have been with an American who has been flying with his feet up on

11:30 the console, sitting on the rotor pedals, smoking a cigar in the aeroplane. Aeroplane, an oxy mask, which is pure oxygen, smoking a cigar. Feet on the console, smoking a cigar.

You can kaboom with oxygen.

Just completely slack. If he had engine failure, he hasn't got rudder control. You just ditch in, low level flying over the sea.

Do you think the Americans were slack in the Vietnam war?

A lot of them were, yes. A lot of them were professional

12:00 the same as us I guess. But they were slack. I just don't think generally they are as professional as Australian pilots, air crew. That's my impression. They lost a lot of men there, maybe they got blasé and said, "Well, life's short enjoy it." I don't know.

When in comparison to the missions the Americans were on to the ones to that you guys were on, did they have more casualties than yourselves?

Yeah, probably

12:30 did. We didn't have planes going into North Vietnam. When they were going into North Vietnam they had a huge loss rate. Because that was completely hostile territory. They supposedly had air superiority and you got shot down from the ground. Okay we did get 2 aeroplanes shot down, but they went into more horrendous areas than we did. No, reflecting on it I can't compare with that type of flying. Their general

13:00 approach to things. We wouldn't jettison bombs, we had a huge - I don't know the statistics they are there somewhere, but we had a very, very high efficiency rate, take offs, missions hitting our target. Very, very high, way higher than any of the Americans. So that says something. We were more persistent, maybe more professional. Maybe they were easier targets I don't know, but the results show that we had a very - one stage there

13:30 we were the leading squadron in the whole American Wing for getting bombs on targets.

How do you sort of keep track of those statistics at the time, was there a sort of competition going on?

Yeah, there was a bit. I can't remember when, every Friday or Monday or something, there was a meeting in the commander's office, and they would show all the statistics of all the squadrons. How many targets, how many bombs, the percentage hit rate.

14:00 We always came out very good except for bomb damage assessment. Because we didn't have anyone to go and check to see what the damage was. Initially we didn't anyway, but later on we did. So we would have all these bombs dropping on target on time dit, da dit dat dit. Bomb damage assessment nil. Americans would have 50 metres of trench, 50 killed by air, all this sort of thing. It didn't look right. It became obvious after a while they send little aeroplanes out

14:30 to check after we bombed.

Were they different height levels that you would be dropping bombs from?

Yeah, I just can't remember, I think it was between 10, 15 to 18,000 for that. For that night type bombing, combat sky squad. We did a couple of missions in the day using it, but normally night. Later on we went to low level bombing with the forward air controller, that was different. I haven't spoken about that yet, but that

15:00 just came in as I was leaving. I did some sorties on that, and later Canberras for about a year or so, we were doing half each and later they were doing just about all low level, visual, forward air control bombing.

What was the benefit in changing that?

They didn't trust our level - the Americans didn't understand our level of bombing and didn't trust it. We dropped bombs in a level mode, they always dive bombed. They don't understand bombing other than dive bombing. And it took us all that time to prove that we could drop our bombs steady on target.

15:30 Initially our low level bombing was done by using Australian forward air controller in Australian area. And they observed and they eventually said, "Alright, your system of bombing is accurate, we will let you go and drive the target." It took a while to convince them. Our system was a World War II system, they had used it through World War II, for years and years. So when we got low level bombing, I think we might have started at about 3,000 feet and eventually might have gone about 1500

16:00 feet. But you always had to pull up at a 3,000, 3300 depending on your bomb. So you got out of - you just got down to the 1% chance of being hit by your own bomb. The 1% was acceptable. 5% weren't.

Why did they change it to the low level if they weren't...?

Because that was our normal method of bombing. That's how we bombed in Australia. We had been bombing for years and years and years, we know we are accurate, we know we can drop our bombs within about 20 metres of the target. Americans assessed we did this

16:30 high level sky spot because they weren't game to let us drop visual low level.

I get you.

Yeah, it was only after so much - saw our professionalism, all the bombs we dropped, and we never mucked up and then we did some low level in the Australian corps and they let us loose to do it. They controlled the war, we didn't.

Surely the higher up you are is the safest position to be?

Yeah, but it's not as accurate. We were dropping on their radar call. Their

17:00 radar. How accurate is that? When we are down low level, we are bombing on a smoke rocket, forward air controller, little low light aircraft, he's flying around he's talking to the ground troops, they say, "We've got VC in the bush over here, we want you to hit that area just north of that hill." He flies around they see him they want to shoot him down, because he's going to call in bombers. He then moves off, he fires an orange smoke marker, we come down and he says, "See my orange smoke marker." "Yep." We hold off. "I am going to fire a phosphorous rocket," or

17:30 something. You know 80 metres to the west of that, "That's where I want you to aim for." So he came in and you might fire another coloured rocket and change after that so he might say, "Release 10 metres left of that." Drop your bomb, and you have got your crossing on a smoking rocket there. And then when sometimes you see enemy troops running around just as you releasing it. Pull up, look down, check your bombs gone off. He comes in and looks at what damage you have done, if you have killed anyone or

18:00 what he can see, or trenches knocked out, or weigh points, or weapons storage points, or ammunition storage or something like that.

And, what sort of a plane is that small plane that you just mentioned?

It's called a forward air controller. It could either be a single engined piston aircraft, or they had Cessna 337's twin engine propeller one at the front and one at the back, push pull. Used them for a while, twin boom tail, little jet aeroplane. But they

18:30 are smaller lower flying more manoeuvrable aeroplanes. It can fly in low, close to the enemy, I mean we come thundering in at 350 knots. 700 kms an hour. We drop our bombs from several miles back. They hit the ground within 6 seconds they are there. So we are not really suitable for flying around seeing

individual bunches of troops.

That sounds like a pretty

19:00 **stupid job to have.**

It is and not only that, if he's flying along peacefully, they see him, they all stop. If he starts orbiting them, they start shooting at him. Because if he's orbiting because he's seen them, he's going to call in bombers. So they shoot him down.

Is he armed?

Yeah, with a rifle and revolver or something. And a smoke rockets, he might have had a little mini gun, but that's not good enough, who knows, they might have had - God knows what they might have had.

So it's just one guy in a plane?

Forward air controller. And

19:30 that's quite a few of our fighter pilots went up there as forward air controllers. Because they couldn't go up as fighter pilots, because they wouldn't allow our French Mirage fighters to go to Vietnam. It was only bomber pilots and navigators going up there. The fighter pilots went up and a lot of them trained as forward air controllers. Quite a few of them won bravery awards for flying low and slow, right in the face of the enemy. Basically trying to attract fire so they could get their target and call in the bombers.

20:00 **So they were Australians as well?**

Oh yeah, Australians. We started out bombing with Australians but sometimes it would be Americans, yes.

It seems like one of the most high risk jobs I have ever heard of.

Yeah, but what if you were an army scout. You go through all the trip wires, just waiting for you. They can wipe out the scouts, you know.

But as far as aircraft are concerned.

It is a very dangerous job,

20:30 I agree. If they shoot him out of the air he can't call us in. That's their aim. I have been up with one of them in a flight out of Phan Rang, he was an army guy, based there. He was more of artillery, they called him artillery, it's like calling in an aircraft. And I went with him and he had a little smoke - a little rocket firing thing on the left wing and a machine gun on the right wing. A little 180 it was.

Was this a mission you went up on?

Yeah, I volunteered to

21:00 go to see what his side of the work was. We were flying around and you see all these people in black pyjamas walking along, he'd say, "They are not VC, they are VC."

How could he tell?

He just reckoned he knew, I don't know. They all looked the same to me in black pyjamas. Fly around and then we didn't call in any artillery or that but coming back he knew an area where he fired off all his mini guns and rockets. I think it was just to impress me, but we were very close to them.

21:30 They are looking up at you. If we had orbited, and they were VC they would probably have taken some reaction, I don't know. They are cowboys, but they are brave.

You volunteered for this exercise because of why?

Because I wanted to see his job. He said if anyone wants to come along, come. Couple of us went.

I suppose it's good to see the other guy's perspective.

22:00 When your number's up your number's up. I wasn't really putting myself into danger I don't think. If you go around worrying what is going to happen to you, you'll have a miserable life and you probably get run over by a bus, looking behind for the taxi that's going to run you over.

Did these guys get a high level of respect from folk such as yourself?

Yep, yep. Forward air controllers yeah, a high level of respect. As a matter of fact, I think Vance Drummond was our

22:30 forward air controller that initially we did our trials with, and he died some years ago, but he was a very experienced fighter pilot. I think he was even a Korean War fighter pilot. He was highly experienced respected fighter pilot. He volunteered to go up there as a forward air controller. Yep. True image making hero sort of person.

Would they do 6 month or 12 month tours?

I am not sure, normal tour is 12 months.

23:00 I was a bit lucky I only did 6 months.

I was just wondering considering the high level of risk involved with the job?

Yeah, I don't know I am not sure. Everything was planned on a 12 month tour, army, navy, air force - navy had guys in Vietnam with choppers, I think it was all 12 months.

Are their any sort of safety features in the bomber that say if you do get hit and you do come crashing down, is there - have you got a parachute

23:30 **can you eject out of there?**

Yeah, ejection seat. Canberra bombers were built between, I think it was 1953 and 1955. They were designed in World War II. Quite an old aeroplane. I think there are still a few flying today around the world. But in the 60s they were in their heyday. An old fashioned ejection seat. Martin Baker 11 ejection seat.

24:00 You pulled the face blind down and it fired you out of the aeroplane.

That was a thing here?

Face blind, yeah. Later ejection seats you pulled on a handle or between your legs or something but ours had a face blind, you got the face blind pulled it down, bang out you went. You didn't have boyangs on your legs, so you didn't have your legs tucked in. They were out here, the air flow would get them. They would flap around and break in about 3 places. Later model seats have boyangs to pull your legs in so they couldn't flail out. By pulling your face blind you keep your

24:30 arms to your side, because if they went out they would all break into bits from the air flow. So anything that separated it, below a certain altitude it popped the seat belt, you then had to force yourself away from the seat. The later ones have an apron that pushes you away. So we used a pretty basic ejection seat. You know it had been used, it was used in Vietnam two crews got out. So we had

25:00 an ejection seat. And of course the minimum for ours was 1000 feet 250 knots straight and level. If you are under 1000 feet if you are less than 250 knots, you weren't straight and level if you had your wing down a bit or your nose down, you were going to break a leg or worse, not survive. That was a minimum situation to get out safely. You are higher, faster better, slower because the air flow doesn't pull your parachute out properly

25:30 or you don't clear the aircraft properly. Aeroplanes nowadays are zero, zero. Zero height zero speed. Just fire out of the aeroplane and you are safe. But we had to do be at a height and some speed.

What the ejection seat actually propels you to such a distance that...

Nowadays they do, yes.

It's safe to do it at any level. That's a hell of a lot of propulsion that you are sitting on.

Yeah, well I mean I later trained on the F-111

26:00 and you could actually be under the water. I mean you wouldn't fire your rocket under water, you could break away and fire to the surface. But you could be zero, zero it's got a proper rocket at the back of the ejection, the whole canopy goes away. The back of the canopy becomes a wing that actually flies. Two stage rocket and two directional rocket that flies you forward and up allowing your parachute to deploy, your parachute to float you down.

26:30 It's far more sophisticated methods than our poor old Martin Baker 1CC in the Canberra.

With the thing that you pull down, you have got to let go otherwise...?

No, you pull it down bang, and you are going up - I have been ejected, I have been in an ejection trainer. You pull it down and you feel the jolt, look out you are up in the air and that's it.

What does the trainer look like then?

Just a big rack that goes up - not quite vertical

27:00 at a slight angle, you sit in on the ground, bang, you feel this big slam, you look out and I don't know, there you are 20, 30 feet up in the air. One of the problems with ejection seats they are very - as compared to the rocket like in the F-111, you have a very high amount of G for a very short period of time. This stress is taken up by your back bone, that's why you have got to sit very straight upright, if you sit bent, your back bone

27:30 can crumble as you do it. If you have a padding in your seat, say a rubberised padding, and if the padding compresses, it does this sort of thing as it is going up. Crunches up your back bone or your spinal cord. So, we used to sit on a water bottle. We had our parachute, then I think it was the life raft,

that you sat on. It was very hard, water is hard.

- 28:00 So if we ejected you just had a complete solid base. You wouldn't get back damage. I mean people still get back damage. So that was one safety feature, we had - what else, we had survival radios with beacons on them. We had a little strobe light, that when you were on the ground you could apply this strobe light at a rescue helicopter.
- 28:30 Strobe light, just a very bright light you could send little signals with it. Shroud around it only someone looking straight down at it would see it. Pen gun flare, a little - like a pen and in it you would put a tiny little flare, like the thing you put in your pocket. Flare in it and fly it and up goes the flare. You carried all these things with you, radios, pen gun flares, strobes. You
- 29:00 might have smoke gun markers, but you didn't want to make too much of a fuss on the ground, because once you came out they would be looking for you. If they saw air crew eject out of a Canberra or any airplane, they were there trying to get you. You would hide and only signal to an aeroplane. They were so smart they used to get radios off killed crewmen and they had proper English speaking people. And whenever there was something crashed
- 29:30 nearby, they would say, "I am over here. I am crashed over here. Come and rescue me. I am near this tree." They would be there waiting to shoot down the rescue helicopter. A rescue in a place like in North Vietnam involved the jolly green giant, S-61 or whatever it is, rescue helicopter, probably an aircraft going in first jamming all the radar, a couple of fighter aircraft to shoot down any other aeroplanes that come to shoot down the rescue
- 30:00 helicopter. May shoot some ground attack that might be fired missiles at them. Maybe a tanker to go with them and the rescue helicopter. It's a huge mission, to rescue you. And I did rescue quite a few people, quite a few air crew.

Successfully?

Successfully. There were cases where the rescue aircraft got shot down as well, but they did rescue a lot, yes. From what I understand from our crew that got shot down, the pilot and navigator

- 30:30 ejected either side of a hill, it was at night time, or late afternoon, but they had to spend the night in the jungle, they never met up with each other. They got individually rescued though. They would have been hiding, someone looking for them probably.

You mentioned before that you would get fired at by mortars, have you told us the story of where you were fired at by mortars?

Well, no I didn't actually get fired at

- 31:00 by mortars. I got fired at by a rocket in flight. I did mention that before we were coming in to land near the 5 mile orbit or whatever it is. We were down fairly low and this mighty great rocket was fired off at us. Just missed us, but completely illuminated the sky. They must have been working on sound or something they reckoned they had the right spot and just fired it at us. I don't know whether they ever - an aeroplane went out and shot the air up,
- 31:30 they probably never got them. There were mortar attacks on the base in Vietnam, not in my area, but there were around the base, we had to go to the bunkers a few times, but after I left it was mortared quite a few times and in the Australian area as well. That's the risk.

How much could you follow what was going on in the Vietnam war from the larger perspective you know, like

- 32:00 **newspaper articles?**

Well, we were briefed on the Tet offensive, all these big major events that happened in Vietnam, we were fully briefed, and sometimes it would be the North Vietnamese have moved back down to the Viet Cong and there would be a major push on a major area, and we were just briefed because we knew that we were going to get targeted from that area. We got bombed from all different targets around that area. And you had to keep an eye on how it was progressing. If they were advancing,

- 32:30 perhaps there might be a stage where you had to evacuate the base, move off somewhere. That could happen even if you are airborne and be told to go and land somewhere else. So yeah, we were pretty well informed. I mean as best the Americans could inform us; they really knew what was going on.

You've got doubts have you?

I don't know. You see a lot of movies, you wonder who was really in control and how well they had it planned. They didn't win that war.

Did Australia have any intelligence coming back

- 33:00 **to you or were you using American?**

Well mainly American yeah, but we had our own intelligence officers. I don't know what was the source of their material but I assume it was from the Americans. But the Americans got it from the South

Vietnamese, they would have people who passed things to them. It would all be vetted, you didn't know how accurate it was. One thing I do remember being told by, I don't know whether it was intelligence, but anyway, the poor people that did worst out of the war were the peasant farmers.

33:30 They didn't want anything to do with the war, they were just happy farming their rice fields. Selling their rice doing their thing, letting their kids grow up, hopefully going to school. But what would happen, this war was on, so the South Vietnamese would have the equivalent to national service, so when their son hit 18 he would be inducted into the army. The Viet Cong needed troops as well, the son hit 17 he would be grabbed into the Viet Cong. There could be a stage where one son of 18 goes into the army and another son

34:00 called into the Viet Cong, both against their wishes. You have sons - brother fighting brother. The poor peasant farmer, he was taxed by day by the government, you make so much money you pay tax you make so much rice. Night time, the VC would come in and tax him. We want money, rice. He was taxed both ways, he lost sons both ways. There would be a bloody great battle on his plot in his village, he would get bombed

34:30 shot, poisoned, the village headman, they would elect their own village headman, the VC would come in and cut his throat. You don't have a headman we are in charge of you. The army would come in and say, we think you are giving information to the VC so we are going to burn your village down. They just missed out in every single way. Completely innocent and both sides got them. It was not only the South Vietnamese government, the Australians Americans or whatever, it was also the VC

35:00 they got them as well. They worked more on terror tactics, they would, normally, would make a public display of taking the elected leaders and cutting their throats in front of the village, let them bleed to death, don't you work with the government, you work with us. It was terrible.

Did you get reports of that at the time?

You would sort of - it wouldn't be an official report, you would get this info. I mean we had padres there who would go out and try and work with the people. We used to

35:30 put in money for little charity things that he would say he wanted to, "Their school's been bombed. I want to put in money to fix it up." Some of the guys would go on working bees and things like that. You are not making up for what happened to them, but you sort of knew what was going on. You hear these tales.

It's just hard to be put in your situation too, dropping bombs on?

We were told, the Vietnamese Government wanted us to assist them

36:00 we were part of SEATO. Butterworth was the FEAF [Far Eastern Air Force]. SEATO was the South East Asian Treaty Organisation. It was America, Australian, Philippines, Thailand New Zealand, South Korea, Pakistan, and I think England. And Vietnam was - or the way we were told was a protectorate country. If they were at risk of being overtaken or if their elected

36:30 government was at risk of being overtaken we had to go and defend them. Pakistan, and I think England, elected not to take part. All the other countries did, basically American driven. We thought we did the right thing. They wanted help, we were there helping them. That's what we were told and I believe that. Years later looking back all the Diems and the Thus, they were all bloody corrupt leaders. They were elected but in a corrupt sort of way.

37:00 Waste, pathetic, trying to prop up a corrupt government to try and stop Communism taking over.

Did you have much contact with - well with your wife to be during this time?

Yeah, I used to write all the time yeah, every second day I would write, mail would come through. I think I had one or two trips back to Butterworth, ferrying an aeroplane back. I wasn't actually supposed to talk about that,

37:30 it was sort of secretive but they were different groups. Malaysia didn't support the Vietnam thing, but a couple of times I went back for a day. And then at the end of my 6 months tour, I didn't take my R & R [rest and recuperation], I saved it up. That's when I got married, my honeymoon, back to Australia.

Did you actually request some of these missions because of

38:00 **your - ?**

I asked - you nominate when you want your R & R. I said I wanted it at the very end, and I wanted it in Butterworth, which is one of the locations you could go for R & R on the way back to Australia. I said that would be fine.

How often would you get mail?

I can't really remember, say I think there was a daily mail, we were writing a lot then, probably a couple of days. My mother used to write to me.

38:30 We used to get Red Cross parcels.

Oh what was in them?

If I remember right, something like a cake, Christmas cake, can of beer, one or two cans of beer, packet of cigarettes, cake, maybe soap, just Aussie type things, it was good.

What did you miss most?

The thing I missed most, when I came out of Vietnam the first thing I did,

39:00 was get a fresh tomato and eat it. I just never ate a tomato over there. Everything - eggs were powdered, tomatoes were powdered, milk was powdered. There were no fresh tomatoes, there were some salads, but just never got a big red juicy tomato. That was what I craved the most. Back in Malaya and the tomatoes aren't very good there.

It's funny how different people... things from a sizzling steak to a tomato?

- 39:30 I never talked about the low level day bombing, but I don't know whether to continue on with that. I suppose I did cover it a bit. It was where our aeroplanes got the most damage, bullet holes through them, one aircraft had a serious action with a piece of bomb going through it. It was
- 40:00 a piece of a bomb. We had a lot of battle damage, in our low level bombing. Of course they could see us, it took them a while to work out the lead like - dive bombs are coming at you from a pretty constant angle, so you can aim and just get the lead and fire and fire and fire. Our approach angle is constantly changing, so as we got closer we were going faster and faster. Further away it doesn't look so close, they had to work out their lead
- 40:30 angle but they sort of got it right after a while, but they were sort of putting holes in the canvas. It was such a basic aeroplane, it could take holes through it without structurally damaging it or without damaging the flight controls or anything. There was all the controls were aluminium push rods. The pilot pulled the control rod back, a push rod through levers went up through the tail plane and moved the elevator. Direct linkage. No electrical cables, wires, hydraulics
- 41:00 nothing. The wings, little tail rods went up and down, rudder went left and right, nothing hydraulically boosted, the only electrical trim, the tail pane trim, that was an electric motor, that was only the trim, not the elevator. A bullet could even go through these push rods and you could still fly, whereas with the modern aeroplanes, they are all a - little electrical current goes up a wire, you cut the wire the current doesn't go up the wire anymore. Hydraulic rams and all these things would be damaged, not the old Canberra.
- 41:30 The fuel tanks that was one thing they did modify in the Canberras. We were using a more volatile form of fuel - they normally use kerosene, or Jet A1, but up there we had a thing called JP4, it's more volatile version of kerosene partway to Avgas, or petrol which is very flammable. So what they did they nitrogen purged our fuel tanks, they put nitrogen tanks on board, and put a nitrogen overpressure on top of the tank
- 42:04 End of tape

Tape 7

00:30 Just talking about the fuel mixture?

We had a more volatile fuel up there, so we purged the fuel tanks with nitrogen, so that little gap above the fuel and the tank, that gets bigger as the fuel gets burnt, is normally a mixture of fuel vapour and air. Explosive mixture. And they used to fire tracer rounds about every 5th round, with a tracer so it had a phosphorous piece in the bullet head that it was on

01:00 fire as it went through. And they used this at night time so you could see where your bullet went through, so you could see this line. So if this went through your fuel tank, or even another bullet could possibly ignite it, so what would happen, it goes through the fuel which is cool and then it would hit this air mix and explode. We had a fuel, vapour nitrogen, and nitrogen is an inert gas, so the bullet would just keep on going even though it was a phosphorous round, it would not set fire to it.

01:30 That was one of the modifications they did to the Canberra before we went to Vietnam, they also put in a steel plate under the pilot's ejection seat and under the nose where the navigator lies, I think they put one there. So if a round came up it wouldn't go through the pilot and through the navigator line. So there was a couple of modifications they did to our Canberras.

What sort of operations were you completing towards the end of your tour?

At the end of the tour was a lot of low level stuff

02:00 at the end of my tour. Later crews did more and more low level - they were more hands on you had to do more things yourself. Like getting your targets and this sort of thing, you had to actually drop the

bombs but you had to actually acquire the target. And you would be - the pilot would be talking to the forward air controller. Visually identifying his flares, his smoke markers and he might change the colour and fire another one and at the last minute say, "Bomb 20 minutes north of that."

02:30 And fly over drop your bomb. Or they might have bought you at the last minute.

Sounds more hazardous than the earlier operations.

More hazardous. And a bit more stressful concentration required.

How did you manage the increased stress towards the end of your tour?

Alright, good. That was the sort of bombing I was used to. I had done that for the last 3 or 4 years so I was happy. I was more content doing that.

Were you having any anxiety about nearly completing your tour?

No. No.

03:00 I mean some people might have worried about their bombing accuracy, because we hadn't done it for 4 or 5 months or something, but I had done it for so many years I was happy doing low level bombing. I was doing accurate bombing and I was confident and happy. So to me that was - I would rather the whole mission been done as low level bombing. Personally, because I know it's more accurate. I can see my target I know I am hitting it. At night time you are relying on someone else.

What

03:30 **did you have any reservations about completing your tour?**

Not really no. I was only young, 24. You are pretty invincible at that age. Didn't worry me no. I wasn't stressed out by it, no. That rocket fired at me, a couple of years later. I lost a couple of mates up there, they still haven't found their bodies. It was a bit upsetting.

04:00 **What was it that took them?**

They believe it was an air to air missile, I think, that was shot down. The crew got out of it, got hit 3 times. Took a couple of hits and got ejected and they saw the hit. The crew that didn't come back, we don't know, they might have been hit and not seen it and tried to eject, got blown up. Might have landed and been killed. As a matter of fact, I went to a reunion

04:30 in about 1986 or something, so it would have been 15 years after they went. I met the mother and father of one of the crew members, and they said every few years the press would come up and say, "We've got some information, someone has found your son's watch." We had these special Jaguar Coultra or Smith's, great big watches, very expensive watches. "They have found your son's watch, there's some hope." And then they would get a story.

05:00 Canberra crashed, one crew member was killed, one was alive, the live bloke was taken out by the VC. "Gee he might be still alive." You hear about those prisoners who were kept there for 20 years and, wow. But in the long term they couldn't - they said, "They knew he was dead, but every time a story comes through we get a little bit of hope." Yeah, that's very

05:30 upsetting for them, for the parents really. Poor parents, the guys are gone. Another time I was a bit concerned, we had done this night bombing and I must have hit some sort of target because there was a huge secondary explosion. Like we orbited for sometime, just a big ballooning continuous explosion. So we either hit a large fuel dump, large ammunition dump or a fuel farm. And I just

06:00 thought we must have hit a friendly fuel dump, it is too big. The explosion is so huge. And we reported it all, we waited, we checked, we never hit the local fuel dump, so we must have hit an enemy ammunition dump. It was huge. But they never ever could tell us what it was. We watched this explosion go on for couple of minutes.

06:30 Strange. Anyway, they kept us in the dark a bit, they didn't tell us everything I don't think.

Did you have any apprehensions about leaving?

No, I was happy to leave, that's what you look forward to, leaving.

What happened when you left?

I can't remember how I left now. I think I went out on a Hercules down to Butterworth, I think it was a Hercules. Others went down to Saigon and flew out on

07:00 commercial jets, but because I wanted to go back to Butterworth and get married, I think it was a Hercules. It might have been a Canberra.

Who did you leave with?

Mmmmm.

Did you leave by yourself?

Yeah, by myself.

What was your journey home like?

It's only a couple of hours. South East Asia is not that big really, only a couple of hours away. Then I had 2 weeks in Butterworth, where I had been 6 months previously. I knew the place. I got

07:30 married. Some of my mates in Vietnam arranged for them to come back via Butterworth to attend the wedding. Probably about 6 or 8 of them. Because we all finished at the same time. Plus I had other people at Butterworth I knew. I had the whole officers' mess, I think there was 180 people. I had the whole lot. I knew 90% of them. It was great. I was out of Vietnam finished.

So you were married on your way home?

Yes. My wife

08:00 got married, came to Australia, she had never been to Australia in her life before. She came from the Orkney Islands, north of Scotland.

Did family come for the wedding?

No. My family were in Australia, her's were in Scotland, so.

What kind of ceremony or reception did you have?

Oh, we got married in a Methodist Church in Butterworth on the Malayan mainland. With an Australian

08:30 Air Force padre. All the services have got padres and he married us there and had the reception in the officers' mess.

So it was a big shindig huh?

Yeah, a lot of people. And of course, we arranged for it ourselves, but the catering was a fairly reasonable price and the mess you paid the military price. I had a friends who used to fly Herc squadrons.

09:00 I got them to buy champagne and stuff at Edinburgh, from the wine field there, and they brought that up, and I bought in Vietnam, before I left, I bought a bunch of liquor. You are not supposed to take out of Vietnam but I bought it. But I remember a litre of gin was \$1.60. So.

Pretty cheap.

Yeah, I bought about 3 cartons of liquor.

09:30 **You got rotten?**

No, like I said, there was 180 people. But I catered - reduced the catering right down. Buying the wine and the liquor overseas. And the beer from the mess.

So what plans had you made to bring your bride to Australia?

No, that was it. I came to Perth stayed with my parents for a while,

10:00 they met her, met my family here, then I went to Amberley, then I was getting ready to go to America to train on the F-111.

Did she go with you to America?

No, not initially. Only paid for us to go over. But by then my wife had met all the other wives because their husbands had just come back from Vietnam, and they had only just got married, so.

I imagine you had settled into the married quarters by then?

No, I couldn't get one, I was too junior. We had a private rental place in Ipswich. As did a lot of the guys. You had to be around

10:30 for a while to get the air force accommodation in those days.

How long did you have to settle down together before you went to America?

I think probably couple of months in Amberley and that was it. Then when I took off for another 8 months. It was an 8 months course but it dragged out to 8 months. And part way through I took off for about 2 weeks or something. Qantas had a special on. I had to pay it.

So why had you gone to do the course in America?

11:00 Well, because I was selected to go on the F-111 which is the ultimate aeroplane in those days.

Why had you been selected?

Because they wanted - or they just chose the guys in the age experience bracket that had done a tour of Vietnam that they thought was suitable for flying it. That was it. I had come off the Canberra it was a high speed aeroplane. Much higher speed aeroplane. Just about all the guys had come of Canberras.

11:30 Had bombing experience and high speed navigation experience.

So how was the F-111 anticipated?

Oh, I mean that was a very sophisticated aeroplane compared to the Canberra. And you know, it was a complex training course. We trained in Sacramento. I had to do a B-47 - I had never used radar, so I had to do an aircraft radar course, B-47. 6 engine B-52, trained on that.

What was that like?

12:00 It was just a simulator, yeah, it was good. Then we went down.

What did you learn?

We learnt all about radar navigation and how to operate radar and work out, navigate. What the picture looks like, identify targets using radar, rather than visual imaging.

This must have been state of the art technology?

It was fairly modern, yeah.

What did you think of the technology?

Oh great yeah. The air (UNCLEAR) was far more sophisticated than that

12:30 of course. Yeah, I did that and then I went down to Clovis New Mexico Canon Air Force Base. They had all the F-111, just straight F-111 training. It had like a swing wing, it had all the bombing system. You could see that it had engines all broken down into engine components. You studied every system on the F-111 there and we ere examined on it, tested

13:00 and got certificates. As part of the course. I think I was there for about 6 weeks. I lived in a - we all lived in this block flats. There were 24 crews, 24 navigators, 24 pilots, that's a lot of Australians there, or maybe say 20 of each. While I was there

13:30 there was a recording studio in Clovis, New Mexico. I don't know whether you remember a group called Jimmy Gilmour and the Fire Balls, a song called A Bottle of Wine. He and his wife and his band were living at this motel. So they took a liking to us and we used to go and have parties with Jimmy Gilmour and the Fire Balls.

They would have been pretty wild days wouldn't they?

Yeah, well we were all there, that was good.

14:00 It was an interesting part of things.

What had you seen that you hadn't seen before?

It was the first time I had ever seen someone inject a watermelon with vodka using a horse syringe. They would say, "Look, some of the girls here don't drink, so what we do is give them special watermelon." The watermelon full of vodka and then cut slices of watermelon. An American thing they did in those days.

Did you

14:30 **take that on board when you came back to Australia?**

No, no. I didn't need to do that.

Can you tell me about the training you were doing on the F-111s?

Okay, well from there we went to Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada. I was there for about 3 months Las Vegas, Nevada, I was 25 years old.

Can you describe the base?

Oh, it was just a great big casino, wasn't it.

15:00 The base was out of town a bit.

I asked about the base not Las Vegas.

Okay the officers' mess was full, we couldn't live on the base so we had to live in the town. So we would commute every day out to the base and that's where they had all the F-111s for flying training. So I only did 26 hours on the F-111 and that was the minimum, that's what they gave us as part of the package for training the crew. We were then supposed to fly them back to Australia.

15:30 But in that 26 hours I did some navigation. I did about 5 bombing sorties, high speed, on radar. I did an air to air refuelling sorties. General training, handling, so it was quite good. That was the first time I saw the F-111 dump and burn. Have you ever seen that? Where they fire along and they dump fuel, hit the after burner and you get a huge torch

16:00 of burning fuel out the back of the plane. You have never seen that at an air display?

I have, but.

It is spectacular.

Why do they do that?

If you have to dump to reduce your weight to land. Say if you are too heavy to land you have to dump fuel but if you hit the afterburner you actually burn fuel to get rid of it, which is the best way, not dumping raw fuel, you are burning it. But as an air show display feature, it is very spectacular. So that's the first time I saw that. We had a - each course the

16:30 Americans ran - we were on a conversion course with some Americans on strategic air command because they were SAC [strategic air command], because the Americans have tactical air force, strategic air force. Strategic is all the nuclear bombers and this sort of thing. Some of their crews are on that. Because the F-111 was designed, to be a nuclear bomber. And there were a couple of crews on that, and they always had bombing trophies on every course. So we always tried to drop the bombs as accurate as possible.

17:00 Me and my pilot, we got the most accuracies, so we got the Top Gun Award. That is the Top Gun sitting over there on that table. I actually have earned a Top Gun. Through bombing in the F-111.

So did you feel a special affinity with Tom Cruise?

I don't think he had been born at that stage. This was in 1968.

When you saw the movie [Top Gun]?

There seemed to be a lot more 'I love me' in his movie, than in the days when I was

17:30 flying. My last wife didn't like it so it lived in the shed for most of my first marriage. Sue now, she lets me keep it in the study.

Why wouldn't your last wife let you keep in the house?

She thought it was a monstrosity. It's an American thing with a piece of marble and some goldie things with eagles and guns you know. A pretty

18:00 outlandish sort of thing.

A fully blown trophy.

Yeah. It's this big. Over there on the table. The pilot I was with on that course was a guy called Dave Rogers, and like I left the air force some years later, and he went on, full career and became deputy chief of the air staff, air vice marshal. Another guys on the course Darryl McCormack he became chief of the air staff, air marshal. Quite a few of the guys on that

18:30 initial F-111 training some got to air rank and some got to group captain, like very high officers. A really good full career in the air force. They were probably like the cream of the guys in those days.

Before I ask you further about your career in the air force, I just want to ask you a bit more about the F-111 what you can tell me about it. It's special features?

19:00 Well, it could fly Mach 2.5 plus altitude, that's two and a half times the speed of sound. And supposedly, secretive stories it had been flown up to 3 times the speed of sound. Now that is very, very fast. The Mirage fighter we had is probably faster than the F-18, it's faster than most of the aeroplanes built. It was a very, very fast aircraft. Low level it could fly at Mach 1.2

19:30 plus. So, one and a fifth times the speed of sound, on the deck. Not many aeroplanes could fly that fast that low to the ground. Okay it couldn't fly for long periods of time at that speed, because one it would burn up a lot of fuel, also the leading edge of the aeroplane got red hot, so you would lose your structural integrity, but it could fly for a period of time at those speeds.

Why could you fly at high speeds at high altitude?

Because it's the air flow.

20:00 The Mach number is the proportion of the speed of sound, whereas in thinner air up high, the air speed works on the amount of air flowing over the aircraft. When air is thinner there is less air flowing over the aeroplane. Even though you are going faster, so you go at the altitude very high speed relative to the ground, but the same air speed in the aeroplane because the air is a lot thinner so there's less air going over it. Because on the

20:30 ground for that amount of air going over it you have a much lower speed relative to the ground. It's Mach number, it is called. So, very high speeds can be flown at a high altitude.

If that plane was so fast why aren't planes flying that fast now?

Some of them go up to Mach 5, I think. It's a lot of engineering and it's that little bit extra say from Mach 2.2 or whatever,

21:00 the F-18, 2.2 or something, the Mirage to 2.5. The extra engineering is not worth it. The F-111 is a big heavy aeroplane, about the weight of a early model Hercules or a DC-9 aeroplane. Very big, heavy aeroplane over 100,000 lbs. Which is what 50 tonnes. A big aeroplane, much, much bigger than the F-18s or Mirage.

What material was it made out of?

21:30 I am not 100% certain, but I think it was aluminium and a composite bits in it and honeycomb areas in it, and I think some structural steel bits in it with big wind flow through box, and bits of steel pivots and that are steel.

But it's not like the planes made of...?

No, it's not made from carbon fibre. Titanium is the thing they use nowadays.

22:00 It might have had some titanium, it can take very high temperatures, it's very lightweight and strong at the same time. The F-111 was built in 1968 this was.

So how many of these planes was the Australian government going to purchase?

I think we were getting 24.

And they were going to form a new squadron were they?

Two squadrons, 12

22:30 aeroplanes per squadron it was originally. One squadron and 6 squadrons. We had 24 crew over there, and each one was to fly an F-111 back. And I was all there ready for flight back. We had finished our training. Part way through our training at Nellis Air Force Base, Las Vegas, the government started... There was a crash where an aircraft, where a wind carry through box failed and a wing fell off and

23:00 the crew were killed. The government then had second thoughts about it. They said, "Well, you have got to fix this before we take them." What had happened previously, the navy United States Navy, it was a multi service aeroplane. Strategic Air Command Tactical Air Command, United States Navy. I don't know about the marines, and the Australian Air Force and the Royal Air Force. The American Navy thought it was too heavy for the carriers, so to lighten it up, the wind carry through box, they...

23:30 The theory is that a piece of steel cut with holes in it as a strong as piece of steel without holes cut in it. So they cut holes in it, to reduce the weight, but it failed. It wasn't as strong as a piece of steel without holes in it. So they had to repair it all, and this went on and on and our government didn't accept it until 1972 and they had to retrain all the crews again. I trained in 1968. I left the RAAF at the end of 1970.

You must have been disappointed to come home without your F-111?

I was. We came back in the back of a Star

24:00 Lifter. America to Hawaii to Fiji to Christchurch to Richmond, the milk run that goes across to Learmonth bringing mail and stuff back every week, sitting in the back of that with big engines.

I can tell by the way you describe it that you weren't too pleased.

I remember the Melbourne Cup was run when we were halfway back, and the crew at the front broadcast it up to the back. I think it was - I keep thinking it was Red Handed that won it, but anyway we had a little

24:30 sweep down the back. We came back in a couple of groups in the transport aircraft. We get to Richmond, Customs gave us a quick run and then I got in a Caribou and went up to Amberley. But no big dramatic arrival in the F-111s with all the press and the fanfare and everything, it was disappointing.

What was your morale like when you got back?

It was a bit low, yeah. Not only that when we came back, we were then two squadrons of

25:00 crews, with no aeroplane. There were Canberras there but they were all training guys to go to Vietnam and we had all been to Vietnam. So we were basically squadrons of crew members with no aeroplane to fly. They got the F-111 simulator going and we used to fly that. In the end it got so boring. I would sit in the pilot seat and he would sit in the navigator seat I would fly it and he would navigate. They would be firing missiles at us, failing engines, breaking this and that, because we'd done everything

25:30 there was in it. You would end up having a crash because they had fired so many missiles at you and the

navigator's flying. And we did tours of industry. I have been to the Bulimba brewery about 4 times and the Golden Circle cannery and envelope manufacturing companies, and soap manufacturing companies, every industry tour there was. Passed exams for squadron leader.

What were you training places for?

Just

26:00 for something to do, we had no aeroplanes to fly, we had all these highly trained pilots and navigators and no aeroplanes to fly. We used to get about 5 hours a month. Played golf, went fishing.

Sounds like a semi retirement?

Yeah, but we just wanted to fly aeroplanes. That was not what we wanted to do. I did promotion exams for squadron leader. I did a computer training courses, structural technique course, every damned course I could think of I did.

26:30 And then I decided I was getting out of the air force and that was when I basically decided to resign. I can't think now, it was early 1970 I tried to resign, and they said you can't resign because you have got to return a service on the F-111. Overseas conversion 3 return of service. "How can I do it? You won't let me fly, there is no aeroplane to fly." Eventually I got out at the end of '70.

What did you wife think of your decision?

27:00 She went along with it. I was instructing in the end on Canberra and training young blokes going up to Vietnam. Navigation and bombing and things like that.

Did you find that a rewarding job?

Not as much as flying operational aircraft, no. It was all a bit of a let down in the end.

A lot of the veterans I have spoken to have found something rewarding in being able to pass on their experiences and knowledge

27:30 **too.**

I did that for a bit, but I was right at my peak of flying, I was 28. Joined the air force at 18 and left at 28. I was at the peak of my training, I had everything, and I didn't have an aeroplane to fly, so that was why I decided to leave.

Bit early to be put out to seed, huh?

Yeah, I mean there would have been some crew there, I also decided. I was a navigator, I was a flight

28:00 lieutenant at 24, that was like captain in the army. And navigators weren't getting promoted. Some of them were retiring, flight lieutenants were retiring at 45, that was the retiring age. There I was at 24 a flight lieutenant, but 21 years at the same rank is not on. I am leaving, so a bunch of us resigned at the same time. I had sussed out another career as an air traffic controller. I

28:30 applied and done all the aptitude tests and they said, "Right, we'll accept you."

Can you tell me about the application process?

Yeah, well every job I have gone for, the military, air traffic controller or anything there were masses of aptitude tests. There would be a bunch of numbers where you got to 1, 7, 13 what comes next or 1, 24, 156 what's the next number. What's out of

29:00 sequence. Words, what's the odd word out, all these sorts of things. There would be a series of levers and wheels, and if you push that lever that way, what happens to the bar at the end, it will go around this wheel up there, piece of string you have got to work out where it goes, and time is pressure on you. There will be psychological tests. A whole lot of logical things for you to do. And then they would say, "If you had to

29:30 kill your grandmother, how would you do it?" You don't have an option, "I don't want to kill my grandmother." Didn't answer it. They were trying to pick nut cases. One of the things with air traffic control is they wanted to see you do several things at once. So they gave me this map of England, so they said, "Right, first question, the grid ref at so and so, what's the name of the nearest railway station?" Okay write that. "Okay, I want you to go 7 miles south-east

30:00 at the first road intersection, then go north to the third railway line and then turn east. What's the name of the next street?" Something like that. He had another sheet of paper with 1-20 on it, a blank sheet of paper. You would be working on this, you would have a protractor and you would be measuring things, they'll say, "Question 27, 5 plus 8 minus 13 plus 22." Finish, never say it again, you had to stop what you were doing, immediately go to question 27 and do this mental addition in your head and write it down. Back you

30:30 go and wait for the next question, it doesn't come for a while. Question 56, question 6, 2 divided by 3 add on 56 go to the next multiple 10 and add 5, never repeat it. So you basically have to be doing

several things at once. You had to stop one thing and concentrate on another thing. I suppose it's like working on a flight plan, aircraft calls and you have got to answer him and go back to what you were doing.

31:00 Over the years I have done so many aptitude tests and psychological tests you wouldn't believe it.

Why is that?

Because all the jobs civil air traffic controller, pilot navigator in the air force, even applying for the army, Duntroon, they are all the sort of jobs that require a certain aptitude and psychological standard to get in. They don't want people with character defects, they don't want people with...

31:30 You have always got to be able to do quick mathematical problems in your head, you can't refer to a calculator or anything, and logic decisions and basic physics solutions and stuff like that. Just an area of work I have migrated into.

I was just curious that you mentioned over your life...?

Well, I have only worked in the aviation industry really other than my short time in hospital.

So what was your reaction to being accepted into...?

32:00 Air traffic control? It was good, yeah, but like I said, they accepted me and the RAAF wouldn't let me go. So then air traffic control, "I can understand the problem of getting out of the RAAF. When you get out of the RAAF let us know and we'll put you on the next course." So eventually I got out of the RAAF after applying and saying I can't give a return of service.

How did you manage to get out?

Because I applied again to resign. I got a permanent commission so I can actually resign, instantly, but the return of service on the F-111,

32:30 got to give a 3 year return of service on a plane you have trained on overseas. I trained on it in 68 and here is 70, it wasn't a full 3 years anyway. How can I give a return of service on them, they didn't even have them until 72 and that was the logic I gave to them. And they said, "I guess you are right. We want you to stay, but we can't force you." So they let me out. So that's when I joined ATC [Air Traffic Control], and I had a good career

33:00 in civil ATC for 22 years. I was in the RAAF for just over 9.5 years.

Did you have any reservations about leaving your old mates there?

Yeah, I did. And even up to this day I don't know whether I made the right move.

You began to mention how illustrious some of the careers...?

Navigators of my ilk that stayed in, it all turned around a few years after I left, navigators started getting promoted, and they got very well promoted.

33:30 Most of the guys on my course got promoted pretty well.

Did you have any second thoughts about your decision to leave?

Yeah, you can't go back. I couldn't reverse it.

But just in reflection?

Yeah, I had because the mates I made then were probably the best friends I probably ever made. But then I guess, in your early 20s in a military environment, lot of hardship, hardship in training and that, you have all got to fight it together. Probably

34:00 going through hardship together you do make closer mates. And it just seems I have never made, people I have met since have never been the same calibre, I don't know.

I guess you have had bonding experiences haven't you?

Yeah, close bonding yeah, and danger, like in Vietnam you put up with all that together. And just seemed everything was a bit low key after that. Air traffic control was pretty all go and everything. And I wound up in the search and rescue part of that, and you

34:30 have got pretty important decisions to make, and you have got a lot of peoples lives in your hands, but it never seemed as critical as flying high speed aircraft in a war or something, it didn't seem as important.

Can you break down your career in the civil air traffic control, describe it?

I started training in Melbourne in the college, went to Sydney finished my training there. I worked in the area control centre there for

35:00 about 4 years. Then I went to Port Hedland. I did a search and rescue training course, went to Port Hedland for a couple of years.

When you say search and rescue training course, what sort of context?

For aircraft that get lost or call for help, or have a fire, have to ditch, force land just disappear, don't turn up. Someone's got to work out where they are and send an aeroplanes out to search for them.

From an air traffic control perspective?

Yeah, well air traffic control is responsible

- 35:30 for the search and rescue of civil aircraft. And is also responsible for conducting air searches for the police and air searches for the Maritime Safety Authority. So, there's a ship out to sea in distress or didn't turn up, they would say, "This is the search area, we want you to search for an aeroplane." I would have to organise aeroplanes, work out how much each aeroplane could search, divide the area up into different search areas, separate the aeroplanes, send them all out and brief
- 36:00 them, and arrange helicopters to go and rescue if necessary, and have them in the right places. It's quite involved and sometimes you would have a 20 or 30 airplanes out searching, big logistics. Sometimes you would have to organise fuel, places would run out of fuel. Observers. It's quite a big business.

So what proportion of your air traffic control career was devoted to search and rescue?

The last three quarters of it.

- 36:30 **What if we perhaps go into a discussion about your early career about the civil air traffic control. What position did you enter?**

I was mainly doing flight data.

What's that?

That's getting the flight plans and working out the - everything works on little flight strips, and the approach controller gets one and so flights going from Sydney to Melbourne, you have got to give information. The tower has got to have some,

- 37:00 some has got to approach control, some to the on route controller, and the other end the person down there makes up strips for the on route controller, the arrivals controller, the approach controller. There's a whole bunch of guys employed, making up these strips. Started doing that, I worked sometime in the tower, surface movement control.

Whereabouts?

Sydney, Sydney Airport. I did some time in the area control centre.

What's the difference in working in the tower and area control centre?

Well, the tower

- 37:30 has only got responsibility to the immediate aerodrome. What you can see basically. Nowadays, it's really only the aerodrome runway. They own the runway, they take off and clear the runway, after that it's the approachers responsibility. Approach can give some air space back to the tower, but basically once they are airborne it's the approachers responsibility.

So you are responsible for...?

Runway separation and traffic movement control. I did that, that's what I did. Sydney's very complex, you have got terminals

- 38:00 either side of the runway, you have got lots of runways, you have got to manoeuvre an aircraft around, get them to cross runways, and that in between landing and taking off aircraft, it's pretty complicated.

How long were you working in that capacity?

Well I was about 4 years.

Did you see any accidents?

No, but I was in the tower once when a PAN AM 747 landed on runway 25 which is a short runway, after it had been raining, and he didn't have an ILS, an instrument landing system, he just had the

- 38:30 VASI [visual approach slope indicator]. And the 747s, the pilot is sitting way, way up in the air, only got a special technique, VASI, visual approach system, you look at the lights and they come at a certain angle, but if you are sitting up very high. You have got to look as if you are flying high and approaching all the time, and you are actually in the right angle. Anyway, he came in too high, he landed halfway down the runway and we were about to hit the crash alarm, and he had full reverse

- 39:00 thrust which all the engines pull power pushing backwards basically, you see the water coming, compressed the stall. You bang, the water got sucked up had to shut the engine down. And he pulled up with a nose wheel in the over run of the runway. Another 100 metres on is the Cook's River, which is a concrete lined drain, effectively. That would have broken his back and possibly caught on fire.

What

39:30 **was the atmosphere like in the control tower in that instance?**

We were just hoping that he would pull up. I believe that pilot came back in a smaller aeroplane next time, smaller capacity. It was pilot error.

What capacity were you operating in when the incident occurred?

I was training on approach. Part of my training. I basically cleared him to land, but I had an approach controller with me, we couldn't do anything. We

40:00 were about to hit the crash alarm when he pulled up.

So he was basically in your hands?

Sort of yeah, but I didn't feel too successful actually, on that one. Nothing of my doing mind you, but I was the only -

That wasn't a bad way to start?

It didn't come to anything but I mean it could have.

What an introduction.

Yep. Okay, and a bit of

40:30 air controlling, that's just controlling aircraft on route. Did that for a bit.

Is that lower pressure?

But as you get into the terminal air space, I never worked any of the high pressure areas like approach or that. Comes to the terminal areas, all the aircraft are bunched up together. In the end you come to approach and they are 3 mile apart and it's just continuous landing. You have got to speed aeroplanes up to fit them in, and someone stuffs up their landing and that stuffs up the whole sequence.

41:00 Very complex area, that's top pressure stuff. I specialised in the search and rescue area early on. And I got promoted because of that. I became proficient in that. I became check controller, check what the other controllers were doing.

I would like to ask you more about the differences between the different air traffic control, but we need to change tapes there Brian.

41:28 **End of tape**

Tape 8

00:40 **With the search and rescue did you actually get a lot of personal satisfaction out of doing that?**

Yes I did. Like I said, I started out at Port Hedland, a new station that opened, we had 3 search and rescue mission co-ordinators there.

01:00 We had our share of searches up there. Basically no one to assist other than the other two controllers and we did an 8 hour shift each, and 1 day off, and covered 7 days a week. Especially when you are able to help someone or locate someone. I had all various people give a may day and crash, and I would have to organise a helicopter to go out and rescue them. Did that several times.

01:30 **It must be hard to be on the receiving end of a may day call?**

Well yeah, normally flight services would take it. In those days we had flight services to do the Headland Carrather for a while, and Perth, in some areas, and they would ring me on the intercom and say, "So and so's has given a may day, or missed a report. I have got other (UNCLEAR) what was his last answer, what's his last position."

02:00 He would state where he thinks he might be. You might start ringing stations around the place. "Have you seen an aeroplane fly over?" "Yeah, one flew over about half an hour ago." Basically once he reaches fuel expiry, he's not still flying. So you send someone out looking for him. That's distress mode so. He could have made an emergency landing somewhere and can't tell you. And a couple of times happened where they forgot to tell us and we were out

02:30 searching for them. But a few times they crashed and force landed somewhere. One guy right out in the middle of the desert on a dry lake. He landed on it and unfortunately landed in the middle. I learned from that the middle is soft, the edges are hard. If he had landed on the edge he would have been alright, but he landed in the middle and got bogged. He was stuck out there. We found him, it was night

time by the time we found him. We got a ground party out and rescued him, and the girl with him.

03:00 But yeah, lots of searches. Like I said before, I was two years in Port Hedland and I - 5 years in Perth, another 2 years in Port Hedland. 8 years in Darwin and the last couple of years in Perth, until I turned the age of 50. So from 28 to 50 I probably spent the last 22 years, the last 15 or 16 in the search and rescue area.

Did you find it highly stressful?

At times it was. 8 years in Darwin, we had some big searches there.

03:30 Found them. Even things like the Kirky that went down here, remember it broke in half and fuel come out of it and guys jumping in the sea and all that sort of thing. We organised helicopters to get out there and winch them out. We were the co-ordinating area for raising these things.

Because you are up against time too aren't you?

You know even an aircraft that force lands, his battery, if there's

04:00 anything left in it for his radio, might work for a while but eventually it won't work. You have got to get out there and get to him it could be damaged. If the guy's jammed in the cockpit engine, he might be bleeding to death. I mean, 4 hours could mean all the difference between life and death. Yes, it was a bit stressful, that was one of the stressful areas. There were only a certain number of guys had the full rating of search and rescue mission co-ordinator. I had that for quite a few years.

04:30 In that time I was instructor on search and rescue courses. Twice I was an instructor. I was check controller for some years in Perth and Darwin. Checking other controllers, running scenarios and putting them under pressure and checking their performance. All air traffic controllers get checked every, I can't remember how often it is, say every 3 months or something. You get a check controller sitting beside you for your whole shift, writing reports on you. Quizzing you with questions and this sort of thing.

05:00 The search and rescue, once a year you get involved with a big search and rescue exercise, you get marked and you can be failed, you can be dropped back to a lower grade. Revert back to a lower grade, be retrained, tower control guys they are all subject to this, do a written report every year, you have got to get 100% result. 25% and you are quizzed on those questions until you get 100%. I mean no other, other than pilots and air traffic controllers, I don't know anyone that checks. I mean a doctor, once he has graduated, no-one

05:30 takes him aside and gives him a set of questions. No one gives him continuation training or retraining or training in new products. They might read themselves and self train, but policeman, they do some continuation training, I do know. Officer's courses and things, but a lot of careers don't do any other training, and quite important jobs.

Why did you end up departing that job?

Well, what happened is

06:00 they consolidated search and rescue. We used to have a search and rescue centre in every capital city, plus one in Townsville, Alice Springs and Port Hedland. They gradually started closing them. They ended up with Brisbane and Melbourne and Perth, and they decided they would close Perth, consolidate its responsibility. As they were consolidating on route control they used a satellite communications. They gradually consolidated down from lots of little

06:30 centres to a couple of big centres. And I had the choice, at consolidation of Perth time, I had just hit 50, I could have taken a golden hand shake, 22 years of service reasonable return for that, or I could have gone back into traffic to demote and retrain to an area, or I could have possibly transferred to Melbourne. I had already spent - I had travelled all over Australia, I didn't want to

07:00 establish in Perth. So I elected to take the voluntary redundancy package. And while I was sorting it out I looked around and found another job. So I said I am ready. I got a job immediately.

So what's the job?

Then I got a job as a navigator with a geophysical survey company. Flying round low level, twin aeroplane, just above the ground as a navigator doing geophysical survey, operating with computers. Magnet, the gamma ray spectrometer,

07:30 magnetometer all that sort of stuff.

I have to say that all the technology that has come up over the years with navigation such as GPS [global positioning system] has got to have revolutionised that?

Well, you are not really a navigator you are more of an equipment operator because the... Okay I have to pull the lines on that, they were all stored - use a computer program to designate the start and input of the survey line. You fly a grid pattern and they might only be 20 metres apart, these lines, but normally say 50 metres or

08:00 100 metres apart. Through a software program you can plot the air out and it co-ordinates, you tell it the track station. And then inflight it is just a matter of pulling up the lines you want to fly. It might be an odd shape area because it goes around (UNCLEAR). But so I had to pull up the lines. But I was continually monitoring all the equipment we had and making sure the storage over the years you know, we had to replace tapes and CDs various forms of data. And in the end it was just removal of the

08:30 hard drives and things so it got easier. But then they wanted the accuracy to be greater and greater and had ground equipment running and you had to download all the stuff at the end of the day. Run software programs to check it out. Check your nav accuracy and go back and re-fly areas if they weren't right, and check every piece of equipment for intolerances, and that there wasn't any sunspot activity and there was a reasonable amount to it. I did that for about 9.5 years from the age of 50 to 60.

Sounds extremely complicated. So

09:00 **where did that take you?**

Well, I stayed in the shearer's quarters on pastoral stations. I have lived in lots of mining area camps all over Australia. I didn't do a job in Tasmania, but I have done every other state. I would go away for 3 months, come back for 2 weeks and then go away for 3 months. At this stage I was divorced and single, so it didn't worry me. Yeah, well

09:30 just different places. And in that time I also did 3 jobs in India, West Africa, and one job in Indonesia.

Was all that to do with mining and that grid sort of...?

Yep. Low level geophysical survey. So I probably spent 6 months India and 6 months in Mali, in West Africa, and 2 months in Indonesia, doing surveys once again.

So the jobs in the other countries must have been quite fascinating?

Yep, different cultures. Different foods, different

10:00 lifestyle, but no matter where you go there's no place like home. It just makes me appreciate that Australia is the place to live in. The more I travel the more places I go to, we've got the best.

Would you always be working with the same pilot?

No, probably about a dozen pilots over the 9 years. But I have flown more with a couple of pilots than others. I was always a crew leader. We normally have 2 crews, 2 pilots to operate us

10:30 or maybe a field hand or maybe a geophysicist or maybe a processing person, but sometimes not, but always 4, up to 10 sometimes. I was normally a crew leader so I had to - I was the person responsible for paying their allowances. I still had to do my share of flying. Overseas I had to employ the staff and pay the staff, and buy the fuel and pay the rent and pay the bribes and pay the telephones,

11:00 just masses and masses of admin stuff, and still do my share of flying. I didn't mind it.

Well it certainly sounds like you didn't mind taking on responsibility.

That's what I have found most jobs I have been in, it's not worth doing the job or working with other guys, its management above you. The next level above you is always the biggest hassle in every job, air traffic control, air force, geophysical survey flying. Next level of

11:30 management up is where the problems occur.

There's always the worker bees and then the people who look over the worker bees and think that the worker bees aren't working hard enough or in the right way.

That's fine if they know what they are looking for, but half the time they don't know what they are looking for. As they say, there's a certain waste product in our body that always floats to the top. And I have found ...

Oh what's that,

12:00 **I can't begin to think what that might be?**

People often, who can't perform, migrate to the management level. Then they think they can do it all. Shit happens. Same word.

So with your experiences, I am particularly thinking of Vietnam, what do you think you gained most out of that war experience do you think?

Oh,

12:30 probably appreciate life a lot more. I mean, I lost friends up there. A lot of Australian soldiers died up there, and some air force guys. Two of my reasonably close friends died doing the same thing I was doing up there, and they never ever found their bodies, which was very sad. So I appreciate life more. I feel I have done things that other people haven't done. I know when we came back,

13:00 other than to air force guys we couldn't talk about it to anyone, because people would say, "You are dropping bombs on babies." And all this stuff. You just had to wipe that part of your life for years and years. I can talk about it now.

Did it upset you too much before?

No. No I just copped shit from everyone all the time. Just bloody, "You are a bastard going over there, dropping bombs on everybody." "God, mate, I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought I was... Our government, was called on by our government to go up there and help them, and I went up to help them."

13:30 That's what I thought.

What sort of reaction did you get when you came back from Vietnam?

I even got bad vibes from one of the vice presidents of the RSL [Returned and Services League]. He told me, "You guys weren't in a real war and you don't know what you are talking about." "Okay, fair enough."

Is that why you don't have a particular affection...?

For the RSL. No, I am a member of a RAAF Vietnam Veterans' Association of Western Australia. I have been in that for 3 years. I didn't have much to do with that for years and years, but I have been in that.

14:00 I am treasurer now. I have been treasurer, I must have been in it for 4 years. I have been treasurer for 3 years. Just elected unopposed for another year. But that's fine, they are a good bunch of blokes, all ex air force. Communicate with them alright.

Did all of you RAAF Vietnam blokes find a similar reaction in Australia about dropping bombs on babies when you came back?

Most people did, yep. A lot of these guys stayed in for a full career in the

14:30 RAAF. Within the RAAF it's probably okay or the other services, the army okay. But civilians, I mean the draft was unpopular, people sent there against their wishes, a lot of them lost their lives, it's a shame. But a lot of people you know, most people reckoned we did the wrong thing - the government decided that we didn't say we are going to go there and drop bombs. We were in the air force,

15:00 the army whatever it is, we had to do as we were told. And we thought we were doing a good job and the right thing and all that. And you know, years later they had these return home parades, and nowadays Anzac Day people are out there cheering and waving flags and that's good. It didn't happen for a long while. But I feel it made me stronger. Made me feel I had done something a lot of people can't do. I felt it was worthwhile at the time.

15:30 I mean hindsight is probably a bit of a waste but no really, we didn't win the war, we didn't save anyone. A lot of guys lost their lives both sides. Was it worth it? They became Communist anyway, it was to stop the domino theory of all the countries becoming Communist and they became Communist. So what.

Well what did you think of the fall of Saigon?

Yeah, once the Yanks stopped bombing North Vietnam and started retracting it was just a fait accompli.

16:00 They could have won the war but not enough political will and that's the way it was.

Did that annoy you there wasn't that follow through with the Americans?

Yeah, it did in a way because it meant everything we lost before was wasted, all the life, wasted. I mean you drop bombs and lose aeroplanes, they are only money and equipment, but the life, yeah. And the guys that were affected by it too. In the end you know,

16:30 there are a lot of guys that are psychologically and physically affected by it, and the end result we didn't really accomplish anything. We've all got some sort of affect on us, I have even got some. Not psychological but other physical things.

Well what's that affect?

Skin problems which they put down to being up there, not so much exposure to agent orange but skin problems.

17:00 I have got some hearing loss from shooting guns and engines and things. I have got prostate cancer at the moment. I mean I am in that age group that gets it but may have had some affect on that. I have got a neck injury, probably from those bird strikes. Lift things, like the last job lifting batteries, basically that's why I had to stop in the end, I had to lift things heavily and my neck would lock up. And I have got degenerative

17:30 spondylosis of the neck. They put it back to the trauma from those two bird strikes, getting hit on the front on that way and then front on this way. Some early damage. But that's - everyone gets something in their life. But there's other guys that have got severe problems and their offspring have got weird problems that no one can explain. Of a high proportion.

Did you get to hear much about

18:00 **the protests that were going on in Australia when you were in Vietnam or did that happen more for you afterwards?**

No, didn't hear much about it up there, but coming back you would see it.

So did that come as a surprise that that was happening?

No, I had seen - I went straight to America and it was really big over there in 1968.

Because the protests over there would have been huge as well?

They were yeah. No, we knew it was happening, really bad.

How did you feel about the protests?

18:30 I just thought they were bloody cowards myself, or they got it wrong. Why protest at the troops, spit at the troops, and throw red paint at the troops and come back and we've got a leg missing. God, you have got to be pretty pathetic to do that. Do it to the prime minister fine, or the president okay, chief of staff or something, but not the troops. That's why I lost all respect for people that did that.

19:00 Way back in there, there might have been a seed of stop the violence, stop the war, but shouldn't take it out on the guys that come back.

Do you think it was expressed in a completely wrong direction?

Wrong direction, yeah. And I know they got fairly fired up about it some of them. They are fairly outspoken and speak on television all the time. There weren't very many advocates of the military speaking out saying, "We are trying to do the right thing." I didn't see that at all.

So you are even saying that the military

19:30 **didn't take on the responsibility to take on the protestors?**

No, I am thinking of individual people that came back. You couldn't, it was just overwhelming, everyone was against it. Even my family, I know they supported me but most others didn't.

Do you think that's one of the reasons Vietnam vets are quite tight within their groups?

Yep, yep. For some years, probably 10 years after or more, you couldn't even talk about it. Not many people in life do something and you can't even talk about it.

20:00 Try and discuss it with people they just go off their brain at you.

Would you talk about it amongst yourselves?

A bit, yeah. Especially when a guy went missing, we'd all talk about things. Training, like when you are still in the air force you are still training for the next war sort of thing, so you are using skills you learnt then and try and improve them. I was only in the air force for a couple of years after

20:30 Vietnam.

When you lose your - you mention your friends that were never found, when somebody goes missing like that how do you conduct a service or memorial for them?

I don't know. We didn't have a memorial. I have had a few of my friends in Vietnam die. One guy died at 28, I went to his funeral.

21:00 **Was that in Vietnam?**

No, he died in Amberley. He was about the same age as me, maybe a bit older. He got cancer in the neck. He died. They cut it out, but it went into his brain and that.

That must have been frightening?

Yes. His wife was still pregnant with their second child. Yeah. I happened to be at Amberley, so I saw him at Greenslopes when he died.

So what do you think on Anzac Day?

21:30 Well, it's quite good now because big crowds come out and wave flags. And they are all yelling out, "Good on ya guys, you did the right thing." It's really good. We have a little thing together afterwards, go to a restaurant or something afterwards, and some of the wives are starting to come along now. Restaurant owner, we get a good deal

22:00 it's cheap food, and he opens up on a Sunday, public holiday, he's a really good restaurateur. \$10 all the food you can eat, all day sort of thing. Excellent bloke.

That's lovely to get that from the community after so many years. That sort of support.

It is really yes, it's better now than it has ever been. Some of our guys are a bit - I think some of the army guys are a lot worse off. But some of our guys are a bit withdrawn into themselves and there's a few of them that are TPIs [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated pensioners], not TPIs

22:30 but they are withdrawn into themselves and they do need a bit of help. And there are some guys that need help and they won't let anyone help them. I know a couple of guys who are desperate financial, psychological, emotional, troubled. They won't - they say, "I don't need any help from the military." Just so terrible really. These are personal friends of mine

23:00 that won't let us help them. Can't force them to do it.

Keep trying.

Yeah, it's all I can do.

Do think it was, you mentioned the welcome home parade, in the early 80s. I think it was the early 80s wasn't it?

Something like that - was it 86 or 87?

Yeah, 87.

I look at the one in Queensland, the year after the Sydney one. That's the one I was at.

What was that like?

23:30 Or was it 68, 67 in Vietnam and I left the RAAF in 70, so I think it was 87, say 20 years later. I hadn't seen most of these guys in 18 years or 20, whatever. And the crowd were enthusiastic, finally coming out. So, like a 20 year hiccup or something, I don't know. But

24:00 once again I was back in the air force where I made all my best friends, most of them retired to Queensland, and they were all there. It was like old times, we were a lot older and a bit fatter, but it was good fun, and the march was great, and a couple of guys that weren't going to come and we got them in.

So definitely a worth while experience?

I still go to some air force reunions, because I trained on the F-111, the F-111 is still flying in Australia, and they

24:30 have a 25th and a 30th anniversary of flying in Australia. My name is still on a list somewhere and I get an invitation and I go, in the mess, and see all these guys in their 60s, and 70s that flew it. And some that trained with me in America.

It sounds fantastic.

It's good.

It's the kind of reunion you really want to get invited to.

Yeah, it is yeah. I am retired now. But you are mixing with the young air force

25:00 guys that are flying F-111s today. Talk to them. It's good. I go to every one that I get invited to.

Do you think the attitude of the Australian public has actually changed with Anzac Day over the last few years, particularly in reference to Vietnam veterans?

Yeah, I think so yeah. The World War I diggers have just about gone. And the

25:30 public seems to respect them as they die, each individual they get a big farewell. That's really good. They are even giving some of the Legion of Honour, I notice. They will all be gone in a few years. The World War II guys are very old. My Dad, he's dead, he died at 80 and that was some years ago. So they are all in their 80s, 90s. There are some Korean War blokes, they seem to be a forgotten force.

26:00 Then there's lots of Vietnam veterans. And the next lot are the army and SAS guys who went overseas, and once again they seem to be copping a bit of a raw deal, poor conditions and injected with all sorts of funny stuff, and all sorts of psychological problems. Not that the public have shunned them, but the military is not really looking after them properly. And not only that

26:30 they are now fighting in an unpopular war in Iraq. Half the Australians doesn't want us to be there.

Well it's kind of got a similarity to what you went through.

Yeah, they probably wouldn't say, "I have just come back from Iraq, because they would probably cop a burst." Not from me, I support them. There is one particular padre in Perth, who is a friend of my mother's, who said something on the air, said, wasn't a war it was a slaughter, and our troops coming back from there.

27:00 I was going to go and punch him in the nose. Like he's nearly 70 but I am halfway to 70 anyway. I told

my mother, "Never invite me and him to the house at the same time or I will - " I just feel I have to support those guys coming back, not some bloody deadbeat like him. Under the guise of a minister denigrating our troops coming back. He's supposed to support them, not denigrate them.

It's history repeating itself almost?

And of course this guy's got a bit of respect, because he's a minister, and various

27:30 people idolise them.

Well Brian, thank you very much for talking with us today and sharing some of your philosophy and also your life story, it's been quite fascinating.

Yeah, well thanks for having me and I have had a pretty interesting life. I am richer for it all.

And we are richer for knowing you for our 141st interview and our final interview, thank you for sharing with us.

28:00 **INTERVIEW ENDS**