Australians at War Film Archive

Wilfred Bowie (Wilf) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:42 **Good morning Wilf.**

Good morning.

Thank you for giving us your time today. I'm going to start off the day by asking first of all if you can give me your rank, name and number and then a quick summary of your service details.

Yeah. Well my

01:00 rank in the air force was sergeant and the number was 26032. Now what...

And how would you summarise your service details?

Well, I don't know, it was a long time, five years and seven months or something like that. It's

01:30 was probably – I'm sorry. You want a resume of the whole thing. Well I enlisted; I went from the army into the air force in March 1940 and just went to Laverton

02:00 to recruit training there and stayed at Laverton until, I can't remember now. Until about August 1940 and then I was posted to Cressy, an armoured training school which I was there for about thirteen months. And then posted to Mallala

02:30 with the advanced party in South Australia. I was there for about five months until I went to Darwin. Well, went north, we didn't know, we finished up in Darwin where I stayed for the next thirteen months. Came home from Darwin in

03:00 1943. I was married and was posted to Mount Gambier where I was, I'm not sure now, two or three months. I went to Shepparton to do an instructors course on the recommendation of the airfield defence officer at Mount Gambier,

03:30 you see, he suggested this. And completed the airfield defence instructors' course and was kept on the staff there for the next time, I think it was roughly fifteen months going over there with a break going through.

04:00 I mean I had a few weeks break and went down to Somers to do an unarmed combat PT [Physical Training] course. I went back to Shepparton. From Shepparton I was posted north again through Bradfield Park in New South Wales to Townsville where I stayed for five months. It wasn't meant to be, I was posted

04:30 north to 75 Squadron but got kept at Townsville because they were short of an instructor. Eventually I caught up with my unit in Morotai and found I was posted to TAFRAAF [Tactical Air Force, Royal Australian Air Force] headquarters. I stayed with them only for a short while I was to go to Tarakan with

05:00 the advance party there as the acting WOD [Warrant Officer Discipline]. And I, after training these fellas up, I was told I wasn't going, I had to go to Airfield Defence Squadron where I trained fellas to go to, helped train fellas to go to Labuan landing

05:30 but I was still kept back again until Flight Lieutenant Dawson came back from Tarakan and said we were going to Balikpapan landing and when the war finished, I stayed there until the war finished. When the unit was

06:00 broken up and we flew home via Darwin and we finished up in November 1945 when I was discharged.

That's a fantastic summary of your service details. Can I just ask you, one question I've got and I'm

06:30 **not looking for the story right now. I just want to clarify when you went to Balikpapan, did you stay at Sepinggang Airstrip?**

Sepinggang, well, we didn't stay right on the strip, the strip was out, maybe to look after if, you know, what I mean, like protect.

And that's where you stayed the whole time?

Yes, yeah.

Ok.

Well we were stationed on the beach. We had a nice spot on,

07:00 at base camp which was half a mile from the strip I suppose.

Great well we'll come back and talk about that.

But of course we used to go down to the strip, somebody went to the strip everyday. Our job was to look after it, protect it, to see that it wasn't, you know, infiltrated which they often try, and you know.

07:30 **And you mentioned that you were discharged on the 15th of November, 1945.**

Yes.

What did you do after the war, or after you were discharged?

Well I went back to my job that I had before the war which was skin classer with the firm I had worked for and I stayed with them until 1949, but I was

08:00 having trouble with my legs and back and I had to keep going to a repat [repatriation] for treatment and they said I should give the job away because you was on your feet all the time bending, and if you can imagine you're picking up sheepskin, which weights average about thirteen pounds. I only talk in the old money. And you handle a thousand of those a day and

08:30 you know they finally said I should give the job away. They more or less told me if I didn't they wouldn't treat me any more, so. So then it was a matter of what to do. I worked at General Motors, I was working at Woodville. I moved into my home I had built, a war service home at Woodville.

Sorry before you go on, where did you do the wool classing?

Where? At a firm called Robert Joust at Hindmarsh,

09:00 that was a fell mongery. If you know what a fell mongery is and I was with them from the time I went to work for them when I was fourteen. I worked up until I went away during the war, you know, and I worked there up until 1949. Unfortunately about four years after they closed up anyway. It was a big wool firm, one of the three biggest in the world with the head office in Leeds

09:30 in Bradford in England.

And then you got a job at General Motors?

Yes for a while, about nine months I was there but I was still, my back wasn't any good for that sort of thing, you know, trying to work on motor vehicles moving down the line bent over. And so I applied and joined the PMG [Post Master General's Department] as a technician's assistant, I thought

10:00 that would be interesting. My father who was just a labourer in the department always said, "Oh you should joint the PMG." And I was always interested in technical stuff so I had to do a bit of a trade test and then I had to do a course of about three or four weeks basic training and then if you passed

10:30 that then they hired you which they did as a technician's assistant. And from then on I just studied and I won my way to a two year adult technician and training course. The department because of the war, after the war they ran a few adult technician and training courses, mostly ex-servicemen who you know, but anybody as long as you could pass the examination to get on the

11:00 course. Which four hundred sat for and they only wanted twenty two. So I was lucky enough to get on it. We did then in two years what most of the technicians in training did in five years you know. We had to pass at a certain standard and because I was working in the workshops I passed. I was able to do substation equipment which was phone

11:30 and switchboards and all that sort of thing. If you passed at that standard you didn't do that on the course, then you did the rest of what the technicians in training do, you know, which is on line equipment and exchange work and telephone exchange and things like that. And then I went back to the workshop and was made a senior technician and I just carried on

12:00 working at that. There were various phases of it and eventually they formed, they started a new set up where all work, I don't know if you understand the workshop, the PMG workshops as it was then exchanges all around the country between South Australia and Darwin if they wanted something built

12:30 they put in an order to the workshops and we made it. This was like technical stuff, relay sets and stuff like that for exchanges, exchange equipment and we also reconditioned stuff at the workshop for instance. Telephones, if the phone was taken out of order, like someone would

13:00 move and the phone would be taken out, it would go back to what they call a sifting room and when we got enough of them we would taken them into the workshop and recondition them, they'd go out like new, in fact better than new in most cases. Then we did the same thing with exchange equipment and relay sets and things like that an exchange was built on,

13:30 like you know. Then they decided they would form a, they called it job control in that everything that came into the workshop would go through the one spot and there was two or three of us and I was in charge of it. It became the production control it was called in the finish. I would have to check the circuits and

14:00 estimate the time that it would take to do the job and then get staff or a few people and they would get someone to order the material and that sort of thing. After a while I found that I, in checking the circuits and things like that I would find mistakes in them so I used to take these back. I would

14:30 complain to the engineer and he said, "Well there's no use complaining to me, go to the drawing office, they do the drawings." So I used to take them to the chief draftsman and said, "This won't work." After a while he used to say well we need someone in here from the field, like the draftsmen are ok, they're qualified, but they don't get a lot of field equipment. So eventually I went into the drawing office.

15:00 I finished the last fifteen years of my time as a draftsman. Which was doing the same stuff; in fact I had a very interesting job. I used to work with a fellow called the circuit standards engineer because they have a standard. We built, is this boring is it? Like you're not bored with this?

15:30 The telephone exchanges by then, of course it became Telecom, now it's Telstra but I mean it was Telecom then, it was efficient those days, I can't say the same. Anyway when they put up a new telephone exchange they always put in the latest equipment. We had the best telephone service in the world. I mean there's no two ways about that. And they,

16:00 when you put up the latest equipment then this had to work into older equipment into other exchanges. So there was equipment that had to be built to interface so that you could work from one exchange to the other and we used to build those in the workshops. Of course the circuit standards engineer, I used to get them up and I used to work with them and do the drawings and things like that. It was very interesting. So I stayed there

16:30 until I retired, well they actually invalided me out, I got very ill, my first wife was ill and I got ill. And if you were off for three months in the Department you automatically went to the CMO, the Commonwealth Medical Officer when you went back. When I went to see him and he said, "Are you an ex-serviceman?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well I would

17:00 have retired you two years ago, so I'm retiring you now." Signed the paper, so I retired.

So how many years did you spend with the PMG?

About thirty, twenty nine, it would be nearly thirty years, yeah.

So you would have retired in the late '70's?

Yeah, well actually '79 I retired, because I went on sick leave,

17:30 you used up all your sick leave and I had quite a stack of it because I was never off sick unless I had to be. And then I was retired yes, so '79, I was only fifty nine then.

Well it's interesting to hear about your work, you would have seen quite a few changes in the telephone exchange?

Sorry?

You would have seen quite a few technological changes?

Oh yes, yes. Yes when I first went in we,

18:00 like for instance the phone we used to do up in the workshops were wooden phones and they were magneto, you know, you turned the handle and things like that. And then they went to CB like they were still, the central exchange in Adelaide at that time was still if you went through central you just dialled B and you got a girl, you know, and you told them what telephone number you wanted and they plugged you up, you know, but they gradually went. It went from there,

18:30 from magneto to what they called CB, common battery to automatic. Then gradually we had pre two thousand equipment and then it went to two thousand type equipment, this probably doesn't mean much to you but its all slightly different and then they went to crossbow equipment with long lines stuff we just,

19:00 it grew out of all. When I worked in the long line section for a while you had to line up for trunk lines

between here and Mount Gambier and Melbourne and Sydney, you know, you lined them up ever morning but then they went to, finally a lot of this went to coaxial cable. I mean we used to think that a three channel system was marvellous

19:30 in as much as you could put four conversations over one pair of wires all at the same time but then that went to twelve channel and then the twenty four channel and then of course you went to coaxial cable where you could put a hundred. And it's probably left me for dead now it's gone on from there.

Yes it is quite

20:00 **phenomenal when you think about those changes. You mentioned your first wife was ill, how many children did you have?**

Five children, yeah. My youngest was only sixteen at the time his mother died. She had cancer unfortunately and so, and they retired me at that time so I didn't care. I mean I'd lost my wife,

20:30 she died and my main interest was keeping, I had still two children home, my youngest daughter who was by then working and my youngest son who was sixteen. I have two sons and three daughters. And so I was sort of, I promised my wife, she said, "You have to look after Steve." We knew Deb was going to be all right

21:00 because she was more or less engaged to a fellow, they got married six months later, now have two sons of their own. One of her sons I get to come and help me with the garden because I can't garden much any more and that sort of thing. So I was mother and father to Stephen my younger son and it worked out all right, it kept me going. And through

21:30 a younger brother of mine I met up with a lass whom I used to go out with when I was at, she was the girl around the corner when I was about sixteen, you know, and after a couple of years we were married and we had a wonderful time. This was her house as a matter of fact, because I wanted to sell my place and she'd sell hers so that we'd build a place but she said, "No I want to stay here." Because she and her first

22:00 husband built this. I knew her first husband, we were all as youngsters in the same social club you know.

And what was your second wife's name?

Jean. I've got photos, that's her photo there when she was twenty one. I've got, there the ones, if you want to see them I've got, I'll just get them in the other room. But she

22:30 unfortunately developed Alzheimer's disease in the finish but she had had cancer. She was a wonderful woman really, because she overcame all these things. A terrific sense of humour and, you know, really wonderful – sorry.

That's ok. Do you want me to stop for a minute? Where were you born,

23:00 **Wilf?**

I was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, right in Edinburgh and I lived there until I was seven and a half. I went to school for two years when my father emigrated. He wanted to come to Australia or New Zealand straight after the war but my mother didn't want to come, she was English. They met during the war. He served in the First World War and two

23:30 years in the Second World War here. Eventually I had two younger brothers and when my youngest brother was born he said to my mother, he was a coal miner he said, "These boys are all going to finish up down the coal mines." And she didn't want that and he said, "Well let's go, emigrate." Which they did.

24:00 She agreed to come to Adelaide because she had a brother here who came out here in 1911. So we, 1927 we came to Australia. It was pretty tough when we arrived because the Depression was on, it had just started, it had just hit Australia as we got here more or less which made it pretty hard, not knowing

24:30 anybody, for my father, you know, but he was a very hard worker he'd do anything he could get. So I started school in Australia. I went to Thebarton School. I went home at lunch time the first day because they put me in the babies. As I said the first thing they asked my mother did

25:00 she bring any paperwork to say how much schooling I'd had, well she hadn't thought of that so they started me in the bottom and I thought, "I'm not going in there with all the babies." So I went home. So she took me back to school the next day and they put me up another grade. I think I should have really gone up another one again, but it didn't matter, that was better. So I just progressed through the primary school.

25:30 I went to Thebarton Technical School for a while until I turned fourteen and those days as I say the Depression, well I was the oldest one in the family and I went to work, as most people lads did those, you know, unless your family was in good circumstances which we weren't it was a bit of a battle you know.

And how did the Depression affect your family?

Well,

26:00 it was very hard I mean it was the reason I left school at fourteen which sort of affected me but my mother and father both did any work they could get, you know, and that sort of thing. And we lived fairly well, plain food but always plenty of it. Your clothes sometimes were second

26:30 hand and mended but always clean and comfortable. I mean we always managed, they rented houses of course they never ever owned their own home. The Depression was a terrible time. I have very sad memories of the Depression, you know, people committed suicide and things like that. Is this all going down, I'm sorry.

27:00 **Did, you know, of anybody who had committed suicide?**

Yes, yes. A friend of my father's lived around the corner from us he was an ex-serviceman from World War I. They were in the RSL [Returned and Services League] and he was an accountant but out of work. Accountants seemed to be the first ones to go those days I think, they seemed to get clerks to do the job, you know, cheaper firms. Anyway

27:30 he shot himself on the front lawn one Sunday morning you know. He had two little girls too, it was terrible. He'd embezzled ten pounds according to him from the RSL funds because he was the treasurer. As my father said if he'd just told them, they would have, you know, said, "Don't worry about it, pay it back when you can." Ten pounds, but it worried

28:00 him. He couldn't get work and he still had his service revolver, he was an officer during World War I and he shot himself on the front lawn. So he was one. There was another one that I knew of through work, in 1934 when I started working who hung himself because he couldn't get

28:30 work. They all became desperate you know. Times are not good today for a lot of people but it's nothing like it was in the Depression there because you didn't get the help that they give you today you know.

There weren't so many welfare services do you mean?

Well there was, you got ration tickets for food

29:00 but that's about the only help you got you know. People who own houses and rented them in some cases were just happy, they couldn't collect the rent but they were happy if the people looked after them and didn't break up the doors to put on the fire or something like that in the winter, you know, what I mean. So

29:30 they were tough times all right.

And how did you heat your own family home?

We moved homes a few times to try and get a better place as things. But my Dad worked at one stage he was working, being an ex-coalminer, his trade was pick and shovel if you know what I mean. And he worked for the ENWS where they

30:00 dug trenches and things because that was what he knew. But they were getting at one stage one week on and two weeks off. And because of that they didn't get any help because one week's pay which was the minimum, about three pounds forty had to last you and that sort of thing. My mother got a job part-time cleaning in the school, she used to go in in the mornings and clean and again at night,

30:30 so that helped you know. I remember I started; I got a job on Saturday mornings working with the baker for which I used to get two and sixpence. I'd start at three o'clock in the morning and finish about one o'clock lunch time Saturdays and of that I'd give my mother two shillings of that because it all helped you know. I was happy with that, I had sixpence to spend.

What did you spend your sixpence

31:00 **on?**

Well sometimes I went to the pictures with it in the afternoon because it cost five pence and other times I bought, I used to save it and bought sporting equipment like a football, cricket bat, and things like that you know. Yes, I'm sorry, I've got to stretch my legs I think.

31:30 They were pretty hard times but everybody was in the same, most people were in the same boat and you just got on with life. So eventually things started, things didn't start to pick up until just before the war, World War II

32:00 actually.

Well you mentioned that you played footy and cricket.

Oh yeah.

Where did you play those games?

Oh well generally you started off, like you kicked the football out in the street and things like that but then I played at school. I played soccer at primary school because being a

32:30 Scot I never knew anything else but soccer, and I was in the school team in grade six and seven which was a bit of a phenomenon. There was only two of us in grade six got in the team because it was a big school, but we managed to be good enough to get in at grade six and then we played again in grade seven of course. Won the cup, I remember both years beat

33:00 Sturt Street in the final. And then when I went to high school at Thebarton Tech because in the school yard you always kicked footballs up and down, you know, and I learned to kick an Australian, like Aussie Rules football. I didn't play Aussie Rules, I couldn't understand the game at the time but at the end

33:30 of the first term at Thebarton Technical they had a sports day and I won the long distance kicking competition which was a bit, for a first year and the sports master said, "I want to see you after term out with the football team." I said, "I don't play Aussie Rules football. I don't even understand it, I play soccer." He said, "In this school,

34:00 Australian Rules comes first." So the next, the term started and I turned out with the soccer team but he came and got me and he said, "I want you." I said, "Look I don't ever understand it." "You can mark and kick the ball." So he said, "We want you on the team." And I was as tall as I am now you know. So I always remember the first game, we used to play on the Thebarton Oval which was right next to the Thebarton Technical School.

34:30 And the first time was played against another school I played, I couldn't play in the first team which was played on Saturday mornings because I had my bakers job, and so I agreed with that so I played in the second team which got out on Wednesday afternoons and played. And I remember going onto the oval at Thebarton, and I didn't even know where I was going to start and one of my

35:00 mates said, "Look, I'm playing centre, you're at halfback. We're kicking that way, you have to see that the fellow you're on doesn't get the kick and when you get the ball kick it to me in the centre." But after a while you learn the rules. And then when I left school that year the league team formed what they called the Colts teams.

35:30 You have to be under seventeen on the 1st of April, but you had to have left school. It was for lads who had left school and had to have somewhere to play you know. So I turned out with the West Torrens Colt team and we used to play before the league. Today they play seconds I think before the league, but I mean those days, the Colts played before

36:00 the league which we thought was terrific you know. First of all we got into the ground for nothing because that's all. We paid to play, today they're paid to play but we paid to play. And I made the Colts team for three years mainly the third year because my birthday's on the 4th of April and you had to be under seventeen on the 1st of April so I just made it.

36:30 So I went on then and played, I played a couple of seconds games before the war and then I went to the amateur league, I played amateur league in 1939. I only managed two games after the war because of my legs and things. So that was it as far as football was concerned. Cricket we had cricket teams we formed ourselves

37:00 and we had a Sunday morning league before the war and I captained the cricket team, I was the wicket keeper too. Until the war, after the war I played cricket with the RSL for a couple of years but then you get a family and you are sort of busy you know. Played quite a bit of tennis too,

37:30 just social tennis that sort of thing. I mean I've always done something, always tried to keep fit. I finished up sailing boats. I used to build my own boats, I liked carpentry as a hobby and I built my sailing boats. I sailed boats for thirty years with the Port River Sailing Club, in fact I'm a life member of the club. I finished up commodore of the club a couple of times. I

38:00 still go down, they invite me down opening day and all that and whenever I want to go of course being a life member. Then I started playing golf.

Well just going back to you left school at fourteen and got a job as you mentioned sulking sheepskins.

Yeah.

Where were you doing that?

At Hindmarsh, the fell mongeries were all around Hindmarsh then. Michels was the big firm

38:30 now but they moved out of Hindmarsh after the war, they shifted them out because it was a pretty noxious trade. Being a noxious trade the money, pay was good you know. I mean I started work at twenty-four [fourteen] on a penny a week, one pound four and a penny a week whereas most lads were getting twelve and six and fifteen shillings a week at fourteen, you know, because it was a stinky trade. After a while you got used to it, you

39:00 know, you didn't take much notice but it was hard work. I worked pretty hard at it for two years and

then I decided that the best job in the place was the classers' job so I went to night school. School of Mines as it was then and did wool classing. I finished that after the war because I was nineteen when I went away like and then.

Ok,

39:30 **well our tape is just about to run out so we will just…**

Tape 2

00:31 **So Wilf you were just talking about moving over to do the wool classing studies, was that involved, what was involved in the wool classing studies?**

Well, the first year you went to the School of Mines for about six months, one night a week. And

01:00 you did, and then they went out they used to be at the Wayville Showgrounds, you went out and you classed you learned to class fleeces and things like that. And from then on once you passed that from then on it was just a matter of once a year you went out and did a shed. The first year out you only do like rouseabout stuff. And then you do, you pick up the

01:30 fleeces and throw them on the table for the classer. And then skirt them which is a matter of going around the edges and taking the furry bits off and that sort of thing and fold the fleece up ready for the classer to class. And of course eventually you do the classing yourself and you get your ticket you know. My last year, it was a matter of and the firm were very good they used to let me off once a year

02:00 to go out and do a shed and I went to one or two different sheds. The last one I did was down Wangolina down in the south east in 1946 because I came back I had to do another year after the war had finished up.

Well just talking about before the war when you were working for the firm, what was the

02:30 **organisation like, what was the company like?**

Oh it was a good company and the fell mongery was a process of taking the wool off the sheepskin and they used to soak the skins in water for a couple of days. And then they'd put them in what they'd call a stove, they'd hang them up in the stove they were all wet and they put steam on there and this allows them after a couple of days they bring them out and they have

03:00 fellas who are usually ex-shearers whom are called pullers. And they have a beam and they put the sheepskin over the beam, lean on it and the wool comes out like by the roots as the saying goes, it comes off clean and leaves just the pelt. The pelts of course are preserved. They are put into a mixture of

03:30 water and acid and preserve them and sell them. They sell them, they used to sell most of them to farms, they use the leather because they are tanned and that later on and different things and they use them for leather tops. Prior to that the firm used to shear the actual skin and then firms like Rossiters here would buy the skins and make slippers and things out of them, wool lined slippers because the wool would only be very short. But then

04:00 with the fell mongery the wool comes off and leaves the pelt clean. So the wool itself then is all wet of course and it's taken away from these pullers and it's put through what they call a hydro machine which was just a big spin dryer. And that's what I worked on for two years when I started work at fourteen. It always amazed me that after the war when I came back to the firm that there was two men doing the job that I did

04:30 from fourteen to sixteen. They weren't handling as many skins and they were complaining about being overworked. So times change, don't they. So then that wool, the water would come out of the spin drying and you would take most of the water out and then the wool goes into a drying machine and goes away into bins and eventually it's packed in bales and

05:00 from this firm they used to send them to the head office, head firm in Leeds in England where it was then of course processed and, you know, combed and spun and all that sort of thing. It always amazed me that there wasn't enough firms doing that here, you know, we sent the wool away and then it comes back again. It's going through,

05:30 wool's a terrific fibre as far as I'm concerned. I mean when you learned all about it, I like wool jumpers and things like this because the natural fibre is a very good subject. It's hydroscopic, like it will soak up water and

06:00 dry out again. Keeps you warm even when it's wet, when I was sailing I used to wear a woollen jumper because if you fall in the water it still keeps you, you know, under your life jacket of course.

I agree, it's a fantastic fibre. How far away were the fell monger from your home, how far

away did you have to travel?

Well, bear in mind that we lived at Thebarton and for the first six months I walked to work because I couldn't afford

06:30 a bike, which meant, and they started work, we used to work forty eight hours a week then. You started work at twenty past seven in the morning and I would leave home and walk to work and then after work I would walk home again. That sort of thing until like after six months I saved enough to buy a pushbike and then I used to ride a bike to work. After the war when I moved to Woodville

07:00 I managed to buy a little motorbike I used to go to work on. A BSA Bantam when they first came out. And that was the first vehicle I had ever owned. I never owned a car until I was thirty years old and then that was a 1929 Fiat. I mean people today there's two and three cars in the family so I mean,

07:30 we were lucky to get one. Anyway, I'm sorry that's how I went to work. It wasn't that far away but I had to go up over the river, over the River Torrens. The firm was right on the Torrens but the other side of the river to where I lived. And then of course after the war as I say when I lived in Woodville well I had about four miles to go, I suppose.

08:00 **And before the war did you get your wool classer's ticket?**

No, no, I didn't finish it because like the war broke out and I went away, I still had a year to go at that time and I did that after the war.

So in 1939 what sort of, sorry in 1938 I understand you joined the CMF [Citizens' Military Force]?

Yes, yes the

08:30 27th Battalion.

That was quite a way before the war was declared.

Yes.

Very early days.

Yeah, this was part-time. As they have the citizen forces they call it now, part-time, this was the same. I used to go to drill down at Keswick one night a week and then once a year we have a camp for ten days. Occasionally we'd have a weekend bivouac, you'd go in for the weekend, you know.

09:00 My, the manager my boss was a great in favour of this and if I needed time off to go to camp, well he gave me time off you know. In fact he still paid me which was good because I got paid eight shillings a day while I was in camp too.

Well, why were you prompted to join the CMF?

Well I just thought it was,

09:30 my father had been a soldier, you know, like and I thought it's one of the things to do, its good training and also you got paid a bit for it, a bit extra and I found it quite interesting. I joined the 27th Battalion because they didn't have a Scottish Regiment in South Australia, but they

10:00 decided the 27th Battalion would be the Scottish Regiment. So I thought well my father was an Argyle and Sutherland Highlander, I'll join them and he allowed me to do that when I was eighteen. So I was in that until and in fact when the war broke out we were the first battalion called in. We went in three days after the war broke out they called us up and we went to Fort Largs.

Before we go on, can I just ask a bit

10:30 **more about your father's World War I experience?**

Yes.

What did, you know, about this?

Well, he being a coal miner, wasn't too happy about down the coal mines. All his family, his father and all that were coal miners. When he turned eighteen he left home and jointed the Black Watch regiment which much to his father's annoyance.

11:00 His father kept trying to find out where he was because being, if you were under twenty one those days you were under the control of your parents, your father you know. He eventually found out where he was after about eight months, by this time he was a fully trained soldier with a Black Watch and he made him come home. He bought him out, it cost him twenty five pounds to buy him out. He didn't want to come out but because he was under

11:30 twenty one and his father said they needed him he bought him out. So he wasn't very happy about that, he said, "The pay was very miserly in the army, but it wasn't down the coal mine." So he was only out

three months when the war broke out, World War I. So he went straight back in again. He went with the local, with some of his mates

12:00 in the local unit, not with the Black Watch but with the Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders which incidentally the other ranks in both the Argyles and the Black Watch wear the same kilt. So it didn't, you know, not that that silly grade thing but it's a. So in no time having been trained he was over in France

12:30 and he was in and out of France for about four years then like he was in France for quite a while. And I've got photos again of his platoon and that too, I didn't pull them out I didn't know whether you wanted all that sort of stuff, I can easily get it. And the first time he came back, he was wounded twice during the war, and the first time he came back wounded it was 1916 I think.

13:00 And that's when he met my mother who was then in Scotland because my English grandfather was a shipwright in the naval dockyards at Chatham in England. But because a lot of, they had to fix up the ships, the battleships when they came in for being repaired they decided it was easier to take them up to Scarpa Flow in Scotland, it was safer. So my

13:30 grandfather was shifter up there and he went up with his three daughters to Scotland. He had two sons but the older one was out here in England, in Australia from 1911. The other one, his eldest son which was my father's brothers was a baker in the merchant navy and was

14:00 incidentally torpedoed three times during World War I and survived. In World War II he was still in the merchant navy and was torpedoed again but they went down with all hands, he was lost. I suppose I'm getting off the track, am I?

What sort of wounds did your father have?

He was wounded in the forearm, twice. Mainly because he was

14:30 a machine gun, what they called then the Lewis gun and to fire the Lewis gun you fired it like this and each time, the second time he got hit there too. He survived; he got gassed a bit of gas towards the finish which didn't do him any good either so that was another reason after the war

15:00 he was very ill for a while with a double pneumonia because he got a bit of gas down the coal mine again and that made him very ill. That was one of the reasons he wanted to get out and come out here, you know, plus the fact that he met a lot of Australians in World War I and he always thought, well you know, he got on very well with them. And when he came

15:30 out here he always used to say this, "Australian's the greatest, it's the greatest country in the world." I said to him that I wanted him to go back for some time and he said, "No, no I didn't want to go back." So he was a great man, my father. People talk about, who do you think is the greatest man who ever lived? As far as

16:00 I'm concerned it was my father, he was a great man; we were good friends.

So he did really influence your decision to join the CMF?

Well he didn't object, yes. Yes he didn't object. He said no everybody should, he thought that the services taught you a lot of things, you know,

16:30 that were good for you and I agree, I enjoyed them. The only reason I left to go into the air force was because I wanted to fly but I didn't get to fly unfortunately for various reasons. In the first instance when I applied I didn't have my immediate certificate. I mean I left school at fourteen and not too many had and

17:00 the first time they wanted aircrew they wanted people with their intermediate certificates you know. They said later on they will have to bring the education standard down and so if you're in on the ground you'll, you know, you'll be. Which wasn't quite true but that's why I went in.

And where was the 27th Battalion based?

At Keswick those days, the drill hall was down

17:30 there. We used to go down there and we used to go down there for drill. Mind you they had companies, they had a couple of companies, they had one in Alice Springs I think and one company in the lower north here, up in the north. But most of the other companies, A Company and that was down there. I went into the transport section of the company, of the battalion after a while which was horse transport those

18:00 days because I liked horses. I used to ride one and lead the other one so I remember, it was good fun. I really learned to ride a horse. Went to horse mastership school and became a second class driver. Unless you were a commissioned officer you never got to be a first class driver, only commissioned officers became first class and some of them couldn't ride I'll tell you.

18:30 It used to be funny putting up hacks for them on parade days when the officers had to go on a hack and I'll tell you what, some of them used to look like a pack of wheat tied in the middle. But the horses were lovely and there was no doubt about it, I liked the horse transport. Of course they all became

19:00 mechanised later on in the war. They were talking about it when I left to go into the air force in March 1940, they were talking about becoming mechanised and of course eventually they did.

And what do you remember of that declaration of war in 1939?

Well I was visiting my girlfriend who became my wife, my first wife

19:30 one day and of course there was always talk about it. And I was visiting her when it came over the air, well it was very, it sort of went on for a while in England and Chamberlain and that sort of thing

20:00 said, "I suppose you've seen peace in our time." you know, like went over to Germany and so called signed this piece of paper which wasn't worth what was written on it as far as that was concerned. He came back and said, "Peace in our time." My memory is sort of failing me on some of these fellows now but Earl Page I think he was,

20:30 he said it won't hold. Oh I'm not too sure now, I can't remember the British history part, you know, but of course they no sooner declared war and they said the Prime Minister here who was Menzies at the time said, "Therefore we're at war." So that was it.

21:00 That was on the, I forget whether it was a Saturday or a Friday, I can't remember now but I know the next day I got a telegram to say on the Tuesday morning be at Adelaide Railway Station with all your gear from the army, like the 27th Battalion. And so we went into camp down at Fort Largs. We

21:30 did duty, there is all the oil companies down there we did guard duties on that. We boarded the ships as they came into our harbour to warn the skippers of the ship that if they had any aliens on

22:00 board not to let them ashore because you couldn't take them off the ship because a lot of crews in ships consisted of all nationalities you know. In fact one German fellow came ashore and was arrested by one of our blokes. He was taking pictures of all the oil wells down on the wharf and one of our blokes grabbed him. He finished up in concentration camp, concentration camp it

22:30 sounds terrible, doesn't it, but they had a camp for a lot of people whom they gathered up. So we did that for a month and then we had a months break and the 43rd Battalion took over and then we went into camp at Woodside after that and they started

23:00 calling up the twenty one year olds for compulsory training. Well they came in and joined our unit like up there and of course a lot of our fellows left and joined the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] straight away and some went to the air force and all that sort of thing. So I was in camp again at Woodside when I got the call up for the air force. And I was discharged from there and like it was ok, they said, "Well you're discharged from that, that's ok."

23:30 And I came down.

And where had your interest in the air force come from?

I was always interested in planes. A mate and I, we used to push our pushbikes out the Parafield which was the only aerodrome in South Australia those days and we'd climb all over these planes, you know, like I was always interested in flying. So I thought, "Here a chance, I'll learn to

24:00 fly in the air force." It didn't happen unfortunately. As I say firstly because it's a case of when that came down I was at Mallala of course they said, "You're an ex, what's your trade?" And I said, "Wool classer." "Well that's no good to us but you're in the army well we could do with fellas in the guards in the air force and you'll be in

24:30 on the ground floor." So I said, "All right I'll come in as a guard." It didn't turn out that way the guards were in such short supply all the time they didn't want you to re-muster as it was called to another you know. But eventually they said you could and I was at Mallala and I sat for the aptitude test and passed and I passed the medical so it was just a matter of waiting to get called up to the air crew and

25:00 the Japanese came into the war. And straight away they said, "All re-musters stop." And anyway in no time I was away and went north.

Well before we talk about going north can you just tell us, first of all when you joined up with the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] you went to the ATS [Armoured Training School] at Cressy?

Yeah I went from Laverton.

The Armoured Training School?

I went to Laverton.

Or Laverton?

Yes.

25:30 **Can you just tell us a bit about going to Laverton?**

Well we were getting trained at, but we were sworn in here. Actually they delayed us a week because they were taking the fellows to Melbourne and swearing them in over there but then when they got them there they found a few disappeared and they got a free trip to Melbourne. So they decided

26:00 they would allot certain numbers to each state and they would swear you in before you went, which was fair enough. So they started South Australia number at twenty six thousand and I was twenty six thousand and thirty two. Anyway we went to Laverton and, do you want to know what we did there? Well the first thing you did was what you called your rookies course. We only

26:30 did, because we were guards we only did a few days and they took us out over to what they called block thirteen which was a great block with rooms which was for permanent air force, you know, where the permanent air force used to live but they put us in there and it was like a hotel as far as we were concerned. So we were in there and we did drill and all the rest of it and then we did guard duties.

27:00 I mean guards, the airfield defence is a matter of protecting the equipment and strip and all that sort of thing so we did the guard at Laverton. It was early in the war and mainly during the day there wasn't a lot of duties, man the main gate and saw that no-one, unauthorised people came in and there was another gate further around

27:30 and they used to have a guard on there. And then at night time we'd do guard duty around the drome, it was a fairly big, Laverton was the big drome down there, Laverton and Point Cook. We had a bomb dump, a couple of bomb dumps someone would be out there guarding that at night because it was further out in the paddock if, you know, what I mean

28:00 and all sandbagged up. And around the hangers, there was quite a few hangers and the workshops where they worked on the aircraft. So general duties, everything was sort of checked at night. And you did two hours out there and then you had four off of a night time. Then of a day time you did

28:30 more drill and weapons training and that sort of thing.

So can you just tell me again what were the shifts that you did, what hours were the shifts?

Well starting from eighteen hundred at night you would go on, you would be out with your rifle and bayonet and around for two hours and then you would be relieved, they'd change the guard and you'd go in,

29:00 go in to the guard room and you would have four hours off. You could sleep or do what you want you'd usually have a cuppa or whatever you know. There was always toast made there of a night and that sort of thing and get your head down and have a bit of a nap and then of course after four hours you was out again for another two hours. So it was two on, two hours on and four hours off. That was at Laverton, when

29:30 I went to Cressy that was slightly different.

So just still staying with Laverton for the moment, so when you're on guard duty do you stand to, can you just tell us how you stand and?

Well you didn't always stand you walked around, you know, with a rifle at the slope, supposed to but I mean after a while you

30:00 slung it on for the minute. And then usually the orderly officer or orderly sergeant would come around at a certain time to see everything was going or anybody that approached you had to bail them up and demand, see who they were you know. Later on the war at different times they had passwords, you know, and that sort of thing but not at this stage they didn't but it was a matter of 'halt, who goes

30:30 there', you know. And then if it was the orderly officer he would say, "Orderly officer." And you'd make sure that it was and you would rifle on the shoulder and salute and he'd say, "Everything all right?" "Yes." And then they'd move on to the next to check the next post and so on. And you were on your own out there until the Italians came into the war. Now not far from

31:00 Laverton is Werribee and it's a big Italian population around there and of course straight away they doubled the guard and so there would be two of you each time which was a bit better, at least you had a bit of company out there. It was for security reasons they thought it was better that they had two. So each post was manned by two people and you just marched around your area. Like if you did the

31:30 hangers well you moved around the hangers to see that no-one came in because the fences was around the drome were only three strand wire fences, so anybody could have got in and there were occasions I suppose, I don't recall any at Laverton where strangers did get in. The only shot

32:00 I heard fired, I could tell you a funny one about when I was in the army at Fort Largs, do you want to hear about that?

What was that story?

We reckoned we fired the first shot in the war at Fort Largs in this first camp when we'd gone into. And it was, again we were doing two hours on and four hours off like down there, that was the standard thing. We'd just come off at midnight

32:30 and we were in having a cup of coffee in the guard ten when all of a sudden someone, it was a clear moonlit night and someone was yelling out, "Halt, who goes there." you know, you could hear it as plain as anything and still no answer. "Halt, who goes there? Halt or I'll fire." you know, and we though hello and the next thing bang there was a shot. So fall out to go, we all turned out then of course. And the fellow on the road and this poor old fellow that was coming along on his

33:00 pushbike, he'd been to the RSL down at Largs and he was shaking like a leaf. They brought him in, this old First World War bloke, you know, and he said, "I'm deaf, I'm deaf as a post. I heard that bloody shot." And he hit the deck. The bloke fired it over his head of course but he strayed off the track and I mean the guard was quite within his rights to bail

33:30 him up, you know. So we gave him a cup of coffee and escorted him around the other side because those days at Fort Largs if you passed Fort Largs now, which is a police academy now, you drive straight past on the sea front but those days the road went down and around the fort and then off the other harbour it wasn't on the sea front. In fact one of the jobs we did there we built, we put up a double apron barbed wire

34:00 fence all around on the beach front there.

That was while you were with the CMF?

Yes, yes. I'm sorry to digress with that,

No that's, that's interesting.

That was just a bit of humour because as we said it was the first shot that they fired in the war. So where were we? At Laverton.

Well actually before we go on with Laverton can you just explain where you put up that barbed wire on the beach?

34:30 Well the fort had big guns facing out to sea which was sort of, they'd been put there I think from the time when the, of the Russian it was thought the Russians would invade in 1901 or something like that and they were to protect the shipping coming up the gulf and the permanent army manned those. Now we didn't go

35:00 right in the fort, our tents were in the back of the fort. So to stop anyone coming in from the front, from the beach we, which was also good training for putting up barbed wire fences because that's a soldier's job, often does that. We put up this fence all along the front on the beach and it was taken down after the war of

35:30 course. And then at a later date the road was taken straight past the front of the fort. So there used to be two types of barbed wire. We used to use this and still the air force, the guards in the air force we learned how to do this too. But later barbed wire fences it's a, do you want a description of that?

Well, how effective do you think it

36:00 **would have been?**

Well it stands about, you know, so high and it's shaped like that and it's all strands of barbed wire and it's pretty hard to run through. We learned how to go through them later on, you crash them and the first couple of fellas jump on them, lay on them and then everybody runs over the top of them and that's the only way you get through, but all armies on both sides use barbed wire fences.

36:30 There was also another type of wire that was called Iowa concertina wire and it was round and it came and you'd bounced this out and it's a deterrent for people, you being rushed. Barbed wire its horrible stuff, but I mean it was used in World War I and

37:00 it's probably still used as a sort of deterrent. But of course these days there's, one of the things you had to learn was how to get through a barbed wire fence or later on when I did explosives and things and we learned how to make what they called 'bangalore torpedoes' to blow them up. And of course when you could, you'd cut the wire to get

37:30 through but.

It's hard to imagine Adelaide Beaches with barbed wire like that.

Yeah, oh yes it was all along there. I don't know whether, they probably put it in other parts at beaches but I wasn't involved in that, I don't know, but I know we put it at Fort Largs anyway.

Well going back to your time

38:00 **at Laverton, when you weren't on guard what other sorts of duties did you have?**

Well you drilled of course for a while but I mean that's to keep you occupied but you had to learn weapons training like, well you had to teach fellas how to clean their rifle and then we did some, we'd go to the rifle range and do some shooting you know.

38:30 And we learned air craft recognition was a big thing because guards were expected to man ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire] like machine guns but we didn't have any there at Laverton by the way. In fact the equipment was in pretty short supply although we had rifles, .303 rifles and bayonets. Everybody had their own

39:00 like and some of these were World War I jobs but the old .303, the Enfield rifle was a very good rifle you know. Then we'd have lectures on different things, we did PT of course to keep fit, they kept you moving most of the time. Occasionally for a start off we went in, we were hired,

39:30 enlisted as aircraft hand guards but it wasn't until after, until I got my papers after the war or, you know, like recent times when you could write in and ask for all your papers after fifty years. And I found that we were re-mustered almost two days after we were in the, not from aircraft hand guards but to just straight guards. But

40:00 partly they used to have us down in the morning, the planes that were there were Avro Ansons which still did coastal patrol work as a matter of fact and they used to shadow the troop ships going out along the coast as far as they could. And these had to be started up in the morning well one of the jobs we got was starting them up. So you stood on a small step ladder behind the engine,

40:30 they were twin engine, and they had like a crank handle in the thing and you wound this up until the plane fired and started and of course you were straight behind it, it was pretty cold, I'll tell you, like Victoria that time of the year is cold anyway. And, sorry as I said, I think I've said in my story all the volunteers were detailed, you don't be a

41:00 volunteer. We did that for a while and then later on the aircraft hands they made straight aircraft hands and they did that sort of thing but it was one of the early jobs.

Ok, well our tape's just about to finish.

Oh, right.

So we'll just stop it.

Tape 3

00:30 **Wilf we're still in Laverton and you just described starting up the Avro Ansons. Were there many training accidents going on there?**

Training accidents oh yes, yes. Yes occasionally when we first went there I remember pilots would, training pilots and that they'd crash and get killed. And they had a,

01:00 very early in the peace they used to have a funeral march for them you know, they gave that away after a while because it would have been going on all the time. I went on, twice I went on the funeral march which was not very good because the last half mile you'd do that slow march which was pretty, arms reversed, you know, that sort of thing. I think they suddenly woke up that there's a war on there's going to be

01:30 people killed all the time and that didn't happen. When I first went to Cressy, the day I got there a fellow dive bombed into the lake and was killed. But yeah there was often like, you know, people get killed and all sorts, you know, when you're away. My wife had

02:00 a cousin who was a pilot and took part in the D Day show as a pilot, an Australian air force pilot and he was killed but not in a plane, he was in a jeep and it turned over. We had a fellow in our unit in the islands who got badly smashed up, turned over in a jeep and had to be sent home. I don't know whether he survived or not, he was smashed up enough to be sent home.

02:30 **And you just mentioned Cressy then which you went to after Laverton, what were your duties at Cressy?**

Well, more or less the same thing. During the day there was a guard room at the gate, there was only six guards there. The whole staff consisted of forty five being a few armourers and things like

03:00 that. And the squadrons would move in, they'd fly in and bring some of their own staff and that sort of thing and the staff at Cressy maintained the targets on the lakes and things like that because they did dive bombing and then they did gunnery, air to air gunnery. And we had what they called drogue towing planes which were old hawker demons, I've got there's a photo there.

03:30 They towed a drogue behind and the planes shot at the drogue and they'd check up to see how good they were afterwards because they used to paint the ammunition belts and if you were blue well if you

hit the drogues they would leave a blue mark on there and that sort of thing. So they would move in for a couple of weeks' holus bolus and we maintained

04:00 the whole area and then they'd move out and another squadron would come in at different times you know. For six weeks in the middle of the year it was a grass strip, they couldn't fly it used to be too soft. It was soft enough for the drogue planes to take off because they were only light but they, and we used to go for a bit of flight with them from time to time you

04:30 know. They'd say, the pilots themselves had to always do a certain amount of air hours every, even if there nothing going on they still had to fly so much, so many hours a month so they'd do what they call circuits and bumps. They'd take the drogue planes up, fly around and come down, land and take them up and fly around the air district and come back and land. And quite often if they were going, you know, we'd often say to them, "Have you got anybody

05:00 going with you, no, right, can we come?" So we'd go along with them it was good. I actually one day did a drogue, was allowed to let a drogue out and we was hoping to get on a para because you got crew pay when you were on that, another two shillings a day but they didn't, the armourers mostly did it.

And did you do any training while you were at ATS?

Oh yes we still, you still did

05:30 weapon training and there we did more, what we called ack-ack training in as much we had a gun like a machine gun, it was a camera gun. And you'd be, you know, you could, they had a Moth Minor plane there and one of the pilots would take it up and he'd come in and sort of dive bomb at us and fly past and all that and we learned to shoot

06:00 and then they'd develop the camera and you'd see how accurate you know. So we had to learn about deflection shots and half deflection and full deflection, you know, like if a plane is going across in front of this way you've got to allow and that sort of thing. So we had quite a bit of that in training which was handy, because when I was in Darwin, well then it was the real thing,

06:30 and they weren't camera guns. They weren't big enough, good enough unfortunately.

And how accurate was your shot?

Oh I got to be fairly good after a while you know. They'd say, "Yeah, that one would have been a hit." And that sort of thing but small arms fire against aircraft of course it's got to be low flying aircraft, it's the only one you can fire at naturally. And

07:00 as they used to tell you in the lectures the surface, there was only I think it was point five of the surface area of an aircraft that's vulnerable to ack-ack, light ack-ack fire or to any ack-ack fire. you know, the planes would come back, our planes would come back with holes in them everywhere but they still didn't come down. I mean but it's a deterrent and the idea is to keep them out of the way.

07:30 As I learned when I went on the section leaders' course at Winnellie later on, the big plane the three point seven ack-ack guns didn't always fire directly at the planes they fired beneath them, the main thing was to keep them up. The higher you can keep them the less accurate they're going to be, well that was the theory, but believe me the Japs were very accurate, very accurate.

Well

08:00 **I'm wondering what the air raid procedure was?**

Where?

At Cressy while you were there.

Oh there was really no. I mean if there had been attacked, but this was in Victoria country it was hardly likely there'd be any attacks there but we, they would have, we didn't really have any then you know,

08:30 when you come to think of it we just never thought that we'd ever be attacked and it never was of course. None of the stations down here were ever attacked. The station in the north, Townsville and those things were and all ports along the north later on. But there would have been, there'd be a siren there which they could have used I guess. I don't ever remember them ever having an

09:00 air raid, a mock air raid thing at Cressy, we did at Mallala later on that sort of thing.

So what did you do...

Because at Cressy the Japanese, let's face it at Cressy the Japanese weren't in the war then. So we did the switchboard for the station was in the guardroom and they had one switchboard

09:30 operator but he only worked sort of, not nine to five but I mean eight till five. And when he was going to lunch one of use would relieve, we learned to operate the switchboard and we would relieve him. And then at night time he'd stand down at eighteen hundred and we would, well he'd stand down at seventeen hundred as a rule because he went for a meal and we would take over. The fellow on duty

10:00 in the guardroom would also answer the switchboard, it was in a little room just off the guardroom. And any calls coming in, usually calls coming in were for officers and they would make call out and that sort of thing and you would have to plug them up. It was an old pyramid type switchboard, it was quite easy to work.

How many men were on guard duty at

10:30 **once?**

In the day time, there was only one man in the guard. He opened the gate for anybody coming in or going out and had a log book and they logged in who went out and who came in. That was pretty strict, you know, and that would be examined everyday by the orderly officer as a matter of fact a couple of times a day to see that it was being kept up to date. Because you had various tradesmen would come in too, it was like the butcher

11:00 would come in and things like that, the milkman first thing in the morning and things. And then the fellows themselves would be, we'd have armourers and that going out to the lakes, Lake Corangamite, it's near Colac because they had targets on the lake and they had to go out and maintain these

11:30 targets and things like that. And they had to keep up, they had some revetments, this is very hard to explain I suppose revetments are if you can understand is they a wall about half as high as or maybe three parts as high as the wall around here and it was a place where they could take planes,

12:00 jack them up and fire the guns to make sure they were synchronised right from on the planes, this was the units that came in. And if they were having a bit of trouble they would take the planes to this area and these things had to be maintained you know. We would, if we had spare time we would sometimes, when all this business was going on all this training with the planes, we would often help the armourers clean the

12:30 guns and things afterwards. So we learned because we had to learn weapons as much as possible because weapons. So there was one man on in the day time, I'm wondering a bit aren't I, and he operated the gate, answered the phone when the switchboard wasn't there. At night time there would be two on from eighteen hundred until o

13:00 six hundred in the morning there would be two. Two of you would be on from eighteen hundred to midnight and you would take it in turns. You'd go out for an hour, there was only two canvas hangers there and you would go out and move around the hangers and just keep an eye out all around see no strangers came in because again only an ordinary wire fence around this aerodrome. We'd be in the guard room doing the same thing, opening and

13:30 shutting the gate and booking people in and out, answering the phones and so on. And then an hour he'd come out and relieve you and you'd go in and take over. So this went on, you were there for six hours straight. Then the midnight ones come on and they were on until six in the morning and then at half past five they'd go and light the fires for the cooks. We were always well looked after by the cooks, because we used to

14:00 light their fires for them in the morning.

How great was the threat at Cressy?

Pardon?

How great was the threat at Cressy?

The threat, oh no threat at all really. All these stations down south when you say, you don't know a great, like today you get terrorists, don't you coming. Well you could still get, there was often people arrested, not on

14:30 the strip itself but throughout the country people nosing about trying to find out what went on, you know, and no-one was trusted. Well you couldn't afford to. Darwin in particular was a place were there was a fifth column [enemy supporters] in Darwin there was no two ways about that because it was in a place where there were plenty of Japanese and that sort of

15:00 thing there, you know, but anyway that's getting up to Darwin. But at Cressy and those places, but you still had to be, make sure that no-one came onto the drome and it would have been fairly simple in some cases, like it was easy to get through the fence that's not a problem and if anybody had wanted to play havoc with anything well they,

15:30 you know they would have tried but that was our job to see they didn't.

Did you get any intruders?

No not, at Mallala there was a couple at one time civilians getting through the fence and then they lined them up and bring them up. It turned out in most cases they were looking for mushrooms or something, they didn't realise this is fenced like, and

16:00 part of the airdrome you know. As far as I'm concerned that was the only couple can sort of remember.

At Cressy we never had any problems. A couple of times got fellows coming through the fence but they were our own fellows, you know, they were late coming back and instead of coming through the gate they were coming in through the fence. It didn't

16:30 worry us too much. I told them, "Get in there and get to bed."

I was going to ask you if you had any problems with young recruits?

No, not really. Well we were all pretty young ourselves you know. I don't, I mean there was always someone. When I was at Laverton there was always someone getting into strife

17:00 and I mean later on when I was at Shepparton which was a recruit depot too and of course recruit depots, everything's got to be pie high, you know, they're very strict on the discipline and that being a recruit depot. And there's always a few fellas that do the wrong thing and get bumpered and finish up on KP [Kitchen Patrol] or something like that

17:30 but that goes on all the time.

Well then you went to Mallala.

Yes.

And you were based at an aerodrome there.

Yeah.

What were your duties there?

Oh same thing you know. I was, just after I got there my promotion came through, I was made a corporal which means I didn't have to do too much palling around, you were in the guardroom and you

18:00 took the fellas out and you changed the guard and that sort of thing during the night, which was a bit easier and certainly better paid. It's the same thing, a bit more intensified because things were getting, you know, the war wasn't going too well and there was more planes and more people training.

18:30 It was called SFTS, which was secondary flying training school which meant that the pilots coming in there would have done their elementary training on moths at some other station and then they would come in there to do, again they'd have Avro Ansons there, they would come in to do their training on twin engine flying so it was called secondary flying training school, that was as far as

19:00 the aircrew was concerned. With the fellas on the ground well mechanics still had to maintain the planes and all that sort of thing and we had to look after the place you know. Again there was bomb dumps on there because these planes could be used to bomb up and if necessary. And revetments again for testing the

19:30 machine guns on the planes and things like this. But we would generally again operate from the guardroom, the main gate, thoroughly check anybody. We were getting, people had to be pretty thoroughly checked then, like if any civilians came onto the, they usually had a pass for a start. We took their name and the number of their car and that went into the log book and

20:00 the time they came in of course. And then when they went out, the time they booked out and we checked to see that when they went out they just went out with what they came in with or left what they delivered, see that they didn't take anything else. The security was pretty tight and that's generally what the job was.

20:30 But when you was on duty as a corporal you did this, there was a guard who went and opened the gate and he'd come in and report to you and you'd put it in the log book. And then when the guard had to be changed at night time you would take out, you might have six fellas out at different places so then you would march out six new chaps and change over as he went.

21:00 around, well they were in pairs as a rule anyway. And then you would bring the other fellas back and see if they had anything to report and then stand them down while they had something to eat and some of them had a sleep or whatever before they went out again you know. So you was going in and out all the time and if there were any troubles

21:30 you know quite often, oh at Cressy one of the things we used to do too, by the way, was turn the lights out at ten thirty, sorry twenty two thirty. The lights were, they had electricity but it was from a KVA [thousand volt ampere] and the first thing in the morning, the shift came on at five thirty in the morning and you used to have to go up and start this. It was a cow of a thing to start I'll tell you, you had

22:00 to wind the handle and get it going and then check the switches to see the power was going out all right. And then at night time unless you were told by the orderly officer or the CO [Commanding Officer] or anybody, they might say, "Oh leave the lights on for a while." And then they would ring later and say, "Now you can turn the lights off." They might be having a party or something up in the officer's mess. But generally speaking, if we didn't hear anything,

22:30 we went up five minutes before we shut it down we dimmed the lights so that anybody that had lights

on knew that they were going to go out and then at twenty two thirty you turned the KVA off. And then you had to refuel it ready for starting in the morning and that sort of thing you know. So guards generally did a few other odd jobs apart from guarding. In fact I always

23:00 reckoned they were a very, very versatile group, guards. Which I'll probably later on in the islands and things like that we had fellas that set up electrical things for us, like we finished up with electric lights in our tents at the last part. Anyway that's another story or a later story I suppose.

This is where you went to re-muster isn't

23:30 **it, at Mallala?**

Yes, yes. Yes they said, they'd sort of relaxed a bit, they said that ground crew could apply for aircrew if they wanted to. So I applied along with two or three other fellas in the guards. And you had to do an aptitude test and pass that and you did a medical because the medical

24:00 for aircrew was a bit more stringent then on the ground. At a later date when I tried again I couldn't pass the medical for the aircrew. That was after I'd been in Darwin for ten months but anyway that will come later I guess. So I passed, now it was a matter of, I was as pleased as punch and there was three of us as a matter of fact. One fellow was told he had to get his blood pressure down, other than that he was all right and

24:30 he used to go for a run everyday in his spare time, I used to go running with him. We were just waiting to be called up to start an aircrew course. Aircrew courses of course when you first started off you didn't know what you were going to be, whether you were going to be a pilot, an air gunner or a navigator. I mean that would depend on, they decided on

25:00 what you would be. One of these three, this is the three of us finally made it to aircrew after I left but as I say first of all the Japanese came into the war and he went off about the time he got called in and did his course. He finished up a wireless air gunner and was killed over Germany as a matter of fact. He was a Western Australian

25:30 fellow. That's just by the way. The Japanese entered the war and they said, "Re-muster's will stop at this stage, no re-musters, so you can forget it for a while." So we after a while I was posted to the embarkation depot which was at North Adelaide then.

Can I just ask how things changed

26:00 **when the Japanese entered the war?**

Well straight away they started digging slit trenches on the drome, big zig-zag slit trenches which as I said when I wrote after they were too wide and too deep for you know, to what you usually use when

26:30 we're, later on. So we put in time digging those, everybody and of course even the civilians in Adelaide were then digging the slit trench in the backyard and putting canopies over them and all sorts of things, you know, because you didn't know what was going to go on. And then as I say quite a few of us

27:00 were posted to embarkation depot. We didn't know where we were going but, so we had a little bit of leave and then went to the embarkation depot. It was in St Marks College at North Adelaide. So I've been to two colleges in my time. When we came back it was Scotch College here, not far from here they changed over

27:30 when I came back from Darwin. And of course we were there for a couple of weeks while they, there was a medical and checked you for dental and all this sort of thing and filled your teeth if you had any and then we were on our way. We went by train to

28:00 Terowie where there was a, Terowie, do you want to go onto Darwin do you?

Oh we'll get there eventually, I was wondering about the embarkation depot in North Adelaide, were you doing more guard duty there?

No we didn't do much, no. We just reported everyday and each day

28:30 a post, the movement order would go, they'd call out names and they'd say right and sent them on their way somewhere. And then you could go on leave which was good for me being in South Australia I could whip off home, you know, but you had to be back by, they'd give you a time they wanted you back, twenty three fifty nine, usually, at night. And then the next morning we'd parade

29:00 and once you'd had your medicals and things like this and you'd be issued with tropical gear and eventually we were called out and away we went, on a train and off to Terowie.

Where did you think you were going?

We didn't know, they didn't tell you they just said, "You're going north." That all but we knew squadrons were in the islands

29:30 and 2 Squadron and 13 Squadron for one thing was up there. 12 Squadron was in Darwin, 12 could

have been in the islands too I don't know at that stage. And then there was a staging camp at Terowie, all tents put up there which my father put up in the army, the army put them up. And it turned out my father who had enlisted again in the army,

30:00 but he was at Keswick but he went with a party up to start this staging campaign there, set up the camp. He wasn't there when I went he'd already set it up and come back.

How many men were in the staging camp?

Oh I don't know the batch of us that went from North Adelaide there was thirteen of us. There was, oh let me see

30:30 how many were guards, there was oh no there was only two of us guards, Bob Simons and myself. Oh no there was a fellow named Mens, yeah Morton Mens. He finished up he used to be a radio announcer here after the war for a long time, he died here a few months ago. And there was, some of them were transport drivers,

31:00 Tubby Smith because he was killed in the first raid with his mate Bob Simons. But there was thirteen of us anyway that left the embarkation depot to go to Darwin. I always thought it wasn't, we went in and got knocked around a lot, two of them killed the first time. I don't know how the others finished up. Anyway

31:30 when we got to the staging camp of course there was a lot of them. There was army in it and air force, even saw a few sailors, a couple of navy blokes in there too you know. But there would have probably been, oh I wouldn't know about two or three hundred people there, I suppose bright fellas. And the next thing they got a train together and we were off to Alice Springs. The carriages were,

32:00 had seats going right down the sides and they put so many fellas on a carriage, they gave us so many tins of baked beans and bully beef and biscuits and said, "That's got to last you until you get to Alice Springs." You had to share it among the, you know. So it was pretty – we went there very long it was just two or three

32:30 days and we were gone.

What was the atmosphere like at the staging camp?

Oh not bad, you know. In what way do you mean?

I'm just wondering the Japanese had now entered the war and whether there was any tension or anxiety about?

Oh no, everybody was just, you were wondering where you'd

33:00 finish up that's about all. It's a long way away as far as we know, we don't know where were going and then it's, the old saying was 'nobody tells you anything', you know, that was used to be the saying. "Where are they going?" "How would I know, nobody tells anybody anything here." You know. So that was the general impression, everybody, we just wondered. We certainly were excited

33:30 and wondered, at least we're on the move and that was the important thing you weren't, everybody was happy to be on the move. But how far we were going and what was going to finish up we didn't know. The army fellas were a mixture from all different units, some units were already up north in Darwin and some weren't. So you didn't get to know them too well, I mean you'd say g'day. In fact we got leave

34:00 in the camp at night sometimes we'd go down the pub so you'd get talking to everybody you know. Of course the pub would officially close at six o'clock. I mean six o'clock close in those days. You'd go down and have a couple of beers and back to camp, nothing else to do you know. Fellas would play cards and two-up and things like that,

34:30 there was nothing much else you could do.

So how long was the train trip to Alice Springs?

It took us about two and a half days, the Ghan I think it was then. Well it's still the Ghan but it's a bit different now. I'm hoping to go on a trip on the Ghan again hopefully. I'm hoping to do a lot of things I never get around to these days but we were two and a half days and

35:00 it was a slow old trip. At times the train stopped a couple of times. There was a pub where it stopped and everybody dived off and when the train had to stop to, you know, them old time trains they had to stop to take water on and coal and things like that and it was very slow and when the driver was ready to go again he'd blow the hooter and everybody was back on the train. And they stopped, they had coppers of hot water

35:30 where you could get, so you could make a bit of tea, they had food they had given us but they said there was some coffee or you could make some tea which was good, you'd get a mug of tea. And as I say at one stop, I forget the name of that place now but it was a pub and they said, "This is the last pub." And everybody was over, trying to get a beer I mean, and as I remember I didn't because I couldn't be bothered getting in the crush to get over but the mug of tea was good.

36:00 And then the train blew the whistle and the blokes come here and across back on the train and that happened quite a lot. And at time the Ghan was so slow that we'd get off and walk beside it, that's a fact. It would be going up a bit of a grade, you know, and everybody would get out, oh stretch your legs and walk along beside the train and then the driver would give the toot toot and get back on it and he'd speed up a bit.

36:30 So we got into Alice Springs about eleven o'clock at night one night and we'd been two and a half days on there and they said, "You better get your head down." They gave us a feed and they said, "Get your head down because you'll be on your way." Three o'clock in the morning we were up and another meal and a cup of tea and we were on the trucks and started going north. Army trucks and we were all sitting in the backs of

37:00 these trucks, just sitting on the floor in the back of the truck with all your gear and that went on for the next, until we got to Birdum. That took another, all told from the time we left Terowie until the time we got off the train right alongside the aerodrome and got through the fence, pulled up by a fence and said, "This is the aerodrome." It was six days. It was the fastest convoy to go through

37:30 the centre we were told and I don't think it was every any faster because this was, you know, just after the Japanese, they were trying to get people up there. And the road once we were on the trucks was terrific, it was just a trek. The Allied Works Council and the army engineers were still widening the track to make it into a road which eventually is the road to Darwin today I suppose. And

38:00 there were times as we got further north of course it was feathery, it was rainy season and the track was like mud, we had to get out several times and help push bogged trucks out. As a matter of fact usually trucks that were loaded with barbed wire and they got stuck in the mud and we all had to get out and get behind and push and you'd finish up with mud all over you and back in the truck again and off you'd go you know. We were covered

38:30 in red dust when it was dry and mud when it wasn't. So, but still they had food stations at Barrow Creek and things like that set up and there was an army units there who maintained these little stations. At one point we even managed to get a shower I remember. But usually we'd get

39:00 three, four, five hours sleep if we were lucky. I don't think we ever stay more than about, usually about four hours and then we were back on the trucks again. Of course the trucks, I think the drivers changed over on the trucks, the army blokes they went from station to station. Mind you all you had to do was sit down in the truck, you didn't have to do anything else, except if you had to get out and push sometimes.

39:30 **What were the rumours that were going around amongst you, none of you knew where you were going but where were you speculating?**

Well nobody really, there was no, there wasn't a great deal because in our truck like there were all air force fellas. We had a rough idea of what squadrons where, we knew they were in Timor and places like that. We didn't know how, we didn't get any news as to how

40:00 the war was going while we were on there so you couldn't sort of, you know, nobody discussed it very much as a matter of fact. All we wanted to do was get there and get off these rotten trucks. So we got as far as Birdum and then the train line started again, to do the last three hundred miles on the train, the Spirit of Protest we used to call it. It was a little

40:30 train that ran in and out of Darwin all the time. Sometimes it would be coming through when there was an air raid on and how the devil it never got, just lucky it never got hit. Occasionally I think they hit the track and that would have to be fixed up. But they were just cattle trucks and even the manure wasn't taken out of all of them as a matter of fact the one we were in. And they put a post in

41:00 each corner and a tarpaulin over it because it rained and that used to fill with water. I can tell you a funny story about that one too I suppose, I don't know if it's of any interest but one of the fellas, one of the guards in our group…

Can I just hold you for a minute, we'll change the tape.

All right.

And then we'll grab the story.

Yeah, yeah.

Do you want to stretch your legs?

Tape 4

00:36 **Wilf I'm just going to grab that story from you about the cattle train and then I might ask you a question about before you left for Darwin?**

Before we left.

Yeah but I'll like to hear the story about the cattle train.

Well we were on this cattle truck and the rain and the tarpaulin

01:00 filled with, you know, so my mate Bob Simons who later on was killed in the first raid he was a very tall, he was six foot four and a half and he said, "Oh I'll fix that everybody's complaining about it." And he got his rifle and pushed it up. Well of course instead of it all running out it only came over so far and it all came in the truck and one of the guards was an Irish fellow, real Irish, Paddy Green and Paddy, we had two

01:30 sausage bags with gear and one of Paddy's bags got absolutely soaked. And oh he abused Bob, you know, "You silly so and so." And he picked up a sausage bag and he threw it over the side and it went away down because it only had clothing in it of course. So that was all right everything settled down again and then about twenty minutes

02:00 later Paddy started abusing Bob again, you so and so, what's the matter. He said, "I had two bloody bottles of beer in that bag." And he had thrown it away. And a tough old man, Paddy. He, oh that's later on during the raid I remember he got out of his gun pit and rescued an American bloke out a plane too

02:30 but that's later on I guess.

Well before we start talking about Darwin because you were there for quite a while, I'll just like to ask you about before you left for Darwin, did you have any pre-embarkation leave?

Oh yes, you usually, we have fourteen days I think it was to your home state. Well most of the fellas out the embarkation were South Australians anyway

03:00 and I think we had fourteen days because we were in our home state.

We were talking about your pre-embarkation leave I was going to ask, your girlfriend Joy how did she feel about you going away?

Oh she wasn't too happy about it. We'd

03:30 become engaged before, when we were in Melbourne as a matter of fact and she wanted to get married but the only reason I didn't want to I thought well I'm going away I didn't want her to be left a war widow or something you know. And of course while we, I think I've written down somewhere it's the only argument we really had I think in our life time.

04:00 And while we were arguing about it I was on my way and it was too late anyway. So, because she was a year older then me so we didn't get married until I came home from Darwin. Once I knew I was coming home I was able to send down and let them know and they had it all arranged. She and my mother had it organised by the time I'd got down.

04:30 So that, other than that, you know, that was the only thing we were sort of, she was disappointed about well so was I in a way and particularly when we were going away and the war was on now with the Japanese, you didn't know whether you were coming back or what, you know, anything could happen couldn't it. I sort of had it, personally had it

05:00 in the back of my mind that you could get killed for a start, you could have got, there was fellows coming back, Ben from the Middle East, absolute wrecks, you know, I mean I could have been a wreck and I wouldn't have like to have wished that on anybody. Mind you I don't think it would have made any difference for Joyce but, you know, it's just the way you feel. I mean

05:30 at twenty one years of age you're not, that was the feeling I had anyway.

And then when you got to Darwin, you finally got there where were you based and how did you move to that base?

Well we got off the train onto the main RAAF drome but there were two aerodromes in Darwin at the time, there was one at Parap called the City Drome

06:00 which was purely civilian but was also taken over by the air force and some of us about who were guards said, "Don't unpack your bags." They put us on a truck and took us over to the civvy [civilian] drome, they said, "Now keep your bags packed because there's a convoy forming up in the harbour and you're going to be on that convoy, you're going to join a squadron in Timor." Which they

06:30 said was 13 Squadron and 13 Squadron was still in Timor, so was 2 Squadron as it turned out. So we were there for three or four or five days I suppose, it was the 10th of February when we arrived there. And for about five days we kept our bags packed and they were loading this

07:00 convoy of ships in the harbour, it was all loading up. The harbour was full of ships. And then we got up one morning and they said, "Oh the convoy's left, you fellows go back over to the RAAF drome." And they, we went over we didn't go to any barracks there or anything like that, we had been in a huff over

on the civvy

07:30 drome and they just took us around and they dropped us off. I was a corporal then, a corporal and three men on each gun pit or a sergeant if there was a sergeant. There was an NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] and three men on each gun pit around the drome. And the gun pits were of course holes in the ground about so long with a post in the middle and a couple of machine guns stuck on top. And they said

08:00 ours was in the middle of the drome where two runways crossed and then we had to go across the runway and we had a tent in the trees that we could go and sleep in at night and that sort of thing. And we just manned the gun pit and cleaned the guns.

Well how, I mean this is prior to the raids on Darwin, was the threat of

08:30 **the Japanese invading growing?**

Oh yes well we knew it was on yes because there was Hudsons coming back from Timor with fellows on, some of them wounded and things like that and we knew that it was on in Timor like. And then the next thing we knew on the 14th someone said, “Oh the convoy’s back in the harbour again.”

09:00 It turned out the convoy got half way to Timor but it was being bombed and strafed all the way and so they, and Timor had fallen then so they were told, we didn’t know who but on the convoy they had been notified of course and they turned around and came back. Of course there were troop ships and navy ships and that and most of the troops came ashore. The 2/4th Pioneer Battalion

09:30 was one of them, I remember, because they got off but they didn’t get much of their, they had their individual weapons and they didn’t have much in the way of ammunition because one of them came around the day after the raid and saw me and wanted to know if I could give them some ammunition, which I did because I had plenty. I had plenty of ammunition but not very good guns. Anyway that’s,

10:00 that was it, in a few days the raid was on and I was only on a gun pit about three days or something like that and the next thing we were in action sort of.

Well how did it start?

Well I was still in the tent, they decided that each one on the crew, they came around and told us we could have a day off

10:30 once a week and you could go and visit your mates anywhere around and that sort of thing. So on the 19th it was decided that it was my day off so I was still in the tent and the next thing the air raid siren went. I thought, “Well I’m off duty really but I better go and see, I’m the corporal in charge.” I pulled my overalls on and slammed the tin hat on and went out. And

11:00 on the runway, and my crew was in the gun pit and they’re waving at me and pointed towards the harbour and I looked towards the harbour and that was going up in smoke, you know, there were planes everywhere so I galloped across and got in the gun pit. And you could see these planes bombing the harbour. And ten minutes later they were on to us, so for the next hour they were there dive bombing and strafing

11:30 us and there were planes everywhere. It turned out there was eighty five dive bombers and Zeros strafing like fighter planes which did most the strafing. So it was on.

And were you able to do any defending with the guns that you had?

Well we did our best, fired them until our guns could only, we fired two hundred rounds

12:00 as I remember because I emptied two panniers and we couldn’t do any more, that’s another story. To load these panniers you had to have a gadget to load them, that had broken down and two days before I had taken it to the armoury to get it fixed and it hadn’t come back, so we couldn’t reload. But in any case we couldn’t see much fortunately for us because there was a couple of old planes and along the edge of these strips

12:30 was forty four gallon drums of oil. This oil was going, the strips were dirt strips, the oil was going to be used to oil the strips so that when planes took off the first plane didn’t throw up that much dust that the next plane didn’t you know, in actual fact that’s what happened. As I was saying when this started there were some Kitty Hawks there with American pilots.

13:00 I understood they were only supposed to be ferry pilots who’d just brought them up there a day or two before. I think there were about thirteen planes and they were taking off, trying to – of course the dust was making it awkward. The first bloke was off and gone and the next bloke had to sort of do the best he could. Oh it was shocking, I watched the first bloke sort of go away and there were planes diving on him. The next plane got off and only got about

13:30 three hundred yards up in the air and he was shot down. And it was sort of on and then we were busy. They were trying to get off these poor devils with the planes because there hadn’t been any warning at all. Only one survived as a matter of fact and many of the strips and things up there like Strauss Field and all them they were the names, they were some of the pilots, American pilots that

14:00 were in there. At the end of the raid one fellow did come back and landed right by our gun pit because I say we were right where the two runways crossed and he was shot up but he was the only one that managed to get up and he said, he was telling us that he got up and shot off across the tree tops to gain some height but he had a bit of a dogfight. His plane was shot up but he managed to get back. Surprising, later on in the

14:30 war I saw, I'll mention this now so I don't forget it, I saw, there used to be a magazine called Pix Magazine with pictures of war and things and they had a photo of this fellow and said how he, his first lot of action was in the first raid on Darwin. He was now on air raids up in the islands; this was later on in the war so he survived quite well

15:00 at that stage anyway. But as I say they were strafing, we were doing our best with the lousy machine guns we had. We had the wrong ammunition. The set of guns I had were from out of an aircraft, they had a fifty mile an hour ring and bead sight on them and the first plane comes over at three hundred miles an hour

15:30 and like that give you an idea, you know, which is not much good. They had balled ammunition; I don't know if you're interested in this, later on they got armoured piercing ammunition and trace. We didn't have any trace or anything so we just did out best we fired as much as we could. But eventually they shot up these oil drums and they started to burn, black smoke everywhere and the black smoke drifted across us after about

16:00 twenty minutes and we couldn't see anything. The last I saw was a dive bomber dropping a bomb on the hangar, one of the hangars, a 12 Squadron hangar. That's the only thing I think that saved us was this black smoke screened us. We couldn't see anything but they couldn't see us either so they didn't worry about us obviously because they had a go at some of the other gun pits.

16:30 Because where we were, we were right in the open. The other gun pits were all back around the edge of the strip where the trees were which means they had a hundred and eighty degrees but they were a bit protected from behind, we had a whole three hundred and sixty. Anyway after the raid when they came around and were surprised to see we were still ok which we were, bleeding nose and everything I was. They

17:00 said, well they shifted us and said, "You better get out of that." They abandoned this pit, it was ridiculous being out there in the open you know. They dug another pit somewhere else out the back in the trees, around the edge of the trees.

How long was the first raid?

Well the time, they dive, strafed, dive bombed us that was for an hour and they wrecked, the hangers were flattened and some of the buildings were flattened and some of the buildings were flattened, there's some of the damage you'll see there in those photos.

17:30 And then that finished like about eleven o'clock and then at twelve o'clock, noon somebody said, "There's some more coming." And we looked, we counted twenty seven bombers, they were about fifteen thousand feet and someone said, "Have a look over here." And there was twenty seven coming that was too and they patterned bombed the drome. That was pretty frightening too but all we could do was get down in our gun pit and

18:00 hope for the best you know. It was very slow pattern bombing, it wasn't – later on the raids they were just dropped the bombs from one end to another, right across but this was sort of like a creeping barrage the way they came down. It only lasted a few minutes but it was enough to kill a few blokes. My mate Bob Simons was killed. Tubby Smith had gone up with us he was killed in the same

18:30 slit trench, four of them in that trench and there were others. In the first strafing raid a fellow who had been my CO at Cressy, Archie Tindall, he was killed. I'd only spoken to him the day before about this thing I wanted for the, because he was the armourer officer too. The Tindall drome, airdrome up in Darwin now, it's a big drome that's named after him.

19:00 He is buried in the Adelaide River Cemetery next to my mate Bob Simons. They were pretty terrible times. It was a first time as an adult that I sat down and cried when Bob got killed, we'd been pretty good mates.

19:30 **So the second raid was quite short then.**

Yes the actual dropping of the bombs was quite short but it was pretty devastating. I saw an article later in the Army News which was a paper we used to get which was printed by the army up

20:00 in the Territory where they said and they were talking about the first raid. And the raid on the airdrome was then one of the most intense raids of any raid in the war on an area of that size at that stage. There was probably more later on when all the bombing in Europe and that but it was pretty intense because the aerodrome wasn't very big and fifty four bombers made quite a mess you know.

How many planes

20:30 **were lost?**

Our planes? Well we didn't have any left by then, they were all shot, you know, shot down like and any planes that we had on the ground they were shot up. There were only a few but not many, they weren't fighter planes anyway, but we just had no defence. We had these machine guns which were no good against the high stuff of course

21:00 and so I stayed on the gun pit, we stayed on gun pits for, I was there nearly five months.

So after the second raid was there any more action that day?

No, but of course we expected them to be landing because until now as they came down anywhere after they raided the place that within a matter of

21:30 hours or a day they were landing. So we thought they were bound to land yeah. And it was pretty chaotic nobody knew what was going on. I went with a corporal from the gun pit across the other side of the runway from us, we went over to see if we could get something to eat because by this time it was after midday and I went to look for my mate Bob Simons and I couldn't find him and his crew

22:00 said, "I don't know where he is, he went to get something to eat." And it turned out he had been killed, we didn't know that until the next day. And I went over but they were evacuating the drome, well there was nothing left the hangers were flattened, any planes that were in the hangers had been all burnt. A lot of the barracks areas which had been a good barracks area because it was a permanent air force thing

22:30 was wrecked, there are some photos there of that. And we went where the kitchen was and there was nothing there, it was gone. We stopped an officer there and I said, "What's going on?" And he said, "The order is to evacuate half a mile down the road and half a mile into the bush." I said, "Well what about on the gun pits?" "Oh we don't know about that." I said, "Well, right."

23:00 This fellow Bob Burke and I we managed to find a couple of tins of biscuits, hard biscuits but they were biscuits, a couple of tins of fruit and we took these back to feed the fellas on our gun pit and we decided we'd sit tight because we've no orders to do anything other than what this bloke had told us and we couldn't see any point in that, leaving our guns because we couldn't carry them too far. And then

23:30 as a matter of fact later in the day there was an army lieutenant came up and spoke to me on the strip he was from an artillery unit, they were based at Rapid Creek, he said. He said, "What are you fellows doing if the Japanese land?" I said, "Well we haven't been told anything yet but we're sticking by our guns and hope." Although we couldn't use ours but I did have a rifle there and I said, "I'm hanging onto this

24:00 ammunition and stuff." He said, "Well we haven't got much, we've got an ack-ack, an eighteen pound ack-ack battery, eighteen pounders." He said, "If they land and you don't hear I'll send the Bren gun carrier up here and pick you up and you can and join us if you like." I said, "Right." So I'd made my own plans. One of my crew was gone, he packed up after the raid he was an absolute wreck. A fellow about thirty five and I can't remember his name

24:30 because I'd only known him a couple of days and he was an absolute gibbering wreck. I mean First World War it was called shell shock and we called it bomb happy up there. And I sent him between the two raids on the day like I sent him over the medical. I said, "Go over and report sick." And I never saw him any more.

25:00 I don't know what happened, he probably went over and what they did with him I don't know but he was, you know, he was a wreck. It's a terrible thing to see fellows like that you know. I saw an American fellow go the same way later on. It's, I mean you see

25:30 fellas that have been killed and things. But to see fellas in absolute shell shock or as we used to call it bomb happy is terrible too.

How were your other men coping?

Sorry?

How were the other men that were there coping?

The other two, one was very good, the other one wasn't too good. They were all older than me I mean let's face it I

26:00 was still only twenty one, I never had my twenty second birthday for another couple of months and these fellows were thirty five you know. They hadn't been in the show very long. They were from New South Wales. One of them was an English fellow, he was terrific. He was my number two, he stayed with me all the time and he was good. We called him George Formby because he looked like, his first name was George it wasn't Formby

26:30 but he spoke the same, he came from the same district as George Formby who if you knew who George Formby was, he was a Lancashire comedian. And this fellow was just the same, he was a lovely bloke.

So how many of you were left then, how many men did you have?

Well as guards on the drome, later on in the afternoon the

27:00 flight lieutenant came around who was, I think his name was McLeod, he'd taken over the armoured section because Tindall had been killed and he said, "Well there's nothing on the drome really to protect but we have to protect it against anybody landing and we'll ask the fifty calibre blokes, the blokes on the fifty calibre machine guns to stay. The ones on the .303s can

27:30 please themselves where they stay, or evacuate down the road." Well we all decided we'd stay with our mates, like it wasn't much point. I mean we thought the more fire power we've got the more we, you know, we're here. And there was probably I'd think around about eighty guards split up like around these gun pits. I don't know the actual figures but there

28:00 could have been because there was quite a few gun pits and there was usually four blokes on a gun pit. And now we stayed we never went off that drome, I never moved off that drome for six weeks.

Did you get any more ammunition?

Oh we had plenty of ammunition yes but not the right sort in our case. It was ball ammunition but at least it was ammunition and I gave some to some of the army fellows who didn't have any, gave them a box.

28:30 And I couldn't reload our guns anyway because they were useless because we couldn't reload these panniers because the equipment to do it was in the hanger and the hanger was now burnt down. But they said they'd find us more guns which they did later on, ordinary Vickers guns, bell fed which as better. A few days time they got us on another gun pit with these

29:00 and there we stayed. During several, I don't know how many raids. We used to count them, I remember we used to count them and we got to thirty six and then we gave it away. This was over a period of time of course, over the next five months.

So what happened to your camp, like where you were staying what happened?

Our tent,

29:30 I went over to the tent and a great bomb splinter had gone through it, it went through one of my sausage bags and everything in it had a hole in it so I threw them away. But other than that the tent, you know, it was somewhere to go and sleep at night and keep out of the rain a bit. But later on where they moved us

30:00 across to the other side of the drome at a place which we called hell fire corner, it was a place over near the bomb dump and it used to get raided fairly frequently because lets face it the Japanese knew where the bomb dump was. They knew lots of things up there. There was a fifth column up there in Darwin and I don't care what anybody says I mean one of the stories that I heard and it's probably quite true that on the day of the raid there were even sheets laid out on the ground pointing the way

30:30 to the airdrome, not that it would have needed anything to point the way because there had been a lot of Japanese in Darwin, the pearlers and luggers and all that sort of thing. The death rate was pretty horrific on that first day. The harbour, the ships sunk and there would be lots of people who worked

31:00 on the wharfs they were floating personnel, people who, you know, would have no relatives, there would be no record of who they were that were killed. One of my mates in the 43 Battalion was in the group going along the beaches picking up the dead, just throwing them into the truck, you know,

31:30 and he said they picked up hundreds you know. And I think the official record of those killed, I don't know whether it's about four hundred and fifty or something like that, it's nowhere near. Everybody reckons there must have been well over a thousand and the, there's another unit, association been formed now

32:00 called the Darwin Defenders' Association and they've got a lot of records of that. I've joined it anyway, anyone that had fought in Darwin has joined the Darwin Defenders.

Well what news did you receive of the impact of the bombings on Darwin after that first two raids?

Sorry what?

What did you hear of the damage caused to Darwin after those first few raids?

32:30 What?

I'm just wondering if any information filtered through to you, to where you were at the aerodrome about Darwin?

Well we knew that the town had been bombed and we knew and I saw the ship, I saw the Zealandia blow up from the drome after the raid we were watching and that went up sky high because it was an ammunition ship and it had been hit and after, between

33:00 the two raids that blew up. And of course we could see, the drome was only two and a half miles as the crow flies from the harbour but I didn't get to see any damage in there at that stage because we never left the drome. As I said we never left the drome until six week when things settled down, they said you could have a day off and I went looking for some of my mates in some of the army units. And as I said that always annoys me, you see where on

33:30 the aerodrome they said everybody evacuated. They didn't all evacuate there were these guards that were still there, we stayed there. We stayed there forever sort of business I mean they were there, well I stayed there until I was sent to 12 Squadron which was down at Batchelor about five months later.

So how soon after the first few

34:00 **raids was the next major raid?**

Well the next raid was about, strangely enough was about two weeks and all of a sudden they turned up with some Zero started strafing us and then the planes came in and bombers, about seven bombers and dropped a string of bombs right across the

34:30 drome. Then it became intermittent, it would be a couple of days when nothing and then you'd get an air raid and sometimes there'd be nothing for a week and then all of a sudden bingo it would be on again you know, you just never knew. Later on we got the radar started to work, in the beginning that wasn't working properly and we started to get warning then.

35:00 At some later date there were fighter planes came up but they didn't work off the drome in Darwin because they didn't have the time to get height to combat anybody coming in so they were working from down further south, Adelaide River way or even, I'm not too sure just where down south. We could then, when the radar started to work efficiently we could get thirty five minutes warning that they were coming and

35:30 that gave our fighter planes time to gain height and, you know, combat and of course they couldn't always stop and they still got in but they'd knock a few down. The ack-ack would fire on them and keep them up but I only saw them hit them once and that was on my birthday, the 4th of April. It was my day when

36:00 I'd gone over from the gun pit and gone over into the barracks area, what was left of it because there was still fellows living in it and there was a guardroom on base to see some of the fellows over there and all of a sudden the raid came on. Well these seven planes were coming in and the Fanny Bay ack-ack opened up and fired two rounds and hit four planes. It was the first time we'd ever saw them hit and everybody was, one came straight down and the others were gradually smoking and losing height

36:30 and they dropped their bombs where they were which was around the Pratt pub area and hit it back out. None of them got away, the fighter planes got the rest of them as it turned out that day, so we found out. We used to get this information later on, you know, but the thing was when these two, we were all standing up in the slit trenches and cheering and the next thing someone said, "Duck". Because they all brought fighter planes with them and they had no bombers to look after they

37:00 came down and started shooting us up. So I always remember that day it was my birthday, I was twenty two. So from time to time the first time I saw a raid and wasn't right in it was when I was on the Section Leaders' Course at Winnellie with the army.

37:30 Is that getting too far ahead?

It is a bit because I'm just wondering what, there was a lot of devastation to the aerodrome did you and your men go about clearing that?

Yeah, well there wasn't much in the way of buildings or anything left, there was nothing of course. Those of us on gun pits had a tent out the back of the gun pit or just a tent fly we had which we rigged over one of the bomb craters as a matter of fact and put some

38:00 duct boards down there and we used to get down there and sleep because if a raid came at night later on there was nothing we could do and we just used to stay down there in this bomb crater and hope for the best. The main damage then of course was craters on the runway and they'd have to be filled in. Well there was quite a crew to fill it in and there was also,

38:30 sometimes there was unexploded bombs and the armourers or the bomb disposal crowd would have to get rid of them. And quite often when the raid came we had planes out raiding Timor. Now there had to be some pretty slick work to get the strip back in order again so those planes could come back and land because in many cases they were shot up and in trouble

39:00 and might have wounded aboard or anything like that and didn't want to keep them, they wanted to get in and down. So that's mainly what went on most of the time, you know, it was maintain the strip. The whole idea, we were to deny the strip, for those first few weeks in particular we still expected them to land. We thought maybe they'd land paratroops. We had forty four gallon

39:30 drums stuck all over the airdrome apart from, not on the runways of course so that they couldn't land, you know, if they landed gliders it would be pretty awkward for them. We did everything we could with what we had, which wasn't much. They keep promising us that we'd get better guns, well we'll get Oerlikons, we were looking forward to getting Oerlikons we hoped, they were bigger, you know,

40:00 more appropriate for the job. We never ever got them. After about three months I suppose I can't remember the time but both the guns moved onto the unit army fellas who'd come back from the Middle East. That was another, they'd never fired a shot in anger in two years in the Middle East, they had been on the border of Syria or somewhere so they told us and

40:30 they dug their pits to put their Bofor guns in and we said, "Well don't you dig any slit trenches?" "Oh we don't need any slit trenches." I said, "Well what happens?" They said, "Well if you don't get in with the gun you just lay on the ground." I said, "That will be no good because the daisy colours used to shave the grass like you were mowing the lawn." Anti personnel stuff. So this 4th

41:00 of April, that's right so it wasn't that, the 4th of April was the first time they went into action this day when these Zeros came down to strafe us and after that when I went past I seen they were digging slit trenches as fast as they could go. So they spent two, some of these fellas spent two years in the Middle East and the first bomb they ever dropped was in Darwin. But that's the way it goes, you go where you're sent.

41:30 **Well we've come to the end of another tape.**

All right.

Tape 5

00:31 **So Wilf you've described or painted quite an intense picture, the wreckage that was on the airstrip was there any pillage or any acts of I guess you know?**

Oh no, there was nothing to steal anyway you know. Is that what you mean? Yeah, no not.

01:00 I tell a lie, after six weeks I managed to get, everybody was supposed to be issued with a mosquito net. It was well after six weeks and I didn't get one, they hadn't had time to give us them and then of course we never got them, you know, so we didn't have any mosquito nets. Consequently we got, well

01:30 I got dengue fever and several others did too which was, dengue fever it's a bit like malaria. Well in some ways it's worse I suppose, oh I don't know. The first day it's like a cold, the second day you think you're going to die and the third day you wish you had, you know, like I mean it's that sort of thing. But I was going to say, I from a fellow who went south

02:00 later on he said, "Oh, I'll give you my mosquito net." And it was a beaut big wide one and I said, "Where did this come from?" He said it's from out of the Pratt pub. Because the Pratt pub of course had been deserted, you know, like and that. So I kept that mosquito net until I came home actually it was a nice big one. When we got organised and we had stretcher beds we got one time later on, many months later when I was at 12 Squadron and they used to tuck the mosquito net in,

02:30 it was good.

Well how did you manage for food during those six weeks?

Well the few Americans that were there at the time, our food dump on the RAAF drome got blown up so, you know, the majority of it, so we were pretty hungry. For the next six weeks I was never so hungry in all my life, I don't think. They

03:00 provided, shared what they had with us, they had some sort of tin ham and a bit of stuff like that. But cooks that came back onto the drome after a while, after this evacuation down after a few days they came back things started to settle down a bit on the drome and we started to get a bit of damper and things and so there was quite a shortage of food. And then

03:30 apparently a shipment came up, you know, they decided down here, down south, that we were still there, the Japs hadn't landed so they better send us some food. A ship load of pork and beans came up and we had beans three meals a day for three months, believe it or not. You got a spoon full of beans you know. I never thought I'd, I still like baked beans but I never though I ever would after that.

04:00 And after that they decided we were still, by this time of course things we heard rumours, things like the Brisbane Line had come in. Have you ever heard of the Brisbane Line? Oh you probably would have of course. We were not very happy about that because we were outside the Brisbane Line and so as far as we were concerned they had written us off. They were the sort of rumours and things, they were the things that made people most unhappy.

04:30 Other than that we just plodded along, you know, and gradually we thought, "Well if they're not going to

land." We got a bit more organised and we thought we could put up some sort of a fight if they did land you know. And of course the time I went on this army course and we were informed a lot more, we got a lot more information.

05:00 **And what did you, how did you manage for water, the drome had been quite damaged?**

Oh they had creeks. The Rapid Creek had plenty of fresh water in it and things like that yeah. And you'd catch rain water yourself anyway if necessary you know. We used to just drink the water I mean out of the creek. After a while they got things, around the barracks area, the barracks were wrecked but I mean you could get

05:30 some of the, those barracks were built sort of on stilts with bathrooms underneath, showers. And they got things working a bit after a while in one or two of the wrecks and you could go and get a shower and things like that, it wasn't too bad. But usually we went down to Rapid Creek and had a bath in the creek, you know, and a swim and that sort of thing. There was a bit of pool down there you could go down, you used to meet army blokes and everything down

06:00 there and it was a walk of about a couple of hundred yards from the drome from where we were down to Rapid Creek and it was quite good. The water was fresh and flowing all the time you know. So that's the way we survived for water. Then they got the water going because there was a big pipeline came from

06:30 Manton Dam that used to run along side the road and that originally fed the RAAF drome. But once they got quite a few, you know, they fixed up all the hut areas and that. Some of the fellas still slept in them even though they were wrecked they were some sort of shelter. You could always sleep underneath them anyway because they were all up on stilts you know. But we just slept out on the gun; we stayed out on the gun pit

07:00 twenty four hours a day, seven days a week we were there all the time, we lived there. We just stood to when it was time to stand to. Got up, checked the guns every morning and cleaned them and that sort of thing you know. Stood ready for action as the saying goes. And then went over to the mess later on, we could go over to the mess and get a feed. Usually one or two would go over,

07:30 one was usually enough and we'd take all the dixies over and get food for everyone and bring it back you know. So there was always two to three men on the gun pit.

You've mentioned that things were chaotic?

Well as I say when we went over there was no-one to tell you anything except for this young officer

08:00 that told us to evacuate. I never saw an office until in the afternoon this flight lieutenant came around but we still weren't sort of organised. If the Japs had landed we…there was no-one organising us telling us what to do. I mean we would have made it up that we fought as I told you, I made my own arrangements with this army bloke if necessary but after a few days that wasn't going to work I mean and we all spoke amongst ourselves to make the different, you know, you'd wonder

08:30 over to the other gun pit and we just decided to fight it out if necessary. If we got over it we'd take our guns and go bush, you know, like and these are the things we had in the back of our mind to do until Squadron Leader Swan came and he was the airfield, he took over the airfield defence and then he had us organised. He knew,

09:00 told us what was going on and what to do and things settled down. Our particular job even then they still thought we could be raided, we could be raided like have troops like invaded. And our job we were given these twin Vickers machine guns on the pole which we used for

09:30 ack-ack when the occasion arose. A funny story about that another day too. And then we were given a tripod thing so if they landed our particular crew we were supposed to take it out to the end of one of the runways, mount our guns on that and fire down the runway. That was to, you know, to protect the strip, I don't know if that would have worked or not. It wouldn't have been too healthy of you, it didn't happen anyway

10:00 because they never landed. I remember I did fire on a plane one day, on a Zero and I reckon I actually hit it too. This was a funny show, sometimes a reconnaissance plane would come over high up and then you'd know that you were going to get a raid because shortly after that the bombers would be over. This particular case this plane came down to tree top

10:30 height and skipped over the drome and then he went past and I said to my crew, "That's a Zero." And nobody fired on it anyway and I thought, "As far as I'm concerned, that's a Zero if he comes back." And sure enough he did I could hear him coming and as he came back we opened up on him you know. And this time we had trace in and I saw the trace bouncing off his cowling so I reckon I, but he kept going, you only see him for a few minutes and, you know, he's gone again. And then after that

11:00 I think one of the Yanks opened up as he left down the other end and that's the only guns that fired and I thought, "What's the matter with all these fellas?" you know, we're not used to one coming down that low on his own. So the next thing the jeep comes around and Squadron Leader Swan was in it and we saw him stop at the next gun pit which was about forty or fifty yards away and he come around to our

gun pit and he hopped out and he come over and he said, “Corporal, did you fire on that plane?” And I thought, “Hello,

11:30 what have I done here?” You know, and I couldn’t say no because all the empty shells we’re busy cleaning them up off the bottom of the pit and I said, “Yes Sir.” And he just said, “Good man.” Got back on the thing and away he went. Apparently he roared the tail out of the other fellas for not opening up. But for a minute there I thought I was in strife, there must have been some reason why. It was quite funny; actually, we had a big laugh about it.

How strong would your feeling of

12:00 **I guess, being a bit defenceless?**

Oh pretty strong. It was, you know, it was disappointing, you know, it was frustrating more than anything. We felt we should have better weapons but I realise, mind you earlier in the piece until the government changed hands like and the Curtin Government got in we never used to get

12:30 anything much at all even down here but once they got in things started to move. Because like, to me we were sort of caught with our pants down as the saying goes Australia, because all the main troops had gone to the Middle East and things like that and all of a sudden they didn’t have very much here. This is why they formed the Brisbane Line of course

13:00 they were only going to defend that part from Brisbane down to Adelaide here like it’s sort of curved down the thing and because with the troops they would have gone back in there and that’s the only part they reckon they could have defended. I suppose in theory it was all right.

And did you hear about the Brisbane Line while you were on the drome?

Yes, yes after a while we heard about this Brisbane

13:30 Line and, you know, there was a few hot words said then, you know, by different people, they’d written us off, you know, given us away, I mean that’s what we felt.

Well how did that make you feel?

Not too happy but there wasn’t much we could do about it. But then of course things, that was why, of course after a while I went to 12 Squadron and then I was

14:00 sent with another fellow from the squadron on this army section leaders course which is run by 6th Division army fellas and then we started to get a picture of what was going on they were very good. And that was the whole idea of the section leaders you could go back to your units and tell them what was going on. That was part of the plan I thing apart from giving us all extra training and that sort of thing. By

14:30 then they said, we had a lecture from Brigadier General Herring himself came up, he was in charge of North Western Area at the time. He came and lectured to us on this course one day and they told us they were confident they could repel any attack by now. This was like five months after the first raid. By this time we were getting planes

15:00 and things like that. Everything was going along pretty, you know, we felt happy about it. We went back to our units and had to lecture this, you know, gave it to the units.

Well when you were living on the drome effectively in your gun pit, how effective do you think your tin hat was?

You mean like what did we do

15:30 and that sort of thing? Well you just sat around the gun pit during the day, got bored, boiled the billy, played Chinese checkers until you went mad and in some ways started to look forward to a raid. But not really, I mean, but at least when that was on, you know, there was something to do. If they were low flying aircraft then we were in it, right in it

16:00 but otherwise it was high level stuff dropping bombs on us. It was a matter of pull your head in and grit your teeth and hope for the best. One of these men in my crew used to drive me mad, I might tell you. He’d say, “Here we are here sitting on the target here and we’re not doing anything.” You know, and all that sort of thing. And I used to say, “Well it’s a war, right, this is our job.” And he’d say, “Oh you’re a fatalist.” I said,

16:30 “Well let’s face it, they drop these bombs you’re mostly going to get killed by direct hits and you’re not going to know very much about it.” That was my way of looking at it, it’s all I could think of. You didn’t want to be caught on the ground, lying on the ground or above the ground because of these daisy covers as we called them because they were a bomb that landed and was anti personnel

17:00 and where it landed it only made a small hole but it spread out. Where it landed in the long grass it spread out and it was like for thirty yards all around it was like someone had mowed the lawn and then it gradually went up, you know, so if you were on the ground bad luck you copped it and occasionally some fellas did, you couldn’t always get in a hole in time. On the drome we were pretty right we used to

get warning and that sort of thing.

17:30 While I was on the Section Leaders Course as I said that was the first time I ever saw a raid and wasn't in the middle of it and it was pretty frightening. I used to think, "How the devil did we survive?" You know, but you do.

So this was...you got posted to 12 Squadron six months later?

About five months I think roughly you know.

18:00 **At what point did you realise you had dengue fever?**

I got sick.

But where did that, did that come at the end of that five month period?

No, I had had it while I was on the drome and at that stage I had stayed in the barracks area for three days, three or four days off the gun pit and a medical orderly used to come around and give you aspirin two or three times a day, you know, and that was all that you could do.

18:30 As I say after a couple of days, honestly you think you're going to die and on the third day you wish to God that you had. I mean it's shocking, you know, but gradually you get over it.

And do you think you got dengue fever, I mean it's unusual to think of catching dengue fever in the capital city like Darwin, so do you think you got it because of your poor living conditions?

Oh it was because of, well at that stage there was no mosquito net,

19:00 there were mosquitos all the time, you'd get bitten all the time and it's a mosquito, it's a dengue mosquito, you know, as a malarial mosquito, some of the fellas had malaria. The fellas coming back from the islands had got malaria well, you know, they would get bitten and then they'd bite you and you could get malaria and some of our fellas did. I don't think I ever did, I did get dengue again down at Batchelor as a matter of fact. I was in the MRS down – the medical receiving

19:30 station down there – but by then they had a hospital and I went into hospital with it. So that was twice I had it there. I got it later on again in Townsville so when I came back after the war I felt a bit lousy and I went down the repat and they said, "Have you ever had malaria?" And I said, "No I don't think I ever did." He said, "You're a bit that

20:00 way." I said, "I had dengue fever but that's not supposed to recur." He said, "We don't know whether it recurs or not." This is the doctor down there. He gave me some tablets and sent me home and I was all right after a few days. But you didn't get malaria later on because they had Atebrin tablets which were very good, providing you took them, they were first class.

Well before you left Darwin to go down to Batchelor

20:30 **you mentioned that you saw the harbour and the wreckage in the harbour, but did you see any other wreckage in the town of Darwin?**

Oh yeah, a few of the houses. The post office of course was wrecked and all the people killed in there. They came from, most of them from down here in Adelaide. Yeah, there was damaged houses around the place, because Darwin wasn't a big place then not like it is now and

21:00 there was a certain amount. And there were bomb craters, I believe in Darwin you can go out in the bush now and you'll still find bomb craters all overgrown, you know, but most of the raids after the first raids, they raided down as far as Katherine, Adelaide River and those places you'd get an odd raid you know. Hughesfield, Kimberley Creek

21:30 they were airfield strips. But generally the raid was on the main drome on Darwin, the majority of raids were on it because they just wanted to deny you the use of the drome, you know, which didn't happen because we still used it. But of course gradually they had fighter strips down the road further but because it gave them time to get up in height and engage the enemy

22:00 you know.

And during those raids or even during that time that you were defending the airstrip, did you maintain blackout on the drome?

As a rule not really, not unless we got, we did of course the minute you got warning, yes, it would be certainly blackout. One of the few raids that ever hit Batchelor because

22:30 Batchelor was hard to see from the air and the Japanese never really found it, but they did raid it one night when I was down there because the warning came too late and someone didn't get the warning and they left lights on, well they just dropped them at the lights you know. And they killed a Bofor gun crew on the strip I remember and they hit service police station and wounded a few of the service police and that sort of thing, this was at Batchelor. That was the only time I ever remember Batchelor being raided.

23:00 And I even saw the planes going backwards and forwards overhead at one stage and we though, “Any time we’ll cop it.” And it didn’t because I wouldn’t believe it until I went up later on for a flight with one of the fellas from 12 Squadron and once you got three or four thousand feet up you couldn’t see the drome there was a natural haze. And apparently the city pilots always have to fly in on a bearing to get there, you know, and that protected

23:30 Batchelor. And the Japanese kept saying, you know, Tokyo Rose and them used to broadcast things and they kept saying, “Oh we bombed Batchelor last night.” They didn’t and even the only time they did hit it, they never told them they just said bombs landed harmlessly in the bush you know. They often bombed us and someone would get killed even but the official report would be bombs dropped harmlessly in the bush

24:00 because you didn’t ever want to let them know they’d hit the target.

And how far away was Batchelor from Darwin?

About fifty-three miles.

In what direction?

There was a turn off. Well, you go down fifty three miles down, let me think, and then you turn to the left, which would be west I think it is or something and it goes in off the main road, it’s still there. And it was a big drome later on I saw

24:30 planes lined up wing tip to wing tip. The Americans later on doing bombing they used to fly from Garbutt in Townsville to Batchelor, refuel and then go over to Timor bomb there and come back and refuel and fly back to Garbutt. And this particular day that I saw Japanese planes going backwards and forwards they had just raided, our CO came burning in in the jeep and said, “They’re raiding Kimberley Creek now.” Now Kimberley

25:00 Creek was the strip where 31 Squadron was, the Beaufighters and they were raiding that when he left. And we thought they’d be on us, they were flying backwards and forwards but they couldn’t see us. And on the strip was Flying Fortresses, American planes, probably thirty or forty of them all lined up. If they had come down they would have been sitting ducks but they couldn’t see the strip which was a marvellous thing. It was very, you know, it’s one of those

25:30 things. Everybody would know where it is now I mean, you know, like even pilots. I mean if there was another war the enemy would know where it is now but then they didn’t know, which was very fortunate for us.

And when you were posted there, did you realise that Batchelor was going to be a target?

Well, we thought everybody could be a target, you know, the other different

26:00 airstrips were all shot up every now and then, they’d bomb them you know. The ones on the side of the road didn’t get bombed much and that was the whole idea. If you looked at it from there, there was the road and then along side this was a strip which just looked like a bit of a turn off, you know, like a passing if, you know, what I mean but it was an airstrip and the planes would be back in the revetments in under the trees so they couldn’t be seen,

26:30 camouflaged. And then they’d wheel them out onto the strip and take off when they were necessary you know. That was one way of combating and keeping the strips from being bombed but they did get shot up. Hughesfield from where 13 Squadron operated from, Hughesfield and Hudsons and they got bombed several times. Because that couldn’t be hidden it was just in off the road a

27:00 bit. These places were all there still, if you’ve ever been to Darwin and looked around there’s all, there’s a sign on every one of them. I’ve been up there and they’ve all got signs up on this place. Where the medical receiving station was just at the turnoff at Batchelor when I was in with the dengue and there’s a sign up there. There’s just bush there now but there’s a sign up there that says such and such RAAF MRS was here. The fellow that took me around lived in

27:30 Darwin and he said, “I don’t know where Kimberley Creek Strip was.” I said, “I’ll show you.” And we went in off the thing and I showed him where it was and when you get in there there’s a sign that says this was Kimberley Creek.

So when you went to Batchelor were you intended to camp again or?

Yeah but my job was where, well there was an airfield defence officer there.

28:00 I can’t remember his name, he took charge of us. I went away and did this course first and then I came back to the squadron. I got pretty sick there for a while, I got like dysentery and was in hospital for a while which was bad. We took over a strip from, the Americans had been there and they had moved on

28:30 and it wasn’t very clean, the fowl ground was not too good and I remember half the squadron went down the diarrhoea and dysentery I think. Could you image me being about six stone in weight? Because I was by the time I come out of that hospital and they sent me out on light duties. I thought I’d go home, I’d been up there ten months and I thought I’d go home. They said, “Oh no.” He said, “You

could have gone home in a box, but I mean

29:00 you'll be all right light duties." So back I went. And another fellow and I went down to Pell Field, they were going to move from Batchelor down to Pell Field which is one of these strips just off the road between Batchelor and Adelaide River and the squadron was going to move down there. Because 12 Squadron was what they call an army cooperation squadron, supposed to work in conjunction with the army and do strafing for them and all that sort of thing

29:30 and you've got to be able to move fast. We were supposed to be able to pack up and move in twenty four hours so they decided to do that one time but before they moved there was a couple of buildings on this, down there across the road from where the Pell Strip was which was going to be the camp area and they wanted to preserve those. One of them was a kitchen with a woodstove in it; it was just a tin shed actually. But to save anybody, because what people did up there like

30:00 army anybody if you could get a bit of corrugated iron well you made a tent out of it like a shack because tents weren't too plentiful. They didn't want anybody taking this before they moved so this other fellow and I were both on light duties, he'd been sick too so they sent us down there to look after it, the two of us. They give us some rations and they said, "Right you're there." We had to fight a bushfire while we were there, a big bushfire started and we had to

30:30 protect this from the fire. And all the water was a stinking well, we got the water up and we had to boil that. So that was Pell Field. And all of a sudden the squadron moved down there and we were there for about one month, a couple of months. If I look up on my papers it's got it on there and then they moved back to Batchelor again. So the packing up the unit was a fair sort of a job. All right for the aircrew,

31:00 they hopped in the planes and fly them down to the other strip but the mechanics and things have got to pack up all their tools and spare engines and what have you, you know. And the guards are usually pulled into service doing all sorts of things. As I said in my resume thing, if you couldn't find a tradesman or anything to do it, you could always find a guard that could do it. And I'm not saying anything about that they were a terrific bunch of blokes, very handy, good

31:30 scroungers. So at Batchelor my job with this ADO [Airfield Defence Officer], because I'd been on gun pits in Darwin, was to train the gun crews down there but they didn't man the gun crews twenty four hours a day like we did in Darwin because they didn't get money but they wanted you to train. So what used happen was you trained the crews up in batches, there was a tender there which is a truck,

32:00 and I had emergency drivers licence and we kept the guns on the tender. And if we got an alarm, because we could get thirty five minutes warning, then over the loud sound, you know, the…

The speaker.

The speaker they'd call the gun crews to rush up to Darwin, they'd pile into the truck, I would hop in, drive them down to the strip and drop them off at

32:30 each gun pit and then I'd stay there and I'd park the vehicle under the trees and I'd stay down with the last crew, that was the job. So I had to train these fellas and that sort of thing. On top of other things, we did patrolling out and in run jungle, teach them patrol work. We were doing virtually infantry work but the guard units, the airfield defence unit which never gets, no-one's ever heard of it I don't think, you know, 2 Airfield Defence.

33:00 I've know fellas in the air force that didn't even know we existed. They all knew about guards but they didn't know what they actually did. But towards the finish by this time they were starting to form them into ground troops, the same as the army training and that sort of thing. This came about, the story we were told mainly because in Malaya where they were overrun some of the

33:30 poor cows in the air force units couldn't even fire a gun to protect themselves you know. So they decided that everybody had to, it didn't matter what you were, you had to at least learn to shoot and most people were armed later on in the islands and things like that, it didn't matter what you were so at least you could protect yourself. But the Airfield

34:00 Defence Squadron was supposed, they were trying to form a unit. The RAF [Royal Air Force] in England, the English air force, the RAF they have an RAF regiment which does the same thing. They were trying to get this corps to be RAAF regiment but it didn't come about, so the story goes I was told. But we did do the same sort of work

34:30 in the finish. We eventually, by the time we went up to through islands and things we did the same training as the commandos and things. In fact Pix, when we were in Darwin Pix magazine, I've mentioned this Pix magazine before. It used to be a magazine that had all pictures I don't know if you ever noticed, I don't know whether there's any, probably some in the museum. They had a big centre spread in Darwin on the security guard unit and across the

35:00 top was, "RAAF commandos training." It showed blokes climbing on wires and doing all sorts of things, you know, because that's what they were starting to form, it was forming as a unit. So mostly at Batchelor as I say I was in charge of the gun crews but I also,

35:30 we formed a, we had to teach fellas in the unit. The CO was very strict on everyone has to be able to

shoot. Well for instance I always remember the photographer, like all these units had a photographer, and he used to develop films and things that they took when they were out on raids and he'd never fired a gun in his life. I had to take him out and he turned out to be a really crack shot but we had to teach him. So we

36:00 formed a three hundred yard rifle range out in the Rum Jungle. We had to, some tractors and we went out and knocked down pandanus palms and everything like and made this rifle range so we could take the fellows out and teach them to shoot. Then I got promoted again down there to sergeant. Always handy, an extra shilling a day like.

36:30 **So by this stage you had done your section leaders course at Winnellie and you were now instructing, so what personal challenges did you face taking up this role of instructing?**

Well I didn't seem to have any hassles about it you know.

37:00 I always got on well with the troops, because I always believe you treat them as you would like to be treated yourself and I never had any problems with them. And I was able to get the message over if it was necessary. I knew weapons backwards because I'd been, I suppose I had army training and then I had it all training again in the air force. It was like

37:30 second nature to me if, you know, what I mean. Weapons like, because machine gun I could pull it to pieces and put it together blindfolded you know. In fact once I got these fellas training on it I used to make them do it in the dark sometimes, you know, because sometimes you might have to operate in the dark and if the gun, something happens and you've got to do something then you've got to be able to do it in the dark you know.

38:00 **This is the Vickers you can do?**

That's with a Vickers machine gun, yeah. We didn't have any Bren. The first Bren gun I'd seen was on this army training course and I thought they were terrific weapons and later on if I dare say so I became a bit of an expert with them later on when we got them.

So what was the knack of striping down a Vickers in the dark, how could you do that?

Oh well

38:30 it gets a bit complicated. It's a very, in the Vickers being an automatic weapon there's a thing inside it was called a lock which was made up of seventeen or eighteen pieces in itself and that was, mind you if that failed, if you were actually in action with it and that failed you'd take it out and put another one in,

39:00 if you had one. But there were springs in these locks and sometimes they would break and you'd have to pull it apart and put a new spring in it and put it together again. You didn't, usually you could do that in the day time anyway, you know, but I mean. But fellas on them had to be able to do anything on these guns. I remember when I was still on the gun pit back in

39:30 Darwin, we improved our machine guns to the stage where they fired faster then they were supposed to by putting a spring under the muzzle cup called the volute spring. They had these in aircraft guns, guns on aircraft and we managed to scrounge some and put some on our guns. The biggest machine gun was supposed to fire five hundred rounds a minute, you know, when you're, but we

40:00 reckon we had them up to six hundred rounds a minute. Because we thought the more stuff we could throw up the quicker the better. Because raids, strafing raids didn't last very long as a rule other than the first raid it lasted for an hour but after that they probably, because they couldn't spend too much time there. The first raid they came off an aircraft carrier so they didn't have far to go back to get back to the aircraft carrier. They were the same planes that did Pearl Harbour only more from

40:30 us because the high level came from Timor but all the planes that did Pearl Harbour were the planes that did Darwin, exactly. And after that they came from Timor, well they couldn't spend too much time there, they used to come over the fighter planes and then they'd drop the belly tank, the fuel tank they dropped that. I've actually got a photo there somewhere of a belly tank

41:00 because then they had to do what they were going to do, either fight off our fighter planes or come down and strafe on the drome you know. And then they had to get back four hundred and fifty miles back to Timor so they couldn't afford to stay too long, they'd be out of fuel. And it's amazing I think probably their records would show where a lot of planes didn't get back. Because even if we hit them with small arms

41:30 we might, well the first plane they ever got, Darwin they got off Melville Island and the only thing wrong with it, it had a hole in the oil system a .303 bullet hole in the oil system. Consequently no oil, the engine seized up and the bloke tapered out on the Melville Island.

I'm going to have to stop you because our tape is just

42:00 **about to run out.**

Tape 6

00:30 **About your time at Winnellie, and then after that I believe you had some leave.**

Sorry, from where?

Sorry at Batchelor.

Oh at Batchelor yes.

Did you have leave after Batchelor?

Oh well, when I came home from Darwin you mean?

Yeah.

Oh once we came home yeah. Yes we had thirty days leave you got that automatically after you'd been

01:00 on active service for twelve months or whatever you know. I'd been thirteen months away so I had thirty days leave yeah and I got married. Because when I knew I was coming home, they gave me a bit of warning up there, said, "You're on the next lot to go south." So I sent a telegram and I wasn't sure whether that would get down

01:30 there but apparently my wife to be and mother got it and they arranged for the wedding. I got married in Scots Church on North Terrace. So I was home a week and I was married and then we went for a honeymoon down to Port Noarlunga. That's all you could go to in those days. I always remember it was funny going down, we went down on the train and of course no station signs were all taken down during the war

02:00 and the train didn't go to Port Noarlunga but it went to Noarlunga and then you caught a bus from there. It seemed funny looking at the signs and fortunately there was a lady on board who was going to the same place.

So why did you change your mind to get married when you were still in service?

Well I thought, "Oh well, I've survived so far."

02:30 How long is the war going to go and to me it looked like it was going to go on forever then, you know, there was no sign of us, we were still on more or less the losing side and I thought, "Well make Joyce happy, you know, and I might as well and I'll probably might be down here for a little while." I didn't realise I was going to be down here as long as I was. Actually if I hadn't

03:00 been sent on this instructors' course I probably wouldn't have, I would have gone away again earlier than I did. But if I stayed a guard but I became a ADI, airfield defence instructor and managed, well got kept on a staff there I wasn't very happy about that.

Well when you came back down to Adelaide and you saw your family did you mention anything about the Darwin raid?

03:30 Oh yeah I was asked a little bit. Actually I went out and took out to lunch my mate Bob Simons' mother and father. He was an only son and he had a sister, a younger sister. Before we went away and before we even went to the embarkation depot to go away, his mother and father gave him his twentieth birthday party in Hindmarsh Town Hall as a matter of fact the room at the back because

04:00 they said, "We don't know where he'd be for his twenty first." Little did they know he never made it to his twenty first but. So of course when he was killed my mother, they came over to see my mother and father to see if I knew anything because you couldn't tell them anything then. At that stage they didn't even know whether I was all right or not. But they were notified that Bob had been killed. And then

04:30 when I could write and get letters through I wrote to them and said that I would see them when I came home. I couldn't tell them very much I mean really but at least I went to see them. Of course it was twelve or thirteen months later then and they'd settled down a bit. It was terrible being the only son but that's the way it goes. He was only twenty and my second wife, Jean, her

05:00 brother was killed at Darwin, twenty, he was in the navy. He was on the British Haarlem which was the first, I think it was the only RN ship sunk in Australian waters just off, not far out of Darwin. Terry, he wasn't in very long. So, you know, there were a lot,

05:30 a lot of fellas I knew. In fact the team I played football, is this important, is this ok to?

Yeah.

The team I played football for in the amateur league Underdale, most of those fellas enlisted in 1939 and quite a big percentage of them were in the 8th Division, some of them got lost in Changi a prisoner of war camp, you know, there was only one or two that came back.

06:00 So it's a bit of luck where you go and where you finish up, isn't it.

You had some photos taken in Darwin and you got Joyce to develop them for you.

Oh well I didn't take them, some of the other fellas did, yes.

Now with the censorship what did you explain to her, what did you say?

Well I just wrote to Joyce and said if there's anything you can get

06:30 through without being too you know. I mean I expected, I didn't think, I thought they'd pull them all out. That's the only one, that one there, that came through and they were for the fellow that I was with, he was for the 2/4th Infantry Battalion, he'd been in the Middle East, Charlie Bye, nice fella. So I managed to get them for him, he was as pleased as punch because normally you couldn't show any weapons at

07:00 all but lots of fellas did get them at different times. I never ever got any and well it was pretty hard to take photos anyway, I didn't even have a camera but others took photos. And some of the photos we got later on the islands, the photographer in the unit would take them and they would let you have prints of them, you know, any that was taken. Some of those taken at Balikpapan were taken by

07:30 one of the local photographers in one of the ADS [Advanced Dressing Station]. We didn't have a photographer but the squadrons on the strip had them and there was always a photographer with every unit because when they went on raids they often took photos as well, you know, for recognisance so they always had to have a photographer. One of the units in Darwin was called the PRU, photographic recognisance unit, all they did was go over

08:00 and take photos.

Well after your leave where were you posted?

To Mount Gambier. I kept coming, I think I had about thirty days leave and then I was about another two or three weeks before I was posted. And I used to report everyday to Scotch College here, do, you know, where that is, there because that was the embarkation and

08:30 if you didn't get posted you could go home, that was great but eventually I was posted to Mount Gambier. I went down there at the end of April I think it was it was freezing cold after being in the Territory. I remember I got pleurisy while I was down there, I was only there a while.

09:00 I was playing football, like they were getting a team together to come up and play the army on the Adelaide Oval and I was picked in this team, I thought, "That will be good, I'll get a trip back to Adelaide." You know, but that night I went down in this pain and it turned out I had pleurisy and you didn't wonder how they come. It used to be ridiculous, you'd come from the tropics and they'd send

09:30 you somewhere cold. They reckoned it was to do something about getting your blood, I reckon it's a load of rubbish. It's just damn cold.

So what were you doing in Mount Gambier, what were your responsibilities there?

Well it was guard duties again I was a sergeant guard then of course. And the ADO, airfield defence officer was a fellow called Flight Lieutenant Bruce whom I sort of, I didn't know

10:00 but I knew of him. He was from Adelaide and he was an Olympic, I think he was a javelin thrower before the war. He was from the family of Bruce Auctioneers in Adelaide, you know, I think that firm still goes, I don't know. Anyway he was quite a nice fellow and he said to me, "Now, what did you do in Darwin?" And all that sort of thing, "Yeah, so what do, you know, about Vickers?" I said, "What do you want to know?" He said, "Oh it's like

10:30 that." I said, "Yes." He said, "Ok, some of these guards here don't know one end of a Vickers from another so get them out there." you know, this is in between guard duties and that, "And put them through their paces, teach them the Vickers." Which I did, and he sat in a few times when I was sort of lecturing to them and showing them what to do and making sure their doing it and all that. And after doing this for about a week he called me in to

11:00 the office one day and he had this form, I'll always remember this, I sat on one side of his desk and he shot this form over and he said, "Fill that in." I said, "What's that for?" He said, "That's to become an Airfield Defence Instructor, I've heard you instruct these fellas and I think that's what you should do." I said, "Oh." At that time when you finished the course you finished up a sergeant, well I was already a sergeant and I said, "Oh I don't think I'll bother now."

11:30 My wife had a cousin in Mount Gambier and she was going to come down and stay with her down there and I thought I'll get to live out and that sort of thing, you know, I had it all planned out. Then he said, "Well it's an extra shilling a day." I said, "Give us the paper." And so I filled it in and it was very hard to get out of the guards units anyway and I failed in Darwin to get out into aircrew because I couldn't pass

12:00 the medical after ten months, for aircrew I was ok for the ground and I was a bit browned off about that and I said, "Oh well, I won't get out anyway, they'll just ignore this." So I filled it in and three weeks later I was told I was posted to Shepparton to do the course. And at the time when I filled it in the course used to be done at Hamilton which wasn't very far from Mount Gambier but they'd

12:30 shifted it to Shepparton. So away I went to Shepparton and it was a good course and the beauty of it, on the course was probably I can't remember now but there were thirty of us on, about thirty of us on the course and I knew probably half of them and some of them I'd been in Darwin with. One of them a very good mate that was on the next gun pit from me, a fellow called Lou Bourke and we were good mates when we

13:00 were corporals. He was a corporal on one gun pit and I was on the next one, you know, and he was on the course too. And the funny thing is when the course finished we tied for second place on the course and they kept the top four blokes there on the staff, much to our disgust because there was a recruit depot there as well. Well where there's a recruit depot there's a lot of bull and all that sort of thing

13:30 but it worked out all right. Then I was, after the course I stayed there and I was lecturing the guards, they had the guard courses there. Do you want to go on from there?

Well I'm just, well yeah, what about the guards' course that you were lecturing?

Well guards used to come in there and do their recruit training which was

14:00 about three weeks and then they would come to us to do a four week guards' course in which time we emphasised, by this time we were teaching them weapons, all different types of weapons, hand grenades and things like that and taking them out doing patrol work, just the same as infantry work really. At the end of the time if

14:30 they passed out all right they went off then to a unit somewhere, so the course lasted four weeks. And I remember Lou Bourke and I, we took over this guards course and which they weren't having much luck with apparently, it had been going for a week and they weren't having much luck and they were a bit uncontrollable apparently. We took them over and

15:00 got them on side. So as I said what we just told them, we were ex-guards ourselves and anything they were trying on we'd already been there and done that so. And after a while we got on the job and they turned out to be a very good course according to Skipper Avery who was a flight lieutenant later on he said, "They were the best guards course that ever turned out." So we did another one after that

15:30 and then we went away on this PT unarmed combat course and I came back to the unit, Lou Bourke went to hospital he did his knee in. This was done at Somers in Victoria. And when I went back they told me I was going to be with Flight Lieutenant Dawson who was in charge of special courses, the ADI Courses themselves, ADIs and ADOs. So

16:00 only the top instructors went there so I thought, "Well, they must think I'm all right." I got on all right with Smokey Dawson, he was a terrific fellow and we became great mates even though he was an officer and I, he'd been an ex-sergeant himself he was in the 2/23rd Battalion in Bougainville and they got kicked out of there as the Japs came down, you know, and he was made B Class. So he volunteered for this air force thing and did an

16:30 officers course. So from then on I was lecturing to potential instructors and ADOs, officers, because they all did the same course.

Can I just go back Wilf and ask you about that combat course that you did?

Yeah.

What was entailed in that course?

Well you did all PT stuff, you know, as well like because there were some instructors in the air force, there were straight out PT instructors. Well this was the course they did

17:00 but then we also did unarmed combat which was more intense. We'd done a little bit on our ADI course but this was intense unarmed combat. I mean it's what you, it's unarmed defence you're supposed to be able to tackle someone who's armed and you're not, like in case you're caught that way and we used to

17:30 have to teach this to the other ADIs when I went back. The first thing they teach you is there's a lot of gym work involved and the first thing they teach you is how to fall, because another thing that the PT and ADI some of the instructors did, in fact we were hoping to get posted there. Went to Richmond in New South Wales to teach the paratroopers because on

18:00 the course we did synthetic parachute jumping which was to say we never actually made a jump but you used to go down in the flying fox and shoot down and at the bottom you had to land and roll without hurting yourself and just to land and roll you've got to know how to fall and, you know, protect yourself, the paratroopers were taught this of course. And they were taught by our blokes in those days, now they

18:30 teach all the, they would teach their own. So we did this great big flying fox up on this hill and you'd go down, you'd go down at quite a rate and then you'd hit the bottom and you've got to pull yourself up, hit the ground and roll which ever way you fall because sometimes you fall sideways, sometimes the things swings around and sometimes you fall sideways because if they're landing in the parachute they don't know exactly how they're going to land on the ground. They've got to be able to land, tumble and get

out of

19:00 the chute as quick as they can you know. So we had to know how to teach this and some of our fellows went to what they called PTU, parachute training unit and I went back to Shepparton, much to my disgust because they'd asked for me to go back actually. They asked for Lou Bourke too but he did his knee and went to hospital and he was there for quite some time and when he came out they sent him to another

19:30 station, Cootamundra I think it was. So I never, I saw Lou a couple of times afterwards and lost touch with him after the war, caught up with him through this Airfield Defence just early last year, spoke to him he was living in Griffiths, New South Wales and I spoke to him on the phone, we had a great yarn but he wasn't well he was in a wheelchair and a month later his wife rang me to say he died, so that was another

20:00 one gone.

Wilf can I just ask you, when we were talking about you going up to Darwin and there was that excitement and anticipation of going into action and seeing something. Now you've made a decision to go well away from that and be an instructor and something that is fairly safe now.

Yeah.

How did that transition work for you?

Well I was happy that I was

20:30 in a fairly safe area for one thing, you know, you're not. Well I mean the job was to teach people particularly when you had active service you were able to part, there were things you'd learn on active service that you don't learn originally, you know, little things and you can impart that knowledge to these fellows and we were very serious about it. I mean the idea was

21:00 to turn fellas out to do the job as well as they could and also how to protect themselves and what to expect. And as I used to tell them, "Whatever you expect, it will be a horrible shock when it does come." Because it was to us you know. All of a sudden when you've got someone shooting around

21:30 and bombs are dropping everywhere and you've never had anything like that, it's shocking. But in some ways I suppose we had an easy war compared to other people, some have it worse then others, don't they? But I was able to impart my knowledge, in fact I used to, when I was first doing this Squadron Leader Smith who

22:00 was in charge of the special courses, a chap and he used to do the ack-ack lecture and then he got sick so they got me to do it because I had actually had practical experience. And then when he came back and he sat in when I was doing his lecture for him, you know, and I said to him afterwards, "I hope I didn't let you down." He said, "Not at all, from now on you do them."

22:30 So, you know, because I had learned a lot about ack-ack on that instructors course at Winnellie was good because they had NCOs from all sections of the army and some of them were from the ack-ack units, Fanny Bay ack-ack was one of the ones who'd hit these planes, I said to them one day, "How did you come to hit those planes?" This sergeant was in the Fanny Bay ack-ack, I said, "Remember when you hit those

23:00 two planes, how did that come about?" He said, "Oh that's a funny thing, this is when I first knew, we don't aim at them we aim two thousand feet below them the idea is to keep them up high. As they come over the coast." And our planes used to do this too they either dive or they go high but usually go into a shallow dive to try and mislead the ack-ack. So he said, "We aid for two thousand feet below and then as they come over they dive and dive right into their first two

23:30 rounds. We didn't fire another shot." They were that excited, hitting four planes with two rounds but they're the sort of things they do. There's a thing with ack-ack. They have a system of box tactics, I don't know whether I should be going into this, like this is the technical, like. They fire so there are shells bursting there,

24:00 shells bursting there and shells bursting there, they try and the idea is to try and box the planes in. They would use this more, we would use this more in Britain then here I suppose because we never, it depends on how much, how many guns they had and whether we could do all this. This was all in the ack-ack lecture that I had to deliver. And then of course with small arms fire we

24:30 put up as much as you can. That's when I found out it was only point, I don't whether it's point five or point o five percent that the surface area of an aircraft is subject to the ack-ack fire like before you do any damage. So even if you hit them you can't expect to see them fall down in front of you.

25:00 But still a lot of planes get shot down of course.

And who were your students?

Pardon?

Who were your students, were they air force or army?

When?

At the defence school?

Yeah the instructors' courses, well one or two of them come from the army yes and some of them were ex-guards who were like me and they

25:30 thought would make suitable instructors. Some of them were ex-drill instructors who used to instruct drill and quite a few were ex-warrant officers from the army and different units and we were then, I mean sometimes I was lecturing to the ADIs. Fellows who were doing ADIs course were sometimes lecturing to ADOs. ADOs were better because you used to only get about six

26:00 at a time which was good. The only difference between an ADO, an airfield defence officer, and an airfield defence instructor is the officer before he does that part of the course does an administration course and he gets a commission. So the actual practical work, they all do the same.

And how long were you at Shepparton?

About fifteen months with a six week break half way through when I went on the

26:30 PT course.

And where were you posted after Shepparton?

I was posted to the embarkation depot at Bradfield Park in Sydney. I was there for a couple of weeks and then I went from there to Townsville to the pool, what they called the pool in Townsville which is where people are coming back from the islands or going up, they all go to this pool and then they get posted out to wherever they were going. It was always about something like

27:00 twenty two thousand bods in this pool at different times, you know, coming and going. And I got posted from there, when I got there they said, "Oh an ADI, we're looking for one." This was this mobile instructional group, there was four ADIs and an ADO and they were going around the different units instructing. They had been in Merauke, New Guinea, and they came back from there and one of the fellows took ill and

27:30 was sent south so they were one short and seeing that I was an ADI they grabbed me while I was in the pool, which that didn't worry me while I was in the pool of course but I didn't think it was going to go on for five months which is what it did. I got posted within a couple of weeks to 75 Squadron and I kept going up always and saying, "When am I going?" They'd say, "Oh you're wanted here with us for the time being, you'll be all right." Eventually we went on a troop

28:00 ship and away we went.

So how long did you think you were going to be in the pool before moving on?

Well normally you're never there for more than a month at the outside as a rule. In fact after a couple of weeks I was posted but and then I finished up being there for five months you know. And what we used to do is, all in the pool is all the air force fellows that, all sorts

28:30 mechanics, fitters, riggers, armourers, cooks, mess men, everything they're all there they're going north. If they were going north they had to be checked to see like medically and all that sort of thing, they'd check them again and they'd get them on to their Atebrin tablets for the malaria before they move you know. And then they had to make sure that they were all

29:00 weapons fit, like they could manage to fire a rifle if nothing else. So we used to get them in batches, they'd give you a batch of maybe ten, twenty fellas and I'd find out how much they knew and then bring them up to scratch and then we'd take them up to the Cluden Rifle Range which is just outside Townsville and give them actual practice on the rifle range by firing.

29:30 I can tell you a funny one about back at Shepparton really, about a fellow on the rifle range – I don't know if you – I was out, I had a sort of a day with no lectures to go to, if you didn't have any lectures you could go in your hut and do what you like and that sort of thing but anyway he came around and said, "Look,

30:00 there's a few drill instructors short and they want, the officer's taking a group out to the rifle range and he needs a sergeant so you can got out for a day with him." I said, "All right." So out I go with this flight lieutenant. They've got these, these are recruits they've had their bit of rifle training and they're going to do some first firing you know. So I get down to one fellow, they were only firing

30:30 at a hundred yards and one fellow couldn't even hit the mound and this officer said to me, "For goodness sake go and lay down beside him." They've got them laying on the mound, you know, like about ten blokes. "So go and lay down by him, see what's wrong with that fellow." So I go down, this fellow was about thirty five, and I'm laying down alongside of him and, you know, one of the rules is aiming your rifle, like you put the rifle up, you close the disengage eye, you know, so you can sight. And

31:00 he's closing the wrong eye for a start, you know, and I said, "That's no good." I said, "Close the other eye." He finished up later on he said, "I'll tell you what serge, if I close the other eye, I can't see." I said, "Why not?" He said, "Well the other eye's a glass eye." I said, "You're joking." I said, "How did you?" I said "Right, put that rifle down, come up here." I took him up and the officer said, "What's the matter with him?" I said, "He's only got one eye." He

31:30 said, "You can't, how did he get here?" Well this is a fact, this fellow just wanted to be in the show and he was a travelling salesman and he said every town he went too he fronted up at the recruiting depot but of course he'd fail the eye test, but he kept going and he said, "I knew that test backwards in the finish." And somehow or other he said

32:00 this bloke was pretty rushed one day he went in and he got through. We had a laugh about that and he couldn't help it, well of course they couldn't pass him. Oh I've got a chill in my back. Can I break for a minute?

Certainly. We were just talking about your time in the pool while you were waiting, oh, sorry, no you'd gone onto the embarkation depot now.

Well the pool is

32:30 an embarkation, well it's just the same as an embarkation depot yes.

And…

Well then I went from there, do you want to know what I did at the pool like well apart from? One of the jobs I got was teaching aircrew blokes unarmed combat. They were from 86 Squadron and they were quite keen. But

33:00 first of all you've got to be a bit carefully, you've got to teach them how to fall and not hurt themselves because they start knocking one another about after a while, I had to calm them down. That was one of the jobs I had for quite a while. My brother younger than me was in 86 Squadron too, he was a fitter too.

How did they feel about doing this course?

The aircrew blokes, they though it was a great joke

33:30 so did I really. I mean it seemed, I think it was more or less done partly the story was it was done that if they got shot down and then they were tackled by them they could look after, at the show. I mean unarmed combat means that you've just got an outside chance; the biggest thing with it is the element of surprise. But I mean quite often if they are shot down they are lucky if

34:00 they survive never mind about. But that was the idea but I think it was as much to keep them occupied while this squadron was getting ready to go further north because it went up to the islands later on you know.

Did they think that they would never get shot down?

Well they hoped they didn't anyway, you know, but fellas did get shot down in the bush and some of them survived. And there was, I think from memory I

34:30 read somewhere in one of the air force books later on that there was only two air force fellas who were awarded the DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal], which is usually an army – and one of them was a sergeant pilot who was shot down and he survived in the jungle and he made his way dodging Japanese and things like this. And he even

35:00 came on where they had some guns there and when they were asleep he threw sand in the guns and he managed to get through to them. So they did survive, like some that crashed did survive. And some of them that crashed, if they came down in the sea like off Darwin well we had rescue launchers that used to go out and pick them up, the sea rescue fellas you know. If they

35:30 parachuted out, if they were all ok and the boat could get to them they'd pick them up, you know, that happened a few times. So I suppose, you know, they enjoyed it anyway and it was good fun as far as I was concerned teaching them but in there it was a waste of time I could have been going up to my unit you know. So

36:00 that was just one other jobs that I did in the time I was there. Then eventually I was on the draft and we boarded the ship at Townsville and away we went. It was an American troop ship called the Sea Cat, I'll always remember.

And where were you going to join 75 Squadron?

Well

36:30 as far as I knew when I left they told me 75 Squadron was in Madang on the north coast of New Guinea but when they got there I was told no they're not there they're on their way, they'd moved on. They'd gone to either Noemfoor or Biak or somewhere like that. It turned out they'd gone to Biak which was an island further up because the troops were gradually taking ground and moving up and as fast as they

could they were bringing the airplanes

37:00 behind them, you know, so they can support them. When I got to Biak, in fact I got my gear I was about to offload there as I thought and they said, “No you’re going there, they’re not here. 75 Squadron are not here they’re gone to Morotai.” So I just stayed on board and on we went to Morotai. We were all disembarked at Morotai,

37:30 got on a truck and I said, “Are you going to 75 Squadron.” “Yes, right.” Down I went. When I got down there they said, “We got sick of waiting for you, you were posted somewhere else.” They gave me a meal – pardon me – so I was there for an hour and went to TAFRAAF Headquarters.

Well when you said they were sick of waiting for you, how long had they been waiting?

Five months, well almost five months because it was, you know, I was five months

38:00 in Townsville and I was posted a couple of weeks after I was there into seventy-five and strictly speaking within about a week I should have been up there you know. In fact the WO [Warrant Officer] in the orderly room was trying to get me on a plane to fly up there and if they had have been successful I might have been gone but they kept claiming me there because they reckoned they needed me which was ridiculous, personally but I mean

38:30 that’s my opinion but you do as you’re told.

So you were posted with TAFRAAF at?

That’s Tactical Air Force, by the way.

In Morotai and what were you doing with them, with TAF?

Well teaching weapons instruction and things like that. I even

39:00 went out on a patrol one day with Americans. At Morotai the – I was going to say the army but there were American troops there too, it was an Australian American turn out. They only took a certain amount of the island, they had a perimeter because they just took enough that they could put an airstrip there and

39:30 operate planes to do the bombing and whatever supporting troops. And from time to time patrols went outside the perimeter to see that everything was. I mean the more that you can patrol outside your front, you’ve got to try and own the ground out there if, you know, what I mean, it’s important. So this American patrol was going

40:00 out and apparently they were very friendly with this flight lieutenant at TAFRAAF and they said, “We could do with more fire power and if you’ve got anybody that you could spare.” So he sent me on the patrol with them which I wasn’t very happy about they didn’t patrol like we did, but we survived. The only Japanese we saw was a dead one and I mean we survived. When we went back I asked him not to send me any more with them.

40:30 I mean they have a different, they talk too much, they’re too noisy, you know, they were, the Americans I’m not knocking the American’s I mean I don’t care what you are, one bloke’s as brave if you like to put it that – as the other, but their method of training was different to ours. A bit sort of mass produced I thought but I didn’t go out with them any more.

We’ve come to the end of another tape

41:00 **now so we’ll stop and would you like to stretch your legs.**

Yeah.

Tape 7

00:33 **Wilf you were talking about the Yanks that you met up at TAFRAAF but I just want to go one step back and ask you, did you meet up with any Americans in Townsville?**

Oh yeah, yes it was full of Americans. I mean when I say meet up with them I never had much to say to them or anything like that because Townsville

01:00 in those days, I’ve been to Townsville since and it’s a nice town but then it was dirty and that because there was thousands of troops coming and going some going north, some coming down and a lot of them were Americans. Because it was a big American show too, you know, there was as many Americans as there were Australians I guess. So but other than that I wasn’t, I didn’t

01:30 do any working with them or anything like that but we saw them. They sort of owned the Townsville in a way, you know, but no, they were ok.

Well they did have a different sort of reputation as you went on to find

02:00 **out?**

Well I don't know about different but I suppose you could say different reputation. I don't know their style was different to ours as far as I'm concerned but it might have been just me. You know, like their system of training, when I went out on that patrol I asked one bloke, I said, "What happens if you get ambushed?" He said, "We'll know when they open

02:30 up." I said, "Yeah but you can be half dead by then." I mean we patrol with scouts out and all that and they didn't have it until I mentioned to this lieutenant and he sent some scouts out in front. By the time the patrol had gone for half an hour I was back with the get away man at the end of the line I might tell you. You know, with the system of jungle patrolling you have

03:00 scouts out in front and scouts on the flank if you can get them, it all depends on what the scrub is like and the thickness of the jungle, the undergrowth and you always have one man down the back and he's, it was always known as the getaway man because if they got ambushed and looked like getting wiped out his job was to get away and get the news back, you know. Of course I suppose there were patrols with army blokes in

03:30 particular, in the early days in Kokoda Trail and that sort of thing, when they really had it bad those fellas. That's what I say in some ways I feel some of us had a lucky war, an easy war perhaps compared to some of those. I mean we had our necks on the line from time to time but not in heavy fighting like that.

04:00 But it got, by the time we get up now, by the time we got up to Morotai and that things are going our way.

Yes it is much later in the war, so the weapons instruction that you were doing with the Tactical Air Force at TAFRAAF.

Yeah.

Can you just take me through what weapons instruction you were doing?

04:30 Well there was a group who were going to be, they were the advanced party of Tactical Air Force. Now these fellas wouldn't be shock troops going ashore with the first early landings but they were to get there to get set up for the headquarters when they move. Some of them, one or two or them were clerks and there was a medical bloke and a few others. There were a couple of guards that were still there with them and

05:00 armourers things like that. And I just had to make sure that they could all fire, they were all armed everyone was armed of course, some had rifles and some had Thomson submachine guns. I had to make sure they knew how to use them for a start. And then just generally checked them all out, I only had a week to do this because the Tarakan landing was coming up.

05:30 Anyway it was within two days of my going down to the seafront to where they used to take off and the landings when I was called in and told I had to go over and report to Airfield Defence Squadron, Squadron Leader Dawson or Flight Lieutenant Dawson it was then. So

06:00 I didn't go to Tarakan. But he went to Tarakan, Flight Lieutenant Dawson he was in charge of the Airfield Defence Squadron that went over there but then I was put to training the next lot that were going to the Labuan landing.

Were you disappointed that you didn't go to the Tarakan landing?

Well in a way, yes, but when they said "You're going over to report to Flight Lieutenant Dawson", I was as pleased as

06:30 punch because he and I got on, like he had been at Shepparton and he was the chief instructor and we got on. We were good mates even though the difference in rank, it didn't mean a thing. He was Smokey to me, like Smokey Dawson and I was Wilf to him and that sort of thing you know. And we stayed that way after the war for many years until he died. Anyway so I went

07:00 with Flight Lieutenant Drain who had been at Shepparton also. There's a photo there, that big photo there of the instructional staff at Shepparton, and these fellows are all in there and I am too of course in there. And he used to be the one in charge of the airfield defence squadron going to Labuan so I had to report to him, Smokey

07:30 went off to the Tarakan landing and Wally Drain said I know your reputation with Bren guns so I want the fellows, there's a Bren gun in every section and two fellows there's number one and number two, every man in a section knows how to handle a Bren gun but the fellows who have the

08:00 Bren gun is the real expert in the section if, you know, what I mean, well the thing is to make them experts they're the best fellas with it. So I got all the Bren gunners and I had numbers one and two from every section and I really trained them at Bren gun. I had them that way that they used to eat and sleep Bren gun.

And how had you become so proficient in the Bren gun?

Oh

08:30 I don't know when I did my instructors course I was, it was the first time we handled Bren guns and I got to be very good with it, you know, like I mean probably above average I would say. I'm not bragging about this I mean.

And why did you like the Bren guns?

Oh no it was a precision engineered job and it was very accurate and it was just a good gun compared to some of the older,

09:00 the Lewis guns and things that we'd had before you know. I just thought well you know, you had your favourite weapons and I thought the Bren gun was good.

How easy was it to operate?

Oh, when you trained, quite easy. Well most weapons were quite easy when you trained on how to use them you know. That's a photo of a Bren gun there, those fellows laying behind it. You usually

09:30 if you was out in the field you laid behind it and you put the butt in here and you know. It had a good range and was very accurate. It was considered to be a little bit too accurate. The idea of a machine gun, because it vibrates it spreads the rounds over and has what they call a zone of fire and it covers an area but Bren being so

10:00 accurate wasn't a big zone of fire but never the less it was still a great gun.

And what sort of recoil did it have?

Not very much, it was pretty good. Most, the old Lewis gun which my father used in World War I and we still have them there, it didn't recoil much either. You held it the same way into your shoulder and

10:30 preferably you were laying down or wherever or if you propped it up on something. But I learned to fire the Bren gun from the hip too, you know, like I mean and I could hit targets pretty well. I think that's why I was considered, you know, it's one of those things you tried out. Because if you're moving, Bren gunners moving when you're on a patrol the Bren gunners is usually carrying his Bren gun.

Was it heavy?

Oh

11:00 I couldn't tell you the actual weight now but not, heavier than a rifle but not too heavy. There was a sling went with it, the Bren gunner could put it on his shoulder and usually did when you're out on patrol but no, not exhaustingly heavy I mean, and everybody carried, on the section usually carried a magazine for it. The Bren gunner had one on the gun and usually

11:30 a couple in the pouch, one in each pouch. The number two carried a couple more and then you tried to load up the rest of the fellas in a section of say ten men, they all carried one if possible. So there was always plenty of ammunition for the automatic weapon you know. The other weapons in a section were rifles and tommy guns in our case. Occasionally when I was with TAFRAAF I had

12:00 an Owen gun but that got taken off me when I left TAFRAAF, they wouldn't let me take it. So I finished up I used to carry a rifle, I liked the old rifle. If you were good with a rifle you could fire twenty rounds a minute out of it, accurately.

Would that be including reloading?

No, well yes. Each magazine held ten rounds and well you'd just put

12:30 the clips in like.

And how easy was it to reload the Bren gun?

Well you just whipped the magazine off and plonked another one on and cocked the weapon again and away you went, as quick as that. If it had a fault, you just cocked it and refired.

Did it have any safety catch on it?

Oh yeah, all the weapons had safety catches.

13:00 And this is the thing of course you had to drum into the fellas that when to have the safety catch on and when they had to take it off because you didn't want them shooting up their mates. From time to time I suppose I don't recall any, or except when I was at Shepparton one of them in guards course a fella shot himself in the foot one day and I had to treat his foot, but he's lucky, it went between his

13:30 toes. He just had his, it should have been unloaded and it wasn't and he fired it and it went through his shoe and through between his toes. I was doing the medical and everything, out on bivouac it was and

we didn't have a medic with us and being the sergeant in charge I had to, I put iodine on it and sent it back to the unit, back to base. But

14:00 it turned out all right because it didn't break any bones, he was lucky it just went through between two toes. We had one fellow in the unit shot in the face with a tommy gun and made a mess but he survived.

Was that while training?

No it was just an accident, this was at Balikpapan.

14:30 One of the fellas come in from patrol and they were tired, the corporal it was, and he dropped his tommy gun down on his bunk and this fellow hadn't been out on patrol he was laying down and the thing went off. It didn't have a safety catch on them see and you could bump them and sometimes they'd go off. He dropped it and it went off and it shot him through his mouth and up through his,

15:00 took his eye out and out through. He was lucky he was in the next tent to us. When this gun went off I said, "God that was." And there was a tree between us and where it went off because it didn't just fire one round it went as a burst of about three or four rounds, you know, brrrr. Anyway we had a medic with us those days and we yelled for him, he came down and he dropped in and they got him off. The doctor came over, the MRS was just across the creek from

15:30 us and the doctor came over and they got the, well the ambulance was coming around, the doctor hopped across the creek and got onto him. And everybody's handing around, you know, wondering, I mean we though he was a goner. The doctor said, "Oh we'll save him." And they did. In fact about a week later I had to go into hospital myself, I've got ear problems, a burst of tropical ear which got very bad.

16:00 That's probably one of the reasons I've got ear problems now, you know, it wouldn't have helped. My ear all closes up and it's inflamed and I got a temperature and they shot me up to this hospital. And the hospital hadn't been open very long, it was a long hut with, down the middle on each side there was a platform that it could take beds. The Japanese had had it of course and now we had it and they had it in the hospital.

16:30 And the week before, this is a funny like I was in hospital a couple of times, two or three times during the war at different times. If you got a bit of a temperature they sent you to hospital sometimes you know. But this is the only time you went to hospital and you took your weapon with you and we had to because the week before a Jap troop had go into this hospital and shot through the hospital shooting up patients and

17:00 out the other end you know. So you had to take, here you are in hospital with your gun loaded beside you. And I was there for about four days while they treated this thing. And this lad was in there who'd been shot because the fellow said to me, "You're from airfield ADS?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Do, you know this lad?" I said, "Yeah I know him, he wasn't in my platoon but

17:30 I knew him." He said, "Well we're gradually getting him going, we need someone to boost his, boost him up a bit." He said, "If you've got nothing to do will you go?" I said, "Yeah, I'll go and have a talk to him." So I went down, I'd talked to him for about, he knew me, "Oh g'day serge how are you going?' And, you know, he had tubes coming out of him everywhere. I said, "How are you doing?" "Oh I'm not doing too bad." And I yarned with him for

18:00 about an hour I suppose, nothing else to do. And all he was complaining about was that he lost his teeth, he was only twenty one and he had beautiful teeth but he'd lost them you know. He said, "Oh they reckon they'd give me new tatts." Nice lad. Anyway for the next couple of days I used to go and have a yarn to him and I said, "Oh you'll be all right." you know, I didn't know whether he would be or not but the doctor said he would be but they were getting

18:30 him to the stage where they could send him south, you know, either on a hospital ship or even flying him but they couldn't move him at that stage. The doctor told me, I said, "What about it come up and went out of his head." He said, "Yeah it missed his temple." He said, "When he goes south I'll put a plate in there." God, I mean the things they do. Anyway some month or so later he came down to the unit one day and he came around to

19:00 see me. He said, "It was great to have a yarn when, you know, that time." And he said, "I'm going south now." He was due to go south and he'd come to say goodbye to his mates and pick up any of his gear before he went you know. Survived, for how long you don't know but he'd probably get a few headaches in his time the poor cow but, you know, they're the sorts of things. War's a terrible business you know.

19:30 **It is a terrible business. I'm also wondering in all of your time as an instructor and on the weapons, did you come across anyone with a self inflicted wound?**

No I can't say, other than the bloke that accidentally shot himself in the foot. But no I didn't, no, certainly no-one to my knowledge anyway.

20:00 We had a fellow in my platoon in Balikpapan who finished up in hospital with malaria. And malaria then was considered a self inflicted injury because if you took your Atebrin you didn't. Now he had had

malaria further down in New Guinea and he hadn't been taking his Atebrin. I was really rotten on him, I'll tell you, because

20:30 one of my responsibilities was to see they took their Atebrin. And they were going to stop his, he went into hospital and they were going to stop his pay, but Smokey Dawson went over and talked to them he said, "This fellow is pretty good. I said, "He's a good soldier." He was a top notch bloke as far as. In fact when I had to do a recce [reconnaissance] patrol just after we landed and I was only to take three men, he was one of the fellas that I took because they were

21:00 all, the three blokes were all blokes I didn't mind backing me up, you know, I knew they'd be there. He was one of them but he got malaria he hadn't been taking his Atebrin. So I went over to see him in the MRS I said, "You rotten sod, you know, you let me down." "Oh yeah I'm sorry serge." I said, "You'll take them from now on when you come back, every morning." He had to come to my tent every morning and I'd see him take his Atebrin. With the army fellas they used

21:30 to, talking to some of the army sergeants later on, they used to line their platoon up and make them take them but some fellas still used to spit them out, they reckon half of them didn't take them. The theory among a lot of the troops was that it made you infertile which wasn't true but that was one of the rumours and consequently some fellas didn't take them, they got malaria. Before we

22:00 even landed we had planes going in spraying all the water and everything to make sure that, you know, to keep the malarial control, like the mosquito. The Japs must have known we were landing because for two or three days before they were in there spraying oil. And then we, you used to just have to take this tablet every morning. It made you go yellow like you had yellow jaundice or something but it kept the

22:30 malaria away.

Well just back tracking a little bit, before the invasion you were talking about training the troops to prepare for, you didn't actually go on the Labuan invasion landing.

No, no.

So then after that it was the preparation for Balikpapan?

Yes.

So what sort of preparations for Balikpapan did you?

23:00 Well it was again, some of these fellas were nineteen, twenty and they'd just come straight up from down below, had to make sure that their weapon their ability with their weapon was good, trained the Bren gunners again and take them out on patrols so they knew what they were going to do when they had to patrol. Because

23:30 our job, the whole idea of the airfield defence was to help if necessary get the strip after landing and then to keep it free of enemy so that the airfield construction squadron could come in and start putting

24:00 the strip into order so that we could get planes landed as quickly as possible. And that second gang it only took them a week and they had Spitfires coming in landing on it, which was good but our job was to protect those fellas. I mean after all they're sitting up on bulldozers, they're sitting shots for snipers and our job was to keep it clear so we would patrol during the day, up to half a mile out around the strip.

While

24:30 **these landings in LSTs [Landing Ship Tank] were quite a logistic feat, did you do any dry runs before you actually did the landings?**

Yes, yes. Yeah we did a couple at Townsville. We did one, I remember we did one with some Royal Navy fellas, marines and they were good and we did another one with Americans and well they got us to shore all right but they were noisy.

25:00 I can remember it was dark and we're heading for the beach, it was a night time job, and the Yanks are yelling out, "Hey buddy, what wave are you?" you know, to the next, so we had a big joke about that.

So you practiced the beach landing with Americans in Townsville?

Yeah, yeah. Yeah just the once that's all and once with the

25:30 Royal Navy mob.

And what about in Morotai, did you do any practice beach landings in Morotai?

No, no some people did. In fact the army, at Townsville by the way one of the air force units and I think it was my brother's squadron, they lost a couple of fellas doing a landing because the fellow operating the barge and it was an American barge,

26:00 it bumped and he dropped the thing and said, "Right out." And the first two blokes went out and just

disappeared because it wasn't at the beach at all he just bumped into something and the water was deep. From then on you had to always, when the barge dropped the front and you had a wet landing you had to undo your webbing equipment so that if it was too deep and you got in trouble you could slip out of it you know. That was the standing rule from then on both army and,

26:30 as far as I know anybody doing wet landings. So, yeah we didn't do any at Morotai we'd already done that we reckon we never had time, by this time it was go, go, go. So we just, we gave them lectures on what to do and that sort of thing. And after all we weren't going ashore in the first wave,

27:00 the army were and we were coming up next like. We were the first lot of air force because we had to be there first and get things, secure things so that the construction squadron could come in and start doing their job. And they came, even the bulldozer came ashore with us as a matter of fact, a fellow on a bulldozer. He didn't get anywhere of course

27:30 for a while but at least he got it ashore each time. They split us up on different LSTs to go over there so that you don't lose, if you don't all be on one LST and it gets sunk well there's nobody left, you know, but they put each platoon on four different LSTs and then you'd load from the LSTs into the landing barges and off you'd go ashore.

And which platoon did you

28:00 **go with?**

I was 17 Platoon, I was the platoon sergeant on that until later when they got short of officers and I became the platoon commander of 16 Platoon.

So you'd been given a platoon on Morotai?

No, on Morotai, no when we left on Morotai I was platoon sergeant. Flying Officer Robertson was the platoon commander. And I

28:30 met him in Victoria once, I've got a photo there somewhere. I met up with him in Victoria he was coming up ninety. He was very good, he was a school teacher in civvy life, he taught at Melbourne Grammar. He said he was still going all right. He had several stents put in and the first time he went to hospital to have the stent put in the surgeon spoke to him

29:00 before. They were wheeling him in and he said, "Do you remember me, Mr Robertson?" He said, "No, should I?" He said, "Well, you taught me at Melbourne Grammar." Robbie said, "I said to him, my God I hope I didn't do you any harm." He's quite funny. I don't know what's happened to him, we exchange Christmas cards and things and I haven't heard. I will be going over to Victoria soon so, pretty shortly to visit my daughter that's over there, they were over here this week they only went

29:30 home yesterday and I'll go over for a while and I'll see if I can catch up with Robbie again if he's still going, but he would be ninety one I suppose now if he's still going.

Well can you describe that trip from Morotai from Balikpapan, what time of day did you leave Morotai?

Well first of all you board the LST, do you just want to know?

30:00 And you, on board the LST down in its hole there was a bulldozers and graders and things belonging to the airfield construction squadron. And then, and we just, I mean all we had to do was sit up on deck and, you know, generally and keep out of the way when we had stand to. A couple of times enemy planes were sighted and of course

30:30 the LST was American and the troops were stand to on the guns and we would just keep out of the way. We didn't want to get in their way but generally speaking, in fact there was an ADI who'd done, a fellow called Bill Trivett who had done the course, was on 7ADI Course, he was the ADI with the airfield construction squadron. Like every one of those squadrons had an ADI and an

31:00 ADO with them and he said, "Oh we've got a cabin down there." But the LST had bunks along the sides, you know, it wasn't a cabin actually. It was pretty noisy and it was the same on the troop ship I slept on deck, it was a lot easier and more comfortable except when it rained of course. So the trip was pretty uneventful, there were

31:30 ships everywhere you know. And then we arrived at the bay, before we got to the bay you could hear the firing going on of course and when we got there, there were navy ships, we went in under, between them and the beach. They were firing over our heads at the shore. The Shropshire was one, it was an Australian ship. The army had landed and at night time it was a real fireworks display, you know, you could see traces

32:00 going everywhere and it was noisy particular with the big guns going over your head all the time. But the trip was uneventful really we had a, they had a couple of stand tos as I say, the enemy planes were sighted but they never came near enough to attack them they apparently were just recognisance I supposed keeping an eye.

Was it rough weather?

No it wasn't too bad going over, no. We had a bit of rough weather on the troop ship going, when we were going

32:30 up but on the LST going from Morotai to Balikpapan because with Morotai, without the map like you have to come down, you're going further south, you come back over the equator again and down to Balikpapan is sort of halfway down if, you know, what I mean, down the coast of Borneo. But the weather was pretty good. The only thing

33:00 I forgot to mention here is we were on American rations and coffee on the thing, you know, going over and when we landed, while we were loading into the – do you want to know about the actually landing? – loading into the barge to go ashore the Japanese were mortaring the beachhead and it didn't look to good so we,

33:30 so I said to the fellas, "When we hit the beach, go for your life up into the sand hills." On the way to the beach which was a couple of hundred yards I suppose the mortaring stopped but you didn't know when it was going to start again it had been going intermittently before. And we hit the beach and we were off up into the sand hills and in the sand hills was a big hollow in this sand and there was a marquee

34:00 up, and out of this marquee came a Salvation Army fellow and he said, "Would you fellas like a cup of tea?" Believe it or not, they'd been mortaring over the top of his head you know, those Salvo blokes, I'll tell you. And we did, he said, "It's a bit weak because the commandos come through just now and got most of it but I'll put some more water in it." I said, "When did you get ashore?" He said, "Oh I got ashore earlier this morning."

34:30 He pitched a marquee, they're unbelievable, those fellas.

That's not what you expected?

That's not what we expected at all, no. Anyway Robbie, my platoon commander went off to see the beach commanders who was a naval bloke, his first question was, "What the hell is RAAF doing ashore?" When he told them who we were and what

35:00 we were he said, "All right, the 21st Brigade's off down the road there." So we started moving down the road.

Was it an orderly landing?

Yeah pretty good as it turned out. The Japanese were only about two hundred yards up on the, there was a ridge of hills a low ridge of hills a couple of hundred yards back from the beach and the AIF were sort of holding them up there. That was about,

35:30 the mortaring of the beachhead stopped and we found out afterwards the commandos had caught up with them and knocked them out, which was a good thing. And we just moved down the road, we stopped by the time it was midday after a while and we, we all had K-rations [US Army field rations], you carried enough K-rations to last you for three days so it was time to, while we did a bit more reconnaissance,

36:00 fellas to eat. It was a terrible thing there, we stopped…

Well just describing that landing on the beach it's a wet landing, how…

About up to there, it wasn't quite up to there about half way up your thighs it was, that's as close as they could get in.

How easy was it to do that landing?

Oh well, they just dropped the front of the barge and you're

36:30 out into the water and go for your life up the beach to, you know, get in among the sand, get a bit of cover just in case, you don't know as it happened nothing happened. It was an easy landing as far as we were concerned. I mean the army landing before us probably had it a bit different but I don't think they had a great deal of trouble by all accounts. One of the reasons was we

37:00 landed, before the landing we were told and I think some of the history I read somewhere about the navy boat, they sort of kidded the Japanese that they were going to land up there but they didn't, they landed down here, you know, what I mean. That was tactics and it worked which made the landing easier for everybody.

37:30 We sat down for lunch and there was a horrible smell there and we found a couple of, it had been an ice works or something and it was run by a couple of Chinese and the Japanese had killed them, you know, and they were laying there and it was terrible. The cruel things they used to do. They tied these couple of people up and then cut their feet off and killed them.

38:00 **And did you see those bodies?**

Yeah, that's right, yeah. I couldn't do anything about it we had to keep moving but I mean there was nothing we could do for them anyway. Things like that, any casualties you came across we had to leave

that to the NEI, the Netherlands East Indies civilians' crowd were landing because it had been part of the Netherlands East Indies and they were supposed to look after the local people.

38:30 So anyway, we moved down and caught up with 21st Brigade headquarters and it was getting late in the afternoon and getting towards dark and they gave us a job for the night. There was a beach and then there was a swamp and they'd bypass the swamp and also there were a couple of big

39:00 crates of stuff and we'd say, "What's that?" They said, "That's a radar unit, it belongs to your blokes." How it got there nobody knows, they'd landed it of some LST earlier, dumped it there and said, "Well you better look after this." They had a battery just of twenty five pounders, army artillery

39:30 a little way down the beach and they said, "Now you have to keep an eye on this swamp." Like, we had to dig in because they bypassed the swamp and there could be Japanese in the swamp. The army to keep moving down the road to get to the strip had bypassed that. So they said, "We've got fellas on the other side and you fellas take care of this side." So we dug in there for the night, a pretty

40:00 sleepless night. Everybody dug fox holes and you know. We had like, platoon headquarters there was a platoon commander, myself and a platoon runner, you always had a bloke who could move around quick in between sections if necessary. We dug in this bit of a hollow because we had the radio with us too and we had the driver, there was a driver allotted to us a funny

40:30 little fellow. Because we had one vehicle given to us, a blitz buggy, to take with us on the landing, we got that ashore but that just had to follow us up and we only had that for a couple of days and then they took that away. But we only had one radio between, to each platoon and we had to check in with the CO, Squadron Leader Dawson, Smokey Dawson at eighteen hundred hours every night, we'd check

41:00 with him. And that's when we found out that one platoon had gone off, drifting down the coast because the barge had broken down that they were going to land with. They didn't get ashore until the next day and had to make their way up the coast. And we were the first platoon ashore and the others didn't get ashore until the next day. So we were the only platoon ashore.

I'm going to

41:30 **stop you there because our tape is just about to run out.**

Oh right.

Tape 8

00:31 **We were just talking about Balikpapan and you said that at this stage you were the only platoon ashore, when did the other platoons arrive?**

Well the LSTs were all along side one another out in the bay; they got ashore the next day. The platoon that was going to land the same day as

01:00 us, the barge lost it's rudder or something and the engine failed and it went drifting off down the coast, some few miles and we didn't catch up with them for a couple of days because they managed to get ashore and they were lucky they made their way up the coast without running into any trouble, you know, but we didn't know what had happened to them. Well they were in touch by radio of course with the CO.

01:30 So the next day the others came ashore but we spent night as I said dug in around the swamp. Do you want me to carry on from there?

Yes I'm interested to know about the patrols you did for 21st Brigade?

Well we, the first one was this reconnaissance patrol, the next morning we

02:00 liaised with the 21st Brigade of course, they were in charge of everything there. They said this trip is almost under control but they lost a couple of men during the night and they think the Japanese had come out of this swamp. Actually they said a couple of their fellas were found in their slit trench with their throats cut. So

02:30 they said someone's got to go, they gave us the job of checking out the swamp, just a reconnaissance job and I got the job. So they, Robbie said, "You pick up any three men and go and go in and see what you can find out in there." We didn't, the reconnaissance patrol you don't fight unless you have to

03:00 to protect yourself but go in and see what information you can find. So away we went, we started off on a path and there was an unexploded bomb right in the middle of it so we steered around that, got into the swamp which was pretty mucky it was coming over our ankles sometimes and just kept moving through. We were supposed to meet up with another patrol who were going to so around the outside of the swamp and meet us when we got through

03:30 when they got part way through we came on a heap of, there had obviously been Japanese there because there was food tins opened and that sort of thing and we knew we weren't far behind them, we though we could hear them they must have heard us and they were moving away from us. In fact we even saw

04:00 some two toed footprints in the mud, which would disappear very quickly, so they weren't too far away so we just kept pressing on a bit and got to the edge where we reckoned they'd left the swamp. I estimated there would be probably about half a dozen to ten of them by the look of it. Which

04:30 proved to be pretty right because someone reported later that they'd seen them coming out of the swamp and crossing the road and going out into the jungle proper. So, or at least we chased them out, I mean not that we sort of caught up with them but we could hear them. And we couldn't catch up with the other patrol because we struck the river; I forget I think that was the Sepinggang, Sepinggang

05:00 Kecil or something which is a small Sepinggang. So we had to go back we couldn't meet up with the other patrol, the river was jammed full of logs which the Japanese obviously did so that no-one could come up the river, so we couldn't get across. So I said, "Well we'll have to go back." But we couldn't go back; you never went back on the track you came out of, in case you got

05:30 ambushed, so we had to cut our way through the mangroves, we had machetes, cut our way through the mangroves out to the beach and we met up with the other patrol then they were heading back, they had realised that we couldn't get through and they were heading back too. So we went back and reported to the 21st Brigade headquarter blokes, the sergeant major there and the officer and they asked us all the information, you know, passed that

06:00 on to them. The next day they told us that what we said, the Japanese had obviously came out, we came out of the swamp, at least the swamp, they knew the swamp was clear then, that was the main thing anyway. So that was the first recognisance patrol I did. I never got the stinking mud out of my gaiters and boots for ever, oh it was shocking.

06:30 A bit hairy but it was all right. We did several patrols after and things like that later on. By that time the strip had been taken so we moved up there and we had to tie in with, we moved around the strip

07:00 to check it all out and just, we stayed there then and kept liaising with 21st Brigade. And our job then, we used to patrol within half a mile the strip all around it and the commandos took over, they were next door to us on one flank and I think it was the 2nd Machine Gunners were

07:30 on the other flank. So you had your area to say well that's you're area you patrol that. You didn't go into the other fellas' area because they might shoot you up anyway. But that was our job from then on. And that night we dug in around the strip and then in the morning we'd get up and patrol around it. The other platoons come ashore so we were able to get relieve. We found out where we were going to

08:00 have our base camp that was selected. Some of them were allotted in the first place, they did have maps, I've got maps of that somewhere not that I had them then but Alan Giltrap, the airfield defence organiser, he sent me copies of them. I had to mark up what I could remember of them and that sort of thing, you know, the coastline

08:30 and where we did this and where we did that, it was pretty hard to remember.

How far from the strip was your base camp?

About half a mile. It was further on, right on the beach under some, well some of those photos some of they were palm trees, well they had been but of course there wasn't much left of the tops of them in fact we had to be very careful with palms because every now and then you'd get a

09:00 blow and the top would drop off because they'd be riddled with shrapnel and stuff, you know, during the landing and things, bombardments. The strip was in a fair mess from our own bombing beforehand but the airfield constructions squadron could then get into it and they brought their, within a week they had it operating which was good. And we were getting spitfires to come in and land, they could then give more support

09:30 to the army as they moved on you know.

And did you see many attacks on the airstrip?

What, air attacks?

Yeah, or even ground attacks.

No. They got in among the planes when they first landed one night and, but the fellows, the guards who spotted them couldn't shoot them, they didn't want to shoot their own planes up and they scarpered off.

10:00 So we went out, we had to dig in that night around the strip and then in the morning, the procedure was you was on like what was called a standing patrol, you would dig in around what ever area you had to protect which in this case was the strip. And then in the morning you'd come out of your fox holes and when it was day break and we'd do a patrol around half a mile to make sure it was clear before the construction squad or at

10:30 a later date the mechanics and everyone came down and started working on the planes. This particular morning we went out and there was a bit of a grass, the grass was about a metre high and as we moved through all of a sudden these Japanese popped up about forty or fifty yards in front of us, they heard us coming. They'd obviously been the ones that had been in on

11:00 the strip during the night and they'd gone out and slept in the grass. I remember our Bren gunner fired the first shots at them and missed, which is number two took them, you know, I wasn't very happy about. I said, "What are you doing? Rotten shot." But they took off, they scarpered of course into the jungle which was like a wall, the jungle. We went up to the

11:30 edge and we had to decide, Robbie said to me, "Do we chase them further in?" You could hear them crashing away. I said, "Well, we were at the perimeter of our area anyway, they've gone into the commandos area now. So I said, "Let's leave it at that." I mean our main job was to keep them away from the strip and we'd done that. Later that, when we went back to base of course we reported to the commandos that they were in their area

12:00 and we heard around about midday the commandos ran into them too but they got away again. Because they, by this time lots of the parties of Japanese, they were in small parties, they were being cut off, in some cases they were like at Morotai and that they were just short of food, their supply lines had been cut.

12:30 They were just, some of them were doing as much damage as they could and some of them were just surviving I think. Most of them that we struck like that they scarpered off except for when we did the water point job later on and they tried to get in and blow that up, that was another job we were given. Once we got the strip and that sort of thing we had to liaise with 21st Brigade every day

13:00 and then they said, "Well the water point is a major point." And we were given the job of looking after it, while they were still trying to take the Mangar strip which was the next one which they never got for six weeks, it took six weeks to get that. Owing to the Japanese being dug in in the hills in a cave with a door on it and they'd come out and they were sort of able to shoot up the strip

13:30 at any time, so it couldn't be used and the army took six weeks to get them out. But we never went down there in the finish we only went down to liaise with 21st Brigade everyday. They gave us the job of, we had to look after the radar unit which had now been set up, at night time we looked after it, in the day time they looked after themselves at night time we had to go down and protect it. We got some

14:00 casualties there, we got five casualties there and the water point was another one. Now the water point was a big concrete tank as big as this house, probably not as wide but easily as long and the water was a, there was a little pumping shed there which they used to pump the water from

14:30 the river that was there up into the tank and then it would be chlorinated. Then all the units, both army, navy and air force would come in with a water cart and draw their water and take it back to their unit. As near as possible that was the only water you used because it was, if you had to use the water from creeks we had tablets to put in them but generally you filled your water bottle from the water that was carted from the water point. Now the water point of course was fairly important

15:00 and the Japanese had had it, when they left it they wrecked the pump but their engineers had put it back, the army engineers had put it back and we took it over from them and our engineers looked after it during the day, they kept it going and they chlorinated the water and at night it was shut down and we took over and dug in around it in fox holes. The Japanese kept probing, we knew they were there, you could smell them

15:30 they were that close, twenty five yards away and finally one morning they tried to get in and there was a bit of a stoush and our fellas killed all of them, there was eight of them I think and they were all carrying huge canisters of explosives on their back which they were trying to get in and blow the thing up of course.

16:00 So that was the biggest show we had, other than that we mainly, if we contacted them they'd chase they went off, you know, so we had a pretty easy time really. We got one other one night I, just as we were settling down at dusk there was a movement, at the water point

16:30 we cleared it to twenty five yards around. And one of the bushes on the edge of the river seemed to me to be, there was no wind but it was moving quite a lot and I told the Bren gunner to just give it a burst which he did and it shook. And in the morning we checked it and we found blood there but it could have been an animal as far as we were concerned, we thought. But I remember a couple of days later they were going out on the patrol afterwards

17:00 and there was a terrible smell and there was this dead Japanese. So obviously he'd got him and there was another one. The engineers killed two or three while they were there. There was quite a little cemetery there in the finish with Japanese. And fortunately we didn't have any casualties, the only casualty we had during was one of the officers tripped over their own trip wire

17:30 when they were doing, they were throwing grenades at these fellas, so it wasn't bad really, we survived fairly well.

Wilf, you were just talking about the defence you underwent, you made a comment there that you could smell them, what did they smell like?

18:00 Oh they had a peculiar smell actually, well they were living like animals in the jungle, you know, they were cut off they were, and they just smelt like animals. They actually too, at the water point had a little fox terrier dog that used to come in and sniff all around us, it used to worry some of the fellas, the CO, Smokey, said, “Let it go, because we know they’re around when the dog’s there.” It never used to make a noise or

18:30 anything it just used to sniff around and then it would disappear again and it belonged to them obviously, so we knew that they were about every time you know. Funnily enough when they had the bit of a fight and killed it, it got reported in the newspaper down south and we got a copy of it and those correspondents got things all, you know, they said, “Oh, we were warned by a barking dog.” And all that which was a load of rubbish. The fellas

19:00 had a great laugh, you know, how this airfield defence team had knocked off these Japanese.

Well I had heard that when the Japanese were cut off like that from their own army that there was some cannibalism, did you see any of that?

Well not that I saw, no.

19:30 They were pretty heartless fellas, when the war finished and they started taking prisoners they started coming in you know, they dropped leaflets to tell them that the war was over and said if they came in with these leaflets they would be taken care of and some of them did. But again some of them came in and then when the army fellows went to take them over

20:00 they produced a weapon and shot some of our blokes. We had some of our, down the army unit down the road lost fellows killed after the war was officially over, you know, so we still had to carry on as if it was still on. The officer that was in charge of the compound where they had them taken prisoner came down to visit us one day, because he was a friend of Smokey Dawson’s and he

20:30 was telling us how they had them in small huts, so many in a hut. He said they went around one morning and found one out the door of the hut and he was dead. When they, through the interpreter checked with them all, he’d been making a noise during the night and his mates couldn’t sleep so they just put him outside the hut. So he needed attention, he just died you know. Apparently he had a blocked bladder or something I don’t know but, so he

21:00 tells us. But that’s, they were like with our blokes if you had a fellow that was sick well you’d be looking after him or trying to get someone to look after him, they didn’t seem to care, I don’t know.

Well how would you describe them as an enemy?

They were tough. They were pretty fanatic,

21:30 fanatical or whatever you like to say I mean but they were, well by all accounts, I mean I didn’t have that much contact with them the army fellows would tell you more about that. They were good fighters I guess. But they, but they were tough, they were cruel,

22:00 that’s the point that you can never get over. We saw some of the allied POWs [Prisoners of War] that were released and they were from an Indian unit, they still managed to keep their turbans actually. They were skin and bones, they were like skeletons with the skin over them, how they survived I don’t know. And of course our fellows that were POWs

22:30 finished up the same, those that survived.

Wilf you were talking then about ground attacks, what about any air attacks?

We didn’t have many there, we had two or three while we were down at the strip of a night time and we heard the planes, we actually saw them one night at the airfield with some of our fellas chasing them but nothing to speak of,

23:00 no. There was at Morotai but not at Balikpapan, by that time I think we had them pretty well under control. There was a few at Morotai, in fact one night our bombers were coming back from a raid and of course the radar would have picked them up because they were coming back but apparently the Japanese followed them back and they came straight in and of course they got in under the radar

23:30 and bombed us before our fellas knew they were there, and that was the night time raid of course. But there was more raids there but not a great deal. It was starting to ease off. We were starting to obviously win the war.

You mentioned earlier about going out on a US patrol when you were in Morotai, did you have any US servicemen with you when you were out patrolling in

24:00 **Balikpapan?**

Well no it was, we didn't run into very much. Mostly we heard them and they moved away because they were in small parties, they were trying to survive generally I think but it was still, patrol work in the jungle was very, how can I say, the tension was

24:30 pretty high. Even if you never struck any trouble you came back and you were exhausted you know. Not just because of walking through but because of the tension. When you can't see much further than from here to the door you're on your toes all the time. And as I say mostly we had to keep them away from the strip and that we did pretty successfully as far as I'm

25:00 concerned. We were mostly just chasing them away, we never really got hand to hand with them or anything like that because they'd reached a stage where they were as I say trying to survive I think. The army of course caught up with them the further, I kept pushing them back and they had to fight them but we didn't, apart from those few things the water point and things like that we didn't really have

25:30 a great deal of actual contact with them, which was fortunate as far as I'm concerned. you know, we were there if necessary.

Well how long were you guarding the strip at Sepinggang?

Well until we came home. It was the beginning of, the end of October I suppose when we started

26:00 to come home, the beginning of November. Because we flew home, I was back in Adelaide from Balikpapan in four days you know.

Well when you were guarding the strip, how did you overcome boredom?

Well it was just a matter of, you couldn't afford, well it was boring but if you was able to talk you'd talk to the other fellow in the fox hole with you or something

26:30 like that, very quietly. There was no smoking of course at night. It was a matter of someone staying awake and keeping, oh it was very tiring I mean you were staring into the darkness. You get to know the different objects and you, after a while sometimes you think they're all moving. And

27:00 we set up fixed lines of fire of course too, with machine guns which, it's a bit hard to explain really but if you had several slit trenches, fox holes, here and you might have a machines gun up there which was lined up across in front of you and they fixed, that was on a fixed line so that if there was movement they would just fire it and that would

27:30 protect your front as well as you could. It was a standard army procedure, fixed lines of fire of a night time. But we never had, a couple of times they opened up but it was nothing, you know, you weren't too sure, you didn't take any chances. They fired off a few rounds.

28:00 I didn't fire too many, you have to clean the gun afterwards if you do. But I mean as, in a unit you have what, your platoon commander is a fire control officer and usually the platoon sergeant is a fire control officer in as much as if you had to do an exercise you would check and tell them when to fire and when not to fire. I mean obviously if you're being attacked, well I'd be firing too, but I mean

28:30 generally that was the job of commanders of the units you know. They didn't always do any firing themselves unless they had to.

And how did you retain alertness?

Sorry?

How did you retain alertness staying on guard?

Well if, you know, that you're not alert you might get your throat cut, you stay

29:00 fairly alert. But you take it if there were two or three of you in a fox hole well there'd always be one awake all the time. We were usually in two man fox holes and once you went dark and you went into those that's where you stayed and one would sleep and the other one would stay awake. If you had three of you, you were lucky because you could have a bit longer, you know, you just doze off. I mean it's not very comfortable sitting in a fox hole I might tell you, but it's not like sitting in a

29:30 chair. You're in a hole with your head just below the level of the ground and the bloke on watch keeps his eye open and if we had a system on standing patrols, like for instance around the water point or the bomb dump when we were there or the radar unit, we had vines between all the different fox holes and if someone here

30:00 reckoned he saw movement, well you'd warn them one to the next one and little sound as possible so that they'd all be keeping, you know, all on the key vee as the saying is. We had trip wires out which had cans with stones in them too so if they happened to hit them, mind you they would have been looking for these too because they weren't silly, they did the same thing

30:30 but they were there. It was nerve wracking actually. By the time you'd finish a night on a standing patrol you were exhausted even if nothing had happened but you were still tired and sort of. It was the same with patrols, you were alert all the

31:00 time and when it's over it's a big weight off your shoulders sort of thing, when you're back in base camp. That's why fellas and even myself after the war for some couple of years I, the slightest sound woke me up and if somebody dropped or banged a door or something I'd be.

31:30 I'd have to admit that there were times I woke up, or didn't really wake up yelling, "Stand to." I mean the first couple of years after the war I was, I wasn't a nervous wreck but I wasn't the only one, I mean I talked to other fellas and you,

32:00 you still dreamed about them.

Well on average how long did you spend on a fox hole on a daily basis?

Oh usually of a night time. So by dark you'd get into the fox holes and you wouldn't come out until dawn, until it became daylight. Then we would carefully move out and start a patrol out gradually,

32:30 move out to check the area. Say if you, and occasionally we'd chase Japanese out of that area but usually they heard you coming because it was clear around the strips, grass sort of this high. They would move out when they heard you coming. I think in a lot of cases they were looking for food themselves,

33:00 that's my opinion anyway like they were, well I'm sure they were some of them they were absolutely cut off but they were still dangerous, you didn't take any chances with them you'd shoot first and ask questions afterwards if necessary. And a lot, we had to look out for booby traps and things, at

33:30 the radar unit we got five casualties one night. The Japs had been there the night before and there was a hut there, the radar fellas would look after themselves and they had this hut where they left gear and things in there. Our fellas were down there and one of them had left his groundsheet, which was also used as a cape, he'd left it behind, he'd put it up on a rail

34:00 and they had to go, the same unit, the same platoon went back the next night and when they went back he said, "I'll get my groundsheet, I left it there last night." So they just arrived, got off the tender and the first thing he did, this fellow went in to get his groundsheet, pulled if off the rack and down came a phosphorous bomb which exploded, got five of them. So during the day the Japanese had got in, the radar fellows wouldn't have noticed

34:30 and they'd been working, they got into this hut and they planted this phosphorous bomb on top. Terrible things, phosphorous bomb, they all burn, they burn like. Anyway it put five of them, fortunately the tender was still there and they, there was a corporal there and he managed to get the fellows, there was pools of water he got them to put their hands in pools of water and things but they were a mess, some of them had it on their face and

35:00 burns, it sticks and burns. And so the tender whipped them back to hospital and then the five were later shipped over to Morotai where the big hospital was. Only one came back to the unit later on. He said the other four had been shipped south. They were too badly injured. That was our biggest lot of casualties in the Balikpapan show, yeah. Apart from the fellow who got shot in the face accidentally.

35:30 So we were very lucky.

What were your own food and supplies like, what were your rations like?

Oh our food was pretty, it was adequate, it was pretty good. In fact when I took over as the platoon commander of 16 Platoon my job was to, like all platoon commanders had another job apart from all the work you did.

36:00 Like Robbie, my 17 Platoon commander, he was the intelligence officer, he liaised everyday with 21st Brigade in the army to see what they required us to do, if they required us to do anything and if so what it was. The job I got was messing; I had to look after the food supply for the unit that was my job apart from platoon commander.

36:30 So I used to go down to the, what was called the DID [Defence Integrated Distribution] which was an army unit and you drew rations from there for the unit, you know, every couple of days. I'd draw enough for a couple of days and I'd have to get a parade statement everyday as to how many bods there were and then I'd go down and I'd say we've got so many men, a hundred and thirty men and I would be issued rations for a hundred and thirty men. And I got talking to these, we got a few lurks,

37:00 I got talking to the quarter master sergeants from the various army units there and we'd all have a chat, you know, and the blokes said, "Don't you put any floating personnel on there?" He said, "Don't you have floating personnel?" I said, "Oh we have fellas going to hospital and then we get knew fellas come to the unit." He said to me, "You want to put so many floating personnel on your parade." Which I did, so we banked up a bit of extra rations that way. We weren't supplied

37:30 with cooks, we had to supply them from the unit because we were an independent unit but we had a couple of fellas that just wanted to cook and one of them was an ex-shearers' cook, they were very good. We said, "Right you've got all the cooking to do." So I had to take charge of them as well and see that they kept the little kitchen, which was a tin hut, but keep it clean and that sort of thing. And as I said

the guards were pretty good

38:00 scroungers, a fellow came one day and he said, “Over at the wing headquarters there’s a fridge been standing there, a kerosene fridge been standing there for, you know, a few weeks and nothings happening.” So I told Smokey Dawson and he said, “Well see if you can organise it.” I just told a couple of blokes, they went over with a trolley, picked it up and brought it over. We had it in the kitchen and no-one seemed to worry about it, so we never heard any more about it, we had this kerosene fridge, we had to

38:30 work out how it worked. Then if we got a bit of fresh meat sometimes scrounging well then we could put it in the fridge. I got extra cans, cartons of unsweetened milk and saved them. We had condensed milk which we used and we did a bit of bartering with that. Bill Shaw who was, Captain Shaw he was then the Salvation Army bloke based with us and not far from

39:00 us there was a Chinese village. They were pure Chinese who had resisted the Japanese very well, they kept their village intact and so they were out of bounds to all troops because they were organising themselves and that was good. Bill Shaw was able to go in there because the Salvation Army used to look after everybody you know. Went in to see if they needed anything and gave them help, gave them some medical

39:30 supplies and things like that. He came back and he said, “Oh you ought to see, they’re not too bad in there, they’ve got stacks of chickens in there.” I said, “Can you get any fresh stuff?” He said, “That’s not a bad idea.” I said, “Well I’ve got some, do you think they’ll want some of this unsweetened milk?” He said, “Yes that’s a good idea.” So I gave him a couple of cartons and he took them down and he come back with a box of eggs, fresh eggs.

40:00 Well we had tinned bacon in the rations and there were enough eggs, I worked it out, he got this big box of eggs and there were enough eggs we could supply everyone in the unit with an egg. So one morning I said to the cooks, “Don’t say anything to them, but tomorrow morning we want bacon and eggs for breakfast.” Right, so the two boys they didn’t say anything. And I’ll always remember I was walking down towards the mess hut the next morning and one of the blokes said, “What’s

40:30 for breakfast this morning Sarge?” Because they all knew that I – I said, “Bacon and eggs.” He said, “Ha, ha, ha.” But it was bacon and eggs. Smokey Dawson CO when I went into the mess he said, “How did you.” I said, “What you don’t know won’t hurt you boss.” He said, “Well whatever it is if you can do it again, go for it.” And we only ever did it once more, Bill was very good, Bill Shaw because he used to eat with us. We didn’t have an officers’ mess and a sergeants’ mess,

41:00 we had a joint officers/sergeants. First of all we used to all eat together but after a while because there are things you have to discuss, the officers and the sergeants that the troops don’t have any interest in, well we’re not supposed to know. So we had a combined officers’ and sergeants’ mess, we all ate together and then they had a mess for the troops, an airman’s mess. But Bill Shaw used to eat with us

41:30 and he looked after us very well. I met him once after the war.

Wilf I’m just going to have to stop you there because we’ve come to the end of another tape and we’d hate to cut you off there.

Yeah ok.

Tape 9

00:30 **I’ll just keep on going. You mentioned that sometimes you would have discussions with the officers and COs separate from the rest of the troops, what sort of discussions would they be?**

Well like the CO would always want to know how the health of the troops were going, you had to keep an eye on the men and sergeants were the

01:00 best. Sergeants were the ham in the sandwich if, you know, what I mean, you’ve got to know, you have to know what the troops are thinking and you also know what the officer is doing and wants. Well Smokey Dawson always said, “Sergeants are the backbone of any unit.” I’m not just, but that’s true because you’re closer to the troops then

01:30 the officers so you’ve got to know what’s going on there you know. If the troops are quiet well there’s something wrong, something is brewing but generally speaking they are pretty noisy and they are carrying on like fools but if you don’t hear them you want to know what’s going on. So we’d have these meetings in the mess after we’d had mess.

02:00 Smoky Dawson was a pretty good bloke and he always used to say, “If you’ve got any problems.” And then he would give us a bit of a run down of what we might be doing for the next couple of days and things like that and keep an eye open for this and all that sort of thing you know. Like one morning we, odd things happen,

02:30 before I took over 16 Platoon I used to go with Robbie our platoon commander to the 21st Brigade every morning, they were down by the Mangar strip by this time, you'd cross over the Mangar River which used to be a hairy exercise at one stage because the bridge over the river was very high, all wood but it had been knocked about a bit and there was just room for a jeep to go over with about you know.

03:00 I used to want to drive but Robbie used to drive, I reckoned he was a hairy driver myself but we made it alive. Twice we were over there liaising when the Japs opened up at the other end of the strip and they opened up and they had a seventy five millimetre gun and some twenty five quick firing guns. They'd open up and fire a few rounds. They got a few army blokes at times.

03:30 So I was down under the jeep one day when we got caught and I thought afterwards it's a silly place to be if they hit the jeep but we survived. A couple of army fellas didn't. There was a lieutenant colonial army padre got killed down there I remember when they got caught one day but anyway that was just by the way. We'd go down and see 21st Brigade and they'd say, tell Robbie what

04:00 they wanted doing and then we'd go back to the unit. And they decided accordingly what we'd do, whether we'd patrol here or do this or do you know.

And what were you doing under the jeep?

I was, they were firing on us, getting taking cover as far as I was concerned. They were firing these twenty five mill cannons and they were an explosive shell, they'd hit and burst, you know, and the jeep, we'd park the jeep

04:30 down the ridge a little bit, it was down towards the river bank actually but I, I always remember Skipper as we called him, Skipper Avery was the flight lieutenant then but he had been one of the instructors who came from the army and he was still a captain then and he was known as Skipper Avery, you know. And he was there, he was a First World War man by the way, but he'd been in Bougainville and won the military

05:00 cross up there as a matter of fact. And this first time this happened we all hit the deck and afterwards he got up and he said, "Wilf, I'm getting to bloody old." He said, "I was the last one to hit the deck." He was a funny old man. He was a decent old chap. He lived at Horsham and at one stage and gunning through to Victoria I called in a couple of times and caught up with him at Horsham, he

05:30 went for quite a while. He's been long dead and gone now of course but he was a nice bloke, a good soldier.

And as sergeant, did you have cause to dish out any punishments or, did you have any trouble with any of your troops?

No I didn't really, mostly I dealt with it. When we were training guards at Shepparton for example

06:00 you can always remember one fellow he was never on parade on time of a morning. So he, they can get pretty cheeky some of them too. He said, "Oh I suppose you'll put me on a charge." I said, "No not while we're out here I won't." But I said, "You'll get up an hour early and you'll chop the wood for the cooks." "Oh, all right," he said. I said, "That's what you're going to do." He said, "Who's going to get me up early?" I said, "I'll get you up, don't you worry about that." Oh he used to wake very early, you get used to it.

06:30 Reveille was like six o'clock, I'd be up at five and I'd go and dig him up and he'd get out and chop wood. He did this for a week, for quite a few days and he started to turn up on parade on time after the end but I could have put him on a charge but I don't think I ever charged anybody, I always found some other way of handling it and they appreciated it afterwards it was when he finished his time

07:00 and he left, he thanked me for not putting him on a charge. Those sort of things, he became pretty good, a good soldier as far as I was concerned he did his job. It took a little while to pull him into line, he was about, a fellow about twenty-two I suppose and I always found other ways of handling these things. I remember

07:30 one, one fellow turned up and wanted to fight me one day and of course you can't do that and he was always fighting some of the other fellows and I split them up and he said, "I'll have a go at you too." He said, "Just because you've got your three stripes." So I said, "Well let's go around behind the hut here and I took the jacket off and I said, "Now my stripes are not on now, what do you want to do about it?"

08:00 It sort of set him back a bit, I said, "Well you better line front up." I didn't have to fight him, I was prepared to if necessary. I mean I probably couldn't fight my way out of a paper bag but I mean he didn't know that. But he came to it and, I mean some NCOs they put them on a charge and then they've got to go up before and after

08:30 and all that, I didn't go for that. I didn't go for that, I mean if I could get them to do that that was my job was to get them to do their job as far as I was concerned, and I had my own ways of doing it and they worked as far as I'm concerned. You get all sorts of things like that, you know, and I always remember when I was still in the army

09:00 there was a fellow, an officer whom I knew in civvy life he played football for West Torrens, Charlie

Williamson, he was a tough cookie, he was a major. And these army fellows, like it was at Woodside and they started fighting behind the hut, some brawl started

09:30 and he was a major, Charlie Williamson. He went around and they were brawling and he didn't, he just took his jacket off and waded into them too. He used to get more results from his men then some of the others you know. They're just little things, little incidents that I can remember. But I never had much trouble with troops, as I

10:00 said if you treated them I mean you had to boss them about, that was your job, but I'd treat them the same way as I hoped some of them would treat me you know. Before I was an NCO I'd served under some fellas, like, you know, we had sergeants over us some of them were good and some were not. So I always reckoned if I ever got to that stage I'd treat the fellas

10:30 as equals, sort of business, you know. I mean you had to order them about, give them orders and tell them what to do, and then I found I had no trouble getting them to do these things either. It never worried me much.

A lot of it is just people management.

That's right, yes. I always seemed to be managing people even when I was finished up

11:00 in Telecom I was in charge of sections. I always seemed to finish up. I think the sailing club I finished up commodore of the club. I didn't ask, it just finished that way but again it's a matter of how you discussed things with people, how you treat people.

Well you mentioned that when the end of the war came leaflets were dropped

11:30 **to inform the Japanese to surrender or tell the Japanese to surrender, did you actually see any of those leaflets?**

Yes, yes. In fact I had one for a long time but it went with a lot of other things unfortunately. It was in Japanese, you couldn't read it. And then these POWs were put to work on the roads

12:00 with army blokes, keeping an eye on them of course and they'd be the roads, there were some photos there of what the road was like if you could call it a road, they were mud heaps you know. And on the sides of the roads it was sort of gutters like ditches which were supposed to drain the water, now these needed attention because they had been in some cases blown up with all the bombing and shelling and

12:30 what not. So they had to be put in order. And some of the locals were working on these, where the locals were working on them, as they got rocks they would pile them on the side of the road, when the trucks came through with Japanese prisoners they'd all knock off work and get these rocks and stone, throw stones at these Japanese prisoners sitting

13:00 in a truck. And they'd sit there, I've seen the truck go past and these locals, well the Indonesians now, but they were all sorts then. And I've seen them hit fellows and they'd just sit there and take it, they couldn't do anything else because it was as the truck went past you know. But they used some of them to do some of the work later on too like as far as I know. When I left to come home they were doing that sort of thing.

13:30 The local people generally were lovely people, I found. When I was at Townsville you go to a lecture on colloquial Malay, you know, because Malay was the language spoken more or less throughout and a lot of the people in those islands were Malays, Chinese and half caste

14:00 Malay Chinese and that sort of thing and they all understood the Malay language. We just learned basic as I say colloquial Malay. I used to still have the book but I don't know where it is now but it was only a little book that they gave you so that you could at least discuss with them you know, tell them if they ask you different things. I've forgotten

14:30 some of the words now like if something was good it was bagus, if it wasn't good it was ti' bagus, things like that you know. They are a couple of them. That was good and bad which we learned. I found them happy go lucky people you know, I don't know what they're like now. This business of, I don't believe this Indonesia

15:00 being one country, it's not one country at all, it's a group of islands and one some islands they're totally different to the people on the other islands. Some were like Malay and some where, there were head hunters on in Borneo. But they sort of welded them into one country and called it Indonesia and

15:30 hopefully it will stay that way and they've got the Indonesian language and that now. But that always seemed funny to me, the Balinese were lovely people and they were different to other people, you know, and now they're supposedly one. Of course they were ruled by the Dutch, the Dutch East Indies and the

16:00 Netherland East Indies people that we met up there were totally different to Dutch people themselves that come from Holland, who are very nice people. Some of these up there in the islands they were bullies. And I think, you could usually tell with the locals, there was a few who collaborated with the Japanese totally, they looked fairly well fed. People who'd been not so, weren't so well fed.

16:30 **How did the local generally – I'm just going to move my chair back a little bit – how did the locals generally, what was their attitude towards the Australian presence?**

Oh we got on with them very well, yeah. They'd come around. I used to give some of them some of this canned milk that we had and that sort of thing.

17:00 Some of them were, I went out to an island while we were there called Nili Nili, it was just a small island, the crash launch was going out there one day and I knew the sergeant on it and he said, "Do you want to come out, if you've got a free day come with us out to Nili Nili." He said, "We go around the islands to see if there's any problems there. And this little island there, you could walk around it in a couple of hours,

17:30 which we did, and there was the native population living on there. And there was a little fellow tagged on to me, he had one crook eye and it was all bound up, but he come up to me and he pulled on my shirt and he said, "Me you friend." you know, and I said, "Yeah right." So he followed us around, it came lunch time and we'd taken some lunch with us, some baked beans and that sort of thing and I offered him some, but

18:00 no he wouldn't eat them. "Why don't you want them?" "No, it might have." It might have pork in it and they didn't eat pork and that's all he was afraid of. But he fashioned and I had it for a long time, a little, it was a letter opener like he fashioned out and he gave to me. "Me you friend," he said. But he wanted my shirt and shirts were a little hard to come by and I wasn't going to let

18:30 him. When we were going back, the Americans had been on this island by the way, there were no troops on the tour now but there had been Americans there. When we were going back onto the launch he said, "Shirt, you want shirt." I said, "No, I'm sorry." I couldn't part with my shirt because we were finding them hard to get ourselves. But he said, "Me buy." He took out of his

19:00 pocket a roll of notes like that, I'm not kidding, they were guilders and Straits dollars and things, which was the money you used to use up there. He'd obviously been dealing with the Yanks. He had plenty, he had more money than I had. He wanted to buy my shirt. One fellow sold him a shirt. He said, "Yeah." One of them sold one of the others a shirt.

19:30 He said, "They gave me fifteen gilders for it." Well a gilder was worth about three and four pence in our day, you know, like, which would be about a sixth of a pound like. Some of them had money because the Americans sort of spoilt a lot of people that way, you know, like that sort of thing. But no I didn't sell him a shirt, I wasn't that hard up, I mean I wouldn't have had a shirt. I think I had two shirts that was all and

20:00 I mean when you washed one you wanted the other one on you know. And sometimes our clothing was a bit hard to replace up there. I lost my fur felt hat, I didn't lose it, it got filled with gun oil after we landed. We were heading towards, we was in the back of the blitz buggy that we had heading towards Balikpapan itself

20:30 when we were still trying to catch up with 21st Brigade. Robbie said, "We'll go this way towards Balikpapan." Well there was firing going on and all that sort of thing and the driver was a bit nervous and it was the first time he'd ever heard a shot fired in anger too and of course he hit a crater in the middle of the road, it was a mortar crater. And the blitz buggy jumped and landed and stopped dead in the middle of the road.

21:00 So we had to get out and see what was going on. And of course this bag of gun oil that was in there tipped over into my fur felt hat, it ruined it. From then on I had to wear a tin hat for quite a while until I could get another one for weeks and weeks. Anyway we got out and he lifted the bonnet on the thing and everyone was shaken up. It turned out, and an army

21:30 bloke bobbed up, an MP [Military Police] and he said, "You fellas don't want to stop here." He said, "We're trying to get rid of some snipers up the road." So it got us all nervous, weren't we all. I'm keeping an eye open just to, you know, and anyway they found that just the distributor top had come off, the drum had come off the distributor, they whacked the cap back on and away we went, turned around and got out of there. That cost

22:00 me a fur felt hat, it was a good hat I'd had it for ages, well broken in. For a long time I never used to wear a hat if I could help it but when I had to I had to wear a tin hat, I had to have a hat. Until I could get a new hat which was quite a few weeks before they had stores there where you could go and get some. It's no wonder you get skin cancers and things, you know, I've had,

22:30 look at this one here.

Well how did your time in Balikpapan wind up?

Well after the war had finished for quite a while we still did the same duties because, you know, not all the Japanese, we couldn't guarantee that they were all, they'd given up or were going to give up. Some of them probably didn't know, you know, they were broken up into small groups and

23:00 they decided in October they would break the unit up, as a unit itself of guards and that like airfield defence, and what they would do, some of them it was the first time they'd only just come up before we

went, you know, at Morotai was their first trip up. Some of them were only young fellows who'd only been in the show less then twelve months. They would

23:30 stay and they would send them out to different air force units that were staying there, they broke up the units. Fellows of long service and you got points allotted, maximum points you'd got if you'd been over five years and you'd had active service, which I'd had two lots, you got maximum points and if you were

24:00 married that gave you more points too you know. So I was practically on maximum points and the unit gradually got broken up, they sent some fellas to Morotai to go home on troop ships eventually and it got down to just a few officers and there was only two of us sergeants left. Smokey Dawson said, "Well we've been together for a

24:30 long time, you'll be going home with us you two sergeants." And he was organising and we flew home. We flew one day in a Catalina flying boat to Darwin from Balikpapan, that was an experience. And flew over Timor and then we stayed in Darwin for a night. The next day Smokey got a jeep and asked me to drive him around

25:00 Darwin and I was interested to see it too. In fact I went to the naval hospital, I'd heard my young brother, I saw you looking through the things you probably saw him in there; he's dead and gone now unfortunately. Both my brothers, the other one died twenty six in the repat hospital, he'd been a fitter too in the air force. I caught up with Sandy, my brother, and he was being discharged that day, they said he was ok.

25:30 And then we drove around Darwin and the next day we flew in a Liberator to Laverton.

And how had Darwin changed in the time since you had been there?

Oh it had changed quite a bit. The aerodrome had been made bigger for a start to when we were there. The water tower was still standing there and it's still standing there to this day, it's a tall water tower that supplies the drome with the water.

26:00 It was starting to change then, you know, but of course I've since been back. I went up there for the fiftieth anniversary of the first raid and Jean and I went up, it was a terrible time because it was February and it was right in the middle of wet season and the monsoons were late and everybody got a wog. But it was good to go up, I was invited onto the drome for tea, they gave us

26:30 quite a good time, took us for lunch in the sergeants' mess, it was very good.

And did, you know, that your brother was in the naval hospital when you went there?

Yes I'd had a letter just before from my mother to say the Sandy was ill in the hospital but he was recovered when I got there. He had been on a ship for a while. He was

27:00 the youngest, like the youngest of us. When I went away both my brothers were still going to school. No Steve had just about left school, but Sandy was still going to primary school. I thought the war will be over, he'll never get there but he joined up about twelve months before the war had finished. He was only seventeen and a half and he went to the naval base in Melbourne, Cerberus

27:30 and of course he was there for six months because they couldn't put him on a ship until he was eighteen which annoyed him. He was an officer steward on the thing. And he went onto a ship called the Bungaree for a while. It was plying between Sydney, Townsville and the north of New Guinea, they used to take, taking stuff up and down and then he came back. He came off that because he got dermatitis or

28:00 something and put him in hospital for a while there, until they took him off the ship of course because of it. He was actually posted to the Sydney but he was in the hospital and the Sydney sailed while he was in there, which was lucky for him because it never came back. So he went on the Bungaree for a while and then when he came off that he was posted to Darwin, to Melville up there,

28:30 the base up there. And that's where he was, he stayed there he didn't come home until late in '46 before he got out because he'd only been in late. My other brother was in the air force and he was at Townsville when I was there, he was with 86 Squadron. He was a fitter 2E, an engine fitter. He was four years in the air force.

Well how did you make your

29:00 **way back home from Darwin?**

Well we flew from Darwin to Laverton and then when we got off there Robbie and Smokey, like the two officers, they were Victorians, they were going home. I had to go to Exhibition Building which was taken over by the air force and I had to go there for the night because

29:30 it was about five o'clock at night and we got too cold, we were in jungle greens and it was freezing cold. So we went there got an overcoat and the next day as a matter of fact was Melbourne Cup Day. And there was an officer there who had a group of people who was taken through to Western Australia and he said, "I can get you a ticket on the train with me if you like?"

30:00 I said, “No, I’ve got my own movement order. I’ve flown all the way from Balikpapan. I’m going down to the RTO [Rail Transport Officer], I’m going to go down and see if I can get a plane to Adelaide.” So I went down there first thing in the morning and I said, “If I don’t, if I’m going to go by train I may as well go to the Melbourne Cup.” Because I could do what I liked, I had my own orders, you know, and I had seen the 1940 Melbourne Cup when we were in there and I thought well

30:30 I might go and see the 1945. In fact I reckon I had the winner which I did have, because he came from South Australia, Bart Cummings. But I went down and they said, “Where have you come from?” And I told them, “All right you get first preference after ex-POW’s.” Having come from that far. The fellow said, “You can leave your.” And he had a little sausage bag of gear, he said, “You can leave that here and come back here at half past

31:00 one and I think we can get you on a plane to Adelaide.” I said, “Right that will do me.” So I went back into Melbourne. I saw this lieutenant I said, “Don’t worry about me, I’m organised.” This flight lieutenant.

Well when you were discharged from the army finally…

From the air force, yeah.

Sorry from the air force, sorry. What difficulties did you have in adjusting?

31:30 Nothing really too bad. Oh the main difficulty was trying to get home and I was entitled to a war service loan of course and I had during the war after I got married I organised with a friend who was boarding with my mother and father, he was a farmer but he was also an engineer, a First World War man and

32:00 he had come up to do war work up in one of the factories and he knew an estate agent and I said, “Let’s buy a block of land.” Because I didn’t have time to go around looking at blocks of land but my wife Joyce could and this fellow said he would help her, like, you know, chose a block wherever she wanted. So what we did, we wanted it in both our names, so what we did I signed a paper,

32:30 this was 1943 of course, to say that my wife could decide on. I filled in my half first if, you know, what I mean and then when she chose a block she filled in the rest of it and that was it. So that was 1943, so we had a block of land. We paid one hundred and fifty pounds for it at Woodville. She chose Woodville because her people lived at Semaphore

33:00 and my people lived at Thebarton and we were half way in between, you know, it was a nice block, a big block, like this block here. But then I couldn’t get a permit to build, of course I went back working in the skin yards and I kept going up. You applied for a permit and then an inspector would come down and see what

33:30 your conditions were. Well, we were living with my mother and father and Joyce became pregnant and my eldest son was born in October of 1946, the end of October, the 31st of October, 1946. And I thought, oh we had a room and usually the kids would be with my mother and father for quite a while but we could have use of everything in the house and we had this room to live

34:00 in, and it was a large room a big bedroom. And so the inspector would come down and say, “Oh you people are right, no, you people can’t have a permit.” So I had the loan all approved but I couldn’t get a permit to build. I had plans all drawn up and everything. And we couldn’t get into that home until 1950, February 1950. It took us a long time. By that time I had two children.

34:30 **It must have been very frustrating.**

It was.

We are coming to the end of our session today, so when you look back on your service years how do you think you would like the airfield defence to be remembered and those who took part in the airfield defence?

Yeah I, this is something that as I say a lot of people don’t know about,

35:00 airfield defence and I think it should go on record somewhere, I’m hoping this will go into the archives on record that they were a terrific bunch of blokes I mean they should be remembered in that they were, wherever the air force went they were the first fellas there. They looked after the security of everyone

35:30 and they, as I say they were handy men, there was nothing they couldn’t do. You could usually get a job done, you might be short of an electrician there was always a fellow at Balikpapan. We finished up with electric lights in the tents because one of the fellas was pretty good. We managed to get a KVA and he wired all the place up, we had just a globe in each tent, you know,

36:00 things like that. We had a terrific shower set up there. We had fellas who were carpenters, good at carpentry, I wasn’t bad at it myself I like carpentry as a hobby. And we pulled timber out of a dug out that was there, that the Japanese had had lined by the local people and they were great tradesmen, you know, they didn’t have any tools much to work with. We put this

36:30 up, we put forty four gallon drums up on the top, that used to get filled with the water cart and we had

showers, you could put showers things like that. Occasionally we fed the unit fish because one fellow who had been in Queensland, a professional fisherman. He'd build, the rise and fall in the tide there was very big, he built a fish trap with stakes and all that sort of thing so when the tide came in then it went out

37:00 and it left fish in the fish trap. They were handy men always and they were terrific blokes. If you wanted a hand with anything, I think they should be well thought of, they did a great job. And I think the, it probably died a little bit I don't know how they went in Korea later on and that sort of thing. I do know in Vietnam

37:30 the airfield defence, you'll probably find out was very strong and they each, actually a lot of them manned the guns on the helicopters, on the gun ships and things like that. So I just want, I'm happy to know that it's going on record that they were, they were a good fighting unit in the finish actually and a lot of them saw a lot more action

38:00 than probably I did in New Guinea and things like that, they were. I don't want them to be forgotten and hopefully they won't be.

Well this record will go a long way to remembering the airfield defence men. As I said we're coming to the end of our session, what final words would you like to say as we close?

Sorry?

What closing words would you like to say?

38:30 Just if there's any fellas, anybody sees this that are in the airfield defence I hope they're going well and thank them for their mateship, they were all good mates. What else can I say?

39:00 We had good and bad times and I'll never forget it, it was an experience. It cost me the best five years of my life, a time when you should be just getting under way, you know, setting up, but nevertheless it was a job that had to be done and I was happy to serve with fellas who, particularly Smokey

39:30 Dawson. I think I've said in my thing, he was a fellow who, people who served with him respected him because he respected, he never asked anybody to do anything he couldn't or wouldn't do himself. And as I say, as I think I've said in my resume you didn't serve under Smokey Dawson you served with him, he was a great fellow.

40:00 I used to visit him for years after the war, he came over here a couple of times.

Well thank you so much for speaking with us today, it's been a real pleasure.

You're welcome.

INTERVIEW ENDS