Australians at War Film Archive

Peter White - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **Tell me where you were born and a little bit about your childhood?**

Well I was born in Scotland in a little mining village called Woodsborough, about twenty miles south of Edinburgh. My Dad was a miner

01:00 and my mother was a school teacher and all the family, the men were miners at that time because it was just a small mining village.

Do you remember the village?

Remember it, yes. I was only nine years of age when we migrated to Australia but I had an unfortunate thing that happened. When I was a kid I got meningitis and I was in bed for

01:30 eleven months but fortunately survived, but I think in those days not too many people survived meningitis. I was fortunate because my mother used to rent a room once a week to a doctor from Edinburgh, Doctor Fraserall, and he was the guy that looked after me right through all that period. So that wasn't a good start. I had to learn to walk again at age seven.

02:00 But I remember a bit about school, the icy conditions and in winter and things like that.

What was the school like then?

Oh it was only a small school. I can't remember too much about it but it wasn't far from where we lived. I know we just walked to school, because mind you I didn't have much schooling there because of the meningitis and things like that.

02:30 I think my mother tried to teach me things but I can't remember that either, but she tells me she did so that is how I started as a kid in Scotland.

Did your mum teach you at that school?

Oh no, no, she taught in Edinburgh.

What was your mother like?

Oh she was beautiful; a great lady.

And what about your father, what was he like?

He was a big, tough

03:00 Scotsman, very pleasant bloke, and he was a professional footballer at the same time, a Scots soccer player, and that's how we came to Australia. One of my Mum's brother's, Isaac, he was here. He migrated a couple of years before we did and he played soccer here in Brisbane and the team he played for were looking for soccer players

03:30 and he suggested that Dad come out and they guaranteed him a job. I think they were very brave because a family of five, the Depression and no work for anyone, and we came to Australia and they found him a job all right and he stayed in that job right until he retired. He became a fireman in Brisbane.

04:00 He became an officer there eventually and he stayed there until he retired.

And what about your mum, did she teach when you came over?

Oh no, she had another two kids, that was seven of us then, quite a handful. But I had five lovely sisters and they were nice and pretty well known in the district. Still got a couple of them left – the others have passed away – but yeah, it was a good family.

04:30 **And where did you grow up in Brisbane?**

In Barton and Ashgrove. I went to the (UNCLEAR) Creek State School and then went onto State High, to junior, and then went to work, had to because in those days every penny counted.

Do you remember what it was like trying to adjust to life in Australia?

Oh it was terrible.

05:00 I'll give you an idea, because in those days migrants weren't wanted because of the Depression, and there were no jobs and most men were on what they called relief work, getting a couple of days for a minimum sort of a payment and oh no, migrants. And at school, state school, they used to call me 'Chum, Chum, Boo Bum'

05:30 because of my Scottish accent. Even the school teachers used to make me stand up and recite poetry just so as they could poke fun at my accent. I have a couple of nasty memories. But we loved Australia, right from day one, except my mother. She couldn't stand the cockroaches and the mosquitoes and things like that. But she would say, quite

06:00 often, she'd go back home like a shot but she wouldn't go on a boat because it was a rough trip when we came out, but if they built a bridge, "She'd walk all the way home," and that was my favourite saying.

What do you remember about the trip out?

Yeah, I remember quite a lot. The trip was via the Canary Islands, Cape Town, Perth, across the [Great Australian] Bight, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane. And I can

06:30 remember the Bay of Biscay and everyone was confined off the decks because the sea was so wild. That lasted a long time and there was a lot of seasickness. We were all seasick and it was a pretty good trip the rest of the way. Kids like us, we enjoyed playing games and things like that and it was a big adventure I guess. But then going across the [Great] Australian Bight you got another

07:00 rough time, very bad time. And I think that's what cured Mum of boats, I'm sure. I can remember Sydney. I had another unfortunate occurrence when we got to Sydney. I fell in off the wharf and I couldn't swim, of course, and a couple of wharfies [wharf workers] pulled me out and that was a very frightening experience

07:30 and they got me out. I can remember the Sydney Harbour Bridge was just starting to be built, the two pylons, one each side. That's one of my vivid memories of the trip out but that's about it.

Just going back a little bit, when you had meningitis, what sort of treatment did the doctor give you for that?

I can't remember a lot of the treatment

08:00 except that my bed was made of hardboards with blankets on. And I think one of the problems was curvature of the spine and I used to have two big, leather belts they used to strap me to the bed of a night. But they're the sort of memories I've got of it, but I wouldn't know what treatment other than that. I had plenty of uncles,

08:30 I can remember that, and they used to come and give me halfpennies and farthings and pennies and I used to put them in a clay bank and it got full, and there's only one way to get it out and that was hit it with a hammer and that was really good. They're the sort of memories that I have of that long period.

Did any uncles end up moving over to Australia as well?

Not

09:00 on the family, on my mother's side, there was only the two uncles came out but the whole White mob, Dad's side, they went to America about the same time, so that's about the total migration that we contributed to two countries.

What are your memories of the first school that you went to in Brisbane?

I just told you they called me 'Chum, Chum, Boo Bum'. I know I

09:30 never had shoes, always went to school in bare feet. Got chased home a lot with the other kids. And I can remember the teachers very well, the headmaster, some of the men teachers, particularly my scholarship teachers. I had no problem with school but

10:00 I didn't like going to school really but it presented no problems to me. I got very good marks in scholarship, managed junior quite well but I couldn't go on, couldn't afford to. But I enjoyed school, very much. Played football and I didn't play cricket but I played rugby league, and to my Dad's disgust,

10:30 because he of course had been playing soccer, and he played for Queensland and for New South Wales a couple of times. I went one year as the team mascot. I can remember that. That's about the memories. They were happy memories for school because it was a great country for us to come to a place like this.

Did you enjoy going to see your father play soccer?

Oh you bet.

11:00 That all came to an end. All the big interstate matches were played at the Exhibition Grounds in those days and in a match against New South Wales he got knocked down and broke a collarbone, and of course there was no players' benefit funds or anything like that in those days and he was off work for eight weeks, so we had a pretty

11:30 hard time. Then Mum put her foot down then and that was the end of his soccer, but he lasted a fairly long time. He did all right.

What position did he pay?

Always right full-back. He could kick a ball a long, long way.

Did soccer get a big crowd in those days?

No, oh no, not at all, not at all.

12:00 Rugby league was the game and that was the game the schools prompted, although I did play [rugby] union at state for a while.

That was State High School in West End, wasn't it?

Yeah, yeah, still there.

What was that like?

Oh good, I enjoyed it.

What sort of subjects were you interested in?

12:30 Oh the four subjects, maths, English, history and geography.

Was there one that you were particularly good at?

Oh I don't know about that. I wasn't much good at geography. I know that. Maths was all right and English was all right. I got good passes, nothing special but always got through. I don't think I applied myself very well.

13:00 I was too rapt up in the Boy Scout movement from the time we got here in Australia virtually, and that used to take all my spare time.

What sort of things did you do at Boy Scouts?

Oh you name it. I was a scout for a while at Ashgrove, went through the usual thing, heaps of badges and so on and

13:30 finally became one of the only four King's Scouts in Queensland at the time, and we went and saw the governor and he presented us with his King's Scout badges and things like that. I became a scoutmaster and during that period of course the war started and I joined the air force and then when I came back I started again.

14:00 But then I took it seriously and it was still the scouting movement and I became the Deputy State Commissioner for Senior Scouts. It was quite a big job.

When you first joined the scouting movement, what day would you meet and for how long?

Beg your pardon?

What day did you meet in scouts when you first joined?

I think it was a Friday, Friday night, a Friday night meeting.

14:30 And we had functions and camps and things like that at the weekends, but usually a Friday night.

When you got there, what would happen on the Friday night?

Oh well, see there are all sorts of crafts to be taught – woodcraft, tracking and mapping and signalling – and we used to have courses. You apparently don't know the system in Boy Scouts by the way?

No I don't. I'm really

15:00 **interested.**

The scout group is made up of troops and they have a system, a patrol leader, and the troops are usually about six blokes, six kids, and that's how they develop teamwork. There are all sorts of things, badges for all sorts of skills and we used to get outside instructors for that,

15:30 and examine us and pass it and so on and you'd get a badge and stick on your sleeve and so on, just up through the ranks and very good training.

What sort of levels are there then? When you say you go up through the ranks, what is the lowest rank in scouts?

Usually a scout and then if you go up through the ranks you become a seconder and then a patrol leader and then a group patrol leader. Then

16:00 you go on then because by then the kid's about sixteen and you go into senior scouts. It's a totally set-up there. And then there was the Rovers, another set-up for elder blokes. Rovers was my speciality when I was that age. We had one Rover crew in Brisbane and it was called the Brisbane Rover Crew and their hobby, or whatever we wanted to do,

16:30 was mountain climbing and we used to climb all the rocks and all the mountains around south-east Queensland and it was great. We had a great leader. He was the Professor of Geology at Queensland University, Freddy Whitehouse, and he was certainly a great teacher, with his geological knowledge. It was great.

How old were you at that point?

17:00 About seventeen, seventeen, eighteen.

When you were growing up, how did you come to be in the scouts? Do you remember?

Hardly, no. Wouldn't have a clue.

A friend took you along or…? Did you have to pay to go to the scouts?

No, no, there was no payment. We used to raise our funds. Totally different to the way funds are raised today, there

17:30 was social evenings and we used to get people to go to the socials and the girls would bring cakes and things, and no grog of course or anything like that, and they'd pay to go to the evening, probably sixpence or a shilling, and then we had a fete every year and that's how we raised our funds.

18:00 We got a government grant to build. I was involved in building one scout hut and that was the one at Ashgrove and it's still there. It's right beside where the Broncos [Brisbane Broncos, Rugby League team] are in Albert Park and it's still there.

How many people would have been in the Ashgrove Club?

Oh gee, there'd be five patrols, maybe thirty, maybe thirty.

18:30 **And was the scouts where your group of friends were? Did you have a strong group of friends in the scouts?**

Oh yes, extremely strong group of friends, because five of us went to war and all went to the air force, yeah, yeah, yeah. Two of us came back and three didn't. It's a great memory; still got a soft spot for it.

19:00 **What about the camping trips? What are your strong memories about the camping trips?**

Dear oh dear, I could go for a year.

That's okay, we've got time.

Well we camped in all sorts of places, did all sorts of hikes. One of the favourite ones was North Stradbroke Island, and in those days

19:30 it was difficult to get there but we had an arrangement. Our scoutmaster, Doug Weatherly, he made a deal with a fisherman at Wynnum and we'd go down to Wynnum of a Friday night and he'd take us over on his fishing boat to Amity Point, dump us there and away he'd go, and he'd come back on Sunday afternoon and take us back, and we did with a regular, camping.

20:00 We walked the whole beach to Point Lookout and do all sorts of activities and in those days on that great southern beach down from Point Lookout, at night-time the turtles used to come ashore in season and we used to have a ball, turning them on their back and things like that. Had all sorts of experiences, but one

20:30 that stands out is one Christmas – we used to spend Christmas there – and every other week, and I don't know if you know Point Lookout at all, but there is five gorges stick out and one of the swimming gorges the cliff in there had a tunnel underneath it and surf used to come in, both ends,

21:00 and splash up and light the whole interior of the tunnel with phosphorus. And we used to have our big campfires down there, on the sand, and this year there was a group of half a dozen young people came by boat, their own boat, to Amity and they came around and they stayed and they joined us that night, to sing songs like Boy Scouts did and things like

21:30 that. In the morning one of them woke me up to say that two of their party were missing and they'd all gone down to where that tunnel was to have a look at the phosphorus and two of them got washed in, so I got all the kids up. I was Assistant Scoutmaster then. And

22:00 we found one lady and they stuck a rope around me and I went down into the surf off the ropes and put a rope around her and we got her body back but never found the friend of the fellow. I got some time off work for that to go searching, but that was a frightful experience, but that's one of the memories that

22:30 really sticks out.

And she wasn't alive when you got her?

Oh goodness gracious me, no.

That's very brave for a young man to do that.

I don't know about that. Crikey, we used to dive into there, off the rocks into the surf, nothing brave about that.

Sounds brave to me.

23:00 **What did your parents think about you being in the scouts?**

Beg your pardon?

What did your parents think about you being in the scouts?

Oh they helped a lot. Mum did a lot of baking for them and my sisters came to our dances and socials and things like that, oh yeah, oh yeah.

Were your sisters close to you in age?

Yes, my word, except the two that were born in Australia. Quite a gap, about eight years between those two, but the

23:30 rest were about a year and a half, two years. I was the oldest.

How did you survive as a family in the Depression with that many children?

You tell me. Yes, that's what I say. I reckon my parents were very brave to do what they did, oh yeah.

What did you eat for dinners? How did you eat at home?

24:00 I think I ate very well – not like in Scotland. I can remember strikes and things like that. I think the miners go on strike and they used to have soup kitchens and I'd have to go up to the soup kitchen with a billy and get it full of soup and get a couple of loaves of bread. But here, oh no, this was a great country. I don't think we had any money to spend but he had for those days a good job, a fireman,

24:30 but a lot of kids, but we survived. We had nothing and I don't know when I got my first pair of shoes and when I did I could only wear them to church, not to school. Can you imagine children going to school today without footwear? But nothing abnormal about it, nothing abnormal at all.

25:00 **So what happened after school for you?**

I went to work at a cycle and motor Company – they had the GM [General Motors] agency there in those days and they were in Creek and Adelaide Streets in Brisbane – as an apprentice motor mechanic. And they went down the drain,

25:30 went broke and split up, and I joined a company called Massey's Sports Depot. They had motorbikes, Hudson motorbikes, and that's the apprenticeship I served. And during that period of course I went into the air force because I was mad on flying. I used to save every penny I could get. I was in the Brisbane Flying Club and I did about six hours

26:00 total flying training with the Northern Rivers Training School, the owner and their only pilot with a bloke that used to call himself Captain Matheson, and that was scouts and flying and that was what I did.

What would happen at the flying club?

Oh you'd do dual instruction, half an hour. In those days to me it was very

26:30 costly because it used to cost me thirty-five shillings for half an hour, and I think I was getting a pound a week as a first or second year apprentice and it took me a while to save up enough for half an hour's flying. Of course eventually I couldn't go on with it; I couldn't afford it.

What sort of planes did you go up in?

He only had one type of plane, Avro Avian,

27:00 really old timer, good safe aeroplane, lovely old aeroplane.

Where did you fly?

Archerfield. There was two flying schools there – the Queensland Aero Club, they were too expensive for me, and Northern Rivers Flying Training School. There were quite a few people used to go there. Kept Captain Matheson pretty busy.

What was he like?

27:30 Oh right, he looked like an ex-army captain and behaved a bit like one. I don't know what his experience was – I can't remember – but he certainly was a good instructor. And I just got to go solo and that was as far as I got.

Do you remember that moment where you went solo?

Oh yeah, really something. I don't think

28:00 anybody could forget ever going solo in an aeroplane, all on your own up there, ah?

Must be amazing?

A bit scary, I can tell you. When you're young, scary things aren't too bad, are they?

And did your other mates from scouts do the flying club as well?

Only one, only one, yeah. He stayed in the air force, Arthur, and

28:30 went on to, oh he stayed in for fifteen years after the war. He joined the Fleet Air Arm. But he's dead, of course. They're all going.

Did you hear much about World War One when you were growing up?

Oh not a lot. I certainly read a lot and

29:00 my Dad was not involved in the war. He was a miner in World War One. I did have some uncles. I know one lost a leg. But of course the other World War One came from things like Biggles [aviation character]. Have you heard of Biggles? He was the ace pilot. He could do everything. He was the superman of today.

29:30 I think I have every Biggles book and things like that. I used to make a lot of model aeroplanes into the bargain and those sort of things, so scouts and aeroplanes have been my youth. I did get a girlfriend but she lived next door, of course, and she was the only girlfriend I ever had.

30:00 I finally married her and she was like one of my sisters. She spent more time at our place than next door, that's for sure.

So how old were you when you met?

I was nine. I can remember her being my first girlfriend too.

When did you start being boyfriend and girlfriend? How old would you have been?

God only knows.

30:30 Off and on, right to teenagers.

And what would you two do together?

Our big deal was dancing. We loved dancing. Nearly every Saturday night there was a dance somewhere, and in those days they used to have occasionally all night dancing and one of the big things that happened was Cloudland was built. Have you heard of Cloudland?

31:00 Goodness gracious.

I have heard of it, but I'd like you to tell me about it for people that haven't heard of it would love to hear it. So what was at Cloudland?

Oh it was a sprung floor and things like that. And the old Trocadero was our best one, over South Brisbane, the other side of Victoria Bridge, but it wasn't a patch on Cloudland and we enjoyed that. Then we used to go out to country dances, over the hills to Sandford, all night dances out there, no electricity. Oh they were

31:30 marvellously great out there.

So you danced the whole night?

You bet, all night, yeah, yeah. And we'd go to work too sometimes if it happened on a Wednesday night because there was an all night dance every year on Exhibition Wednesday night and they were great. As we got older we used to go up the town hall

32:00 and they used to have a good one there at times and Cloudland. They were the two that we mainly went to.

Can you tell me a little bit more what you remember about Cloudland? What was it like inside?

Well I know it was a big ballroom and it had a gallery all around and you could walk around and stand there and watch everyone. Billo Smith used to be the orchestra and the crowds were terrific. Apart from that,

32:30 well to get to the place, if you didn't have a car, you came by tram. It was up on a hill. They had a tramway that went straight up the hill and you could have a ride up in that tram, but as I got older and managed to get a vehicle of some sort well I used to go up the hill from the other side.

And when you got there, what would happen?

Just go dancing, what else?

33:00 **What sort of dances were your favourite?**

Oh old time and new vogue and jazz, oh yes. I'd have a go at it all, but a lot of old-time dancing in our day. It was most enjoyable. Bett and I won a couple of old-time waltz dances. They used to have these little dancing competitions and we entered some of them. I finally became an instructor at

33:30 a dancing school down in the [Fortitude] Valley in Brisbane for a couple of years.

Was that before the war?

Yes, oh yeah.

How did you come about that job?

Beg your pardon?

How did that happen, that you became an instructor?

I used to go there and pay for jazz lessons. Matt Le Minga's Dancing School it was in Gipps Street. And natural progression, I

34:00 think. Must have needed instructors and they needed plenty of instructors. Unpaid thing but pretty good because it helped you with your own dancing. And they used to have competitions there too but never did much good at that but enjoyed it. I can tell you one experience I had

34:30 going to dancing one night. I was doing a Diploma of Electrical Engineering down at the tech [technical] college then, two nights a week, and I wanted to go dancing one of those nights after because college was finished at nine o'clock. And I had an old Indian Scout motorbike – one of the first motorbikes in those days – and I had a friend on the back, heading

35:00 down the Valley, and we went up Ann Street. And in those days Wharf Street, there was a tram track came up Wharf Street, and I hit a tramcar right in the middle with the motorbike. Bob and I never got injured. We both finished up on the tramcar, and oh on one corner was the Brisbane Fire Station, that was the main fire station.

35:30 There was all these firemen standing there looking and of course one of the guys came out with my Dad, so he arranged to shift the wreck and get us home. That was quite an experience.

Do you remember what he said to you?

Goodness gracious me, no but I know it wouldn't be very kind. They didn't approve of me having the motorbike to start with,

36:00 but I was doing a motor mechanic's apprenticeship at the time.

What did they think of you wanting to learn to fly?

Beg your pardon?

What did your parents think about you wanting to fly?

Oh they thought it was all right; no problem with that.

Was your father ever in any danger in his job, that you knew of?

Oh yes,

36:30 yes. I can remember one fire where three firemen lost their lives and it was at the end of Roma Street. I forget the name of the place, big furniture place, and I have newspaper cuttings of it upstairs but I just can't remember the name of it but I remember the fire. He got burnt a few times and smoke problems, things like that.

37:00 But he was a big, fit, strong fellow, he really was.

And when did you decide to become more serious with your girlfriend? Do you remember what happened there?

Hardly.

Because you got engaged, didn't you, before the war?

That didn't happen until I'd been in the air force over a year. I'd been away at Point Cook. I went to the wireless school

37:30 at Point Cook, at the college there, and I got posted back to Brisbane, would you believe. And of course we could presume normal proceedings when I got back. About eighteen months after I got back I think we became engaged, somewhere about 1940, '41.

Do you remember exactly where you were when the war broke out?

38:00 Oh dear, oh dear. 1939. Well I had applied, I'd been trying to get into the air force for a number of years and hadn't got in and they advertised for wireless operators in 1939 and I'm trying to find out where I was.

38:30 I applied for that and they accepted me. I was either just about going into the air force or just at Point Cook when war broke out. That's about as close as I can get. Yeah,

39:00 I think I was at Point Cook.

So you were already in?

In '39, late '39, that's when war broke out, wasn't it? It had just broken out or it had been pending. It was a sort of a phoney thing for a long time but it got serious; it felt serious. It was my opportunity. I wasn't worried about war. All I wanted to do was get into the air force and learn to fly

39:30 but I hadn't made the grade that way because the competition was too tough for a guy like me. And they told me that if I got in and did a wireless course I could re-muster, which never happened. Once they train you that's the most difficult thing. I applied and applied and applied to re-muster and never got it, but anyway I got in the air force.

40:00 **That must have been disappointing?**

It was, oh terribly disappointing because I must admit that my only aim to get into the air force was to learn to fly, not to go to war.

That's the end of our tape.

Tape 2

00:33 **So can you tell us how you came to join the air force?**

Well the process, well for two years, 1937 and 1938, I applied to join the air force and do a flying course. It was very competitive, a competitive examination and mostly on maths and things like that. And I think the selection was made on if you passed that, you got

01:00 in on the exam and I never got anywhere. I only got to junior, but junior was sufficient to make an application and that's why with the pending war then, I suppose, it must have prompted me a bit then too. But the main driving force was to get into the air force. And they advertised for

01:30 applicants to do a wireless operators' course and I applied and sat another competitive examination and was successful. I think four of us got through that and all they did here was go to a doctor and they sent me a railway ticket. I went to Laverton in Victoria and

02:00 I filled in application forms and all the rest of it and I joined there in Laverton. Then they sent me to, oh no, I did my rookies course at Laverton, three months, with the rifle and guard duty and all those sort of things and then.

Can you tell us a little bit more about that three months? Do you remember what you initially thought of the air force and the training?

02:30 I can remember more what I thought about Melbourne, but the training, oh it was quite good. I don't think I had any problems in becoming, because I had been in the Militia when I was in the Boy Scouts at the time – I forgot about that period – and I had no difficulty, but it was much

03:00 stricter and tougher. Our warrant officers, oh boy, I can remember, our warrant officer disciplinarian, he

was a bloke named Champion and he was really tough. One morning, I can remember this, from a bloke coming from Brisbane to go down to Melbourne, oh gee it was cold. We were doing

03:30 some drill with the rifle and apparently I hadn't done the right drill and he demonstrated where the rifle should be and he stand it down on the ground, or he thought he did, but it was on my foot and he damaged my little toe, and gee it hurt, so I can remember Warrant Officer Champion, very much. In those days – I can remember this too –

04:00 tobacco, ready-rub tobacco to make cigarettes, came in round tins and the favourite one was Champion and they used to call it 'bastard tobacco'.

Because of the warrant officer?

Because of him, yeah, Champion. But the companionship was quite good straight away. We had to do guard duties. We were never given uniforms. We

04:30 were given underclothing, overalls, and a beret and boots and things like that. That's as far as that got while we were doing our rookies. We were not given any leave for a month and we got our first weekend leave after a month and we still didn't get any uniforms. It took until we had completed our rookies and then they gave us a uniform

05:00 and then we were allowed to wear our uniform on leave in Melbourne. They were very strict. But oh gee, sometimes you'd get a job in the kitchen – pot washing – and it wasn't a very good air force. But I know this. I had two friends went to flying school as cadets and they had just as bad a time, exactly the same sort of situation.

05:30 But then after that the signal school, the wireless school was at the college at Point Cook and I was posted to a course there, Course Number 16 and I spent twelve months. It was a long course and a difficult one, but I enjoyed it. We always had the threat over our heads of monthly examinations and if we failed more than

06:00 once we were given the choice of getting out or re-mustering to some other category, so you had to strive pretty hard if you wanted to stick around. It was good.

What was the base like at Point Cook?

Oh great, a lot better than Laverton. The accommodation was a two-storey accommodation block. We had our own rooms and at winter time we had six blankets and a heater and things like that,

06:30 yeah, yeah. And the food was great. And our instructors were all civilians because we went back through maths and calculus and all those sort of things. And the only air force instructors were the guys who taught us morse code, and that was a pretty lengthy business learning to use morse code because that was the only form of communications in those days. You

07:00 had to become proficient, very proficient, and to pass those examinations was very difficult because you had to have a skill of being able to transmit and I think it was twenty-five groups of words and I forget the period of time – must have been a minute – and with 99.5 per cent

07:30 correct, 0.5 of an error, so you can see two little slips and you were down the drain.

And you didn't really enjoy school that much so how did you adjust to having to do maths and calculus and…?

Oh we were serving a purpose, right into it. Oh maths never worried me at school, not at all. I should have applied myself a bit better if

08:00 I wanted a really good mark, but I didn't have to. I had no ambition of going on further than junior because I thought I'd get into the air force as easy as pie, but it wasn't so.

At Point Cook, how would a normal day take place from the beginning?

From the beginning, reveille would be six o'clock, down into the showers and

08:30 on a cold morning the building there, the two-storey building, had a hallway right down the middle and the shower blocks were right in the middle, and as you came out of your room and headed to them it was just one mass of steam on those cold mornings. I remember that. And we had to of course be very,

09:00 very fastidious in keeping our room tidy in a regulation manner and so on, and every Tuesday night was panic night. Everything had to be done to the book, polishing the floors and things like that, and they'd have inspection and that was pretty strict. Yeah, it was a pretty good life. After breakfast we'd parade, be inspected and

09:30 if you didn't have a shave you'd be sent back, and I got sent back quite a few times because I hardly had a beard as you can imagine in those days and it didn't look it to me that I needed a shave, but the warrant officer would look at you and he'd know that you hadn't had a shave and I got hunted back a few times. Then we'd go through some drill, things like that, just for a while, but not very often, because

after that

10:00 parade we'd march off into classrooms, whichever classroom we were going to for that period, then go for the day of ordinary school routine. Knock off for lunch and used to have to march from the college to the mess. It was quite a long way and the same back to school after lunch. Then it

10:30 all changed later on when we started doing flying instruction in flying classrooms and we'd go down the hangar area for the afternoon and away we'd go in the DH 84 or the Avro Anson. And we learnt to use morse code and the radio in the air, but it was all good. I enjoyed it.

What did you think of Melbourne?

Melbourne? Well

11:00 I was a young, naive fellow out of Brisbane and Brisbane was only a country town in those days really, and you get landed in a town like Melbourne, gee I grew up quick I can assure you. Yes, once we started getting regular leave we'd meet first, always go to a hotel called

11:30 Young and Jackson's, and in those days of course there were drinking restrictions for hotels because closing time was six o'clock. Young and Jackson's Hotel was opposite Spencer [actually Flinders] Street Railway Station, I remember that, and we'd get in there just in time to order maybe three or four beers before closing time. And you'd just put them on a table or something like that and

12:00 then drink them before we worried about what we were going to do for Friday night. And the big attraction I think to start with for Young and Jackson's, and probably still is, is a big, life-size painting of a prostitute called Chloe. Have you heard of Chloe? Oh goodness, gracious me. It's probably one of the most famous paintings, to servicemen, put it that way, in

12:30 Australia. I believe there's a copy somewhere in some pub here in Queensland, but round the back of the bar there was this huge painting of Chloe and the girls in Melbourne were very friendly, all very friendly. But I became involved with a club. What was their name?

13:00 Oh gee, this is where I've got a problem. I lose words like this. What was the name of that club? It will come to me, but anyway it was a social club. It was formed in England, I can tell you what it is, by one of the princes,

13:30 early princes there, and the idea was to mix ordinary working boys with boys from upper classes and this is how it went. Something running along lines of not unlike the Boy Scouts, but not doing the things, woodcraft and things like that. They had dances and socials and they had a lovely club house, so I enjoyed

14:00 going there, more so than going out with the fellows and having a few beers, and I made a lot of friends there. Oh gee, fancy not being able to tell you the name of it.

So it wasn't a religious organisation or anything?

Oh no, no, no, no, not at all, not at all, still going and still has the awards that are granted each year in Australia.

Is it like the Masons?

No, no, no, it's a youthful thing,

14:30 only youth. I nearly said it then. I had a most enjoyable time there and as I say I got some lovely ladies there and we had a lot of fun.

How did you hear about the club?

Probably one of the guys on the course that was going there or something like that. I wouldn't know,

15:00 wouldn't have a clue, but I'm sure there was more than one of us that was going because one of them had a car, one of our blokes that used to go in, and that's how it started anyway.

So with all those girls around was it hard to stay faithful to your girlfriend in Brisbane?

Oh yeah, a bit of a problem, nothing that got too serious with Brisbane,

15:30 off and on as I said, but oh I wasn't totally unfaithful, but I enjoyed myself. Oh there was some lovely ladies there, oh boy, and they would have liked to have let me I think, but anyway I didn't. Yeah, fond memories of Melbourne.

What were some of the other things that you did at Point Cook?

16:00 Other things, I played football, Australian Rules, for Point Cook, number two, some Saturday afternoons. And we'd play about three games before the main club game for the day and stay and watch the game and sit there barracking for all the sides that you sort of had problems with, but no, it was a lot of fun. I used to go fishing

16:30 in the bay [Port Phillip Bay]. It was right on the bay there and spearfishing in a very sheltered bay, and that's about all. Work and study was a bit serious because passing an exam you really had to put your nose to the grindstone.

Were you looking forward to being posted to a squadron and going posted overseas?

17:00 Yes, yes, I think that was the ambition. As soon as you got into a squadron life the better. And as I say after ten months I was posted to Number 10 Squadron in England and was just getting ready to go on embarkation leave and they changed my posting, which was very disappointing because I would have loved to gone back. It was on

17:30 Sunderlands, flying boats, and they posted me to Brisbane would you believe, my home town, to 23 Squadron, Wirraways. I soon got used to the idea. Lost my disappointment and I spent two and a half years with 23 Squadron and had over eight hundred hours flying and flew with goodness knows how many different pilots.

18:00 **What sort of things were you doing from Brisbane?**

The war came on of course, and the squadron basically when I first was posted as a wireless operator they had Avro Ansons and then Lockheed Hudsons and my job there was a wireless operator. And we were doing what we called seaward patrols, looking for

18:30 German submarines because the war had started. We'd go out to sea and up and down the coast and things like that for about five hours. That was our main work except for practice bombing and things like that and gunnery. Then I got changed from the Lockheed Hudson when the squadron acquired Wirraways. They formed two more flights,

19:00 B and C Flights, and I was posted to B Flight with Wirraway. Then the first job we got was going by train to Melbourne to the CAC [Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation] factory to pick up the new Wirraways and flying back up.

What did you think of the Wirraways?

They were a dangerous aircraft to the pilot because they had some very bad habits

19:30 because the pilots… At that time it wasn't too bad because they were coming off full-time flying courses. And as war came on they started a scam called the Empire Air Training Scheme and it sort of mass produced pilots and everything like that and I'm afraid it became a differentiation between those in the early days and these guys, and

20:00 we used to call them 'six week wonders'. I was then sent to do a navigation course, which I passed all right, and came back to the squadron and then did a bombing, air and gunnery course at Evans Head at the bombing gunning school with the squadron. What else did I do? Then I did my photography.

What was involved in…? I would like to go through all those courses, if possible. Yeah, I

20:30 **want to know the details. What was involved in the navigation course?**

Oh dear oh dear. Just simple straightforward DR [Dead Reckoning] navigation.

What does that involve?

Well maths mainly, solving some triangle and things like that. And we were taught all sorts of things: to use drift

21:00 recorders where you can measure your drift and you have lots of formula and things like that, map reading, making macadam projections and I can go on and on with the sort of technical stuff that we had to do and it was all part of it. And a fair bit of sky study and knowing some of the major constellations, but it was only a four month course and if you passed it you came out a qualified navigator, not a master navigator

21:30 but a straight out navigator.

What's the difference between that and a master navigator?

Oh dear oh dear, full astro navigation is a science all on its own. And I did a fair bit of astro nav [navigation], but you had to learn how to nautical tables, air almanacs and things like that and use an astro compass.

22:00 **Did your involvement in the scouts help you with that kind of thing?**

Oh it sure did. To start with that's where I learnt morse code and it was as simple as that. And I also was in the Militia at the same time as I was in the scouts. I was in the 5th Field Brigade and we had eighteen-pound field guns and we towed the guns around. And I was a signaller

22:30 there and I learnt morse code and how to use your morse code key and signal heliographs and flags and things like that. As a signaller we were horse drawn in those days and the guns were drawn by horses

and so were the limbers. And I had a horse all to myself, as a signaller. The signallers did and I can remember I had two big rolls of wire,

23:00 one each side. I had flags. I had all sorts of things. I was really loaded and used to ride. That was great. We used to have our camps up at Caloundra and Tin Can Bay and Caloundra, where we used to do our shooting practice with the guns; that's all houses now. It's all main suburbs up there, all along those beaches.

23:30 I remember those camps very well and I remember when we switched to trucks and I left then because that's when I got into the air force. When we first got a truck, I think I've got some pictures of me loading it, the first trucks we had. They hired trucks from civilian places and we all went to Tin Can Bay. It was great.

24:00 **Did you ever think of trying the army instead of the air force?**

Oh no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no way. I always wanted to get into the air force. The only thing I wanted to do was learn to fly.

Did a lot of the scouts go into the Militia?

I can only think of two who were in the same time as I was.

Why did you go into it? What was different about it?

24:30 I don't know. I think it was just to learn signalling. I'm not sure. I couldn't tell you. I did one thing which was wrong. I joined the navy, the naval cadets, as a signaller and I didn't like it. I think it was the uniform that put me off. I lasted twelve months and then I went into the

25:00 Militia and I liked that very much. I couldn't give you any reasons, not at all, not at all.

What was it that you didn't like about the naval cadets?

As I said, I think it was the uniform. We used to meet down at the old naval drill hall which is now, what was called The Domain in Brisbane, the big bend of the river, and now of course it's QUT [Queensland University of Technology], it's full of all those

25:30 QUT buildings. Because later on life I got involved in the construction of all those buildings so I went back to The Domain in a totally different role. I didn't last long in the navy, but I spent a couple of years as a cadet in the army. I became a bombardier. You didn't become a corporal, you became a bombardier. Maybe it was the

26:00 uniform, but I don't think so. I can remember the dress uniform.

So you'd done quite a bit of training by the time you joined the air force?

Oh yes; I think it all helped me. That's why I went to the wireless school and it wasn't all that difficult. What most people found difficult was learning morse code to get to the schools, and I was more or less well on the way before I even got there, so it was quite a good balance there.

26:30 **And after doing the navigation course you did a gunnery course, is that right?**

Yes.

What was involved in that course?

The main thing was air to ground gunnery and air to air gunnery. At Evans Head Gunnery School, No 1 BAGS [Bombing Air Gunnery School], they gave us air to air gunnery and this was done by one aeroplane –

27:00 and they were Fairey Battles in those days – on a long wire towing a drogue cargo and we'd shoot at the target, and try and hit it and things like that. Drogue pilots, they were a queer lot; they had some strict rules. They didn't like it if you approached them in what appeared to them a dangerous direction where they might get hit. They had a system of fining you and

27:30 in each error you were fined and the fine was calculated in bottles, bottles of beer. It all happened because all of the courses I did were of one week's duration. And then we did air to ground gunnery where they had four large targets on the ground at the range and you'd fly at them and try and hit them. And

28:00 then you were assessed on your skills. Then there was a separate course that I did on bomb aiming, we used because as a wireless operator and as an observer into the bargain you did the bomb aiming in the Lockheeds.

How do you learn to aim a bomb?

Ah?

How do you learn to aim a bomb?

Simply know what the formulas are,

28:30 what your bombsight, you learn to use a bombsight. Ours was no magic bombsight like the Americans, but you simply set your bombsight to the height, the wind and all the rest of it and guided the pilot using a sighting through your lines on the bombsight, getting the pilot to fly, "left, left, right, right, right," and things like this, and

29:00 then once you got it right you just pushed a button and away went the bombs, not that you ever hit anything, no way. That was the bomb aiming course and it was very simple. And the same with the photography – didn't take long, about a month with photography. So as we were called observers then, I was made an observer. And there was five of us did that course and we had

29:30 a passing out parade and they awarded us our wings and made us corporals, big deal. So we became corporal air observers. Later on when the Empire Air Training Scheme came in they split that up. They trained in mass production training where the air

30:00 observer, in the days where I'm talking, the early days I'm talking about there were only two aircrew musterings and that was pilot and air observer. The pilot flew it and the air observer did everything else that was needed because most of the aeroplanes of course were two piece aeroplanes in those days. But with the Empire Air Training Scheme navigators became either wireless air gunners, they all did the wireless, the abbreviated wireless course, and then they either did

30:30 gunnery and they were trained wireless operator air gunner, and observers became navigators then, and they were taught navigation and bomb aiming and wireless. It was a wise idea because they trained blokes much more quickly and they needed so many people. It

31:00 was a pretty good scheme but it didn't work too well with guys like us. There were four of us in 23 Squadron and the most senior observer was a sergeant, and the other three, we were corporals. And our new observers came to us from the courses and they were sergeants, straight off course, flight sergeants, and

31:30 it didn't go down very well I can tell you. Took a long time to catch up, but catch up we did.

So you were much more comprehensively trained?

Oh no question about that, yeah, yeah. See here with the wireless course alone on completion of that, by doing some commercial training and passing an examination with the Marconi School of Wireless you became a commercial wireless operator and could operate on ships,

32:00 get yourself a job after the war. Well that was the beauty. And not only that, we were not just wireless operators, we could maintain wireless equipment and that's what I did first when I went to Archerfield, the base station wireless and things like that, handled the equipment and communication between states and then flying, did the lot.

32:30 It had to be split up.

So after you became a corporal, what happened then? Where did you go?

I stayed with 23 Squadron and flew and flew and flew and flew.

With all that training that you had, including Militia and early years, did you witness many accidents in training?

Not a lot.

33:00 The most serious one, of course, was in 23 Squadron. Unfortunately as observers we used to have to fly with the pilot no matter what the training was. And some of the practices were air-to-air combat training and one of these – there were three lots of us out, three pairs – and one pair was flying and practising. And

33:30 we practised over water as you could appreciate. And we were down over here, down over the Jumpin Pin area. But up over the Cleveland area, two of the Wirraways collided and the four lads were killed. Four very good friends. And the wing of one of the aeroplanes landed at the high school at Cleveland and another part of one of them fell in the cemetery there,

34:00 and the rest of the aircrafts fell in the swamps and things like that. They got the bodies. So that was probably the most serious training accident. There were plenty of other accidents. I had a nasty one myself, but with that Cleveland one later in life, not so long

34:30 back, there was no memorial or anything to those four guys, so I designed a memorial, set up a memorial service and had a day at Cleveland cemetery and we got nineteen of the relatives of the guys and we had a great service. Managed to get two restored Wirraways from Caboolture to

35:00 come down and fly over for us and the air force provided a band and it was very good. One of the guys did a video for us of it and it was very good to have.

At the time, was there any service or anything at the time?

For them? Oh yes, well when they died of course. You've got to keep nudging my memory otherwise

35:30 I wouldn't have remembered that. Yes, three of the blokes were buried here in Brisbane and Allan was sent back to New South Wales, his body was sent back there and I was a pall bearer for each of the three services and you can imagine an awful week we had in the squadron rooms, oh boy. Still remember it. Still remember that damn

36:00 crematorium. One was at the crematorium at Holland Park and we had to march up that steep hill, not very far, but it was a normal full service that goes on with the air force and eight of us and gee whiz, going up that hill and I wasn't very big, that's why I remember. George, it was George, it was, but as I

36:30 say, we did the three services.

And were you actually in the air with those?

Well we flying, doing the same practice but well away from them. There were six of us in the air, scattered around Moreton Bay.

And what happened? Do you know how it happened?

Yeah, head on collision, just failed to break away early enough and

37:00 one hit the other.

And how did you find out, do you remember?

Didn't find out until we landed. We didn't have any voice communication in those days, not like it got later on when VHF [Very High Frequency radio] came in.

So that must have been a terrible shock when you came in?

Oh a big shock. We had lost two other guys on separate accidents, but these four under these circumstances –

37:30 it wasn't good.

And what was, sorry, go on, what were you going to say?

Well of course when we lost the Hudson crew, I wasn't in the Hudson flight at the time, but knew the guys, but it just didn't get back, but it wasn't so traumatic as what happened with the Wirraways.

38:00 We lost one, two, three, I can remember at the moment, in single accidents, just flying accidents. Most of them piloted on their own fortunately, but this was guys flying military aeroplanes with very little training and anything could happen. One of them was a bloke named Unsworth, Jimmy Unsworth, and I can remember Jimmy because Jimmy's Dad brought his ashes to the squadron and a

38:30 bloke named Peter Ambrose and I got the job to scatter Jimmy's ashes over Archerfield Aerodrome. And I had the urn. And my camera hatch was a little hatch, not much bigger than that, that used to come up, and I put the ashes down there. That was fine, took the lid off and instead of waiting – I didn't want to drop the lid

39:00 and have it fall on someone – I tipped it too early and of course you know what happened to the ashes? They just came right back into the aeroplane! And when I looked at Peter's back and he looked around, he was white and so was I, we were covered and I was swallowing Jimmy Unsworth for a week. Oh dear! With

39:30 Wirraways I flew eight hundred and two hours in Wirraways and you can imagine the experiences. They were endless experiences.

Yeah, we want to try and get a few of those experiences out. You said before that you were in an accident as well?

I had one that nearly took my head off at Archerfield, over Archerfield Aerodrome.

40:00 I was flying with Peter Ambrose again. He was a flight sergeant pilot and he was giving me flying instructions. I wasn't too bad at flying. I had all those hours.

Tape 3

00:31 **Peter, can we talk a little bit about the Wirraways when you joined the 23 Squadron? Can you tell us a little bit more about the aircraft and how they operated?**

Yes, I guess I can. The Wirraway was a training aircraft, an American Northrop trainer, and it was built

here in Australia

01:00 by the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fishermans Bend. It was our first-line fighter, would you believe, at the time. It was armed. It had two .303 machine guns that fired through the propeller arm and more often than not they put holes in the propeller, that's how bad the interrupter gear was on them.

01:30 They were a low wing monoplane. Had a high wing loading and were very difficult to fly. The guys who were coming to the squadrons when they were equipped with Wirraways were coming from service flying training schools where they'd been taught to fly on Tiger Moths and things like that. In those early days there was no operational training units and any operational

02:00 training was done within the Wirraway squadrons, of which there were five of them in Australia, so therefore all the training they got before going to war was with these Australian based squadrons. Its most vicious habit was that in a tight turn it could stall, get into a flat spin and it was very hard to get out of.

02:30 I think that's about a description of it. It didn't have much speed, but any of the pilots that were trained on Wirraways and did a fair…they could fly and that's why our guys who went onto Kittyhawks and Spitfires and things like that, they were a piece of cake for these blokes because they just loved them. So it was very good training for Australian pilots. But of course it

03:00 was our first-line fighter and as I said there was five squadrons and 24 Squadron was based at Garbutt in Townsville and the Japanese invasion was imminent after they entered the war in December '41. The squadron was sent to Rabaul and I can assure

03:30 you we went up… I went up with Jimmy Iles and we ferried Wirraways to Garbutt and then they went on and we came back, fortunately, to Archerfield. And of course the Japs invaded and I think the whole thing was over

04:00 in five minutes, wasn't it? I lost again some good friends, but a lot of them got out and that was a terrible thing that a government would use a training aeroplane as their first line of defence here in Australia. That's what happened. And that's the Wirra [Wirraway] and that's the part

04:30 it played, and I think it was a vital part as far as training was concerned. Guys like myself look at all the hours we put in before we got into other types of decent aeroplanes.

That's a fantastic description, thank you Peter, that's great. You were about to tell us I think before we stopped for a break about your own accident?

Oh with the Wirraway, oh yes. I think I got to the stage where I mentioned

05:00 that Peter Ambrose was… A lot of the pilots used to teach me or let me fly the Wirraway because it was dual control. The dual control was always in the back seat, always in the back, and this was deliberate landing, circuits and landings we were doing at Archerfield. And on the Wirraway you sit one behind the other and there's a sliding

05:30 cockpit cover. Once I was landing it and making, this particular Peter's cover was closed and I opened mine and had my goggles on, and because you have to look over the side to see things and I was doing that, and there was a Tiger Moth crossed my path in the circuit area as I was approaching to land. And I pulled tight and did a tight

06:00 turn away from him and a sheet of perspex off the sliding cover about three foot square blew out under pressure and it struck me on the goggles and it carried on and hit the metal tail plane and carved a hole right through the tail plane. I bled somewhat and it knocked me out, and Peter

06:30 got covered in blood and he did an emergency landing right in front of the medical section and they carted me off to hospital, so it was pretty close. I nearly got scalped only it wasn't Indians that were scalping me, so that was a pretty close one.

That really was a close call. I mean you laugh about it now, but at the time how did you react when you sort of woke up?

On of the memories is our doctor

07:00 was Neil Marsh and he reminded me a few times after. He said, "The first thing you asked me when you came to was, 'Can I have a smoke?'" I tried to bludge a smoke off him. And they hunted me off down to Amberley Hospital. And if you look at my nose you can't see that it's been damaged, but I tell you what

07:30 it was a mess. I've had about four operations on it and it was a very small penalty to pay getting hit with a piece of perspex.

Did it happen so fast that you were just knocked unconscious and were not aware?

The only memory I have is I thought it was a wing strap that had broken. On the Wirraways where the wings fit onto the main body the cover plate goes right around all the bolts, and I thought it

08:00 had sheared and it had blown back and hit me, never realising it was a piece of perspex. Had no idea, no idea at all.

And do you know how much time Peter had to make that emergency landing?

Oh yes, we were making an approach and he took over and landed and I had done the cross wing leg and was just turning onto my approach

08:30 landing when I had to do this turn. He just took over and instead of landing where he normally would he just overshot towards the end of the – Archerfield Aerodrome was a big, large, grassy paddock in those days – and landed on the grass in front of the medical section.

So you were knocked unconscious but Peter had to land the plane. What he tell you afterwards about how he felt about it?

09:00 About the blood, that's all he could talk about. He felt this and it was on his hands when he wiped himself.

Was he concerned for you? He must have been worried that you'd been…?

I suppose he was, I suppose he was. I can't remember anything like that.

It really was a close call. How long did it take you to recover from that?

I think I was off a week or something like that. Not a long

09:30 time. I went to Amberley Base Hospital and I was there for a few days and I went back. I had some leave, I know that, but it was later on when the thing healed a bit that I started having to go into Wickham Terrace to a specialist there and into Brisbane Hospital where he operated on my nose a number of times, twice at least.

10:00 Anyway it's not a bad nose, it's all right.

It looks great to us. So after that incident, did the pilot still let you fly occasionally?

He would have a bad job not, wouldn't he? I think it was all in a good cause. If anything had have happened to him I would have had no trouble landing that aeroplane. I think

10:30 it was a good thing.

How often did you get to fly yourself? Was that something you did?

Never allowed to fly on your own, not a solo, you could only fly the aeroplane with someone. The other flying that we did do, but not really flying, but we acted as second pilot you could call it, and these

11:00 guys were doing their instrument flying and they did their instrument flying training in a hood that came over their head and they could see nothing bar their instruments, and you needed someone to give them instructions and things like that and we used to do that quite often.

You said earlier that really the only reason you joined the air force was so that you could fly?

Yeah.

But when you signed up there was a war on. Did it occur to you

11:30 **that you would actually have to go into battle?**

Oh gee, then we started looking forward to it, I'm sure. All you wanted to do really was once you were trained was to get out. I think that was the big deal. Who wanted to stay and learn?

What were your expectations about what it would be like?

Put it this way, I think you wonder if you could measure up. I think we

12:00 would all think that. I did. And you had to find that out. But we thought we were world beaters and I used that word advisedly, not realising how good these Japanese were. They could run rings around us and they

12:30 had better aeroplanes. It was exciting anyway when we did get there, and I think that was the ambition to get there. I'm sure every bloke in aircrew wanted to get to serve in a squadron in the war.

So when you were doing, for example, the wireless operator course and your ambition was really to fly, how did you find sort of doing that course?

13:00 I had a purpose and I was in the air force and that was a big plus because I'd been on the shortlist and I'd applied for re-mustering and 'no trouble', like fun. The reverse was the case. I must have applied at least three times and never, ever got to first base on re-muster. They just gave me

13:30 more training and I became an air observer.

So did you feel that you'd been misled about that?

You bet, oh yeah, yeah. They just said what they needed to get blokes to fill their courses in those days as they actually wanted wireless operators. I don't know their purpose.

And each time you got knocked back for being re-mustered, did it ever occur to you to sort give it all away?

14:00 How could you? There was a war on. You know what would happen if you did that – you'd be up on a lack of moral fibre charge, no question about that, and why would you want to do that? No, because late towards the end of the war we were glad that it was all over because it was a different war,

14:30 totally different. The whole way of life had changed and I think what we were doing honestly was a wasted effort.

So when you were still with the, so when you were actually assigned to 23 Squadron, how did you feel about that? What were your thoughts on that?

As I said earlier I was disappointed because I had been posted to 10 Squadron in England, but I soon

15:00 got used to it when I got back home – it was great. And of course it had one big advantage – it led me in a career change and if I had of gone to 10 Squadron I would have been made a wireless operator because they had large crews and all you ever did, on a Sunderland, you were a wireless operator. But by going into a Wirraway squadron with a two-man crew

15:30 they had to have observers and that gave me a complete change, which was a big improvement and something that I enjoyed.

Do you remember very much about the training that you did with the photography?

Not a lot, a bit of maths and to assemble and things like that, lens. It was all pretty basic.

What was the importance of that part of the course?

Well

16:00 at first what it trained us to do was use the aerial cameras and some of the work I did in 23 Squadron was… I don't know if you've heard of a thing in those years, it was called the Brisbane Line. The government had decided that was where Australia would be defended from and that's as far

16:30 as the Japs would get us. As part of that they wanted to build a number of very large aerodromes and we got the job, the 23 Squadron did the job, was to photograph these aerodrome sites. And I went out there with a guy by the name of Collier, Jimmy

17:00 Collier, to Western Australia and we photographed about eight different spots, right out as far as Thargomindah, that were proposed. A couple of racecourses, Charleville, for instance, their aerodrome in those days was a racecourse and Dolly was a paddock, Oakley was just a paddock and

17:30 Cecil Plains was just a paddock. And all that was involved, and it wasn't tricky photography because we were doing feature line overlaps, which meant that we flew at about ten thousand feet and took a series of shots, timed shots, and they overlapped each other by sixty-six and two-thirds per cent. And that meant you could use

18:00 a stereo and get three-dimensional views on them for the purposes of building or suitability. But we had a bit of fun as you can imagine – two young fellows with an air force aeroplane. I had a book of vouchers that paid for our accommodation and all sorts of things, as you can imagine, and fuel.

18:30 We had no fitter and we did all our own dailies. And five days we were out there because cloud cover was quite a problem and we were entertained, particularly with a couple of the bigger country centres, particularly Charleville. Charleville Hotel looked after us and the club looked after us and the nurses threw a barbecue for us. And of course two young fellows would just show off a little bit with an aeroplane and

19:00 of course these people had never seen an air force aeroplane and I took a lot of forty-five degree oblique shots. I used to take these as part of the exercise anyway from each of the four cardinal points, as part of the drill. But a lot of our blokes, the pilots in 23 Squadron, there were four, five, maybe six, who were sons of graziers in the area and we'd find their properties, land on the properties,

19:30 take a photo of the properties, and when we got back they'd enlarge the photographs and send them out. It was great. We got lovely letters back and we had a lot of fun. The one decent job I did – that was a good job – but the other one I did I did it in a Hudson and that was an aerial survey of Palmerston Channel, for mapping, and that took a few days and it was good. That was a real, dinky-di [genuine]

20:00 exercise and that was a tough one.

In what sense?

Oh everything had to be accurate where what we were doing. It didn't matter where you were, what height, as long as you got a good result as a photograph, but for mapping purposes the overlap had to be right and everything had to be exact, but with a good formula it did work. Not only that, the pilot had the advantage – he had

20:30 an automatic pilot and he could fly a course and keep on it, the automatic pilot, whereas with the Wirraway the pilot had to fly a course. A straight course in a Wirraway was impossible really for any length of time.

So when you were taking those photographs of potential aerodrome sites, what were you told about the Brisbane Line?

You didn't know a lot about it at all.

21:00 We knew it was for defence, oh yeah. We thought in the main it was for to accommodate large bombers from America because they starting to come in at that time I think and that's what happened anyway.

But did you have that understanding that north of Brisbane would be left?

No, not really. It was only really later on that that was admitted by the government.

21:30 Well, partly admitted, wasn't it? They never really admitted it.

So at the time you weren't really aware of that?

No, no, I think it would have been very wrong if the government had have admitted that, but we knew it was for big aerodromes for American aeroplanes.

So with the Wirraways and with all the training that you had, I guess the purpose of training that second person was that you could take over if necessary at any time to fly the plane. Was that part of it?

That

22:00 was a good idea, wasn't it? It was in a sense, but that normally happened. Wasn't part of the curriculum of training, not at all. Some of the guys didn't want to learn to fly, no way.

But in that eight hundred hours that you did with 23 Squadron, were there any incidents when you did have to take over from the pilot?

No, not one, not one.

22:30 **So what other significant memories do you have of those two and a half years with the Wirraways?**

It was great; it was a good war for blokes like us. I did forty-odd missions. We did seaward patrols with the Wirraways. And normally a single-engine aeroplane was never used over the water, but they had to use Wirraways. And we did the patrols on the eastern coast

23:00 from Newcastle virtually nearly up to Townsville. We patrolled there and we were on standby all the time in case, always had standby crews at the ready in case the Japanese came in, so that was the purpose apart from the training. The training went on, but we were carrying out a job of work at the same time.

23:30 We dropped bombs once. I was flying with Ron Richards at that time off Point Lookout and a submarine was submerging and there weren't supposed to be any because we'd been briefed. And we didn't recognise it and I don't know whether it was a Japanese or an American and just couldn't, but our briefing said there was no submarines in the area, so Ron decided to drop a couple of bombs.

24:00 It was well under by the time we got to it and I reckon his bombs lasted, they must have overshot by three hundred yards at least. It was a big miss, but that was the only effort that we made warlike. We had one accident, well we had a couple of accidents, but we only had one serious accident. It was down here

24:30 in this area between North Stradbroke and South Stradbroke Islands. There is a bar, an estuary bar called the Jumpin Pin Bar and I used to go there fishing with my Dad in those days and one of his old mates, a professional fisherman, I saw his boat there one day and dived on him and shot him up, showing off as Ron did, and he was a pretty good

25:00 pilot. Unfortunately he failed to pull out quickly enough and his propeller tipped the water with the result that it bent the blades and he made a forced landing in the water. Unfortunately it wasn't too deep as when we got out the water was only up to there and I was standing on the wings. And that took a lot of explaining to the court of inquiry. And we convinced old

25:30 Kliney what he had to tell the authorities, and he took a lot of convincing I can tell you. He took us back up to his house and he happened to have some rum and by the time we had a couple of rums and we

were convincing and his evidence got us right off. All he had to say was he heard this aeroplane with an engine missing and it landed in the water. I think

26:00 Ron got good mention in his flying log book instead of the truth being told.

That's an incredible story. So it was just you and Ron, obviously, in the Wirraway? Can you tell us exactly about what you remember about what happened and?

Yeah, we were just beating Kliney up. I wasn't aware that he was going to touch the water, no way. He was just

26:30 going to go up to maybe two thousand feet and dive right down on him and go back up.

What was the purpose of what he was doing?

Just fun, all did it, all pilots, it was a beat up, shoot him up. They used to go to their girlfriends' places up Toowoomba and those places and beat them up there too. You got away with it. I flew under the Storey Bridge because my wife worked in a building there and she was looking down

27:00 on me. That and the salsa story.

We'll talk about that one in a minute, I think.

There were no real restrictions on us. Nowadays of course you get put in gaol for some of the things we did on that course.

So it was called 'beating up'?

A regular practice, yeah, beating up.

And it was just to have a bit of fun?

That's all, a bit of fun.

27:30 **And what exactly would a pilot do in that situation?**

Just go into a dive because we were being trained at the time, one of the trainings was as a dive bomber and we dived from about eight thousand feet and dropped practice bombs and see how we went. And that was all Wirraways were going to be used for, as dive bombers.

28:00 Aerobatics was a lot of fun for pilots. Mind you it was pretty difficult for some of them as they were pretty ham fisted, but some of them were absolutely skilful. They became very skilful guys.

So on that day that Ron went down over the bar, from what height would you have dived?

Maybe about a thousand feet, not very high, shallow dive, oh yes.

28:30 **And your friend was?**

He was going back home. He'd been fishing down at Swan Bay that night apparently.

And what did he do from the ground? How did he react to you guys?

He really got stuck into us when he picked us up. He was an old German bloke because Beenleigh was full of German settlers and fishermen.

29:00 Oh no, he was just putting on a bit of an act I think. He didn't like it, I'm sure.

So when you were heading down you were comfortable with Ron doing this?

We were always doing it, nothing unusual about that, but anyway some of the practice we used to do was like that. One of our gunnery practices was down there, down in that area, and two aeroplanes would go out

29:30 and one would fly down on the water and he would throw his shadow in the water and the other plane would go up to a thousand feet – and we were using live ammunition – and shoot at the shadow. You could see if you were hitting because of the gun splashes. And then you'd change places, so it was pretty normal practice. Nothing unusual about it, crikey.

But the only unusual thing was on that day that you

30:00 **were with Ron that the wing hit the water, I guess?**

Not the wing.

Oh not the wing, sorry.

Oh crikey no, I wouldn't be talking to you now.

What hit the water? Sorry I misunderstood. What exactly?

Just the propeller tip.

Oh the propeller tip, okay. So at that point were you concerned at all?

I don't think so. It all happened, it was all over before we knew what was going on. But Ron must have acted very quickly because he had two five hundred bombs hung under the wings and

30:30 he jettisoned them because you went up to a bit of height, maybe a hundred, two hundred feet, I don't know and he dropped the two bombs safe, and they're still down there. The aeroplane was recovered later on and they floated it and got it back.

So it must have been a bit of a rough landing?

It wasn't bad. Not like landing on wheels.

31:00 Hitting water is like hitting a brick wall, but you're well strapped in. If we could strap ourselves in motor cars the way we do in aeroplanes you could have the most serious accidents ever and never get hurt.

Were you injured that day?

No, no.

So why was there a court inquiry?

31:30 Always with accidents, there is always a court of inquiry. Many a pilot got kicked out of the air force because of the results of those sorts of things.

So you had to leave the plane, I suppose?

It was down under water.

It was actually submerged?

It was sunk down to the bottom.

It totally sank?

That's what I say, but it was in shallow water off Kalinga Bank down there near a

32:00 place I fished and I was stood on the roof and when I got out the water was only up to there on me, so didn't even have to swim.

So you were lucky, really, in a sense?

Oh very lucky, yeah. Yes, if he had have been heading in a direction across mangroves he would have gone straight into the mangroves,

32:30 but we were going straight up the water and water was straight ahead, so we didn't even have to do a turn or anything like that. It was just a matter of settling in and making a nice forced landing.

Did it bother you at all that the truth didn't come out in that court inquiry?

No way, no way. We deliberately had to fix the evidence and

33:00 I don't think… Some courts of inquiry were conducted by our commanding officers and I think they were very lenient. I think occasionally they knew what really happened, which was not the same as the evidence he was listening to, but it didn't matter I don't think.

Interesting story. Now can you tell us about flying under the Storey Bridge?

Well

33:30 that was with training for dive bombing and one of the exercises we did was drop some eleven and a half pound smoke bombs on the Brisbane River at different points, flying up the river, and we'd go up to two thousand feet, dive down, on given spots where there were quadrants set up for training for naval people to mark and position themselves, and that's what we were doing.

34:00 One of the spots was below the Storey Bridge, downstream. At the time Bet, my wife, she worked at Atchelly and Dawson as a secretary there, and it was a ten-storey building, right on the river, right on the other side of the ridge, on the upstream side. And at the back of the building they had a wooden fire escape, like they used to have

34:30 in those days. And we organised all this. We knew we were going to do this and the timing was right and Bet and a few of her friends were on the landing up on the top there and we dropped the bomb, the smoke bomb, straight under the bridge, big bridge, you could put six aeroplanes under that. And we were close to the bridge and he did a nice turn and I reckon we were at half

35:00 the height of the building and they were up there looking and waving. It didn't worry Bet either. She

thought it was pretty good.

It sounds like you had a lot of fun during that time?

You betcha. It was like being in a big flying school, all the goodies, it was. We had lovely parties.

35:30 We used to have champagne parties at the Bellevue and they were something, and they were a great bunch of guys.

What was the Bellevue like?

Beg your pardon?

What was the Bellevue like?

Oh marvellous, yeah. That room of theirs, beautifully panelled room. And the squadron parties we had, we had two a year, and they would be champagne

36:00 parties and they'd get the champagne bottles in all these old metal washtubs full of ice, gee they were great. Except one night a bloke that became very famous, Les Jackson, he got, he drank a bit and Bet had made

36:30 herself a nice, new evening dress for the party out of her wedding frock and it was pretty good and Les was mucking around where she was sitting and he had champagne and he poured champagne down the front of her dress. She wouldn't have a bar of Les Jackson, even in postwar years when Les was down the coast and he had a boat and we were in the same club and things like that. No, she

37:00 hated it when he came aboard our boat to have a drink and things. But they were really good parties.

What was the atmosphere like? Can you describe the atmosphere for us in those parties?

Oh just a heap of fun, oh yes.

Music? What sort of music did you have?

Gee I can't tell you that. I couldn't remember.

37:30 No, that's something I couldn't. I don't think we had any, but anyway I don't remember any, no, no. But later on in life that served as a pattern for me, would you believe? Yes, the company I worked for, I ran an annual party there for clients, not a company party, it was for clients, and

38:00 I based it exactly on what we did with the squadron only instead of having washtubs I set up six old concrete type barrows that they used to cart concrete with on the building sites. They filled them with ice and they'd get these big, large bottles of champagne, huge bottles, and they'd plant them all around.

38:30 We had them in the corner of our parties and the parties went till the sun came up, and Frankie Pyle parties were really well liked here in Brisbane. Then of course they destroyed the Bellevue. They knocked it down. Then of course the other thing about the Bellevue that was where Bet and I spent our first night after we were married.

39:00 **I have to ask you how you came to be married? You were posted to Brisbane and at what point did your relationship sort of get quite serious?**

Not long after I got back, not long after I got back. My family were still living in the place and they were still living next door. Didn't take long I can tell you.

39:30 **And so can you tell us a little bit about getting married, because it was war time, so...?**

We got engaged and I do think it's hard to make a decision to get married during war, but Bet wanted to and I don't think I was very definite one way or the other. And we agreed it would be a good idea and we got married in

40:00 the Presbyterian church and honeymooned at Noosa and it was great.

Was it a big wedding?

Oh no, not at all, had quite a few people there but in the restaurant in Brisbane at the time, Prince's Restaurant, and that's where we had it there. Quite a few

40:30 air force blokes, the wedding party was all air force blokes. One of them, Binky Davis, one of the pilots I flew with, he joined 75 Squadron later on and he was one of the first pilots shot down in Kittyhawks in New Guinea and killed. Yeah, they're great memories. You shouldn't bring them up.

We love to hear them. We'll just stop there.

Tape 4

00:37 **When you got married, when was that in the war?**

1942.

1942, okay.

’42.

1942, so the Japanese had entered the war?

The Japanese had entered the war, yes, yes.

You said it was a difficult decision to make to get married during war time. Did it concern you that you might be going away and that?

01:00 No, no, I wanted to go away, no question about that.

But as a married man, did it concern you?

No, it didn’t make any difference, not really, I don’t think anyway because by the time I went away our first child was born, my daughter.

So where were you when she was born?

Brisbane.

So that must have been a

01:30 **significant event in your life?**

Oh it was, yeah, oh gee, yeah, yeah.

How did it compare with flying Wirraways?

Don’t ask me to compare that sort of thing. Oh no way.

But it must have been… On one hand you were in the middle of fighting a war and going out in dangerous aircraft and then in the meantime your wife was having a baby?

02:00 You used the word there ‘dangerous’, but aircraft were not dangerous.

You did say earlier though that the Wirraways were dangerous?

They had problems, but skills overcame that, don’t they, the guys that were used to flying? Like a Spitfire never had a bad bone in its body but the Wirraway did have a couple, and inexperience caused a lot of accidents.

02:30 Yeah, but once you were used to it and skilled with it, it was really good, excellent.

When accidents did happen, how did the rest of the crews in the squadron sort of respond?

Depends what the accident was and how it happened and all the rest, but when someone was badly hurt it’s a pretty

03:00 traumatic thing at times. It was what was happening and it could never happen to you and it was always the other guy and that was the attitude. We maybe played a bit hard and we did drink a fair bit and some of our parties in the mess of a night and the games we used to play in the mess. They’d certainly make your hair stand on end if you knew.

03:30 **We’d love to have our hair stand on head. Can you tell us about some of those games that you played?**

Oh dear oh dear, this is going to be hard to put it so it’s reasonable.

You can tell us anything. We’ve heard so many stories.

One of our favourite games was called ‘Cardinal Poof’. Now there was a story of what Cardinal Poof was and what he

04:00 did and you all had to know that off by heart, all sitting around and drinking, and if you faltered when it was your turn when it was passed on to you, it was called ‘Cardinal Poof Says’ and it was your turn. And if you made a mistake you had to drink a glass of beer and they all sang, “Down, down, down, down, down.” You can imagine as it went on and on and on and you made more

04:30 than one mistake in the end you were really in a bad way, but we drank. Another one we used to put the tables on top of one another in the mess and they reached a height where you could just reach the ceiling, and with a pencil we would see who could stretch out the furthest to make a mark and you can imagine what used to happen. Blokes used to tumble

05:00 down and we’d catch them and things like that. All those sorts of things went on all the time, but it was

great. It was part of the whole life, lifestyle, but most enjoyable.

What role do you think alcohol played for you?

Oh it was a great relief, oh relax, yeah, had to be. I don't

05:30 think there was, I can't remember anyone who didn't drink within the squadron. If there was – there would be of course – and I'm talking about aircrew, I'm not talking about any of the ground staff. But in the main, seventy per cent of that aircrew enjoyed a drink.

Had you been a drinker before you joined the air force?

Oh no. I didn't smoke and I never

06:00 drank. I had been involved in the Boy Scouts and all these good things and Biggles, and King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and you name it all, and that's how I was brought up. The air force changed all that.

So when did you start smoking?

I didn't start smoking until I was in the Beaufighter squadron.

06:30 We were coming back from a pretty nasty do and we got hunted by a couple of Zeros. And we always had an emergency pack – you call that a K ration I think the Americans called them – and in that it would have a number of things, chocolate, dried fruit, some sweets and a packet of cigarettes.

07:00 Well I'd never used them to this day and we'd had a bad time and that's when I lit my first cigarette and never stopped because we were getting cigarettes free of charge, American cigarettes, pretty strong cigarettes as far as cigarettes go, and I became a very heavy smoker, very heavy. That's when I started smoking.

07:30 **Now what about the drinking? You said you weren't a drinker before you joined the air force. How did that sort of develop?**

I don't know, probably started in Melbourne. I think that's where it started, in the early days of training, going into [Young and] Jackson's on Friday nights. It wasn't serious as drinking as we did in the squadron.

08:00 Yeah, I guess that's where it started.

So with that amount of serious drinking that was going on with the squadron, were people struggling with hangovers when they went out the next day?

Sometimes, oh yes, you'd run a bit woolly sometimes. If we knew there was an operation on, different matter. When we were in 30 Squadron, for instance, we didn't get much grog [alcohol]

08:30 anyway to start with. We had none because Papua New Guinea was a dry area and all we got was what we flew in illegally and that wasn't much. And we'd have one party a month or something like that; that was about it. And we were issued with two bottles of beer a week, later on, as we got a bit better. But there wasn't a lot of heavy drinking done up in New Guinea, not in 30 Squadron.

09:00 **But in 23 Squadron when people were drinking quite heavily, do you think people were ever under the influence of that sort of hangover when they were flying?**

Well they mightn't have been a hundred per cent, but they were all right. Never heard about anyone talking about grog having an influence in an accident. I think you would find that people who had

09:30 been recommissioned the next day would not be involved in drinking. I think it was a pretty normal decision to make, but I don't think you were forced into anything, but I doubt you'd want to have a bellyful of grog if you were going out at seven o'clock in the morning. But occasionally some of the guys got caught, but not often I think. Les Jackson was one.

10:00 He was a heavy drinker but he could fly standing on his head, but that's the way things go.

When you were going out in the Wirraways did you have any sort of lucky charms or anything that you took with you?

Always had one or two. In my navigation bay I carried the first pair of shoes that were bought for my daughter, and of course

10:30 I had a nice photograph of Bet in my wallet. They were two things I always carried. I don't know if I looked on them as a lucky charm, but I just took them.

You liked to have them with you?

I liked to have them.

Did any of the pilots have lucky charms?

I'm sure, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Do you remember any of those?

No, I couldn't, no way.

11:00 I couldn't remember any.

So I think we said earlier that with the 23 Squadron you were involved in one bombing?

Oh I dropped bombs, two bombs, on a submerging submarine off Point Lookout.

That's right, it was the sub [submarine], but you missed it.

I don't think it was ever in any danger.

What's the sensation

11:30 **like in a Wirraway when you've dropped those bombs?**

It was a bit exciting to start with and we had a bit of an argument there about what it was – was it Japanese, was it German, or was it American? And Ron made the decision as in the briefing: "No shipping in the area."

12:00 And away he went and took no time, we weren't far away when the decision was made, looking, looking, looking. But we dropped a few light bombs in training. We used to do that on Bribie Island and they had an area there which supported landings and we dropped two hundred and fifty pound bombs.

And what's that like, the physical sensation of the plane, what happens when…?

12:30 Nothing, absolutely nothing, no, because the plane's in a dive anyway. And I mean if you're flying straight and level and they lift in height a little bit if you drop, if you drop quite a few bombs at one time, it lost its load a bit like that, it wouldn't move, but not in the Wirraways. I would only be in a Wirraway half a dozen times when we dropped bombs but we

13:00 were always in a dive, always.

So you don't really feel anything, but it's exciting you said?

Part of the fun, yeah, yeah. You don't change in altitude in planes at all.

So who were your best mates in 23 Squadron?

There was quite a heap of them. We were there together for

13:30 so long, some observers and some pilots. Some of them went on to become very famous. Looking at the pilots, not that there was an awful pilots as you can imagine in 23 Squadron because what was happening there then was the pilots would come to the squadron, be there about three months, four months, and they'd be posted overseas to Europe or to the desert and things like that.

14:00 So that meant they didn't send us as they were sending these guys to single-engine aeroplanes, and we stayed with the squadron and changed to another pilot. Some of those, a maiden name I can tell you, one of the most famous is Bobby Gibbs. You're sure to interview Bobby. He became one of our top aces in Kittyhawks

14:30 in 3 Squadron in the desert. And I remember when Bobby, he came to the squadron the same time as Nicky Barr and they hadn't got their commission. They were still cadets when they came. Bobby was a very good pilot and Nicky was very ham-fisted pilot. He was a good pilot, but pretty rough.

15:00 I flew with Bobby for a while and we nicknamed him 'Gibbs Maru', that's how we knew him in the squadron because with his leather flying helmet on, if he was flying in a Wirra beside you, with his goggles on, he looked like a little Japanese for sure, so he became 'Gibbs Maru'. Bobby went on to win lots of decorations and Nicky Barr, of course, you know about.

15:30 He was another one and he became one of our most decorated pilots. Have you read that book of Nicky's?

I haven't, no, I haven't unfortunately. I'd like to though.

It's one of the most exciting books written of the adventures of one guy. He's the guy you want to interview.

Well I'm sure that we will, but we're really enjoying interviewing you at the moment, Peter, believe me. So how would you describe the relationship between you and the pilots?

16:00 Oh very good, very close, good friends, more than just good friends mostly. Sometimes it didn't with the other guys, but with me in most cases, great, as long as we flew together for a couple of months and we did all sorts of things together then. John F Jackson was another one. He was my CO [Commanding Officer], or flight commander, and he became CO of 75 Squadron,

16:30 the first Kittyhawk in New Guinea, and he was shot down and killed. Binky Davis, another close friend. Binky was best man at my wedding and he was the second pilot shot down and killed in 75 Squadron. You see I made some good friends, lost some good friendships, but they were all top people, all top fellows.

17:00 Yeah, quite a lot of them. And I think my only real friend in that same sense, 30 Squadron, was Arthur Thompson, the pilot. I flew with him for eighteen months, which was great, and he had a son born and named him after me and I had a son born and his second name was Arthur, and that was how close the relationship goes. But in 30 Squadron

17:30 it was a good situation because we didn't have separate messes for non commissioned and commissioned officers in that squadron. We had what we called an aircrew mess. And of course we lived in tents up there and they were a two-man tent – a pilot and a navigator – and they camped in the same tent, so you can imagine how close you became after a long, long period and flying aeroplanes in

18:00 missions you do get close; you do get close.

It must have been incredibly hard as a young man to make such good friends then to lose them?

Oh it was tough. Even some of your ordinary friends in the squadron, it was very tough to lose them too.

Were you a religious person?

I don't think so.

18:30 When I was a kid I was. Being of a Scottish family my family was Presbyterian, and church and Sunday School three times a Sunday. I even sang in the choir. But I grew out of that here in Australia.

So during the war in those first few years did you ever pray?

19:00 I don't think as such on my own. I might have hoped and I don't think, no, I couldn't say I prayed. I know I was scared a lot, yeah. Of course subsequent to the war and postwar years three of my friends are chaplains. Two of them are my fishing mates, would

19:30 you believe? They are still serving and I still go to services, weekend services and enjoy their services. One is Roman Catholic and the other is Presbyterian, but I can't say I'm very Christian, very religious. Maybe I think I'm a bit Christian.

So can you tell us about transferring to 30 Squadron, how that happened?

Well that's pretty simple.

20:00 The pendulum does swing your way eventually. Someone down in headquarters decides, "It's time we sent this bloke," and that's what happens, you get posted. And I was posted to 5 Operational Training Unit at Wagga [Wagga Wagga] and of course we had operational training units there. Experienced pilots and crews were sent there to train on a particular type of aeroplane.

20:30 OTU [Operational Training Unit] units were Beauforts, Beaufighters, Kittyhawks and so on, different over the years. And I got posted to 5 OTU and the system there was they posted the same number of pilots as navigators and the system was you sorted yourself out, you weren't allocated. In the first few weeks there you'd go and talk to a bloke

21:00 and you'd find out a bit about his record. And of course I was a bit fussy, having spent a fair bit of time in the air force, but I had a recommendation on this particular bloke and I knew what he'd done. What I found out later, he'd been told about me and he was looking for me and I was looking for him, simple as that, and it sorted out.

21:30 **That's Arthur?**

Yeah, Thompson. Worked out wonderfully well.

So do you remember when you first met him?

Down there when we all got together to be given the first talk to and things like that and in the mess.

What did you think of him when you first met him?

He looked anything but a pilot. A little fellow, smaller than me, quiet and

22:00 he was a farmer – came off a property north of Adelaide. But oh dear he had a great record in flying. He'd been barnstorming away back in the early days and things like that, became a flying instructor and then joined the air force, so he had a lot going for him. And the chief ground instructor down there was on my wireless course, Col Butterworth, he gave me the drill on Arthur

22:30 and I don't doubt that it was him that gave Arthur the drill on me. I think that's how it came about, but he was not a very prepossessing looking a bloke as far as a pilot was concerned, but he soon proved what he was once we got started flying. He was great, very good.

How did you hit it off?

Personally, excellent, as you can

23:00 imagine. We're still in touch regularly, oh my word.

What did you think about being posted to the Beaufighters?

It was the best thing that could have happened to me. Took a long time, I thought.

Why were you so excited about it?

Here was a chance to get into a really good aeroplane and get into the war and do something

23:30 after all that training we had, and here it was and couldn't have got a better opportunity.

So what was it about the Beaufighter? You say it was a really good aeroplane, but can you tell what it was about it that you liked so much?

Yes, its ability as a fighter, its armament was the heaviest of all aeroplanes. It had six machine guns, four twenty mill [millimetre] cannon.

24:00 It could carry bombs and it could carry rockets. In England they carried torpedoes and they were doing a splendid job in England as a night fighter and attacking shipping and we got them. At Tarakan they were the fastest aircraft in the war zone here and in the south-east Pacific. The Japanese Zero was the fastest till then, till we arrived

24:30 and we were about fifteen knots per hour faster than the Zero. It's a nasty aeroplane on the ground, very hard for a pilot, swung badly on takeoff. We lost a lot of aeroplanes that way. But once in the air for a pilot… Of course I have never flown a Beaufighter because there was only one control – you couldn't get anywhere near it because I was way, way at the back –

25:00 but what the pilots tell me and you listen to and the way it goes, well you realise the power it's got because Bristol Hercules engines had one thousand, six hundred and seventy-five horsepower each, which is an awful lot of horsepower in two engines. On takeoff, once the pilot opened those throttles, it just threw you back in your seat

25:30 and you were pinned back in your seat and oh they used to have a lot of power and when you saw them in action, you knew you were in a top aeroplane. You knew you were in a war and you knew you were in a war you could win; you had a lot going for you.

So what sort of training did you do at 5 OTU?

All the normal training, conversion. Some of the pilots who

26:00 supposedly came off single-engine aircraft so they had Beauforts. They were a medium bomber, built by the same people who built the Beaufighter, and that had dual control. And the pilots went and flew a number of hours in Beauforts with Beaufort flying instructors. That got them into that sort of configuration

26:30 and once they got a bit of skill then they'd allow us to fly in the Beaufort, with your pilot. And we did, to start with, navigation exercises, cross-country navigation exercises day and night and that's about all the Beaufort training was. Ran to about fifty hours. And then they went into Beaufighters

27:00 and we went through the whole bit, gunnery, bombing and navigation until we got skilled, we all got skilled.

Do you remember your first experience in a Beaufighter?

Not as such, I don't think so. No I don't think so, no.

So did you and Arthur team up in the training, actually teamed up

27:30 **and started training together or…?**

Prior to the training, down there at the time that we both arrived, when he first arrived. Yeah, we had quite an experience. We had a couple of experiences that may be worth mentioning in a Beaufort. One of our cross-country exercises from Wagga was to Parafield Aerodrome in South Australia. Arthur overshot there on

28:00 his landing – the first time he'd made a mistake, in my view – and he ran through the boundary fence, across a road and through another fence, but he did very little damage to the aeroplane. We were off the next day when they patched it up. And then I made an awful blue in a Beaufighter and my problem then. One night, late at night, doing night nav exercises

28:30 right to the South Australian border and we turned at Swan Hill, right on the border, round about half past eleven or something like that at night, and I'd given Arthur a course to follow and we had a radio

aid, the only aid we had in those days – it was what you called a 'direction finding loop' – attached to your radio and as you know radio transmitters

29:00 they put a signal into the air, the loop picked that up and by winding that loop you can get the direction that signal came from and that gave you one line of position. You didn't know if you were going towards it or going away from it and it was a good thing at night. Now that was during war years and of course everything in the country was blacked out and you saw nothing, absolutely nothing. And I was tuned into Wagga. It was a Wagga

29:30 normal broadcasting station, and the pilot then can fly on the signal. By listening to the signal, if he wanders off it he gets a change and he comes back onto it and he just checks our course with that. When he'd done that and said, "Okay," I'd switch it back to music and we'd listen to the music and have a yak [chat] and things like that because it was about an hour and

30:00 three quarters flight in from there. And it came midnight and I switched from the signal for Arthur back to listen to the radio and the guy on the radio announced that the station was closing down for the night, and it was 4BC Brisbane, so we'd been flying to Brisbane not Wagga. So I really had to do some work. Fortunately I kept what we called a DR Flight,

30:30 plotting our course, and I was able to plot back on time and distance and speed and figure out, "That's where we might be." I gave him a course then to Wagga and would you believe in twenty minutes we saw the flashing light of Wagga aerodrome, but oh boy, if that guy hadn't have come up and said, "4BC Brisbane,"

31:00 we would not have had a clue. We would have been done like a dinner. We would have run out of fuel before we got anywhere and had to get out. However he said, "4BC Brisbane," and that shows you how easy it is to make a mistake.

Absolutely. So I mean that was your only mean of knowing where you were

31:30 **with the…?**

No, at night-time that was your only aid. It didn't tell you where you were.

The only aid, I mean?

The only aid gave you a line of position, if you were a thousand miles away. If you could get two you could plot them, use what you called dead reckoning all the time. You had wind velocity

32:00 given you by the met [meteorology] section, you knew what wind was supposed to be blowing, not that it did blow, and you just calculated a course according with the speed and things like that. And you plotted that along and you plotted at timed intervals and you marked the position and it gave you your position at that time. And you should always go back to that in case something happened. But it was

32:30 purely dead reckoning and that was the theory of it. If the wind had have been blowing in a different direction you would have been miles off, and because you had that check you couldn't take a different sight. But I always kept a DR plot, always; it was not difficult.

So while you were at OTU, 5 OTU, what was actually happening in the war in the Pacific at that time?

Beaufighters, and the Japs were giving us a bad

33:00 time. Kokoda was on and all that and the Japs were pushing still forward. And then 30 Squadron were formed and they went up. They were there two months before we went up and of course our task then was mainly supporting the army

33:30 in the mountains and attacking Japanese held airports that they'd captured in northern New Guinea, like Lae, Buna, Salamaua, Madang. And they were having some good successes, strafing aircraft along the ground and they did very well, and that's about the stage it was.

In that training

34:00 **before you went to New Guinea what were you told to expect of the Japanese as an enemy?**

They were pretty good pilots; they proved that and we knew that. It was totally different to what we knew when we were in Wirraways. We thought they were a bunch of no-hopers, these Japanese. We were world beaters

34:30 in Wirraways, incredible! But no, totally different situation. We knew we had a formidable enemy against us, well trained in good aeroplanes and very dangerous fighter aeroplanes as far as we were concerned, these Zeros. We could do nothing about it. We couldn't combat that, but we knew we had that hand, but we had an aeroplane that was good. We were faster. If

35:00 they got at us we could run. That's what we had to do. And we were a good attacking aircraft because we'd attack low. We'd get in and do our job before they knew we were there half the time. Made it very difficult for the biggest fighters in the air to get at us, but mind you the lower level ground ack-ack was

very intense at times, pretty dangerous.

So before you left Australia, what were

35:30 **your thoughts going into that?**

Oh keen, oh yeah, yeah, because we'd heard some of the results of what was going on, oh you bet. I can remember when we left Garbutt, we got the job to fly Beaufighter from Garbutt to Milne Bay and as we were approaching I

36:00 went, "Oh gee, I wonder how I'm going to be?" All of a sudden it dawned on me, I think, what was happening. I wondered how I'd make out that's all, I'm sure of that. I really doubted then. And then what happened was a different matter, but then I wondered could I front up to it and I wouldn't like to let Arthur down.

36:30 So I can't think of anything else.

Did you ever express any concerns of those concerns to Arthur?

Oh you bet, oh yes, oh crikey, I would say, but in that case I didn't until after we landed in Milne Bay and I felt like an old hand when we were down on the ground, but I was a bit scared.

37:00 **So that was your first introduction to overseas, Milne Bay? That was your first? So can you tell us what your first impressions were of what you saw there?**

Well we didn't stay there long. We went back straight up to Port Moresby to the Seven Mile the next morning. Oh it was strange, but it was great to be in the squadron and getting used to it. The biggest advantage we had,

37:30 we knew most of the fellows. We knew the CO, knew the flight commanders, knew some of the ground staff, so we weren't into a strange area; it was something we knew. I think that was a big help. And then of course the next thing they did there were periods where you were taken by other pilots in other crews around the ridges

38:00 and shown the ropes and practise this and practise that before you're even allowed out on a mission, so you got familiarised around the area and it was a pretty good introduction. And of course all the time these guys were coming back from doing missions and you can hear what they've been up to. Then they give you a milk run or two to start with and

38:30 very seldom did any crews get pushed onto a tough target straight away. Brian Walker was our CO, 'Blackjack' Walker, and he was a great CO. He was a flamboyant person, a brilliant flyer, a brilliant flyer. He became a DeHavilland's test pilot after the war and yeah, he knew how to run a squadron and that's why he had an aircrew mess, the only

39:00 squadron that had it. He used to wear a big gun, an American gun of some sort. We used to wear the old Smith and Wesson revolvers, but not 'Blackjack', and he'd fire at anything around the camp. Because we were camped off the strip fortunately. We were camped up in June Valley in the hills, which would be about two ks [kilometres] from the

39:30 strip, which was a great idea because when we got bombing raids, the bombing raids were always on the town of Moresby or on the strip and we never got a bomb in the camping area. As a matter of fact when you got used to it, a bit scary at first. But when the sirens went… No, they weren't sirens. They were gunshots. Three gunshots would go for an air raid.

40:00 One would go for a yellow alert to say that they were attacking about twenty minutes away, and then three for the attack starting. But that was a bit scary. But when the searchlights picked them out at night, it wasn't good either. But then you got used to it. The bombs were not landing in the camp area and we used to get our camp chairs out and sit and watch

40:30 the show, oh yeah, listen to the guns. At first you'd dive into a slit trench. I can remember that the slit trench was inside our tent, Arthur's and mine, under our bed. Of course we didn't realise it early in the piece, but redback spiders and things like that made homes in these trenches so I doubt if we ever used it other than those first few nights

41:00 that we had bombing raids. Like the rest of the squadron, once there was an alert on we'd get out in a cleared area and watch the show. There was danger because one of the things that happened, and it did happen a lot, we'd get nose cones and shrapnel fall from the sky from the anti-aircraft guns, from their shells. They had a big brass nose

41:30 cone that carried all sorts of things and that never broke up in the explosion, and some of the guys had them go through their tents and they sounded like a little bomb when you heard them. When they were coming down they whistled – you could hear them – but you knew it was a nose cone because you could hear the big bombs going down on the strip; it was a totally different thing.

Tape 5

00:32 Oh four months, three and a half months.

And after those few initials days, what sort of operations did you do then?

Oh the first op, as an operation, apart from early exercises, were army support stuff. By the time we got there the army had turned the Japs back up on the Kokoda Track

01:00 and we were doing support exercises on that, on both the Kokoda and on Newgo. Our first three missions were attacks up there on Japanese positions that we never saw. All we saw was mountain tops and jungle, jungle, jungle, because it was scary stuff.

01:30 Because of the positions we were trying to shoot at were down in valleys and the ridges rose so steeply and Arthur used to say, “Gee, I didn’t think I was going to go over that one.” I said, “Oh yeah,” and this went on. It was difficult that they used to give us an army officer to give us the datum points, where to start shooting,

02:00 and they were our first three or four missions. And we went onto targets like Lae, one of the big airstrips, and Salamaua.

With those first three missions that you did, can you remember one of those or the first one that you did and can you describe it from the start?

Oh hardly, oh dear. All I can say

02:30 is we were briefed and we’d done some hours flying and we knew what the score was and we were one of three aircraft. We were being led, so my part of it was just to keep a dead reckoning plot. I didn’t have to do any navigation because the bloke in the lead aircraft was doing that, and well we got to where we went and

03:00 started strafing. And one thing I found difficult was one of the duties of an observer in a Beaufighter was to load the cannons. There were four cannons and the breeches were just in front of the observer’s feet. And the drums held a hundred cannon shells, weighed fifty-six pound, and we had twelve of those, four on the breeches and four on each side of the aircraft, and they were

03:30 very heavy. But the pilot only had to hold his thumb on the button for a second and those four drums were empty. They had to be changed and it was no fun. You’d get an empty one off and Arthur would know I was changing them, but he’d still be pushing the aeroplane all over the place and cause I’d sit on my bum sometimes and

04:00 I’d lose the drum sometimes, lose a full one sometimes, and trying to put it on the top of a breech was pretty hard work.

And how often would you have to do that?

Twice, at the most, twice at the most. And of course the cockpit was full of cordite fumes, coming up, and you knew there was a war on somewhere. You were a part of it and you could smell it. That’s my first impressions of that.

04:30 And later on, on the third mission, they started a feint and I dropped half a dozen screamers with tobacco tins, tins of tobacco in to see if, for the army blokes to give them something to smoke and things like that, but we never ever heard about any of those things being recovered. But they were not too hard exercises, very little ack-ack or anything like that.

05:00 It was a good way to start, I’m sure, even though it was dangerous flying, very dangerous flying.

How did you adjust to the conditions in New Guinea?

Oh I had no problem. Camping was all right with me and we made ourselves comfortable, yeah, yeah.

You didn’t get sick?

Oh yes I got malaria, got over that pretty quick. Broke an arm on my

05:30 gun butt once. I got two days off for that, we got two days off for it, back and then that was a dreadful thing. Had plaster and insects used to get inside the plaster and I had a long spike, it was no fun, no fun.

06:00 **When you got malaria, did you have to fly?**

I was in hospital.

You were in hospital?

Yeah, for a couple of days, but only a few days off and I went back. I got bitten by a scorpion and that wasn’t funny. The only entertainment we had there was open air theatres and a couple of tins with a

coconut log on and a screen. And the Americans had them

06:30 and 22 Squadron near us, they had one, and we used to go there of a night. And of course it rained an awful lot and normal gear was your tin hat and a waterproof cape and invariably it rained. But one night a scorpion got in on my trousers and bit me on the belly. Oh gee, it hurt. I had a bad time for a couple of days. I

07:00 caught it and fortunately killed it.

What happens when you get bitten by a scorpion?

Just painful. I don't think I even got a temperature or anything like that, just dreadful pain. He was only about that big. Don't think he could be that deadly. I had more problems.

And what about Arthur, did he get sick?

No, oh no, he was

07:30 terrific and he wasn't a huge bloke or anything like that. Not once, not once.

So what happened after those initial three missions?

Oh well, then we started attacks on Buna and I've listed some of them from the official

08:00 operation reports. There is a CD [compact disc] I've given you there of where I've written some stuff of what I've done, what we're talking about. I've done a bit of that. It's pretty rough, but I thought it will confirm if you need the operations of 30 Squadron which I've described there. I've taken it straight from the official records.

What was the first most unsettling

08:30 **operation that you did? The first really dangerous?**

That's hard to say because we did quite a few that were very successful early.

Can you tell us about those?

Well Salamaua was one. And that was a strongly held place and our

09:00 first attack on that, when we attacked the installations there and they had a lot of anti-aircraft stuff there and it was pretty deadly. We lost an aircraft on one of those missions that was flying number two. They had big guns and they used to fire them at us out to sea and things like that; that was pretty deadly. We did a couple on that and we used to do joint ones with

09:30 22 Squadron that had Bostons. And they were attacking the same place at the same time and one of their pilots got badly hit there once and he went back a second time and he was shot down and he was awarded the only VC [Victoria Cross] that was awarded during the war, so it was a pretty hot target. Lae was another one that was pretty hot. Madang wasn't too bad.

What was at Lae?

10:00 Lae? That was a fighter strip. They used to stage their fighters from Rabaul to Hoskins Strip on New Britain then over to Madang and then down to Lae because the Zero didn't have a long range like the Spitfires, didn't have a long range for duration, rather, and that's how they'd stage them. This is how we caught them. We had blokes – they called them

10:30 coast watchers – and they'd spot the aircraft being brought in and landed and they'd have to stay overnight so they'd arrange an operation to be organised for first light and the aircraft would still be on the strip. And that's how Beaufighters were so successful in the early pieces. They'd catch six or seven aeroplanes in the one go, so we became pretty deadly for them,

11:00 even with that. But we then moved then to Milne Bay. We were there for maybe a month and that was a dreadful place. It rained and it rained and it rained and the ground was so wet and soggy that the strips were covered with steel matting

11:30 called Marsden Matting otherwise the aircraft couldn't land on them. But mud used to ooze up through the matting and the aircraft on landing would go all over the place. And there were still the remnants of the early attacks where the army had beaten them, and on the end of the strip they'd mass buried a lot of Japanese and

12:00 the stink from that, you could smell it in the aeroplane. You could even smell it when you were on the ground. It was dreadful. Yes, it wasn't a nice place. Sometimes it rained so much that we couldn't fly. I had a hobby there to pass the time away. There used to be flying squirrels. We called them 'silla sills'. They called them

12:30 flying squirrels here, beautiful little creatures, and they lived in the fibre of the staghorns up in the palm trees. And they made great pets, so I managed to get a set of climbing irons from an army sea unit

and you could climb trees with it, a big leather belt, and I'd climb up the trees to the staghorns and pull them apart and had some of the blokes all round.

13:00 And I'd pull these little things and they'd fly to the ground and we'd catch them and we'd put them in a cage. That all came to a sad end too because one day when I did that and I pulled the frond away there was a dirty big snake there and it gave me such a fright the irons came out of the tree and I was onto the tree with a leather belt and I went down to the bottom. I got gravel rash, I can tell you.

13:30 But I passed on a lot of those little silla sills and I had a couple that I used to sit on the bar in the mess and enjoy cheese and things like that. Used to sleep in my shirt at night in the tent. But that passed the time away, as very little to do unfortunately, play poker and pontoon. Then we went onto Goodenough,

14:00 Goodenough Island, further north. And it was a lovely place, beautiful, paradise. And we were camped in the foothills of a very steep mountain that overlooked the strip and at the back of the place a lovely stream ran down and made a big swimming hole in the back and that's where we got our fresh water and that's where swam, and

14:30 living conditions there were the best we ever had. It bought us closer to the attacks. We were now pushing the Japs back a bit to New Britain and our targets were in New Britain, like Arawe and Gasmata and that was two hundred and fifty nautical miles across the Solomon Sea, which was a fair step, and the closer we could get the better. And Goodenough

15:00 was nearly the closest we got, but we were doing it there.

What was actually happening on Goodenough?

Beg your pardon?

What was actually happening on Goodenough?

Well the army captured it back from the Japanese and the construction mob fixed up the strip and they bought forward aircraft like ourselves and the Beauforts to carry the attack on to

15:30 New Britain, and then captured another island further north called Kiriwina and then we moved on to Kiriwina, kept bringing us closer and giving us more time to spend over New Britain.

What were some of the bigger missions you did on Goodenough?

From there, Gasmata, the Japanese held strip, the hot one, the salsa,

16:00 Arawe, there was an interesting one on Arawe later on. Well it was the first landing of the combined landing with the army in their push forward with the Japanese and we got the job of organising the coordination of signals with the navy. The navy had a task force for that and the

16:30 famous ships that you might have heard of were the Australia, the Shropshire, the Arunta; they were all part of that task force. They were operating from Milne Bay and we were at Goodenough and they couldn't cover that task force with fighter aircraft as Arawe was too far away, so we were given a lot of that task and Arthur and I got the job to do the coordination and things like that.

So what was involved in that?

17:00 Well we went back to Milne Bay and were briefed by the navy – and that was an interesting story, getting briefed by the navy – but to be briefed and to organise things and so on and doing that in that first trip down. Well we were told that we just had to walk from the strip to the wharf and there was a little boat there to pick us up and take us out to

17:30 the warships and we get there and oh yeah, there's a little boat there. Wasn't it a fancy little boat and a couple of sailors. And Arthur and I, well I don't know, but we wore just shorts and leggings and khaki, no badges of rank or anything like that; I had a grubby hat. And anyway we were walking out and Arthur said, "I don't think they're for us." And

18:00 he said, "You go and talk to them, Pete." So I did. And they said, "Oh no, we're waiting for a couple of big shot air force blokes to come," and I said, "We're them." So you can imagine what we must have looked like to these blokes. We convinced them who we were and they took us and away they went and went out to the Shropshire and had to pick a bloke up there who was the boss of the that task force, a bloke by the name of John Collins,

18:30 Vice Commodore Collins. And he came down and he landed in the boat and they were blowing whistles and things like that. And we were sitting out the back and he walked out the back and he looked at both of us and I can remember his words: "Don't tell me you're the airmen?" Oh, that was the only words he ever said us. And we went on the Aussie [Australia] for the briefing.

19:00 But fortunately things changed after the briefing and we were allocated an officer who was called 'Guns' to look after us. And we were down in the wardroom in his quarters and we had a hot shower and got fresh underclothes and had a few grogs and we went back. I got two nice new towels to take back. So that was our introduction.

19:30 We did the job.

What did the briefing involve?

Oh just finding… I forgot! What we did too, we had a practice. I forgot about the practice. Boats aren't so easy to find out on the water and the job was just to protect the fleet from attack by aircraft, but yes, they had a practice. And pretty important, me being the navigator I've got

20:00 to find those ships. Couldn't find them as there was something wrong with the position they'd given, but anyway doing a bit of a square search I found them and we did our practice of communications and things like that and then we went back. Then the operation went on and we didn't take part in it, just briefed our own people. But for some reason, I don't know why, we didn't go.

20:30 When it was all over instead of someone who went, we were sent back for the debriefing, which was crazy, but we didn't mind. I suppose because we were the contact and Arthur had become a pretty senior pilot in the flight by then. So we went back for the main debriefing with the navy. And we listened to that and things like that, had a party and I disgraced myself.

21:00 I discarded my flying boots and was wearing army boots flying, and after a few drinks on the Aussie, departing the ship, when you leave a ship you've got to salute the quarterdeck so they told us this and pointed out where the quarterdeck was and they were escorting us to where you go over and I had to turn around, and as I turned around with my steel nailed boots

21:30 you know where I finished up? Sitting on the deck, disgraced, an absolute disgrace. Anyway we got off the ship.

What did Arthur say to you?

He thought it was a joke like I did. Yeah, that was a pretty good incident, the whole lot, meeting the navy, but it was impressive. We were living in tents, doing our own washing

22:00 and things weren't always the best, and you go aboard a ship like this and these guys are in starched, pressed, clean clothes, spotless and done for them.

Is it really different when air force meets navy? Do they have really different procedures?

Oh yes, oh certainly, no question about that, yeah.

Was it

22:30 **difficult communicating with them?**

No, never difficult just communicating, goodness gracious me no. All had the same things, no.

So what happened after that?

Well that was Arawe, Gasmata, then we pushed them back a fair bit by

23:00 then. And their main base, of course, was always Rabaul in the Pacific. That's where everything went. And it was a huge base and they had five different strips up there with their aircraft. And we weren't carrying out attacks on Rabaul, but the Americans were attacking Rabaul with heavy bombers

23:30 from high level and our Beauforts were attacking the shipping in Simpson's Harbour with torpedoes, but it wasn't very successful. We were then given the task of picking up their shipping along the coast. They were sending their shipping down the coast in barges, mostly in barges, because it got so dangerous for their shipping in daylight, with the way things were going

24:00 that they had to travel by night. Well we used to do barge sweeps on certain sections of the New Britain coast and they'd camouflage these ships and we'd find them and shoot them up and burn them up and things like that. We did a fair bit of that. I did a lot of that on both all around New Britain, all around New Britain. I don't know

24:30 if I've got a copy of it, but there was an article in the Courier Mail about Thompson and I, sixteen barges in sixteen, no it wasn't sixteen barges, sixteen kills in sixteen days, and we did have a lot of luck there. We got a lot. And this is how we were slowly strangling them with their further held positions up around the northern part of New

25:00 Britain. We were stopping supplies getting to them because the Bismarck Sea battle was the biggest of them and they were reinforcing a lot of blokes there. And I think the Battle of the Bismarck Sea was a combined operation where 30 Squadron led most of the attacks and they destroyed eight ships, two destroyers, but they had over eight

25:30 thousand troops that they were taking to Lae to reinforce.

Before we go to the Battle of the Bismarck Sea, can you tell me a little bit more about some of those barges that you went for?

Barges, they all carried fuel or men. They were only armed lightly with two or three machine guns, but

some of them were fully loaded. You can see a couple of pictures I took of barges we got, and they used to burn beautifully.

What

26:00 **did you see from your position?**

Uh?

What could you see from your position?

Most things, oh yeah. The pilot was too busy, he was looking ahead all right, but the way it was done, the barge sweep was done with two aircraft, one down low on the water and one at a thousand feet and the one at the top was protecting the area from fighters.

26:30 Then they'd change over halfway through or something like that, or if you spotted barges you'd make an attack and you used your ammunition up and that was that. That's how it was done in pairs. The navigator, he had a better position because it would be easy for the pilot to fly past the camouflaged boat because they put palm trees around them and a couple of times you'd

27:00 go past them and you'd think, "Was there something there?" And he'd say, "I don't know." He'd say, "Yes," or, "No." And once we went back and we got four barges. There were barges there. One of the trips was very interesting. By this time we were leading all these attacks because of Arthur's seniority and I was responsible for all the navigation.

27:30 And it's a long way across the water and we were going to just about eighty miles south of Rabaul we were heading, and our landfall was wanting to make, and I spotted an aeroplane away in the distance, travelling the same direction and a little higher than us. And I mentioned it to Arthur and he said, "We'd better go and have a look at it," so I gave him a course to fly.

28:00 As we got closer I identified it and called it a Beaufort, one of our own bombers, and Arthur doubted it and he said, "We'll fly up a bit closer and say good day to him." "Righto." And away we went. And as we got closer, he was up sun, and as we got close enough he had a big red dot on him, a Japanese bomber, so we attacked it and shot it down and

28:30 I got some good piccies [pictures] of that. And we used some ammunition as we went on and found a couple of barges at Wide Bay and came home. So anyway, when we got home… 30 Squadron only ever shot down two aircraft in aerial combat and that was one of them. We had a party in the mess that night, I can tell you, much excitement.

What would happen when you'd come back from something like that

29:00 **in debrief? Can you describe that debrief if you can remember what happened after that?**

Well debriefing, oh well, I think with that particular one you can't confirm a victory. It's got to be confirmed and there's nothing better than a photograph to confirm a victory. And in the other case you reckon you shot him down and it's all this, that and other and it's only called probable. But with pictures, of course,

29:30 no problem. Well there are two intelligence officers, usually a CO and an army officer, a couple of other guys as a rule and they'd fire questions at you and you'd just tell them what you saw. They'd ask particular questions about anti-aircraft positions, what was there and all the rest of it and what you did and what ammunition was expended and what damage. And

30:00 when we were with 5th Air Force it was very good when you did any of those because they gave us a fifth of their moonshine liquor, but it was terrible stuff.

Where would the debrief take place?

Back in the squadron, in the operations room.

Can you describe the operations room?

Gee whiz, well in our

30:30 case it was always a hut constructed by natives, but that's about all that was. And it would have tables and maps and all the rest of it. And a big, what would you call it? An operations board – had the whole status of the squadron: the squadron aircraft, the state of whether they were serviceable, unserviceable,

31:00 and then for a mission it would either have a map, a full-scale map and a few directions and things like that. Then it would be listed the name of the operation and the crews taking part and you'd sit round the table and the intell [intelligence] officer and the meteorological officer would

31:30 give their report and they'd give you the weather and brief you on what and show you photographs of what was done before and away you'd go, simple as that.

How long would one of those barges missions take?

About five and a half, six hours – such a long way across the water.

And when you were travelling across the water like that, what did you do in the plane?

32:00 Talked to each other, what else? Of course by then we had good radios and there was no need for morse code or anything, as VHF system had come in and we could talk between aircraft, talk to the ground, and it was a marvellous situation. I had two big radios stuck in behind me and we were pretty well set up that way.

And what if you needed to go to the toilet?

Beg your pardon?

What if you needed to go to the toilet?

Oh yeah, I'll tell you the name

32:30 of it. I hope you're not offended?

I don't get offended easily. We've heard everything. It's okay. No, really, it's interesting as you're in a small space for a long time.

That's right. Each of us had a place where we could be relieved. It was called a 'pisserphone'. It was just a tube with a funnel on it and it hung on the wall, as simple as that.

33:00 Oh yeah, came in handy.

Absolutely.

Uh?

Yeah, absolutely.

It was a long time in the air, not like some of the bomber aircraft as they had toilets as such, but we had nothing.

And what about food?

The only food we had was that K pack of rations. That was enough.

33:30 **And did you suffer much? Did the plane come under much attack on those barges missions?**

Oh yeah, they were armed, oh yeah. They were only two or three machine guns, but you were down right on top of them. If you got down quickly you'd make them duck their heads pretty quick and they mightn't shoot back at you, but we lost a lot of aeroplanes.

34:00 Even in New Britain alone we lost twenty-nine people, which is a lot of people out of one squadron. That's why I did that memorial. Four of them that were shot down, they were captured and they were beheaded by the Japanese, bayoneted to death and beheaded and their remains were found later, fortunately, and they were reburied

34:30 at Bita Paka in the war cemetery at Rabaul. We lost a lot of blokes.

When you were doing those barge missions you lost a lot of blokes at that time?

Well all through that period. I'm only talking about the period I was there, the eleven months I was there. I can't talk about anything else.

Yes, sure, but how long were you doing the barge missions?

Oh, probably

35:00 the last two months I was there. We did some other missions, too, of course. The biggest one we did out of that lot was the one on Rabaul with the Americans. That was a bit of a hairy one, but that was a big mission.

Can you describe that from the start?

Oh yeah, that wouldn't be hard. I can remember that pretty well.

Great.

It was a joint mission, 5th Air Force and ourselves.

35:30 We were a part of 5th Air Force. We flew from Goodenough Island to northern.

Can you go back even further and start with the briefing and how it all came together?

I haven't got to the briefing.

Oh you haven't got there yet? Okay, I'll just be patient then. Sorry.

And we flew to a place called Dobodura near Buna in northern New Guinea

36:00 for the briefing. We stayed there overnight. That night the Japs got into us and bombed us that night. I got the pants scared off me that night for the first time really in a bombing raid. We were camped in a transit camp and pitch black at night and I'd gone to another tent. And they'd put us in these big marquee tents, the crews,

36:30 because we had twelve crews. And there was twenty-four guys and I had gone to see some of the guys in another tent that night and the yellow alert was sounded, pending attack, so I thought, "I'd better head back to the tent that Arthur is in," and by the time I got on – I was just starting walking – the red alert

37:00 came on. And immediately after that oh gee, something went 'bang', 'bang', and it sounded like a stick of bombs and I started running. I thought it was a stick of bombs coming behind me and it was pitch black. Anyway I finally got to the tent and oh was I scared, and I'm telling the fellows and they're laughing like steam. It wasn't bombs at all.

37:30 It was an ack-ack gun that was just beside us, firing. It wasn't funny at the time I can tell you. Anyway we were briefed the next day and there was a very large number of aircraft to get off and the combination of strips there. There were a number of strips all together and they were built of coral. And we were the fastest of the aircraft. The

38:00 big aircraft, like the four-engine Liberators and the [Flying] Fortresses were coming from the other side of New Guinea and some from Australia in that attack. All the twin-engine stuff like us and the B25s. And they didn't have Lightning fighters then, it was B25s. We took off from Dobodura. And there was so many took off

38:30 there was a dust cloud created by the coral dust and we couldn't take off. We just had to wait until it cleared. And we went to our first datum point. We left more than ten minutes later than takeoff time and there were no aeroplanes there. And our next datum of course was back across the Solomon Sea, an island called New Ireland, Cape St George,

39:00 and that's where we did our run in onto the Rabaul target across St George's Channel, which is only fifty miles, and it meant that you could go straight in and be right for a landfall and get right where you wanted to. When we got to the Cape St George there was no Americans and of course we must have been getting further behind. And we headed across to Rabaul and the leader was Bill Bolton, no, no, yeah, Bill Bolton was CO. He was our leader. And

39:30 Arthur and I, we led the last section of four. We were in sections and mid way across the St George's Channel we saw the first of the American aircraft coming out and they were from almost water level to as high as you could look and there was heaps of them. There were over three hundred aeroplanes in it. And as they got closer, all of a sudden some of the aircraft broke off

40:00 and attacked our formations. There was a lot of yelling on the two-way radio and we were flying everywhere, taking avoiding action. And it settled itself down and no-one was hurt, no-one was damaged. And Bolton called us all together back to Cape St George and I thought, "Oh, we're going home." No such luck. He headed us back in and our target was

40:30 Rabapo strip, a fighter strip, and as we approached it… I might have a photograph of this; I took it. As we approached Rabaul it was just large fires everywhere and it was a terrific looking fire as we headed into Rabapo. And sitting over Rabapo there was over forty-four single-engine fighters. They'd got stirred up.

41:00 The Americans had hit them before they got their fighters into the air and of course they got fighters into the air as the Americans were going out and we walked straight into them. We were a bit lucky again. A couple nailed onto us, but we got away from them. I was pretty cunning and we made a run over Rabapo and we finished up over another strip, Tabero, but that happened to be just in the way. And he still had some ammunition so he used it and he got down on the

41:30 Rananga River, which was in the Simpson's Harbour, between the trees, and these two guys lost us, fortunately. We were heading out thinking we were safe and I spotted another two and they really got the jump on us and they chased us for twenty minutes down towards the Solomons, but we just stayed ahead and then no more for twenty minutes and then they gave up and they must have run out of ammunition.

Tape 6

00:31 **Then another two came?**

Yeah, what I forgot to tell you, when we got over to Tabero, the second strip, I spotted one of our aircraft, we got scattered, Dick Stone, and he was climbing away and a Zero was right on his tail and he

shot Dick down and Dick crashed there. And then we had headed down on the Rananga River and got

01:00 out and then another two nailed us, and anyway they left us eventually. And we got back and we were twenty minutes later, we were twenty minutes last at getting back. Like I don't know, there might be a photograph of this, the debriefing, because we were the only two being debriefed and I'm standing there like I'd been dragged through a hedge

01:30 backwards and Arthur's got his head in his hands and we'd had it.

Any damage to the plane?

No, not a scratch. We'd have never got away if they'd damaged the aeroplane, not a scratch. The closest they got was bullet flashes around the aeroplane.

So you were really quite a team?

We

02:00 weren't bad. We enjoyed it too. We really did.

Did you actually see Dick's plane go down?

Dick? No, only saw him shot, but I knew he went down just above… Well couldn't have been anywhere else. The wreck was found many years later, but not the two remains. And anyway

02:30 Dick's… Now, who was it? Wife's father or someone, I don't know, his son, was Stuart, no, son-in-law, Stuart Lovell, it was, yeah. I don't know what business it was, but he had a business in Townsville

03:00 and he spent some time in Rabaul and he visited the wreck site a number of times, and he was determined that they must be there somewhere so he decided to conduct a search, a minute search, which hadn't been done, outside the radius that the air force had done and they discovered the remains of Dick and Laurie Hamill-Smith, and their remains were put together. The air force was good enough, they got a service

03:30 together and got the relatives, flew them up there for a service in Rabaul and reburied the remains.

When you first came across the forty fighters, do you remember what the reaction was? How you…?

Oh hell, they were sitting up a bit high; that was a shock, a bad shock. I'd never seen so many.

04:00 Of course I wasn't the only one that had seen them either.

And what did you and Arthur decide to do at that point? What do you do in that situation?

We were going for our lives, down low. They hadn't seen us. We were hard to see down low on the tree tops, but a couple soon pick you up after a while. But we can only cut and run and if we can get a good enough start they can't catch us.

04:30 But if we don't get a good enough start, and this is how they could catch us, they were higher, and dived down and had speed advantage over you, which could damage you, which happened to us later on of course and they did catch us, but different story, totally different story.

Can you describe the feeling, there must be an adrenaline rush that happens at that point?

Is that what they call it? Never heard that word. All I knew

05:00 was it was a bit of excitement, that's how I saw it, never the 'adrenaline' word, no, that's a fact.

And what would the pilot be saying to you? Are you talking?

Oh all the time. The only thing is it's very hard to keep your voice down when this is on.

05:30 That's what I found anyway.

You'd be shouting?

I've heard Arthur on one chase, oh that was that one I think. Yeah, it was, and he said, "Peter, someone is shooting at us, not me," because of the bullet flashes he saw and that will give you an idea of what the man was like.

And how did you navigate when

06:00 **you got into a situation when you met the forty planes? How did you get out of that as a navigator?**

I've got a thumb. I used to suck it. Now that's the big difficulty. I'm glad you asked a question like that because it's pretty important. Two things happen when you're in something like that and when the cannons are fired the lines are forced and barrels to the cannon is changed and they affect the

compasses, and both

06:30 my compass and the pilot's compass were then incorrect so you had a problem to start with to get back home. You didn't know which compass to fly on and that was just for starters. First you had to know where you were flying from and then you could plot a course. And in this case you were all right. You knew where you were starting from and all I could do was look at my watch

07:00 and get the time and then look at a compass and see a general direction because Arthur was jinking the aeroplane all over the place and he couldn't fly in a straight line. And then I guessed the ground speed and the time and fixed a position that I reckoned might be it and I sucked my thumb and headed on that. But New Guinea was a

07:30 big island and you'd be unlucky to miss it, which was fortunate because I could never make an accurate landfall. Once you hit the island you could map read your way back.

It must have been a relief to get back to that island?

It was nice to see the land, always, always. (TAPE STOPS) Then from Seven Mile we went to Milne

08:00 Bay, the whole unit by ship. The units went from Milne Bay. They went to Goodenough and this is how we progressed as they were taking these islands and then we went to Tarakan and then Kiriwina, Goodenough and Kiriwina. Now I left Kiriwina in December, no, in January, January '44. And in January '44 the unit moved along

08:30 the north coast of New Britain to Noemfoor and then to Morotai and so on. So it was not just me. And we had camps at each place.

At each place. Can you describe the sort of set up at those camps, what it was like?

Oh yes, I think I could. Our first camp was in June Valley outside the Seven Mile at Port Moresby. It was on a hillside and

09:00 it was one k back from Ward's Strip. It was a nice sight and we had very little facilities. Water was difficult to acquire and our messing was done by a mobile cooker and the strangest thing about all this, it will tickle your fancy, we had two cooks

09:30 and they were both of the wrong sort of sexual inclination and it was a great scream amongst all us. They were good kids, good fellows.

I don't understand what you're saying?

You know it.

Tell us what you mean?

I think I've told you enough.

So they were homosexual?

Yeah, that's right.

10:00 **And how did the other blokes react to that?**

Oh they were great. In those days of course homosexuality was a nasty thing, but it's hard to describe it. That's one of the greatest shows ever because they were good cooks. They had nothing to work with and all we lived on… And this is something you may not realise – we never had fresh bread at Port Moresby for three months, not a slice of fresh bread. We had very little fresh meat except for what

10:30 we bought in from Townsville ourselves and we lived on hardtack biscuits and bully beef and goldfish and things like that. And what these guys could do with a tin of bully beef was tremendous, so therefore there was no problem with them as far as we were concerned. They stayed with us right till… They went when we went to Goodenough and that was the last we saw them.

11:00 I thought you might be interested in that. And that was June Valley, very safe camp because we were subject to a lot of bombing in those days and daylight. We only had two big daylight bombing raids, and once we lost three aeroplanes on one and then we moved down to Milne Bay. Oh Milne Bay was frightful. We were living in another camp that wasn't ours. It was 6th Squadron's camp and it was amongst the palm trees

11:30 and it was swampy country and full of mosquitoes and all the rest of it. And fortunately we were only there for six weeks and we moved to Goodenough, and Goodenough was an island paradise, that really was. We camped up in the foothills and we had a cold stream running down with a big pool at the back, a rock pool, and there we got fresh water all the time from there and we lived in elevated floors on our tents

12:00 and it overlooked the strip and the ocean and it was really a delightful spot to be. I was messing officer by then and I used to supplement the mess with tucker. I used to go and trade with the natives for fruit and vegetables and WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s and things like that, and I built a fish trap down on

the beach and we caught lots of fish, more than enough fish for us

12:30 and it was farmed out to other people, other squadrons. And so we lived pretty well there, even though we didn't have fresh bread, again it was bully beef, but we weren't doing all that bad.

How did you come to be messing officer?

Someone has to be messing officer and you just get told, "You're messing officer." You've got no choice when the CO gives you a job; it's a job.

13:00 **And what did that mean? What did you have to do?**

Very little because our rations were allocated. They came from… The army supplied all the food, but we could then work out various items and I collected money from the men. And when we had an aircraft that went back to Townsville to be repaired they'd have to bring a repaired aircraft back, and that would be filled to the top,

13:30 mostly with liquor, eggs, meat, bread, and things like that. And we shared that out of course and that was a great thing to have. And then, of course, acquiring. I got to the point where I got fresh materials available from the natives. I used to trade with… The army would give me big drums of rice and I could trade a drum of rice for

14:00 six chickens. Not that they were worth eating, but they did lay eggs so we had a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK run and that was made out of steel matting and that had to be guarded because… It was part of the guard's duty to check on them. And the other thing they had to guard was the fish trap down the beach because that used to get raided at low tides. I had the fellas build it to my pattern out of timber and wire netting and it

14:30 worked really well.

How did you communicate with the natives?

Pidgin, it's all pidgin right through there and (he speaks pidgin) and, "Where's your Dad?" Things like that. And you certainly learnt to talk a bit of pidgin. Each group of blokes we had a… When we went to Goodenough this happened, and we were allocated a native

15:00 houseboy and they're more trouble than nothing most of the time, but however he did a bit of washing for you, tidied the tent up and things like that and stole what he could, oh yeah. That was all part of the life. It wasn't a bad life on Goodenough.

How did you like those people on Goodenough? What were they like?

Oh they were great because they were Polynesians, particularly the females,

15:30 oh they were very fair skinned, well proportioned and the same as on Kiriwina. On Kiriwina there were very few males. All the males had been acquired for ANGAU [Australia New Guinea Administrative Unit] service with the armed forces. And we used to have open showers there, particularly when we first got to Kiriwina. And there's

16:00 all these females standing around the showers while we were in having a shower, and in the end we got stuff to cover it. But I can remember some of the words they used, "Sinna gar gar, sinna barda gar gar," and, "He's got a bad look," and things like that. We got on well with them. And the other thing I liked was our doctor was a very fine fellow and he would

16:30 go to the villages, and I went with him quite a fair bit when I wasn't flying, and he gave them some medications. Yaws, which was a sort of syphilis amongst natives. It was terribly prevalent and he was very interested in that. On one occasion the king on Kiriwina, yeah, I forget his name now, he had seven wives and

17:00 each wife lived in a different house. And we went there quite a few times and once they put on tribal dances for us, only once, with drums and the whole bit. It was marvellous. It wasn't until later on in life I saw a big sing up in Papua New Guinea, but this was much more a thing and it was great, during that period of time too. But we were getting more confidence as people in ourselves in what was happening and I think that made the big

17:30 difference. Not like the early days when we were taking a bit of a thumping and Morotai, it wasn't real good. It was a flat island, but tucker was a lot better up there. Things were much better. We spent eleven months on the island of Morotai, but of course again attitude was another thing because we

18:00 were doing missions that were just carrying out a job, there was nothing to it.

That was near the end of the war?

Oh yeah.

Sorry.

We finished up dropping pamphlets and things like that there.

When you first arrived in Milne Bay, what were the losses being incurred then? When you first arrived in the Pacific was the situation with the Beaufighters and the Japanese, was it a bad situation there?

18:30 It wasn't good, oh no. The worst was over because the army had kicked the Japs out when we got there, just shortly before, but we were only there for a short period of time. We got shelled one night by destroyers stood off the cape and it was spasmodic. And I think one mission we went on there was three

19:00 destroyers we chased and that came to very little, so we were starting to push them back then.

Can you describe for us exactly what your job involved when you went on these missions?

I thought I'd done that?

Well I mean, what I mean is when I say I know what you did, but could you explain exactly what would happen on a mission sort of from, what you would be doing while you were on the plane?

Each mission might be a bit

19:30 different. Some missions called for more work, but one thing I thought I might have got through, an observer in a Beaufighter had a bit to do, different things. He wasn't just a navigator. First he was a wireless operator and he was then a navigator, he loaded the cannons and he was a photographer and all that work he had to do, so he had a busy

20:00 time except when you were flying over water and all he could keep was keep a navigation log till you made a landfall, and then you were back in action and that was a very busy job. Not like when I went to Liberators. All you did there was become a navigator and spent most of the time asleep, simple as that.

That's what I was getting at, I guess. You were doing so many things. Let's give an example of them. Perhaps you could give us an

20:30 **example of a mission, perhaps one of the more significant missions that you went on and what you had to do on that mission, what your role was?**

Oh well, could I describe one I haven't described to you?

That would be great.

Another good one. It was another barge sweep we were sent on with another aircraft. There were usually two aircraft on a barge sweep and

21:00 as I told you before we led all these missions in those last five months, and we were to make landfall at a place called Brown Island at Wide Bay. That's in New Britain and it's twenty-five miles from Rabaul. Of course at that time we were still armed and still had plenty of aeroplanes and things like that.

21:30 We were fortunate. We found three barges out there and we got a couple of really good fires going. Two of the buggers were oil barges and were laden, and once they started burning a column of smoke went very high and very black. I took my usual couple of pictures and then

22:00 decided I'd like another one and I suggested this would be a good one to Arthur that I come up behind him – I'd done this a few times – over his shoulder with the camera. The camera was about that big, just a handheld camera, and I knew he had some ammunition left and he'd shoot at the barges that were burning, but only hit the water,

22:30 so that simulated an attack and I'd get this picture with bullet splashes in the water and the burning barges. So we did another circuit round, in we went on our town and Ted Marron, he hung off somewhere. I don't where he was while we were doing that one, but I took a couple of pictures and as I headed back to my seat the port wing tip of our plane was shot off!

23:00 Two Zeros had come up and attacked us and I was out of position where I should have been and seen them. What we forgot, or I did really, and maybe Arthur, but we were so close to Rabaul that obviously the smoke and word had got back to Rabaul and they'd despatched these two fighters, caught us with our pants down.

23:30 They attacked a number of times and we took bad damage on the port mainframe, our port main fuel tank was open and fuel streamed out of that until self-sealing took over and held it, and the port a line was destroyed and we had hits and things like that. My seat, the struts were shot away from my seat,

24:00 so I got all this part of my trousers shot away under my right leg and my fly was opened and it had a large piece of aircraft metal stuck in it, so every time I moved I had the most horrible pain in the most private place, but I got it all out all right. Didn't bleed very much.

24:30 And of course these guys ran out of ammunition and we were still flying, but just… And it didn't look like we were going to last too much longer. They vanished and I worked out a position to head for home and Arthur sorted things out. I went forward again to see how Arthur was and had a talk. We had no communication of course – the radios were shot out – and we headed for home.

25:00 And we didn't think we would make it as the port motor was sick. There were a couple of hits in the port motor and we had two hundred and fifty nautical miles to get back to the nearest land we could hit. It was a long, long way. It was an hour and a half in a Beaufighter which can go at full speed. I went forward again

25:30 and Arthur, because of the strain in flying an aeroplane you have servo tabs. They are little tabs on the control surfaces that act in the opposite direction of the control surfaces and they make it so you can handle the steering and columns just like that. Without them you're going to be pulling back on a huge surface against a huge force and you can't do it. This is a problem because

26:00 with the port aimer shot away because the aeroplane was flying like that, and remember you're a hundred, hundred and fifty feet, and we were sort of slipping away, losing our height, then again, and it made me go forward. And I was going forward and I couldn't see his head – he had flaked out. And when I got there his head was down and he was absolutely saturated and of course I could not reach the controls

26:30 because they were all forward of the pilot. I didn't know what to do, shaking him, slapping him, and he came to just before we hit the water and he must have just lifted the nose up enough. I went and got a piece of lanyard off my revolver and used that on the aileron. It's like spectacles, tie it on, and I could hold that up

27:00 and make his work a lot easier. And we headed home that way and we finally got to Kiriwina and we crashed on the island. They carted us off to hospital and things like that. That was some trip, but to get back was an incredible thing, you bet. Fortunately

27:30 my navigation worked again and we were… So that's what I did on that trip.

When you realised you'd been hit and you could see the fuel escaping and so forth, what went through your mind?

Look, training comes in at all times. When you get scared, all I can say is this, I know of no other answer than this,

28:00 you do, you see it as it happens. You see a couple of fighters sitting high above you, peeling off, and boy that is scary. You are absolutely a sitting duck for them, but before you know it you're training's taken over and that's gone, that scary attitude, and you're doing your job, talking to the pilot and keeping him in the right direction, so he can take the right evasive action. One instance

28:30 just near Gasmata, there was a heap of Betty Bombers went over the top of us with a fighter escort. We thought we were pretty safe – we were way down when I saw them – but two of them peeled off and they came down at us and I was able to tell Arthur all the way where they were heading. They saw us and he did a one hundred and eighty degree turn right into the direction they were coming

29:00 from, and of course when they got down low they couldn't find us. And those sort of things help you escape when you're in trouble.

So your training just kicks in?

Kicks in, it's got to, oh yeah. The same when we got that hiding. Again, if it hadn't been for the training, where would you be? If you were just a pretty normal guy who hadn't been trained we both would have been history, wouldn't we?

Did you ever hear of

29:30 **anyone on the squadron ever actually being, if you like, affected by their fear to the point that they couldn't take action?**

Yes, we had three cases. One was a personal friend. I won't mention his name because it's a well-known Brisbane family and his navigator was a well-known speedway driver. They had been shot down very early in the war in an unarmed aeroplane,

30:00 a Douglas C47, in one of the squadrons, up north of Darwin. They spent two days and three nights in the water before they were rescued. The pilot, he eventually, much later on, he went to fight over here and he came to us

30:30 when we were at Goodenough when we were flying, when we started flying over water just too much for him. Normally we had another guy who just chickened out. Every time he went out he had engine trouble and things like that, but he was put on a lack of moral fibre charge, but this particular bloke of course there was no problems at all.

31:00 He was sent home with no disgrace and of course I continued to know him in civilian life because of what their family was and what I was doing, and he couldn't overcome it and he tried. He did three missions over water and had to come back. I would have been worse than he was with all the time they spent in shark-infested waters.

31:30 **You said there was a third case. There were three cases you said?**

Yes, yes, yes, and I'm trying to think who that was. I thought it was back in Australia, couldn't have been. There were certainly three guys. I know who it was now.

32:00 A bloke from Tweed Heads, and he was a hell of a nice guy too. His navigator had been in Wirraways at Rabaul and got shot down there and they started coming back, twice the pilot came back. And he was the other one. He was put on a moral fibre charge. I don't know what happened to him as he lived to a ripe old age. He's dead now, but

32:30 he was a member of our Beaufighters association.

How did the crews view that situation when somebody was up on a lack of moral fibre charge?

Accepted it, reckoned it could have happened to anyone. It was not normal, but as I say your training kicked in when you were in that sort of trouble. We are all built a bit differently, but

33:00 no disregard for any of those guys, no way, not at all. Could have been me as easy as pie, could have been me.

Can you tell us a little bit more about what happened at Rabaul? You told us before about how you flew into that situation where the Americans started attacking you. Can you actually tell us about the attack

33:30 **on Rabaul and what happened once you sorted that situation out there?**

Once we got in? Well we went with twelve aircraft, three flights of four, and we led the last flight of four and we all had stipulated targets because Rabaul was a huge area and it had a large number of strips. And that's what happened: we went in, we all went in and attacked our targets. While we were in there then of course they had these fighters all ready sitting there. Now if we had have gone

34:00 in our normal positions we would have been where we got to the datum point on Cape St George and we would have taken over the lead and led all the aircraft in because that was our role. With such big firepower that we had we could go in there and strafe and allow the bombing mission to be carried out a bit easier. But in fact the reverse happened because we were late, and if we had have done that they wouldn't have had a fighter in the air.

34:30 We would have been in there and knocked them about and got out, which we usually did with the Beaufighter, but we were in the reverse position with the main force going in and dropping bombs. And they got so many aircraft into the air and of course they were still there when we went in and that's when the attacks occurred against us.

It must have been an extraordinary sight to see all those aircraft?

35:00 It used to be bad enough to see two, three or four, but when you see single-engine fighters, a heap, all looking and searching, it was not good, not good. However, we'd had it happen quite a few times, but that was the worst time, oh yeah. It was the longest time once the two actually pinned onto us, and to chase us for twenty minutes was a long, long time.

Was that the biggest

35:30 **chase that you'd experienced in any of those things?**

That was the longest one, oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

For twenty minutes; it must have seemed like longer?

We were halfway down St George's Channel, believe you me, and out the side and no wonder we were so far behind. And we still had fuel, of course, which was fortunate because we did carry a fair bit of fuel, needed plenty of fuel.

It's hard for us to even imagine that.

36:00 **It sort of sounds like a scene out of a movie. I mean, what was it like for you?**

Exciting, as I say. What else could it be for young people? Not like an old fellow like me. Just one look at something like that would kill me. I'd drop down dead and when you got back to camp and you were flying on your back and doing all sorts of strange things. It was a marvellous time in a young man's lifetime,

36:30 had to be. You hear of all the miseries of war and sure there must have been, but maybe we were in the fortunate part, doing our part quite well, but in a different way. Didn't have the deprivations and starvations and things that, say, the army had. The navy was better off than us, of course. They really had it made.

37:00 But we were very fortunate. We knew what we were doing after we'd been there a fair bit and of course we finally had the better of the enemy which is another good thing, so it was a great experience.

But in that twenty minutes when you were being chased by these two aircraft, were you only

thinking about the excitement or did it occur to you that perhaps you might not get home or…?

Oh no, never dawned

37:30 on us; never dawned on me. We never got a mark on us, not one mark on us, not like when they could dive and fire at you and then get away and come back and do it again. They only got one shot like that and then the rest was chase, chase, and trying to catch up with us. We stayed even steven and we were doing three hundred and ten knots at indicated air speeds so

38:00 they must have been doing about the same. They didn't slip back. They just stayed there. And of course it made it easier on Arthur because if they had have been attacking he would have been jinking the aeroplane all over the… The thing we called jinking, by moving the control column and the aeroplane goes all over and makes it a difficult target. He would have had to work his tail off but it was not necessary. I just keep giving him a running commentary of where they were sitting.

38:30 We were hoping they'd go away. It took them a long time.

So you were giving him a running commentary the whole time?

Well he can't see through the back of his head.

So what sort of things would you be saying to him?

Just positions and things like that. What else could you say? You couldn't talk about the girls back home.

Did you have any exchange, like did he talk back to you?

Oh yes, all the time, oh yes, made comments.

39:00 **What kind of comments?**

Oh he'd fire a question at me, "Where the hell are they now?" I might have shut up for five minutes or something and something like that or he'd ask me how they were going or if they were increasing their depth back from us or getting closer. That's all we could do – nothing else to talk about. And their height was important. As long as they were at same height

39:30 as us we had the advantage as that's our best area for speed, was below a thousand feet. If we had have gone to two thousand feet the Zeros could go past us.

Why was that?

Just the difference in the engines that we used, the carburettors and the boosting and the things like that. Because the change in the atmosphere as you go up, and it suited the Beaufighters below a thousand feet.

So at that height were you always

40:00 **superior to the Zeros?**

Yeah, always faster, yeah. We couldn't mix it with them. The Beaufighter weighed ten ton and it wasn't a manoeuvrable plane like a fighter and there was only one thing we could do, unless they were right in front of you and that was a different matter.

Fantastic, we'll stop it.

Tape 7

00:41 It was an area midway down on the southern coast of New Britain and it was held strongly by Japs and they had a lot of ack-ack there. We lost a commanding officer and his crew. We lost three other crews and we lost another crew that had an army bloke on. And in total between Rabaul

01:00 and Palmalmal, all that area, that's where we lost all those people. Nut we did not have a memorial or anything. A few of the bodies and I spoke about some of the blokes that was recovered and their remains were put into the Bita Paka Memorial at Rabaul and some were never recovered. So in later life, actually it was the year 2000 when a memorial

01:30 was dedicated. I felt it was warranted that we had a memorial.

So did you instigate that memorial?

Oh my word. I instigated seven memorials. I had to do something for the association so that there would be something for the youngsters coming on to tell them that the Beaufighter squadrons took a part. We seemed to be the forgotten aeroplane in a lot of things and we had nothing here in Queensland. Well I couldn't do anything while I was at

02:00 work because of my work was a bit too much for me, in other words. The only time I'd got boating every now and then. But once I retired it was put to me and asked if I would start an association here. When I started to have a look around there wasn't enough people available to make a Beaufighter Association branch at all

02:30 but there was a few Boston people. Now that was 22 Squadron and they had had an association, but from lack of numbers it failed so I had a list of some of those guys too. I had a list of about thirty guys, where I started from, and I wrote to all of them and that's where it started from.

How do you get a memorial together?

There's nothing much to that as long as you get a bit of money.

03:00 I did need a bit of support. I've designed a memorial.

But is there a process you go through with a memorial? I mean do you have to approach someone to say, "Can we?"

No, no, no, no, no.

So you can just put something up?

Oh yeah, my word. You design it and it's warranted and I had an association that was doing it, not me. I might have instigated it, but it was on behalf of an association.

03:30 **But if you want to put a plaque, you know that propeller that you did, where did that go?**

That's the one on New Britain.

For the eighteen crews? But you would need permission to put that where it was?

Well that's all the things you have to do. When you make… That took two and a half years to do that and I didn't complete it in the end. I had to get another guy, George Robinson, who had friends, to finally get it down, but oh yeah,

04:00 the same with the propeller. Of course I knew where that aeroplane had crashed. That was our CO, Clarrie Goss-Scott and young Tropper Cain, and it crashed only five miles in the jungle from Cape Hoskins strip. Now Kimbe, which was the township to that strip, during my working life I tendered for a job up there

04:30 to build the foundations to a Palmolive factory, right there at Kimbe, would you believe? And I was very keen to win it, even though I did have some other work in Port Moresby at the time. It meant shipping all our materials from Australia just to do this job, but I thought, "If I can get that job I'm going to go back there and have a look." We got the job and we did the job, under difficulties, but I was so busy I never ever got back

05:00 and that's why I sort of made a contact with the people who had the oil, the coconut oil factory, not a factory. So then when I started here with the association, making the association work – this didn't happen until 1998 –

05:30 they decided it would be good to get it under way again and so I started and got the permissions from the San Remo Club, rang and sent letters and things and the manager there reckoned he wouldn't allow us to put a memorial in their grounds because if you put a memorial up there anywhere well the natives will only knock it down and take

06:00 everything away and it wouldn't be warranted. So that was the basis on which we started, but we got a bit serious about it and to get the propeller off the aircraft was a major job as there was no access to that area. It meant a landing pad had to be carved in the jungle and we had to hire a chopper [helicopter] to go in and remove a propeller. Well that proved too much

06:30 for the people who went in and I got a phone call from them, and one of my members was an engineer officer with Beaufighters and he knew every nut and bolt and so he came and gave me a detailed description, the size spanners and all the rest of it, and I sent that to them and then they went in and they recovered the propeller. Got a couple of piccies of it being flown out, but my concept when

07:00 I first thought about it was to use materials that were available and relative to what went on up there. And it's a bent propeller, of course, a broken one on a pole and it's just an ordinary plinth.

So that was the actual propeller from his plane?

Oh yes, that was the important part about it to us. So it all went ahead at the time and the air force

07:30 came to the party in the end. They paid the fares for the family to go up and things like that and provided other things like a chaplain.

Who else was there from the Squadron?

Yeah, Georgie Robson, oh gee there was about six blokes from the squadron, still serving, still living, who served in the squadron that time.

08:00 **So how was that experience then, all meeting up for that?**

Pretty hard work, put it that way, but that was a pretty big one. I did one at RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Amberley. You've seen the photos of that at the memorial gardens there on the sandstone block. That wasn't hard at all. But people at Amberley were very good and getting the castings down for the plaques is the expensive part. But

08:30 I got to know the people at Ipswich who do that work and they do it a reasonable cost.

Why were those memorials so important to you? That's a lot of work!

Not to me as a person, but it's for future generations, simply that. But I can go to

09:00 anywhere now, to any school – and I used to; I've stopped that now – and ask one question, but I don't get a correct answer, and that is, "Do you know where the Bismarck Sea is?" Very few kids know; very few adults know. They think it's somewhere around Germany and that gives

09:30 you an idea. That was a turning point in the war, so I think memorials are an important part.

Did you actually witness any of those crews going down?

Yeah, Dick Stone, at Rabaul.

Can you remember what you saw at that point?

Just an aeroplane being attacked and going down, nothing else. Didn't see it hit the ground. The other one at Palmalmal

10:00 was Ron Vinny, and he had an army bloke aboard when he was shot down and we were flying number two there and saw him hit, saw him crash, saw the three of them get out and enter their dinghy. And we stayed till almost dark and we were almost out of petrol because

10:30 I had radioed back for them to send a rescue Catalina to pick them up, or a crash boat from the Americans, a PT [Patrol Torpedo] boat. And I thought they might get one there, but it was such a long, long way and we had to go. The next day we started searching for them and couldn't find them. We thought they got ashore and things like that, but

11:00 a lot of magazines carry that story, very tragic, but what actually finally happened was they had got ashore, they were captured and they were executed by the Japs at Rabaul.

Do you remember what you were thinking when you see those planes go down?

What can we do? As simple as that, what else?

Did you

11:30 **think about it when you were leaving for an operation that the concept of you going down on that one?**

That only happened at one time and when the announcement was made over the PA [Public Address system], the target and the crews, and when you heard what the target was, well it was either a good one or a bad one and for a moment you thought, "Oh gee, that's a tough one," but that's it.

12:00 You go in to be briefed and it's all on. You've got a job to do. But that was a bad time, when you were listening to who the crew was after you heard what the target was.

Did you ever think about what you were firing at?

Beg your pardon?

Did you ever think about what you were bombing or firing on? Like the concept of…?

12:30 Well they were always selected to do as much damage as we could. We were trained to kill; you must remember that. That was what was the final analysis of all we did. We were trained to kill people, nothing else, and you had to accept it, even though you were doing something that you wanted to do, fly. I had to. I don't think I had any doubt about it.

Did you accept that easily?

13:00 It's different now. My attitude is the complete reverse to that, oh my goodness, holy jumping catfish, but that was how it was. If you had any reverse thoughts about it you would have got out of the air force as quick as possible, so that's what you've got to remember about guys like us. We were trained to do one thing and that was to kill and that's

13:30 what you did if you could, because it was kill or be killed of course. That sort of qualified it, didn't it? Or

excuses, I don't know what words you used there.

I know what you're saying. We've heard that before too, to kill or be killed.

Yeah, they nearly got square a couple of times, didn't they? But they didn't get there with Arthur or I.

14:00 **What did you think of the Japanese?**

Very little, oh dreadful because I had the unfortunate experience of seeing the very first prisoners of war from Singapore come to Morotai and it was frightening. We'd heard what they'd done and all that and we were getting sit [situation] reports all the time and knew what was going on. And it was

14:30 the first time that I'd seen what actually happened with these prisoners of war. They were bought to Morotai to get straightened out a little bit before being flown back to Australia. And I'm afraid I had a chip on my shoulder for a long, long time, still have, but I wear it not so badly now, but yeah. Of course I had a very good friend who was bayoneted to death by them into the

15:00 bargain and one of the memorials I've just finished at Amberley, we've just had the service was to him. He was bayoneted to death at Lae and they were shot down at Charlamarla and this pilot got his head cut off because he was an officer, and John was stabbed to death in the back. Anyway they recovered their remains

15:30 and there was never any memorial to John Lyons, but of course Bill Newton, a lot said about Bill because he won the VC for what he did and the family took it pretty strongly. And I decided on behalf of the family to get a plaque, a memorial plaque, to put on the wall at RAAF Amberley to recognise what he'd done. And we did that

16:00 about two months ago and the air force played a splendid part, fortunately. The service was great. And we had nine of the family, including John's widow and two daughters, the grandchildren. And the service was an excellent service, under the wing commander, the chaplain gave a service. But the three top serving

16:30 officers at RAAF Amberley all attended and three of them with their wives and they provided wreaths and said a few words and that sort of gave a big thing to the family. A couple of us had a few words and took some piccies and I got some lovely letters back from members of the family as it meant so much to them.

17:00 I had been trying hard for him to get awarded an MID [Mentioned in Despatches] for years because you only get two awards posthumously, and that is a Victoria Cross or an MID, and the least John should have got was an MID because he saved Bill. Bill couldn't swim and he helped him ashore from the crash in the water. I think that was, even just flying with him as a navigator was enough. But no way.

17:30 They wouldn't do it. And I have some letters there from Barbara, his oldest daughter, that she wrote to the minister and I published some of them in our newsletter and they felt so strongly about it. Now things have changed and that little service and the attendance of the air force people made all the difference in the world.

18:00 But that's what you get out of these things. There is one nice big one up at Caloundra. There's an Australian veteran aircraft museum at Caloundra, a big one, and there's two memorial stones there at their entrance. One is to the Pathfinders and one on the other side is for the Beaufighters.

18:30 I ran a big reunion for that at that time and it was an Anzac Day thing, and we had a four-day Australia-wide reunion. We had two hundred and ten people come and had a great day. We had trips here and trips there and dinners, and one of the things we did, we had two memorial services, one at Anzac Square where I had a plaque made, and I had a lovely

19:00 big garden bench made up on Ann Street level, near the flame, so people could sit, and had a plaque put on that. And we had an Anzac Day memorial service there between the dawn service and the main one, and we had all these people there from all over Australia. The same at Caloundra. And they provided a couple of aeroplanes up there and flew over for us for that. Yeah, that was a great one.

19:30 We had five buses full of people, five big buses and we didn't lose one. I had about three files about that thick and it took me about a year to organise it and run it.

When someone would go down, what was the process of notifying family?

The commanding officer was the only one. He wrote to the family. I did

20:00 think the air board would too eventually, but the air board had to, of course, officially. But the commanding officer always wrote to the family. And then someone like me – I did it a couple of times – was given the task of getting all their gear together and getting it back to where it should go. That was the normal procedure.

And that wouldn't have been a very pleasant task?

Oh hardly, gee.

20:30 Going through a guy's… A guy that you know and now you've buried him, going through his personal belongings and packing them, who liked that job? I did it three times, twice for 23 Squadron and once for 30 Squadron. No-one did it for me yet.

How did you get that job?

CO.

21:00 You don't acquire it, you get told you've got the job and I don't think you could back off anyway once you're told.

And did you have some kind of ceremony there at the time?

No, only wherever they were buried. The Archerfield ones, they were

21:30 given full air force burials, all the trimmings, guns and all, which they're entitled to.

Where were you when the war ended?

I was at Morotai.

How did you come to be in Morotai?

I'd been posted to 31 Squadron, 21 Squadron Liberators, and we stayed there until the end of the war,

22:00 bombing nothing.

What were the Liberators like?

A lovely aeroplane, a huge aeroplane, but oh dear, oh dear, not a patch on flying in the smaller aircraft. You had a crew of eight and all I did was navigate. There was a pilot, a second pilot, an

22:30 engineer, a bombardier, three gunners, a wireless operator and a navigator and you never had the crew spirit. You had the crew spirit, but no question about that, but it wasn't the crew spirit of two guys who did everything together for such a long time; totally different. It was

23:00 a totally different job for me as a lot of the other guys that was the only job they ever did, but having being in twin-engine aircraft for so long in the air force that was what I was accustomed to and there was no excitement to it. You flew a long distance, you were in the air for seven hours,

23:30 you dropped bombs, well someone else dropped the bombs from ten thousand feet and there was very little resistance if any and then you flew home. Unfortunately the Americans must have decided to do what they did and proceed through to the Philippines on their own, but he had to return, didn't he? And

24:00 sent the Australian Army and air force across the top of New Guinea to clean up what was bypassed and that was the role we played there, instead of being upfront with us all. But still there was a part to play and it had to be done, but it would have been better to be upfront.

Where was Arthur at this stage?

He went to a transport unit back in Australia.

It must have been sad to say goodbye?

Yeah, we were good buddies,

24:30 you bet, we really were. I caught up with him after the war. He had his own aeroplane in those days on his property down on the Mornington Peninsula and once in a while he'd fly up here to Archerfield and spend a few days with Bet and I, but that was when he was flying for Ansett Airways in postwar years. And if he landed here and was over-nighted

25:00 at Brisbane, well he didn't stay in the pub – he came and stayed out at St John's Wood. So we kept in contact that way too.

What was Morotai like as a base?

Which?

Morotai? What was it like on the island?

Morotai? Very flat coral island, no features. Very hot, we were getting so close to the equator there, very hot, very drying but

25:30 a long hard trying there.

How long were you there for?

Eleven months.

Eleven months in Morotai?

No, with 21 Squadron. About seven or eight months in Morotai because we went from the back of Toowoomba where the squadron was re-equipped and then we went to Fenton, just south of Darwin. Then we went north

26:00 a bit to Batchelor for a while, then to RAAF Darwin, then to Morotai, and that's where we finished off.

Can you remember what happened on the day that the war finished?

I know we were so happy. I was there when the surrender was signed, of course. I've got piccies of that, what they all did.

Can you describe what happened there?

Well there was a lot of fuss and ceremony that day. I'm not talking about the days

26:30 leading up because there were quite a number of days before the surrender was signed and it was officially over that we'd been dropping pamphlets. That's all we'd been doing, telling these Japs to walk in and we wouldn't shoot them or something. And of course they'd picked up some of the prisoners of war down in the Celebes and flown them in before they could butcher them. These were

27:00 very nasty happenings for me and others to see these fellows. And the other thing was all lined up and we had no part to play in it, but we hung around. They came in a big Betty Bomber, some general and things like that, and they sat around and blew bugles and signed documents and then they went and whatever they did with them, I don't know what

27:30 happened to them. But they did fly in their own aeroplane, a Japanese Betty Bomber, that I remember. Cause we had a prisoner of war camp on Morotai, quite a lot of Japanese prisoners in there.

What did the men look like that came from prisoner of war camps? What do you remember seeing?

Oh you wouldn't believe that they could live. You've surely seen some

28:00 photographs of them and the photographs you see of them are absolutely right. You couldn't possibly see what they were like. You could see ribs and their faces alone were enough to turn you off.

And how many of them were on Morotai?

I couldn't tell you, but I saw about fifteen out of that one plane load.

28:30 **Did you ever get to talk to any of them?**

No, they were being transported to a hospital and then they were flown to Australia after they were sort of sorted out a little bit, so that sort of makes you pretty bitter towards people when you've seen what they've done.

Did any of the Liberators get shot down when you

29:00 **were with them?**

We only lost one, never lost any crew, and I think we lost one by an accident in the Northern Territory and there was no damage. The one that was shot down was… The only time we did lower level work was a landing and I think one of the biggest landings

29:30 they put on up there at Balikpapan, that was a major landing, and they used the Liberators as spotter planes to inform the army people aboard that directed whatever they directed with their landing forces, like a flying platform. And they were flying around at about two or three hundred feet and one got knocked down, and that's

30:00 the only one I know. And I don't know of any others because the opposition to us at high level bombing was just nothing, nothing.

What about the Americans, working with the Americans?

Well we didn't work with them there. We were separated. We were back into 9 Operations Group and we were detached to Fair Force, and that's

30:30 where we should have been, the Beaufighters at least anyway. That's where they wanted to be.

So when the war came to an end, how long were you on Morotai after that?

Oh not long, just about a month.

And what did you do in that time?

This will make you laugh. I was given the job as an acting commanding officer of an air sea rescue squadron that had no aeroplanes, and all it had was big

31:00 barges and two crash boats. And the main job to start with was to take parties of nurses and soldiers for picnics on the islands surrounding Morotai. It was a great life. Then of course all the materials, all the war materials that the Americans had supplied to Australia were under a lease lend arrangement and had to be destroyed. And I used to have to go

31:30 on each barge and sign the documents when all these huge crates and boxes and motor cars, you name it, were dumped in Morotai Harbour. That was the last job I did. And I applied to get out as I got myself a job by mail working at Archerfield Aerodrome as an aerodrome control officer. I didn't want to miss out on the job and

32:00 anyway they let me out and demoted me from flight lieutenant to flying officer on the reserve, that's how I got out. I had to serve two years on the reserve for 23 Squadron, but I didn't mind that.

Why were you so keen to get out?

I didn't want any more flying. I'd had enough and I had two kids and I think it was about time. Look, I was a stranger in the house.

32:30 Pete, he was born and as he grew up when I got home he would scream! I mean that, yeah, yeah.

How long had it been since you'd been home?

Oh at varying times, mind you. See I had that long spell right from the word go, over two years. I was home all the time and it was great, but that all changed when I went down to

33:00 5 OTU and I was only home for short periods just on leave, from there on until the end of the war. Ended up in New Guinea and back down at Wagga as an instructor, Tullamore as an instructor, Williamstown as an instructor.

When were you an instructor?

In between.

In between?

Tours.

Oh right, in between?

New Guinea and Morotai.

New Guinea and Morotai, right.

33:30 **Can you tell us a little bit about how that came about?**

Oh it was pretty normal procedure. They've got to find you a job back in Australia and most of the pilots when they completed their missions they went to a transport squadrons or other type squadrons like that, and navigators were needed to teach navigation and I was a nav instructor at 5 OTU at Wagga for a while.

34:00 Then they transferred to Williamstown so I went to Williamstown and just getting nice and comfortable in what I thought was going to be my job for the rest and I got posted to 7 OTU at Tuggermore, and I thought, "As an instructor? Like fun!" Well that was the OTU for the Liberators and 21 Squadron being re-equipped from

34:30 their previous aeroplanes, dive bombers to Liberators. And Peter Parker, a bloke I knew very well, was CO and I found out he'd had decided he'd have me posted there as his navigation officer, which I didn't think very much of. But he was a good bloke and that's how I got that job.

Which place did like instructing at the most?

Oh 5 OTU, yeah; it was great.

Why was that?

Oh the people

35:00 I knew. I was so familiar with what we were doing and there was more to it than just nav instructing; there were all sorts of things. I was familiar with the aeroplane and my job as I was. It was easier to transmit than those who were just starting.

Was the air force winding down some of the instruction because it was coming towards the end of the war?

Oh they must have been, I think. I was not aware of what they were doing

35:30 but I do think they had a surplus of aircrew. I do think so, as gee, they were training them in such huge numbers, huge numbers.

What did you like about instructing?

It was a nice, cushy job. One of the cushiest jobs I'd had since Archerfield days. It was great, yeah, yeah; nothing to it.

36:00 **And what about the guys coming through? What were they like?**

Oh they were pretty good, much better trained in some ways than I was myself. Yeah, they were pretty good guys.

Why do you say that? Do you think the instructors were, then?

No, by splitting up the situation, by splitting an observer category into three different categories and at

36:30 5 OTU at Wagga the category was Nav/BW as a navigator or did a bit of wireless. The others were wireless operators where the others were wireless operator/air gunners so that meant that the observer schools were concentrating on navigation and could give a more intense, much shorter course

37:00 but a much more intense course. Oh yeah, I don't know if that was a fact, but that's how I thought about it.

Do you think you guys had seen a lot of action yourselves and you were better equipped to instruct?

I think so, in some ways. Mind you the blokes that instructed me in my days as a wireless operator, they were civilian and they knew their job, couldn't have better instructors. It's the same with pilots. The best instructors

37:30 they had were ex-pilots or pilots who had gone through the mill. There is no other way, is there?

Did you talk much about your experiences to the guys coming through?

If they wanted to hear some stories, oh yes. They liked to know. And I'd have a few drinks and a few of us together, of course mind you about four or five of us always at 5 OTU were in 30 Squadron so we were fighting a war

38:00 again occasionally and we could talk to them about it. Gave them an idea what they were going to do.

Did you miss the action when you came back as an instructor, the excitement of being up?

No, not that I know of. I was glad to be home. I think I'd done my bit. I would have gone back for a third one if I had to, but I didn't want to. But there was no chance of it the way the whole

38:30 war was going then. It was coming to an end.

How important was mail from home when you were away?

Oh gee, you lived for it, but it was so erratic on the islands, it was terrible. You'd get three or four letters in one bundle and it was only coming from Australia, and aeroplanes flying to New Guinea all the time.

39:00 **It must have been hard to start a marriage with that much time apart and…?**

Not good I can tell you, yeah, yeah, but still the decision had to be made. I think it was wise. It turned out all right. It turned out real good.

Did you know other men that got 'Dear John' letters [letter informing that a relationship is over] while they were there?

Only one, and I don't know too much about it. It must have happened, yeah it must have happened

39:30 but I can only think of one, only because he spoke to me about it.

What do you think kept you two together?

We would have been next-door neighbours for so long that it was the fence that kept us apart, a life time.

Yeah, you were pretty good mates really, weren't you?

Weren't we ever, in everything we did!

40:00 We were rotten I can tell you. And not only that, as I decided the job that I took, the examiner of… Oh, they didn't give me the job of aerodrome control when I got to Archerfield. They were getting applications from pilots who were getting discharged for commercial pilots licences and didn't need to be any flying tests as the guys had plenty of flying, just had to be assessed on what their flying did and what their

40:30 assessments were and they didn't, it was a clerical job only, and that's the job they gave me. I interviewed these guys and they made their applications, gave me their log books and I did a summary

on their log books or told them if they didn't have the hours on the right types that they'd have to go and get so many hours somewhere else before they applied. Once I put that together once a week I sent that down to head office in Melbourne

41:00 and they either stamped approval on my recommendations or otherwise, and then I issued letters to them advising them they had a commercial pilot's licence. But I wasn't built to be a public servant and that's what it was. I had an office in Archerfield on the ground floor there in the building and I couldn't get my own secretary. I

41:30 had to always take a typist from the pool and it was ridiculous! And the old officer-in-charge, Tommy Amos, was an ex-flyer. He retired and they put a senior clerk in his office in charge of Archerfield and he was a cranky old git, so I decided I'd go into bridges.

Tape 8

00:39 **There was one thing I wanted to ask you Peter, you were mentioned in despatches, can you tell us a little bit about the circumstances of that?**

I said read the MID itself up there. Didn't you read it?

Can you tell us for the record?

I believe it was because of the work we did as a

01:00 team. Arthur was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross and he earned that, really earned that in the way he went about the job, made my job so much easier and so much more pleasant and I think it's the result of that and my work as a navigator, leading the flights in a lot of things and that's what it says in the thing-oh. Perhaps I don't believe I deserved anything, but

01:30 they gave me an MID for those things that I did and they made special reference in leading that last flight into the big new one in Rabaul. I see that was in there, but apart from that it was we tangled with and we shot at and we did destroy a lot of things. I think good teamwork was the important thing, but there were very few observers decorated.

02:00 I think you'll see that as you go through, very difficult for an observer. But of course then I did have one fortunate incident where Arthur passed out, badly injured, badly knocked about and I got him back by being able to fly and he did write me a letter after the war, I've got it, bringing to life what happened and what I did.

02:30 I treasured it. Yeah, I don't think I could.

That day that you were talking about, when Arthur passed out, when you'd been shot down, we spoke about that earlier, but you told us that you crashed on Kiriwina Island?

Kiriwina Island.

What happened then?

We were taken to hospital and the aeroplane was bulldozed off the strip, oh yes, a complete wreck, write-off. A couple of

03:00 nasty things happened while I was in hospital. I had all my gear, I always carry my nav bag with everything in it and I had a beautiful Longines chronometer, wrist chronometer that I hung on the control panel all the time. And I always wanted one of those and there was only one way to get one out of the air force, get it written off. If it was written off you were charged and they would replace it with a

03:30 new one. And I had a glorious opportunity and a couple of things I didn't tell you about that incident. There is a million stories I could give you, but however with that one when I went back down to the aircraft a few days after, after we got out of hospital. My nav bag had been taken into the operations room, but my chronometer wasn't there, my wrist chronometer.

04:00 So I went back, couldn't find it and somebody had nicked it. I was going to nick it anyway, but somebody beat me to it. But what I didn't tell you, as a consequence… And you'll probably see a cartoon up there, Mike Burgoyne – he did two that were hung in the operations room after that shoot up and one was about me with my hair standing on end with Zeros at that time, and the other was Arthur tearing

04:30 out with some very rude words. He got that one and I got this one. But we wore Mae Wests [life jackets] all the time and they were about that round and they were kapok. And the armourers, when they got in, they took two armour-plated bullets out of my Mae West that had hit me here on that side, and the bullets were whole because they were

05:00 armour plating. They hadn't splintered when they hit the aeroplane! Not only that, they had my trousers and they were hung in the operations room all the time that we were there with these notices

underneath, my trousers with a rude remark underneath and my Mae West, because at the time we were all keen to get rid of them. The Americans had a beautiful Mae West. It was flat

05:30 plastic and it just fitted beautifully with two CO2 [Carbon Dioxide] bottles in the bottom of it, and if you wanted to inflate it you just pulled the tags, instead of this bulky damn thing. Boy, I got a brand new Mae West, I can tell you, without one of them. Should have told you about that.

What did you think when you saw that you had come so close to being killed?

I don't think I thought any different to what I'd been thinking anyway,

06:00 just another thing that happened, wasn't it? I knew something had happened, but I was in so much pain with my lower regions and a tiny little thing. It wasn't a big thing, but it was painful.

It was a bad spot.

It wasn't the best spot. I carry the scar, so there you are. Don't ask me to prove it.

No, we won't. But

06:30 **did you require any surgery for that?**

No, no, now it was just a piece of metal that was digging into me when I moved. Any further damage was stopped when I pulled the jagged piece of metal out, but those two items hung in the operations room for a long, long time.

You said there are a million stories you could tell us. Are there any

07:00 **that you haven't told us yet that come to mind as being…, or funny stories that you remember, the positive ones? Nothing that's…?**

I feel I've spoken too much.

Oh, not at all. I've still got some questions to ask you. I just thought there might have been a story that you had in mind that you hadn't told us about?

The only thing I thought about was that incident about the trousers and the Mae West that was in operations room and the cartoons that were done.

And they were in the operations room as

07:30 **sort of evidence?**

Oh my word, well because as I say we were all trying to win these other Mae West's from the Americans. We didn't have them. Rather than the standard kapok ones, and of course this was highly recommended, armour plating. It was all right for the pilot. He had an armour plated door behind him and armoured plate glass in front of him and armour plate under his seat. We had nothing. We had the perspex cupola.

08:00 It wouldn't stop anything.

When you were strafing airstrips, what was the…? I just wonder if you could explain. I know you feel you've talked about this so much, but what was process of the operation in strafing an airstrip? What exactly did you have to do?

I had nothing to do.

No, but I mean your aircraft? What was the objective?

My job was to get the aircraft

08:30 into position. We selected that before we took off and where we attacked from, was it from the water or the land, and once we got there and we'd go in, and if it was from the water we'd be right down on the water and we'd spot a barge in close and we'd go in very low. Almost, you could see wrinkles from the propeller blast on the water at times. And as we got closer

09:00 to the boats the pilot would lift the aeroplane up, about eight hundred feet, and then do a shallow dive, so they couldn't shoot for nuts some of these pilots of ours and that gave them an easy target. They would then aim at the water below the boats and see the shots – you saw about it in there – and lift the nose of the aeroplane and that would bring their cone of fire right through the boat

09:30 and that's how they obtained the accuracy.

And if you were attacking an airstrip what was the objective there?

Well, then again, pick… Well we knew before we went where the buildings were and where the ack-ack positions were and things like that and we had to look for aircraft on the strip or in the areas around and that was the first thing you looked for. Then the pilot would make a decision or if I saw two aeroplanes in the distance

10:00 I'd talk to him about that and maybe it was too late and maybe it wasn't, and he made up his mind. He strafed what he'd picked and then we'd get out and then get away and then make a decision whether we should go back again, and that all depended on what had happened, the strength of the ack-ack and the recommendations at briefing.

Can you describe the sensation for us of flying through ack-ack?

10:30 You don't know too much about it unless it hits you. You see very little unless there are some tracer bullets. They use very few tracer bullets, but on ships they did against us, tracer, but you weren't aware of it until you got hit or someone got shot down, but you knew the strength of it.

11:00 Mortars you could see. Lae, they used mortars there. They used to fire up vertically, not aim at you, and make a curtain of steel which you'd have to fly through, which was a very good idea because it's a bit hard to shoot at an aeroplane flying at three hundred mile an hour just down at you. And they did that and that was some of their defensive jobs. Light ack-ack stuff, they'd

11:30 put a curtain up and every aeroplane had to fly through it and they got a few hits that way. I did think once, at Palmalmal, that I could hear the breech blocks slamming in a multiple pom-pom gun. The navy had multiple pom-pom guns there and I swore I could hear the thump-thump of the breeches, but it might have been imagination.

12:00 I kept arguing with Arthur about that one.

You said that you were involved in Balikpapan. That was one of the final ones?

That was the final big landing.

Can you describe what you saw there?

Oh yeah, oh yeah, it was spectacular, a lot of big ships and there was a lot of gunfire from the ships and

12:30 barges started going into the water, and the barges were going round and round in circles, and then they'd get into groups and then they'd move ashore. You'd see all these barges going ashore. It was spectacular, oh yeah, a great sight. One of the greatest sights I ever saw.

The landing at Balikpapan?

Well the only landing I saw anyway, but I did the practice run with the navy out in Milne Bay, but they didn't

13:00 use the barges there, this was just the task force, so we could communicate. But here at Balikpapan I saw the lot, that first day.

When you say it was one of the greatest sights you ever saw, in what sense?

Just spectacular, just all these barges. I was a bit of a boaty, always, and you see all these boats.

And what was your role in the squadron in that landing?

I was a navigator, but as I say the squadron's role there was

13:30 we kept an aeroplane flying, a large aeroplane, a Liberator, over the area with army officers aboard and they were spotting for the forces down below and giving their instructions from there, which was a pretty good idea, smart idea. We didn't do any attacking. We'd done plenty before, dropping bombs and things like that with the Americans, but on the landing that's what the 21 Squadron was employed to do.

14:00 **We've heard a lot of criticism about some of those final operations.**

Have you?

The Borneo operations and...

In what way?

As being unnecessary?

Oh, totally unnecessary! I'll agree with you. We should never have been there. We were going and bombing tank farms, those big fields of fuel tanks for the oil

14:30 wells that had been smashed to smithereens by a huge American attack. There was nothing there to hit. Their defences were nothing. We were bombing these sorts of targets and there was no sense. We were not achieving anything, no.

And people were risking their lives?

Well any time you go flying in a military operation you do risk your life a little bit, but it wasn't achieving

15:00 anything and, as I said to you in the interview, the Americans decided to go on their own for their own

reasons and wouldn't have us or the army. I do think Blamey was to blame for some of that and they just gave us the role of cleaning up what was bypassed, a dismal second-class role.

15:30 **Did you feel that sentiment that it was useless at the time?**

You bet, you bet, oh yeah. We all felt that way, but we were doing our job and what could you do? It wasn't achieving anything.

You've talked a lot about how exciting your job was during the war and that as a young man it was pretty exciting a lot of the stuff you were involved in. When the war actually came to an end,

16:00 **what was your own personal feeling about that?**

Glad to be going home. I think they'd sent me away too long, I'd been away. I think it all balanced itself out and I'd had a great spell in the early parts, all that time here at home in Brisbane, but they got square with me the rest of the time. Not often did guys get sent back two or three times.

16:30 I wasn't real pleased about it, but there you go. Most of my friends when they went back they got instructors' jobs and stayed with them. A few of us were sent back.

Did you have any belief systems at all at the time that you felt helped you at all in dealing with the stress of the situations that you were in? Any methods of dealing with tension or…?

17:00 Oh goodness no, I don't know how I could even think of anything like that. Oh no, not at all.

Looking back, I mean what do you think kept you sane if you like in a situation where you were witnessing people dying and potentially risking your own life?

I don't know. It was in my training. I was trained to do that. I think that was the mainstay. It had to be. Of course it was.

17:30 I can't think of anything else. As I say I felt after about four or five months. Up in the Darwin-Morotai area it was not achieving anything and I could do better going home. I had to see it out.

How do you think the war changed you at all?

I grew up. I was a very naive

18:00 boy at twenty and twenty-one with the sort of upbringing I had, rapt in the Boy Scout movement, all this honour, and I was a scoutmaster and when I went to Melbourne, those twelve months sorted me out for a while, prepared me for what I was going to do. I matured.

18:30 **I mean when you finally came back to Australia to live with your family again, how did you find adjusting to living back in Australia?**

Not all that difficult, not all that difficult, no, no, no. I think getting the kids to know me was one of the problems. Yeah, it all happened, but I think at first it didn't work too good because of my job. I was interviewing people from the air force

19:00 looking for pilot's licences, and so often it happened I'd end up with someone I knew and we'd go down the Rocklea Pub and get a skinful [drunk] and I'd get home much the worse for wear and it wasn't very good. That was a difficult time, but I think when I decided to get out of what I did then made all the difference. And I bought a milk

19:30 run, would you believe, and it turned out to be the worst thing I ever did. A shocking industry! And I wasn't fit enough to do it and I couldn't even give the milk run back to the guy that I bought it off so I decided to see it out. And I got stuck into it and I formed an association called the Retail Milk Vendors' Association of Queensland and built an organisation of five hundred milk vendors in three years. I was their president all the time and

20:00 put together all their rules, their model rules and things like that. And I had two secretaries then and I built a very big business and I had a wholesale and retail business in the milk industry and then decided to get out after thirteen years. This gave me a start in life when I needed it

20:30 to build a house and things like that. And I wanted to see the kids better educated than I was and they both did, and they both did well. I got out of the milk industry because I reckoned I'd worked too hard, and bought a cab. And bought a second cab, paid it off, and it was while that was on that I picked up a guy from Sydney once and he kept coming up here on a regular monthly

21:00 basis, trying to start a business, an office for an organisation he was manager for, and he asked me if I'd take on a job of opening an office. I did eventually agree, but I said, "Only for twelve months." I wanted to keep the two cabs going because I had drivers and it was a good business, long hours, but with the two drivers I was able to do all the things I wanted in scouting. I became

21:30 the Queensland State Deputy Commissioner for Senior Scouts then for five years, which was something I wanted to do, about the third top scout in the state. And the job then got so interesting and so

challenging after I got in that my wife became secretary and I opened their office in my son's bedroom. He got posted to Texas here in Queensland in the bank

22:00 and that's when we started. She was my secretary and we built Frankie Pyle organisation here in Queensland and it was the best organisation in Australia, and for twenty-three years I worked for them. I made a lot of friends and I'm very closely associated with all the bridges we did. And the last bridge I did was the big, cross railway bridge at South Brisbane. And

22:30 all the other new bridges, we did them. Nearly every building on the Gold Coast has got our foundations on them. Yeah, it was great, and the company was a great company to work for. It's only recently they've proved it again. On my eighty-fifth birthday last year they threw a cocktail party at the Brisbane Club and invited some of all my old friends amongst the old customers and some of the new ones and a few politicians and

23:00 things like that and made some presentations again, so nice to think even after all these years – and I've been retired twenty years – that they can still think and say good day to you like that. They sent Bet and I around the world twice and oh yeah, used to give me a brand new BMW [motor car] every second year, so you can see how generous they were. They were

23:30 colossal. I have very happy memories. Still associated with most of them and a lot of the young fellows that I put on as engineers they've got their own businesses now. Two of them are in a club that I run, a fishing club. We go to Fraser Island once a year for a week and a few of them, one was our opposition. One was our opposition and the others were very good clients and we've been together, we had our thirtieth anniversary on Fraser Island

24:00 last year. This year it is coming close again in August, the 31st, and we are part owners of Wattie Lines on Fraser and it's a glorious place.

And you keep busy with doing things like the Whisperer?

And I'm in Legacy and only three weeks ago I went down the coast and they presented me with an award down there and

24:30 a gold medal for a seniors' award, very nice of them. Pretty big do [party] – they had a band and all sorts of things – but a very political do of course in my opinion.

When you look back on your life, how significant are the memories that you have of your war experience? Are they the strongest memories you have?

Yes, just. My

25:00 experiences with the milk runs?

No, with the war?

With the war?

Your war experiences? Your memories with the war, are they the strongest memories you have?

Of all my other experiences, is that what you're saying? Perhaps, it might come close with two others, with my work with Frankie Pyle, what I did, what I established, and some of the things we did here in this country, in this state, and

25:30 what I did for the milk industry. I became a member of the Queensland Milk Board and I wrote a few variations to the regulations during my time and turned the supply of milk in Brisbane to what it is today. It was a dreadful thing when I went into it, but nobody wanted to buy it. I didn't want to borrow money and we'd saved five hundred pounds if I remember rightly.

26:00 That was enough to get into the business and put a deposit on a truck and we had no money left.

So how important are things like Anzac Day for you?

Very important. I don't miss an Anzac Day; don't miss a dawn service.

What does it mean to you?

It means that I think of

26:30 guys that I know that aren't with us and what we did and what we did for the country and I think it's a big thing, what these people go to from World War One and us and the other wars and so on. I think we done a pretty good job for Australia and it's good to have a yak to them and notice.

27:00 **Do you dream about the war?**

No, never. Not a single dream. And I had some scary times, but no, not at all.

When you look back on your war experiences as we have today and thought about them…

Don’t remind me.

When you do that, what’s the overriding feeling that you have about

27:30 **your war experiences?**

I wouldn’t have missed it for quids. Does that put it bluntly? I would hate to have not taken part. That’s about all I could say about that.

Have you got, is there anything you’d like to say as a final comment, that you’d like to put on the record about your life experience or your war experience,

28:00 **anything at all for the benefit of future generations?**

I don’t think I would be much great benefit to future generations really, but I think what I could say is no matter what you endeavours are they’ve got to be straightforward and honest and to the best of your ability, and you’ll get on in life if you do that

28:30 very well.

That sounds like wonderful advice.

I don’t know about that. I know what some youngsters would think about that: “Silly old git! What’s he talking about?”

There is one final question I wanted to ask.

Oh gee, I’m pleased to hear that.

You were involved in, you were one of the people who fought to win that war, have we won the peace?

29:00 Holy jumping catfish! Well I thought we had. Since the war as far as Australia is concerned it’s been a marvellous peace, the country is prospering and everything has gone so wonderfully well. I went through a Depression, my age group did. We survived that and then we went through

29:30 a war and we survived that and look what’s happened to this country, Australia. It is colossal. And the only trouble is that so many of the people that live in it don’t appreciate it and that’s for sure. I can be very critical about that and that includes some politicians.

That’s a good comment. Thank you so much for all your time today.

30:00 **It’s been a real pleasure to listen to you.**

Oh boy, I’ll never overcome this. It will take me a long time.

Have you ever talked to your family or anyone else about your war experiences?

Only once in a while when they ask me a question because I don’t want to bore them with my old war stories. There were a few that I wrote for Whisperer and a couple of my family get a copy of the Whisperer and they can read it in there anyway.

30:30 There’s enough junk up there for them to see when I go.

You’ve never talked so much as you have today?

No, not at all, never, ever.

Well it’s been a great privilege for us to hear your story. Thank you very much.

Okay. I’ll tell you what, I’m glad it’s over.

INTERVIEW ENDS