

Australians at War Film Archive

Peter Grindon-Ekins - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/2213>

Tape 1

00:43 **Okay, Peter if you could just start by giving us a summary of your life.**

As you said, it's going to be a hard call.

A challenge.

It certainly is. I was born in 1940 in Tasmania and spent the first six months of my life

01:00 there before my family moved to Chelsea in Victoria. I have two older brothers, the oldest one is a retired surveyor in Queensland and the other one worked for Westpac [bank] for thirty five years and he is running his own gardening business now in Cherrybrook, about ten minutes away. We lived in Chelsea for five years almost and while Dad was in the Australian Comforts Fund

01:30 supporting the troops up around mostly Darwin and Townsville. He emigrated to Australia from the UK as a seventeen-year-old in 1923 and had an accident which shattered both his ankles, in 1927. He was a very good gymnast, a gymnastics champion for South Australia in the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] at the time and he had this accident which shattered both his ankles

02:00 and they said he'd never walk again but he is more pig-headed than I am and effectively then went into youth work, teaching gymnastics and that sort of thing. So he was supporting the troops through the Australian Comfort Fund and in 1946, at the end of the Second World War, they asked him if he'd like to escort a lot of the children who had been evacuated from England during the

02:30 war to Australia, back to England. He said he would because his father was still alive and it would give him the opportunity to see him again. With two assistants he took a hundred and twenty teenagers back to England on the Aquitania and when he got over there the (UNCLEAR) of the YMCA asked him if he would work in the DP [Displaced Persons] camp, the displaced persons' camp in Europe, particularly with the children and trying to rehabilitate them. So Mum gathered up my brothers and I and we went to live in England

03:00 and we wound up in Sunderland, which is Tyneside, Northumberland, and my old man [father] spent a lot of time away, also running the YM out of Sunderland and he and Mum ran the camps every six weeks along with the holidays in the UK [United Kingdom] at a place called Croxdale and they used to have sixty kids in there at a week at a time and my brothers and I

03:30 got all the good jobs like tents, cleaning cutlery and digging holes and things like that. We came back, landed back Christmas Day 1950 and then my old man went to work at the YMCA in Port Pirie in South Australia so we went to Port Pirie and then we went to [UNCLEAR] in '54, '55 because a lot of the guys coming out of the Snowy's Scheme [the Snowy Mountains Scheme] used to R&R [Rest and Recreation],

04:00 it wasn't that term at the time, but out of the Snowy's and down into [UNCLEAR] and a lot of the youth hostels were there and there was a big demand for youth management, young men really at that stage, so we lived in Port Pirie in 1954 and '55, and we went to Ballarat in '56 and I finished high school in '58 and fronted

04:30 up to the air force to say, "Here I am". They said, "That's very nice, now go away and get a bit of experience and find out what the real world is like". So in 1961 I was accepted and started on 10 March '61, finished a nav [navigation] course in March, end of February, 20 February

05:00 '63, and then went on posting to Amberley [base] on the Canberra [aeroplane]. I was a pilot officer on 1 March '63 and a couple of years at Amberley, October '64 posted off to Butterworth [base in Malaysia], still on the Canberra as a navigator and then

05:30 my wife and I, I met my wife in '61, we were married in '64 and so we went up together to Malaya during [Indonesian] Confrontation in October '64 and got home for Christmas in '66. While I was on leave the government made a decision to send 2 Squadron to Phan Rang in Vietnam and

- 06:00 the crews that were immediately available went up there, they got organised immediately and a guy called Huey McIndoe was a navigator and he got, the phone rang for about a day and suddenly they discovered his wife had cancer and Huey came straight home and I went off and replaced him and then I got home from
- 06:30 Phan Rangg Christmas '67, and then '68 with the [F] 111 program to pick up the aircraft in the States to go across and do our training. Forty eight of us went across to the States in four lots to do weapons assistance training all around the States in different places, and
- 07:00 then when the carry through box got cracked, that's the bit that holds the wings, it's a fuel tank that holds the wings on they said, "You are not going to go home, you are going to stay here for another year while they fix up the carry through box". In fact they didn't, they decided that they would put them into storage and we all came home in the back of a 141 Starlifter [aircraft], via
- 07:30 the world's most securest route and then arrived back Christmas, or November time I think '68. They said, "You haven't been away from home long enough, you can go down to Sale and do an advanced nav course". I spent another seven months away from home. Instead of going back on the 111s they said, "You are now going to Aircraft Special Development Unit". So we moved down to Werribee,
- 08:00 the base at Laverton and three years at Laverton and I was fortunate enough to be selected to go to the UK for my education, so I then did College of Air Warfare, Duty Air Assistance Course, general duties air assistance course, at a place called Manby in 1973. At the end of the year they closed the base at
- 08:30 Manby and instead of me being posted back to Australia I was then posted onto the staff of the College which then became the Department of Air Warfare at the RAF [Royal Air Force] College at Cranwell. Two years there and then back to Laverton. But after a year at Laverton during which, or at the end of which, we moved the unit across to South Australia.
- 09:00 They said, "You are not going, after having done that you are going off to staff college in Canberra." in '77 and at the end of '77 I was posted into Operational Requirements Weapons Systems. On the ninth floor at Russell offices [the Department of Defence] , commonly referred to as Cloud Nine, that's where all the concepts were being developed, initiating the projects
- 09:30 for upgrading and look toward the future for new weapons systems. Three years in that job and then during which they had initiated one of the defence re-organisations to create the material division and then I went across into acting director material definition, and worked a couple of years there and then at the end of '82
- 10:00 did Joint Services Staff College at the end of which was the joint military group to go to China because we were, I think, fifteen different nations represented on Joint Services Staff College. At the end of JSSC I was posted to our base squadron at Edinburgh in South Australia, so '83, '84, '85,
- 10:30 down in Edinburgh and at the end of that was posted back into Defence Central, into 'Wonderland', and at that stage I was approached by industry to join the industry and leave the air force. I left 10 March '86, so twenty five years to the day, and fifteen years in the defence electronics industry. Then when the government
- 11:00 sold the Australian Defence Industries to a joint consortium that was fundamentally based on the French Thompson organisation, Thompson CSF then they said they wanted to introduce French communication systems into the navy. Another long story, but I was managing all the projects to put comm [communications] systems onto most of the surface ships.
- 11:30 They then said, "How long do you want to bat on for?" I said, "As long as I enjoy it". The boss and I had a discussion and he said, "Come up with a date. There is a guy coming out from France to put French comm systems in, which is the long term goal, he will be here after August." And the government had at that stage had planned to change the superannuation laws on 25 August, they ultimately didn't, they dropped them, and I left ADF [Australian Defence Force] on 17
- 12:00 August 2001 on the basis that that was beforehand, that was the end of August, my elder daughter was to be married on 31 August which she was, and six weeks later our son and his wife were married. Interestingly, they froze all the superannuation when the September 11th circumstance, that's another story.
- 12:30 That was 2001 and then in January 2002 I started a watch making course at TAFE [Technical and Further Education] and we are in the last semester at that and that's sort of where I've been and what I've been doing mostly.

A hell of a career.

Many and varied bits and pieces.

Now we go back to the beginning. So, obviously

- 13:00 **you weren't in Launceston long enough to have any memories so it would be Victoria where we would find your earliest memories?**

Yes, we had a house in Chelsea, Mum and Dad had a house in Chelsea. My brothers had started school, I used to wander off to school when Mum was asleep in the

- 13:30 afternoon and get into trouble. Go and find my brother and sit next to him in the class he was in and Mum would wake up and come over to the school and get me into trouble. They were the earliest, but apparently I used to also, I do have a vague recollection of whenever Mum would go sleep when we were down at the beach I'd disappear up to the local police station because they'd always buy me an ice cream and then take me back to Mum. They were my earliest recollections.

So you were a

- 14:00 **fairly independent young chap by the sounds of things?**

No, I think a bit mischievous rather than independent.

Did that tend to be an ongoing thing for you in your younger years, a bit of mischief here and there?

Yes a fair amount of that. When we lived in Sunderland in England it was Tyneside which was the big shipping area and

- 14:30 it suffered a lot of bomb damage. I used to go to school over three bomb sites and there was one in the building, all but one next to the YMCA, we lived in a flat upstairs on top of the YMCA in Sunderland, go over the bomb site, cross a tram line where we used to find little dumps, cut circles with brass and stuff so the trams could run over them and flatten them out,
- 15:00 and get chased by the tram driver and conductor. Passed a nice big bakery which was always good to stand next to in the morning but there were a lot of guys who were homeless who used to stand up just to keep warm because the bakery walls were always warm. Then to the primary school, which was mostly cobblestone and both my knees bear the scrapes from the cobble stone.

- 15:30 **So tell me a bit more about your dad?**

As I said, he came out in 1927 on the Balranald, steerage, and worked around South Australia in the Eyre Peninsula in farms and wheat and sheep

- 16:00 but also a lot of timber-getting and wattle bark stripping. Wattle bark was used for tanning hide and for under [UNCLEAR] area but seemingly in and out of Adelaide a lot, and I am disappointed that I didn't chase down the detail of his life when he was around. He married Mum in 1936

- 16:30 and there was a YMCA, what they called Easter tournaments in Easter in Melbourne and he was over representing South Australia, I think in gymnastics and a couple of other things. Even with his square feet, because he couldn't point his toes because when he shattered both ankles, the feet were sort of stuck on at ninety degrees and that was about all you could get.

- 17:00 He met Mum there and they were married on 4 July 1936 and he then, Mum went to Broken Hill, again in the YMCA, my eldest brother was born in Broken Hill and then Dad went to Tassie, Launceston, I guess it was just on standard rotation from the YMCA where my

- 17:30 other brother, the middle one was born, Gordon was born. Then me. So the old man used to go to the YM at nine o'clock each morning and come home at five for dinner. Mum would always have dinner on the table; he'd go back at a quarter to seven until ten o'clock. Then on Saturday mornings he'd be in there at nine and be home about twelve thirty and that's what he did all his life.

- 18:00 When he and Mum set up a camp at Croxdale in Durham again for the kids in the area to run the camps around, you know, just attended camp. There was an old stone wall paddock by the farmhouse and there was a rumour that there was a tunnel from the farmhouse to Durham Cathedral where apparently the monks used to

- 18:30 depart, go under the river, and then go down the river to get away from whoever they were trying to escape from, which we spent a lot of time looking for. But this large walled paddock, Mum did all the cooking for sixty kids with a bit of help from whoever was available and the old man ran the program. The kids used to have a swim first thing in the morning in the river. Mum got the job, this was

- 19:00 in a coal mining as well as the ship building area, and the kids were sewn into their underwear for winter, sewn across the front so you could drop the dacks [pants], but that was it, so Mum got the job of cutting these kids out of it and throwing these kids into the river. Then we ran programs. It was a great time. We were just little people at that stage,

- 19:30 I was nearly ten when I got home on Christmas Day '50. My two brothers were two years older.

I was going to ask about the nature of dad's accidents.

He was practicing gymnastics in the YMCA in Rundle Street in Adelaide and he cut away off the trapeze. Cut away is like a back somersault and cut away your hands effectively, and he used to land on a windowsill.

20:00 Which was not the smartest thing in the world to do. But this window had never been opened in all the years except this window was open this day and he went straight through the hole and down onto Rundle Street and being a gymnast landed on his feet, which was a pretty stupid thing to do, but there you go, just a natural reaction and shattered both ankles. He did a whole bunch of other damage as well. My oldest brother was down

20:30 from Brisbane a couple of days ago and we dug out a box of bits and pieces that we were trying to slowly go through, and in there was the original doctor's report and it said he was complaining of some pain and he'd actually split his palate and this guy was about to, there was a hole between the nose and the mouth, and he was going to sew up the palate, this was 1927 so it must have been pretty

21:00 savage.

So how much flexibility or mobility did dad end up getting back with his feet?

He refused to walk with a stick. We got him a stick in about 1976 or so, but his right foot, he had I think about an inch of movement of the toe and his left foot about the same and that was

21:30 about all. So if he started to tip backwards he just kept going backwards, there was nothing he could do about it. But he was quite strong therefore in the upper body and he compensated, so when we got a clout around the ears which was usually very well deserved, it was quite meaningful.

So what sort of a bloke was he back in those days? How was he as a father to you?

Good. A pretty strict

22:00 disciplinarian, but he was able to generate a rapport with kids, that's what he did, that was his sole thing. He was probably more strict with my brothers than me, but also with the three of us and the kids in gymnastics. Good guy.

22:30 In fact we had a problem with Elgas, not a problem with Elgas, there was a delivery that I needed and it didn't come and Joanie was pretty sick, she got sick a couple of years ago, and Elgas rang up eventually and told me that they were going to provide some gas so we could get some heating. The gas heater was all we had at the time.

23:00 The girl said, "That's an unusual surname, were you related to Max Ekins from Ballarat?" And it was my old man and he had taught her gymnastics you know, thirty years ago. He did, even in his spare time, what little time he had, he still taught gymnastics to groups of girls and boys.

It was a total passion for him?

Yes, absolutely,

23:30 the whole thing. He came out of the YMCA on night in Ballarat and standing on the steps was this Thai fellow and this was ten o'clock at night when he was closing up to come home, and this guy had been sent out from Thailand by his parents to the Ballarat School of Mines except what his parents didn't realise was that it was not a full boarding school.

24:00 So this guy, Prasat, had wandered around the streets of Ballarat and saw the YMCA symbol which he recognised and said could he get a bed. Well, Prasat came home to stay the night and stayed three years at our place. Pat finished off I think, working for the Thai Embassy in Canberra. We always had people coming to stay and it didn't seem to matter how much. How Mum

24:30 ever provided enough food, clothing, for us at home, because the three of us were all finished our education and the year the old man retired was the first year he made a thousand pounds a year. Now, how Mum ever scraped food together and the clothing together to keep us as we were, I don't know. But it didn't matter who we rocked up with, there was always enough dinner.

25:00 Particularly over a weekend, she'd sort of count heads in the morning to see how many there were for breakfast to see what stray fellow he'd brought home. Mum did a remarkable job, absolutely remarkable.

How would you describe her personality?

She was lovely. Very warm, accommodating, loved singing,

25:30 she wanted to go on the stage but going on the stage was not new in 1930 and born 9 December 1910 she was the eldest of five children and her father was Godfrey Robinson and she was born in Oatley

26:00 in Melbourne and as I said, she brought up the three of us pretty much while my old man was away throughout the war years and then because of Dad's commitment to the YM, Mum was the one who was there when we rocked home from school and everything else. She loved singing; she was in all the choral groups

26:30 and she had a pretty hard road but did it remarkably well. She died in 1989, 3 March 1989. Sorry, 10 March, the same date I joined the air force.

Was there anything

27:00 of the spoilt youngest child syndrome going on?

My brothers would say there was a lot. I guess I got it pretty easy in retrospect, although it didn't seem like that at the time. No, I think the three of us by and large went through what normal families go through.

27:30 Gordon, the middle one, was the pacifier; Max and I were usually at each other's throats for whatever reason, as kids do.

Can you tell us a little bit about the Comforts Fund and how your dad was involved in it?

Australian Comforts Fund ran pretty much parallel with the Salvation Army.

The Comforts

28:00 Fund and your dad's involvement?

ACF [Australian Comforts Fund] ran in parallel with the Salvation Army to support the troops. A lot south of Darwin, down towards Katherine, and also around the Townsville area. Apart from teaching guys leather work and that sort of thing

28:30 I don't know too much more about it, my old man wound up in Townsville Hospital with meningitis during the process. Mum went up to be with him at that stage but I really know little about the ACF. YMCA was part of it.

That's obviously how he became involved?

Yes. So I don't know what the relationship or how that actually came together.

29:00 Had he pondered service in the war?

With two shattered ankles they wouldn't take him. So, I mean, they stuck him in a uniform as part of ACF and he's got a service number and that sort of thing. It was really just mental and physical relaxation.

29:30 Obviously you were very young at the time, did you have any consciousness of the war going on?

The only consciousness of that is that the old man would come home in a khaki painted vehicle which we thought was pretty good. Three small boys and here's the old man come home in a uniform and a service vehicle. But I was too young to recognise

30:00 that at that stage of course, I wasn't even five.

So the involvement with the Comfort Fund you explained then led to the trip overseas to the UK?

I am not sure that it was through ACF as much as the continuing service with the YM. However, the bureaucracies operate at the time,

30:30 but it was the YM that said to the old man about did he want to go back to the UK and take the opportunity by accompanying the evacuees. One of them lived with us at the time. Mary came out from Grimsby and Mary lived with us pretty much as a big sister as much as anything else.

31:00 Company for Mum and she went to high school in Mordialloc, get the train up to Mordialloc every day.

What was the extent of the evacuation of the kids?

I don't know the totality of it. I just know that a hundred and twenty of them went back on the Aquitania and the old man and a couple of assistants for a six week

31:30 ocean voyage with a hundred and twenty teenagers. Fortunately I guess the standards of the day were different than what they are today which might have made it a bit easier for him.

Then the family set off for Sunderland?

We went through the UK, through London, and then up to Sunderland. I recall little of that apart from

32:00 my brother telling me that I could walk along the handrail of the ship, that would be a good trick to do and Mum caught me doing that and there you go. But we wound up in Sunderland and as I said spent five years there almost.

How did you and your brothers feel about being in a new country?

32:30 I am not sure how they felt about it. If you were from the next street you were a bit of a foreigner. You didn't speak the local Geordie dialect you really were outside. If you came from another country you

were a long way outside. You were very much an outsider and it took quite a bit to be accepted.

33:00 It seems that my modus operandi was by eventually fighting my way to the top.

The different accent and different background initially was a reason to be teased?

Absolutely. I had a pretty short fuse and

33:30 it's not something I'm particularly proud of. I guess that was the way you got teased and how you accommodated that was a personality issue.

So you worked your way to the top in the schoolyard?

Pretty much or usually on the cobblestones outside.

How did you find school over there?

34:00 They were posted in a period where there was a lot of disadvantaged families in the area and they were pretty hard yards. Schooling came I think, probably too easily for me because later on I didn't study enough as I should have.

34:30 I learnt that lesson.

You did pretty well in your primary school years?

Reasonably well. I seemed to get through that okay. I think the three of us used to go to school reasonably comfortably and go home. It was a depressed area, coal mining, ship building, bomb sites.

35:00 It was not the most pleasant place and I guess that's why the old man and Mum through the YMCA organised to run the camp out at Croxdale. Croxdale was through Durham and if your geography is good through that part of England, it's a nice part of the world. It's rolling green hills and the river, it's well away from the industrial city.

35:30 **You got enjoyment out of those camps?**

Yes, we had lots of fun, lots of mischief. There were giant oak trees around the boundary outside the wall and there was a big bull in the paddock, another walled paddock next to the walled paddock that we were in. There was a walled paddock and you had crab apples in the orchard and you had this big bull in the orchard and the trick was to see who could get the crab apples.

36:00 We had lots of fun; those were good memories of those years.

There was sport?

Yes.

Activities?

Yes, my old man worked on the philosophy that you run them until they drop and they are going to sleep and not cause you trouble. There was lots of that. Enjoyable time.

How did you feel about

36:30 **the news that you were coming back to Australia?**

I think coming back to Australia was one of those things that was eventually going to happen. It was talked about by Mum and Dad and I think, you know, it was just the next phase in life. We rocked back, we docked in

37:00 Melbourne in fact on Christmas Day 1950 and we were met there by family. Mum's parents were still about. They were retiring at that stage and building a new home down in Philip Island and we all rocked down there and together with Mum's two sisters, two surviving sisters and brother, and

37:30 their families and we were sort of living with Granddad and Granny while the carpenter was still there trying to finish off building the house. Horst was his name, nice guy. So that's where we first met up with all the family and of course Mum was pleased to see all of her family and catch up with them. We caught up with Granddad while we were in England and

38:00 in fact when I got posted to England in 1972, we left election day '72, 2 December '72, and my Gran went early for my Grandfather's ninety-third birthday because he was still alive. He was a ramrod straight shock of white hair and he had been a carpenter all his life. I said, "Were you a cabinetmaker Granddad?" He said, "I was a

38:30 carpenter, cabinetmaker was one of the things we did," and he sat back on his heels. We caught up with him then and six weeks later he rang me up to say goodbye and I said, "Hold on, I am up to my gills in mathematics and physics and all the rest of it I will be down on the weekend and I will come and see you". He said, "No, no, I've done everything I want to do, I've seen my great grandchildren, I am

39:00 pleased and I am just ringing up to say goodbye". The next morning he was dead. There was a list of people to ring, a list of people to write to, a copy of his Will, a copy of his carpenter's union cards, a copy of his savings bond certificate all laid out, left to right on his writing desk which was never opened except for this moment. He had it buttoned, down to a T.

A well organised man?

Well I then

39:30 had to ring my father and tell him his father had died, which I didn't enjoy at all.

So back in Australia did you finish your primary schooling back here or did you go straight to high school?

Went back into Port Pirie primary school for three years in Pirie, and South Australia ran a seven year primary school and still do, whereas eastern states run six year primary, six year secondary.

40:00 Which then meant when I went to Yallourn there was some debate as to which year I would go into and my brothers. We all went to Yallourn High School, so I went straight into second year high school which caused a bit of a hiccup because I hadn't done first year French and all those sort of good things. I was three years in Port Pirie Primary,

40:30 used to ride a bike to school over the salt flats and if you did it when they were wet and you clogged up and you wound up with this red sticky mud from one end to the other and the bike wheels wouldn't turn and you'd get quite frustrated. But my brothers went to high school in Port Pirie and as I said, we went off to Yallourn.

Tape 2

00:30 **Okay, Peter, we are at high school, what sort of a high school student were you?**

Not that good. Should have been better. Should have worked harder. A couple of years in Yallourn and then three years in Ballarat. I wound up doing my matriculation by correspondence after I joined the air force

01:00 and while I was in Malaya in fact.

What were your strengths and weaknesses as a student as far as subjects?

I think that's better left unsaid. I had some capability in maths and physics, along that line, but not as good as I should have been or could have been.

Still it would have come in handy as a navigator.

Yes, as I said

01:30 I started my matriculation re-education by correspondence before I joined the air force because of the practical work I had done at school it was recognised by the authorities and then I could just do the theory and wound up doing the exams after I was posted to Malaya. Did reasonably well there and then continued on and I think I'd

02:00 been going by correspondence, my school or external studies some way or another for almost all my life. I'm still doing little bits and pieces.

Nothing wrong with that. What about sport at school?

Yes, a little. Hard as it may seem to believe my Mum was five foot two and I could stand under her arm, her outstretched arm when I was

02:30 Fifteen, so I don't think the five years in the UK did my physical stature much good. Then I grew, as it were, before I joined the air force. That was really quite late for most people I was pretty short and slight and then

03:00 I was boarding with a family in, just out of Bendigo who actually had goats and it seemed like a diet of goat's milk and duck eggs and those sort of things and it fired off whatever it is that finally causes you to grow.

Just a bit of protein it sounds like instead of the British postwar diet?

My brother used to actually sell the ration tickets.

03:30 Take them to school and sell the ration tickets and then with the money that used to, from flogging those at school, that used to supplement whatever income Mum needed to buy the food that we actually needed. When we got back we stopped in Fremantle on the way home, on the Moreton Bay ship and Mum said we should all go and have a milkshake and we did and all three of us were violently ill

because we couldn't handle the

04:00 richness of the milk, the cream in the milk, our bodies just totally rejected it. So, there you go, didn't do us a lot of harm in the long run, the three of us are pretty healthy which is good news.

What sport did you get involved with as a young man?

I tried to play basketball but I was too short until I eventually grew. I used to play baseball in the winter

04:30 in Ballarat but eventually played a bit of basketball.

Any female attention as a teenager?

Girls were always of interest, particularly with two older brothers. They would sort of show the way as it were.

05:00 I guess I was like most young fellows interested in girls. Probably to the detriment of my studies as well.

As well as being interested in girls I believe that aircraft were an interest as well?

I joined the training corps from Yallourn in fact. There was a local flight established in Yallourn, at Moe,

05:30 was it Moe?, At Moe, and there was an airfield there and they had some Tiger Moths and I used to fly around and that's where I got interested I guess.

Why did you join that in the first place?

My brothers had both been in the army cadets. That didn't impress me too much. Having watched my eldest brother give my middle brother a hard time, Max was a cadet officer and Gordon got heaps and I thought,

06:00 "I am not going down that route". So the air force cadets seemed like a good idea. With that aircraft interest that sort of continued on through schooling in Ballarat and with air force camps they took them down to Point Cook and places like that. I got to be the lofty rank of flight sergeant in the air force cadets and I guess that helped me get in the front door.

06:30 **So what did it involve being in the air training cadets?**

It was usually one night a week marching around the parade ground and doing a bit of theory on aircraft operations and that sort of thing.

How much sort of flying as a passenger did you get to do?

None.

No joyrides or anything?

No, nothing.

That's a bit steep.

Yes,

07:00 it was, but there you go. I guess the camps I went on didn't have that latitude or availability.

Were you interested in like building model planes?

Yes, I was trying to clean out the garage and rationalise some of my junk the other day and I've still got a box full of model aircraft motors and things like that because I used to build control line aircraft and fly them and cover myself and everybody else

07:30 with aviation fuel. It was an abiding interest, I wasn't as good at it as I could have been, should have been.

As you were coming towards the end of your school life, what were your ambitions?

Pretty much to join the air force, to fly. Like all kids I wanted to be a pilot.

08:00 That was the goal and did all the entry exams and the rest of it and went down for the interview having got through all the aptitude tests and exams and all that and they said, "Do you want to be a navigator?" I said, "No".

Hang on, let's wind back a bit first. When you left school you applied to join the air force, that's right, where did you go to do that?

That was in Melbourne and you went down and did three days of battery

08:30 testing.

What sort of stuff?

All sorts of math and physics and bit of aircraft instruments and those sort of things. So all the air training course stuff that was certainly valuable for that. Having done my matric [matriculation] in maths and physics was valuable, I didn't do as well as I should have done in the external exam but I did alright in the air force

- 09:00 aptitude test and got through those and it was those interviews at the end of the aptitude, you know they cull people all along the line and they said, "Do you want to be a navigator?" I said, "No, I didn't I wanted to be a pilot". They said, "Go away and get a couple of years' experience in the real world and then come back". That's what I did.

How did you feel about them saying that to you?

It was a bit disappointing and disheartening.

- 09:30 In retrospect, perhaps even a couple more years outside before I joined the air force might have been valuable.

So as somebody who came a career air force officer, why do you think they made you go out into the world for a couple of years?

Lack of maturity. You needed to be a bit more independent. I had still been living at home at that stage.

- 10:00 Just all those things. It's certainly valuable to have a broader base once you are in the force because effectively you become an officer by dint of your training and the officer's training part is quite strong within the services but it did rely upon you having at least

- 10:30 a little bit of common sense.

Do you think that's different than these days?

I don't think so. They've changed the training program, they now put people through officers' training school before they put them onto the aircrew courses and if they don't scrub up they don't get onto the aircrew courses. That is part of the course.

I mean also the fact there is quite a

- 11:00 **heavy targeting of high school students to go...?**

At that stage you could have gone either to what was called in the college at Point Cook or direct entry aircrew. The college was matriculated students who then did the college course and at the end of the college course you could elect to then go back and finish off by doing

- 11:30 another year university degree. Some very good friends of mine did that but direct entry, that was just a straight flying course but the officers' training course is just a part of it. As I said, they subsequently changed the process.

So after you had been sort of temporarily turned away from the air force what were your options for employment?

- 12:00 I joined the bank for a couple of years and got posted up to Mildura and lived in a boarding house with a couple of other guys, a couple of clerks of the court which was valuable, and a stock and station agent by the name of John Clarke. Clarke hated crows because he used to say crows used to fly around and say, "Clarke, Clarke". He hated crows also because they used to peck the eyes out of ewes that were

- 12:30 Down, or the lambs. So he had some vendetta against crows. Through him we used to go up and spend weekends on the banks of the Darling River on Katherine Station or a couple of the other stations whose name escape me at the moment. Fishing and shooting roos, and just generally having a good time.

How easy was it for you to get a job in a bank?

- 13:00 Walked along, knocked on the door and said this was what I was looking for and they said, "Yes, come along, do a training course in Melbourne". That was it. Nothing like the difficulties of this generation of kids have in getting a job.

Certainly is a different story these days.

Absolutely, and my brother was in a different bank.

Why did you choose a bank?

On Lydiard Street

- 13:30 in Ballarat there was about five major institutions. Gordon was in the Bank of New South Wales, next door, so it seemed like a reasonable idea to knock on the one next door.

What was the name of that bank?

ES and A. English Scotland and Australia, basis of Esander taking over.

I mean, a bank as a career was just something as a spur of the

14:00 **moment or...?**

It wasn't a career I was looking for. It was reasonable occupation, they provided training, I was only in the bank a few months and they made me, they sent me to a tellers' training school in Melbourne and I was at Mildura as a teller and after about a year they sent me to Bendigo as a, what was called the General Clerk who wrote, as well as being a teller, ordered the hire purchase agreements. That sort of thing

14:30 which firmly convinced me that I should never go into hire purchase at any stage in my life thereafter. The bank was pretty good to me. I was being given pretty much a learning passage and accelerated promotion through there.

Why do you think that was?

The others didn't seem to be that capable. I don't know, fortunate circumstances, place.

Was your level of education a little bit greater?

15:00 Yes. Most of them hadn't gone past intermediate [certificate] and I was fortunate. In fact, the accountant in Mildura had been an air force pilot so that might also have had another influence on me. The manager in Kangaroo Flat just out of Bendigo tried to convince me that joining the air force was not a good idea; banking would be a better career structure.

15:30 But my brother actually stuck with the Bank of New South Wales for thirty five years and was instrumental in introducing electronic banking and then they were having a downturn some years ago and they said they couldn't afford to run the new technology branch, he was a manager in the new technology branch and after thirty five years gave him the flick. With three boys in university

16:00 it was pretty hard to take. That's why he set up his own gardening business. They said to him, "What's your degree in?" Because part of the outplacement training, and he said, "I don't have a degree, I've been with the bank from year eleven and spent thirty five years developing all the modern systems". They said, "If you haven't got a degree we virtually can't find you a job". He said, "I will find one".

16:30 And he did.

Okay, so how long were you at the bank then for?

Just from 1959 until 1961.

It seems obvious that you kept your eye on the ball as far as the air force went during that time?

Yes, that was my objective. I went back and did correspondence courses to try and get my matriculation

17:00 to improve my opportunities of getting in as much as anything else.

Did you ever consider sticking with the banking?

Not this bloke. I mean, it was good and while I was doing it, it was paying my board and all those sort of things. Particularly when they closed on a Saturday, they still opened on Saturday mornings, really, you balance the

17:30 books at the end of the day and you were out of there. There was no great brain strain, nothing taxing on you at all.

Was it a fairly slow pace of work in the bank?

No. Pretty good. I guess that's probably why I enjoyed it because it was demanding. I hate being bored, I hate having nothing to do. I never want nothing to do.

18:00 **So at what point as it that you started to consider it was time to reapply to the air force?**

Every year.

You made repeated applications?

I had made, I just kept applying.

Did those applications involve you doing the aptitude test over again?

Yes.

How many times were you told to come back again?

Pretty much

18:30 when I got back into doing all of those in 1960 because I had applied in '58 and then I actually had interviews in Melbourne at the end of, in '58 and then here in Sydney in '59 and then when I applied in '60, early in '59, doing the YMCA training course out here at Yurramundi

19:00 and then went into the city for a day and then that was an odd situation, I am not sure what occurred there, I still don't understand that. But then in 1960 I reapplied again and then was accepted to start in March, 10 March 1961.

How did you feel when they said this time it's on?

Over the moon, absolutely.

19:30 I had been accepted for pilot school and that didn't work out, sadly.

When you first enlisted, when you were first taken in, it was March '61?

Yes.

What did, where did you go for that?

Point Cook, straight to Point Cook.

What did the initial training involve?

A whole bunch of ground school and

20:00 it seemed liked endless ground school at that stage.

What sort of materials?

Aerodynamics, maths, physics, meteorology, maps and charts, navigation and all that sort of stuff. Then the flying training started and about six weeks before we were due to go to Pearce to go on the Vampires I missed out on a flying test and you only miss one test and you are out of there.

20:30 They said, "Do you want to be a navigator?" Which I had heard before and I said I would and because I still wanted to fly and I went down to Sale and waited for the next nav course to start.

The test you had failed, what were you flying in that respect?

Wing jet.

21:00 That was a seventy five hour test, seventy hour test.

What was it that you actually failed to achieve?

I made a couple of what are now pretty fundamental errors but at the time didn't like errors, it was re-joining a circuit on the line which was done,

21:30 there was some aerobatics, you know, they were just marginal, the guy sat me down and said, "I don't know what to do with you. You are just marginal but I don't know whether or not it's going to be worthwhile continuing." and all the rest and he went through that routine for about an hour and then he said, "Come back and see me in the morning." I went back in the morning

22:00 and I was on the flying program. I thought, "Beauty". He called me into the office, I went for a briefing with the new flying instructor and I said, "I am on the program and this is what's down as a sailard [?] but I haven't seen Godfrey Lindeman because he said to come back and see him in the morning." He said, "You better go back and see him." So I went back and saw him and he said, "You are out of here".

22:30 Thanks a bunch.

After years of dreaming of being a pilot and all that persistence.

Yes, you get it between the eye. Pretty hard to take. But, you know, you have those sort of disappointments and you say, "Alright, well, I'll go and get my act together and think about this". I went down and did nav training

23:00 with a single-minded objective that there was no bloody way in the world I was going to fail this. Quite the reverse in fact.

Would there have been from your later experience a quota that they had to fail out into navigation?

No I don't think a quota to fail out into navigation I think a quota of limitation of numbers on Vampires as much as anything else and that reoccurred in my son's

23:30 case. After I left the air force was accepted for pilot training he got to Pearce on the Mackies and he missed out at Pearce. Poor bugger.

How long did it take for you to sort of recover from that disappointment?

In retrospect I would be pushed to identify but

24:00 they had me out of there reasonably, actually, after a couple of weeks, they gave me a few weeks to get

my head around it and get out of there. It wasn't as if you were out of there today.

How did your fellow trainees treat you who were still on the pilots' course?

"That's tough." But 42 pilots course started with, I think, about thirty odd of

24:30 which they were only taking half of that number at Pearce so we had seen guys go beforehand and in fact other guys who had gone from the pilots' course wound up on three different nav courses, consecutive nav courses. One of the guys just missed out on the final handling test at Pearce. They are pretty brutal about it.

So

25:00 **what did the navigation school involve?**

Lots more of the same sort of theory but a lot more in depth on astro, maps and charts, obviously that sort of stuff. Flying the Dakota, usually six hour trips, three hours as first nav, three hours of second nav, you'd run and swap it over half way through the trip. All different

25:30 sorts of application whether it was maritime whether it was all astro. Maritime was usually low over the water reading the wind streaks, reading the wind speed from the wave height, the white caps. Doing free drift winds, so flying dog legs over the water to pick up where the wind was and doing a lot of dead reckoning. Astro

26:00 was obviously all night stuff, you learnt all the stars, major nav stars, sun and planets and all that sort of stuff. It's interesting that it's now with my interesting in horology, clocks, with the navigation signs it is all sort of coming back together to the extent that the National Maritime Museum has asked me to give them a lecture for an hour in November on the origins of

26:30 finding longitude and time and all that sort of stuff. So it's obviously built in somewhere.

You weren't carrying big brass chronometers in the Dakotas?

No, far more accurate, no not more accurate than a chronometer, but

This is what I was going to ask you, what navigational instruments and aids were you using in the early '60's?

I am going to need a break.

27:00 The Dakota was set up for astro it had an astrodome on the top so you had a sextant and also you could use this small, I can't remember what it was called now, like a sighting device for picking up angles as you went by, drift meter for watching the speed streaks over land to determine how much drift you were being subjected

27:30 to, an air positioning indicator, an old API [Air Positioning Indicator], it worked on the air being blown in the front of it and it told you what the air speed was, so the dial taking the air position and from the wing to determine the ground position so pretty much that's all you had.

Fairly much on the level of World War II technology. Okay, so we just talked about

28:00 **your flight or navigation instruments, that was your navigation school was just an escalation of the complexity of those sort of exercises?**

Yes, it started off as pretty basic map reading and then went through there with different aids and then we used aids, navigation aids, that's how it ran for twelve months.

Twelve months of that?

Yes.

You said before because you had been scrubbed

28:30 **from the pilot course that you were absolutely determined to stay in air crew, how did that manifest in the way that you approached the exercises and the study?**

I got my act together and made sure that I did everything I could to get out of there and I did.

How did you, not just in navigation school, but even earlier,

29:00 **how did you take to air force life and discipline?**

Pretty well. It was what I expected, the discipline, those things were all as I had expected them to be, it wasn't a surprise in any way, shape, or form.

What about even at the basic training, how sort of hard was that?

Square bashing, drills,

29:30 again, it was pretty much what I had expected. Some of it was obviously tedious but that was part of the deal.

Any what would you consider today as a bastardisation?

Very minor. There was always rubbish in the junior courses. There was no physical harm,

30:00 there was a bit but nothing that was ridiculous.

Was it more vocal than physical?

No a bit of both.

Would the way that was carried out in your day be acceptable today in the air force for training?

Pretty much I would imagine so. I wouldn't think there would be

30:30 any major retribution for anything that was identified.

It obviously didn't leave you with any scars?

No, I don't think so.

So after the twelve months of navigation, you mentioned you started with DC3, was it always on DC3?

Did a couple of trips in Canberras and Vampires at the end of the course and a little later on high speed navigation. A bit of jopping around through the snow fields and Kosciusko

31:00 in a Vampire at a couple of hundred feet, it was good fun.

How do you navigate when you are going that much faster?

Well, that's mostly just visual, map reading. You don't have the rigour that you do with, like you do in maritime. Like I was explaining earlier with the plotting charts,

31:30 you don't have that rigour, you do a lot more preparatory work on the ground, planning the route, putting unit markers, putting safety heights, putting all of your headings all of that detail, track and heading detail, reporting detail, all on your charts so you spend a lot more time doing that which is fundamentally what we did on Canberras in Malaya and Vietnam.

32:00 **What about in something like a Vampire or a Canberra, the space you had to do that work in?**

That's why you have to do it beforehand. Because all you've got is enough space to hold your map pretty much and that's it. There is a bit more space in the Canberra back in the nav station, for the long transit or high level work.

What aircraft did you expect you would end up flying in?

32:30 You had a bid on the nav course as to where you wanted to go and if you were lucky enough to be in the first couple of places on the course you got your bid which was the Canberra.

Why did you want Canberras?

There was a guy on the staff called Bruce Kutcher who was killed on the Canberra sadly, and Pete Kennedy

33:00 and these guys had both been Canberra navigators and they were always very happy to have flown in the aeroplane and they said you always go out, drop a bomb, take a picture, and you always do something, you get around to some interesting places that have interesting circumstances rather than maritime where you are

33:30 out looking at a bunch of water all day. My son in law's a maritime navigator he's a tacko and he wouldn't agree with that definition. Those were the sort of things that influenced my selection.

What were the aircraft options? I should ask that as well besides Canberras.

There was maritime and they were flying Neptunes out of Richmond and out of Townsville and they were the P2E or the

34:00 SP2H's, then it was P2E 5 or 7's, they had a bunch of different numbers. They were the Neptunes essential for maritimes. Transport, you could go trash hauling in Dakotas or the first of the Hercules were in. I think they were pretty much the options or Canberras.

So

34:30 **was there a, you sort of pejoratively said 'trash hauling', that was considered a low status?**

No, they gave us some really interesting places but it was just transport, air route flying, didn't seem to me to be all that attractive but they do go to some fascinating places. They did. I wound up flying in Dakotas for a lot longer than that anyway.

35:00 **You obviously did reasonably in the navigation course, how well?**

I was dux of the course.

How did you feel about that when you graduated as aircrew?

Pretty good. I was sort of achieving the goals I had set myself and got my act together

35:30 and doing what I wanted to do. If you do what you want to do and get paid for it what else could you do?

By the way, what did your parents think about you joining the armed forces?

They were pretty happy. Again, it was what I wanted to do. Mum and Dad were always supportive in whatever the three of us wanted to do and wanted to achieve.

Who

36:00 **came along to the passing out parade?**

My grandparents, my parents, and my now wife, Joanie.

So when did Joanie come onto the scene?

At a young Anglican fellowship camp in Melbourne in the start of '61. She was, there was a conference and all these Anglican fellowships

36:30 around Victoria in Melbourne and it was being held at Grammar School and she was there with a guy and we met there.

Your early life seems to be dictated by youth camps in one way or another?

I guess so, well, Mum and Dad were very strong Anglicans and my old man became a

37:00 lay reader in the church. The YMCA was a Christian association and Mum was in the choir in the church. The three of us were brought up going to church and holy communion every Sunday morning. When the three of us got into our working life we were all in the young Anglican fellowship and in fact all

37:30 branch leaders at one particular time, it was that time the meeting was in Melbourne. So there you go, circumstances.

So while you had been doing your training you were obviously in contact with Joanie?

Yes, she at that stage had applied to join Ansett [Airlines] and she was accepted into Ansett about that time

38:00 and while I was at Sale she was posted up to Sydney and she was flying out of Sydney and I was at Sale so about every third weekend I used to drive up there on a Friday night, we'd go out on Saturday night and I'd drive back on Sunday night.

That's dedication.

Well, yes. Particularly as the road was unsealed for a hundred and ninety two bends going to Cann River, between Cann River and Eden.

38:30 **There was no, as an air force guy, there was no chance of bludging [begging] a flight?**

No, that wasn't even a consideration.

So Joanie was aircrew even before you were?

Pretty much.

Whereabouts did she used to fly to in those days?

All up and down the east coast mostly but also did the New Guinea runs, so she used to go

39:00 up to New Guinea and stay in Lae. They were six day stopovers. So they'd go up through Brisbane and up to Moresby and then to Lae and then they'd go around New Guinea as much as they could. In fact we were on exercises where we were camped beside the runway at Moresby flying Canberras and she came through one day

39:30 and we chased each other around. At that stage the moment the girls got married they had to leave. They were not allowed to have married hostesses, Ansett didn't allow it.

Was it just coincidence that she was interested in air crew?

I think so. She always wanted to do that. So we got four in the mixture there somewhere because all the kids, Sally is a air hostess and Rachel is married to an air force navigator and Paul

40:00 did his commercial pilot's ticket after he got busted from the air force.

So you've all spent more time in the air than on the ground just about?

No, you never get to that situation.

So where were you posted off to after you passed out of navigation?

Amberley. Up to Amberley '82 in Amberley where they were flying Canberras and to OCU, operational conversion unit and in fact Ron Bedall, the guy who dobbed me in

40:30 for this was on the same conversion course. Gus Guber, navigator, was on the same nav course as I was. There was a guy called Garrison who was the OC [Officer Commanding] of the base doing the same course. We were brand new pilot officers and there was an air commodore on the course and we weren't too sure about that.

It must have been an interesting dynamic?

He was very good. He was very

41:00 accommodating for us. Jack Tolge [?] who I was flying with on Canberras. Sadly Jack lost his air crew category, that's another story.

Tape 3

00:30 **So you graduated and you were off to Amberley next?**

Yes.

How did things unfold for you there?

There was the conversion course.

Converting?

To Canberras. Then at the completion of the course

01:00 I was posted to 1 Squadron. 1 Squadron and 6 Squadron operated out of Amberley.

How long did that conversion course go for?

About three months or something like that, I can't recall specifically but I can check it if you like.

Were the Canberras everything you thought they might be?

Yes, they were.

01:30 The Canberra was designed, it started the design process before the end of the Second World War but it didn't finish, its first flight was 1947 as a high level strategic bomber and of course we were using them as a low level daylight visual bomber and the air conditioning system was designed around high level

02:00 operations out of the high latitudes of the UK rather than the low latitudes of Australia so the air conditioning system was never up to the task and in Malaya it was even worse. The aircraft was good. Queen of the Skies it was colloquially known as.

What did you like about it?

It was just a good aeroplane to fly and

02:30 a good squadron to be in and good camaraderie in the crew. It was a two place aeroplane so you got to know each other pretty well.

How were you positioned in the aircraft with the pilot?

The navigator sat behind the pilot, tandem seating, ejection seats were tandem seating. The navigator used to get out of the ejection seat and go down past the pilot to lie down on the couch, the couch down the front

03:00 with an eighteen inch space beside the pilot and there was also a jump seat so you could actually take a third person on the aeroplane without an ejection seat and if you put the jump seat down and sat sideways with half of your backside on top of the electronic control panel, you could actually see out of the aeroplane as well, which is what you had to

- 03:30 do for daylight operation because predominately it was all daylight map reading. For the long transit flights there was a pretty reasonably navigation fit, for its day, there was green satin Doppler radar to give you ground speed and drift. There was a pretty good mark four ground positioning decoder which did the arithmetic which gave you
- 04:00 latitude and longitude. As well as the usual air instruments and a pretty good compass system. It was reasonably well set up for high altitude operations but for low altitude the Doppler wouldn't work because it was too low, particularly in the tropics where the greasy surface of the sea was not giving a good radar return for the green satin so you
- 04:30 couldn't get decent ground speed off it. Most of our bombing was done by a very old fashioned bomb sight that came out of the Second World War and it was all visual and based upon your assessment of the wind as to what drift and speed differential, and you would direct the pilot left, left, or right for correction,
- 05:00 and we were bombing in Malaya at three hundred and fifty knots at six hundred feet so it was, you developed very strong neck muscles with your helmet and oxy mask and the rest of it on, and you had to actually depress your head and look up to see through the bomb sight to try and get a decent tracking. You actually went up a size in shirt collar.
- 05:30 **Are you harnessed in down there?**
- No, it's designed to give you claustrophobia. There is not space and by the time you've got a Mae west [lifejacket] on as well,
- Pretty tight squeeze down there?**
- Yes, bigger guys than me managed it so I had a bit of space.
- Can you give us an idea of what your range of vision was looking through the perspex?**
- For bombing?
- Just general**
- 06:00 **observation.**
- If you were just doing en route navigation at low level, you'd be up beside the pilot and looking out
- You'd be propped up?**
- You'd sit up with your feet on the jump seat and your backside on the CP, control panel, and you could see out through the canopy pretty well.
- Was that a precarious position or do you just get used to it?**
- Bit of both.
- 06:30 Danny Shima and Gus Guber were flying the aeroplane when they got a bird strike that took the canopy off and Gus off course not being strapped in nearly went out through the top. It was a bit precarious but that's the only circumstances where I know that a canopy's gone. I know lots of cases where they got birds in through the nose cone. Patty O'Farrell was flying with Ron Bedall
- 07:00 and he was down the nose when a bird came in and smashed his arm, it went straight through his forearm, and all the other bits and pieces that come off at the same time. I think I managed to beat about four birds straight past the pilot by not being hit by them. You don't really get enough time to see them coming, you are just fortunate to get out of the way. So from the nose you had a limited amount of
- 07:30 visibility forward because it's a cone, but pretty good. But for bombing there is a flat plate for direct view so you don't get optical distortion and it's through that you look through the bomb site through the flap DV [Direct View] panel, direct view panel, that's fine but at low level you don't have a lot of forward
- 08:00 visibility at all.
- So you are prone the whole time down there?**
- Yes.
- What's the comfort like over an extended period of time?**
- Not very, you are prone and you get rattled around there. Particularly in high turbulence conditions. The pilot is strapped into an ejection seat and in Vietnam they put armour plating under the pilot's seating and the navigator had a piece of plastic
- 08:30 to look through, so equal opportunity.
- So how long would it take you to get down into that position?**
- The nav seat?

Yes.

Not all that long. It depends; you got pretty used to getting out of the seat. The seat has a parachute built into the seat, sorry, sitting in the seat,

09:00 if you have to get back into the seat you've got to cut a strap, two side straps that go through the crutch strap and up into the parachute connector box and two shoulder straps and then same again on the ejection seat over the top of all that. So you got to get in and out of that sort of stuff. The oxygen system and the mikel system [?] you've got in the ejection seat, to get out of it you've got to then connect yourself up to a

09:30 longer lead that goes to nose position so you've got to change over your oxygen system, change of your mikel as well as getting out of the harnesses. You could do it in twenty or thirty seconds with a bit of practice. Getting back in takes a bit longer but I think I've done it in a shorter time than I had to.

You said the Canberra was essentially designed for the high altitude sort of work,

10:00 **were there any other setbacks because it was being used to do the lower altitude stuff? You mentioned the fact that you had to jump up to be able to see out the window. Were there other sort of factors that were negative?**

Mostly from a pilot's point of view. It didn't have an auto pilot. Australia actually signed a contract to put auto pilots on the aircraft and a guy who became a

10:30 friend of ours came out with Smiths Industry to put the gyros, to put an auto pilot in and then they cancelled the contract and he was on the way out. It did never have an auto pilot, so for long flights at altitude there was no auto pilot, which is really when you would need it. I guess that's its most severe limitation. It also had a

11:00 talk tube control system so that there wasn't a direct linkage to the flying surfaces so when you put a control, when the pilot made a control input it actually wound up a tube which wound up another tube which wound up another one and went down the back so it wasn't direct so you could actually, it wasn't as precise

11:30 or as responsive as a fighter for example. It had a bit of a nasty characteristic that if you lost an engine and if you put the flap down to land and then you found out you were in the wrong position and you would need to go around it would roll, badly. I think off the top of my head eighty per cent of the fatalities we had in

12:00 Canberras were due to that circumstance, an asymmetric go around, the flap down and that's how the guy I mentioned before, Bruce Kurchett, lost his life. So it had a couple of those things, those characteristics, which as long as you knew about them and respected them. It also took a long time for the engines to spool up, when the pilot put power on it took

12:30 seven seconds or so for it to go from idle up to giving you the power you wanted, it can be a long time. The aeroplane by in large is pretty good, pretty reliable. It was a good bird.

Did you have any sticky situations when you were converting to it?

13:00 Yes. The one we talked about, unfortunate.

Could you quickly take us through that one?

One of the conversion tasks was to do a low level maritime navigation exercise culminating in dropping practice bombs at Evans Head. This was three hundred knots, two hundred feet over the sea.

13:30 The guy that I was flying with, do you want me to mention his name?

If you are happy.

Jack Torris and I were crewed up for the conversion. Jack had been in hospital with gastro [enteritis] and he wanted to finish the conversion and we went, we did this trip and he obviously wasn't over his gastro and probably dehydrated

14:00 and the aircraft was very hot and it was pretty hot day and he said was I going to come up the front and I said, no, I have to sit in the back and check out the instruments and navigation system to see what its limitations were. He said he would rather I did because he wasn't feeling well and the next communication was when he had taken his helmet off and dropped it into the little well beside the

14:30 Pilot, which was very unusual and uncharacteristic. So I got out of my seat in a rush and went beside him to be met by a somewhat glassy glaze and he passed out and went on the control panel and without an automatic pilot of course we were starting to descend and at three hundred knots and two hundred feet planted towards the ocean. I was able to grab a hold of the pilot

15:00 and we whistled up and got up to an altitude where, because we had it on full cold, you selected cold even though you were getting hot air and cooled it down and with a bit of friendly contact counselling got him to realise what was going on and he managed to land the aeroplane with me sitting beside him

- on the jump seat, shouting at him. He landed by himself quite
- 15:30 safely, pretty safely, and came to a halt at the end of the runway and he literally tumbled out of the aeroplane and took him back to hospital. It was pretty hairy.
- That would have got the adrenaline pumping?**
- Yes just a bit. So Jack lost his category later and became an equipment officer and left the air force sometime later. He had a business in Perth last time I heard.
- 16:00 **Do you think you would have coped as well if you hadn't done so much pilot training yourself?**
- No, I think I was fortunate that at least I had some idea what I needed to do. It wasn't pretty.
- Got you there.**
- Got us out of the problem.
- So three months or so converting to the Canberra bombings and posted where next?**
- Posted to 1 Squadron where
- 16:30 we were then training for essentially what 2 Squadron were doing in Malaya. 1 and 6 Squadron were both doing the training program and various exercises.
- What were they doing in Malaya at that stage?**
- Malaya was where 2 Squadron was based and that was part of the Far East Air Force run by the Poms [English] and 2 Squadron became a squadron at Far East Air Force and
- 17:00 subsequently became the five powered defence agreement between England, Australian, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. That still exists so even though our friend Dr Mahata [prime minister of Malaysia] keeps raining on the Australians; he's been using our defence system for some time. But 2 Squadron was a part of the strategic reserve for Far East
- 17:30 Air Force and when things got untidy in Indonesia with Soekarno [first President of Indonesia] and the slaughter of millions of Chinese there was a very high probability that Malaysia was going to be drawn into that conflict and we were part of that strategic reserve. We were doing
- 18:00 in Malaya pretty much what we had been trained for in Australia and that was low level, high speed, we call it high speed, navigation and bombing. But again limited to daylight predominately because it was a visual bombing system and a level bombing system. Again limited by the weapons that were fitted
- 18:30 to the aircraft and it wasn't until we went to Vietnam that we found that some of those clearances that we thought we had needed some rework even for operations in Vietnam. We thought we had it wired but there we go.
- Where are we time wise?**
- '64 to '66.
- 19:00 **So you became a part of 1 Squadron?**
- No, 1 Squadron was in Amberley, that was '63 and '64, then in October '64,
- So let's just talk about that initially.**
- Sorry, I jumped there.
- Not a problem. So what did that entail at that time for you?**
- It was becoming familiar with the aircraft. You learn all the stuff on the conversion course but you have no experience, you don't have the familiarity with what you can do, how can I tweak this to make it
- 19:30 work better for me? How can I improve the bombing accuracy, how can I work better with the pilot to make sure he puts it where I want him to put it so when we drop the bomb it goes where I want it to go. Navigation exercises.
- Were you working with a number of different pilots?**
- In 1 Squadron yes. I think,
- 20:00 we originally crewed up, initially you are crewed up in the various squadrons because it's a two place aeroplane and it's more convenient to be just able to program a crew to do things. But as the new graduate, the navigator, any job that comes along that somebody doesn't want to do you wind up doing. Some interesting trips but there are a number of guys
- 20:30 that I flew with but only for a short time. I crewed up with a Pakistani on exchange, we had an exchange program. Roger McLeod was flying Canberras in Pakistan and Shak Raman was flying Canberras in 1 Squadron.

How did you find him as a pilot?

Not bad, pretty good. A bit fatalistic, 'Allah will

21:00 Provide'. I said, "He might provide for you but he's not going to provide for me." Some of the exercises, when we were doing exercises, Pitch Black is on at the moment, Exercise Pitch Black where there is a defensive and offensive force. We were doing the forerunners of Exercise Pitch Black. The Canberras would go out and try and get in to bomb Darwin and the fighters operate out of Darwin to try and make sure they got you

21:30 before you got there. He did some pretty hairy flying on some of those. But I got to see a lot of Kakadu at quite a low level and got an appreciation of the countryside around there.

Where were you based at that stage?

Still Amberley. Flying out of Amberley. But you'd go on deployment to Darwin or Port Moresby or various places.

22:00 That was really just honing your skills to then go up to Malaya to take over from the crew who were coming home from Malaya.

You were getting briefed on what was the latest in Malaya?

You got the weekly updates as to the situation and the intel [intelligence] room was there and you could go and find out what was going on at the time. You were always checking the intel system to find out

22:30 what the intelligence people believed was going on.

So how did you feel about the prospects of going to Malaya?

It was just exciting. A new place to go. Joanie and I had only been married a few months so if you got married on posting you didn't get marriage allowance. That was all on your own head as far as the air force was concerned so we needed

23:00 a posting to be able to get marriage allowance to be able to actually survive. We were renting when we were married and it was nine guineas a week and we tried to talk him into making it nine pounds a week so we could actually have the nine shillings to spare, it was that tight. She went back to work.

Tell me a little bit about the wedding?

About the wedding?

23:30 Brilliant, absolutely magic. A very lucky fellow I am.

So you had been courting for how long?

A couple of years before then and throughout all the time that she had with Ansett. Her parents are brilliant people, they are just lovely, there are two girls in Joanie's family and Joanie was the youngest.

24:00 She virtually had been born and bred and brought up in the same street in Balwyn and she was married from home in the Anglican Church, St Barnabus, we went in there on our thirtieth wedding anniversary which was nice to do.

24:30 It was a great day, good day.

How did she feel about you actually making it into the air force?

She's been totally, she has been totally supportive throughout all of our time together, probably more than I deserve.

She no doubt anticipated that there was going to be a lot of moving around?

25:00 I don't think you anticipate those things. I think they come along and you go with them and she went with them better than most I think. I think we did a quick calculation and it was something like twenty-four moves. To put up with anybody doing that is ridiculous but she did.

How keen were you both to start a family at that point?

I think we were both pretty keen.

25:30 Those things just happened in those days, they came along. We reflect now on the fact that our children are having children, not easily, and how little we knew about anything but how lucky we were that our kids are all happy, healthy individuals. We are just so fortunate and you don't appreciate that until you look back on it and reflect on the fact that

26:00 when your own children are having not an easy time as to how lucky you were to get away with those things. I say get away with it because one of the things my old man, my father did, was set up a sheltered workshop in the Queen Elizabeth homes in Ballarat, of course there was nothing else to do of

course in the YMCA and I helped him set up this sheltered workshop and I got to see

- 26:30 a lot of Downs Syndrome kids and it really did strike home for me, the impact of that. I think we are lucky.

This period of honing your skills at Amberley went for how long?

- 27:00 March '63 to October '64. That's the beauty about moving so often, you can lock in the dates pretty easily in your mind. There has to be some advantage.

Was there any other aspect to that training that you can talk about that's relevant do you think or have we pretty much covered it?

There was high level, I mean, there are all sorts of experiences that you come across along the way.

- 27:30 The last trip we did on the conversion course was to go around Australia. Practicing a high level navigation and making sure you've got it all buttoned up. We got out of Pearce and we picked up a jet stream that was over two hundred knots. So we whistled across from Pearce to Amberley doing over seven hundred knots. The air traffic controllers were saying, "Are you sure,
- 28:00 where is the wind and what's the speed because the civil airliners are having trouble?" They were going the other way to Perth and were bucking us and we were able to tell them what the grounds were. So all sorts of bits of interesting pieces. It's that development of experience that you gain by those sort of exercises. People can question why do you just burn holes in the sky. No, you are learning about the
- 28:30 aircraft itself, its limitations, and yours and all the rest of it. You suddenly realise then that the canopy is just a big solarium and that gets super-hot and you are sitting in, the pilot is sitting in the solarium there for four hours just trimming the aeroplane continuously as it burns fuel, continually, burns off the fuel, and it's
- 29:00 hot, sleepifying and you are sitting there for four hours. In the aircraft it gets very cold. In later days we've done some of the higher altitude stuff and there is just ice around the inside of the cockpit. That air conditioning system. So it can be very cold, the heater doesn't work all that well either
- 29:30 even though that's what it was designed for. So all those sort of limitations, general experience and gaining confidence in how can I wring this thing out if we need to and we did in pretty short order.

What were you wearing when you were flying at that point?

A green bag [uniform]. Nothing more. You had, well, your undies.

- 30:00 Just a light cotton flying suit, always in your Mae West and that was it, well, your helmet and mask of course. Gloves, I rarely wore gloves, I felt they didn't have the dexterity I wanted with those but you always had them. If you did get a fire in the cockpit you've got to have them on pretty quickly. I was not aware
- 30:30 of any fire in a cockpit in the Canberras.

Were there any major accidents during that time amongst the blokes?

Yes, sadly. Sadly we lost, again the asymmetric flap.

How many blokes do you think were lost at that point?

During the time at Amberley, I think we only lost a couple.

- 31:00 That's pretty sad I don't remember it quite specifically because I know it was pretty traumatic for everyone in the squadron. I think there were two.

Did they plague your confidence?

The flying safety business in the air force

- 31:30 is pretty well tuned. They go through the accidents in fine detail and the first day you get to Point Cook on the pilots' course all the accident summaries are there. This is the prescribed reading sort of thing that's in the crew room and you read about everybody else's' accidents and what they did and what they found out and therefore
- 32:00 you learn from that. Even on pilots' course the day we started flying, the guy on the previous course, I used to play basketball with, Andy Davies, he was a student, he was an army lieutenant and I think it was Bruce Scott, I only knew him as 'Sir' and he was the flying instructor and they pranged an (UNCLEAR). They are very
- 32:30 solitary milestones and you take what you can from them and you make sure you don't get into a nasty situation yourself.

Obviously there are two clear components to the work that you were doing, the navigating and there's the bombing, how did you feel about the bombing side of it and how were your skills in

that department?

How did I feel about it? It was just

33:00 the other part of the job. That's what I wanted to go into Canberras for. I was, I think, a pretty fair bomber.

Which part of the job did you enjoy the most?

I think it's all rolled in together, it's all wrapped up. I take a fair bit of pride in having sunk the

33:30 target in Malaya a few times. The target was moored off Song Song. I was crewed up with a guy called Merv Lewis for most of my time in Malaya and we managed to sink the target which is pretty good in the Canberra. You've basically only got a twenty five pound practice bomb and you've got to punch a hole in the pontoon the target is sitting on to do that.

So getting close to the time that you were heading over to

34:00 **Malaya, was there any final preparation, training, offered to you to help you understand the terrain you were moving into?**

No specifically. We had done jungle survival course, in fact I think we did it before we started the conversion course.

34:30 Yes we did.

Where did you do that?

Canungra. Army were managing all that. We all went down to Canungra for that training and they gave us a flying set and a twenty four hour ration pack and put us in the jungle for a week and said, "Feed off the ground and we will come and pick you up in a week's time" sort of thing. You've got to get to this

35:00 rendezvous point but anyway that had been done earlier.

How was that?

Good. It was demanding, mostly trying to keep the leeches off yourself, the biggest demand I think. Anyway, that was interesting. But no specific training. We got some pretty good briefs when we got up to Malaya.

How did

35:30 **they get you over there?**

We were supposed to fly from Brisbane but I wanted to see my parents and Joanie see her parents before she left.

You were both travelling together?

Yes. They were both in Victoria so we went down to Victoria for a couple of weeks before we did and because we left from Melbourne and my daily rate of pay was so low it was cheaper for the air force to send me

36:00 by ship and they said, "It's cheaper to send you by ship than flying so you have to go up on the Galileo". So we went on the Galileo around to Adelaide and Perth, or Fremantle and had a wonderful time because we had only been married in the July and this was the October.

It was your honeymoon?

Effectively. Because the honeymoon was driving up the east coast back to Amberley after the wedding. It was great.

36:30 **Who else, were there any other servicemen on board?**

Yes, there was the squadron leader and the equipment officer and his wife and children. A couple of little babes. They were the only other servicemen. There was the DS [Director of Signals] guy and his wife, signal director. But that was all, we had a wonderful time.

Nice

37:00 **quarters?**

Yes, we had a good time, it's one of those situations that you fall in to and you just make the most of it. You have to make the most of it. So we got up there in October '64 and we were accommodated

Where did you pull in?

Into Singapore and the ship was held out in the straits so they actually put us in lighters [small boats] to take us up to the land and then we flew from

37:30 Singapore up to Banglapat which is the airport on Penang Island.

What was your initial impact of Singapore?

Hot and steamy. It's a different place now. It seemed awful chaotic at the time but it was interesting. The heat would hit you when you first went

38:00 out there in the morning. We arrived early in the morning and we then flew up to Penang Island and I think we were met there and went to temporary accommodation at the Runnymede Hotel which then became an army barracks subsequently. About six weeks until they found us somewhere to live.

How did you spend that six weeks?

I was at work. There was a bus, well several buses used to pick up

38:30 all the guys around the island who were working at Butterworth [base], go across on the ferry and then after Butterworth, it was a sort of forty minute bus trip, and fortunately another navigator was there at the same time and he and his wife, we were there at the same time, and his wife and Joanie spent the day wandering around the shopping. That sort of thing.

39:00 Six weeks there and they found us a house and we went out on the north coast of Penang Island. Just beyond that now is the high priced tourist area, it wasn't then, it was all just jungle. We joined the Penang Swimming Club, there was a swimming pool on the north side not far from where we were living, and

39:30 things seemed pretty idyllic and six weeks later they posted another guy into 2 Squadron transport support flight and he had four children so we got bumped out of the house into a flat which was over on the mainland side of Butterworth and Ferguson Court. Which wasn't as nice but it was still good. At that stage things were hotting up politically

40:00 and they wanted all the Canberra crews, or as many of the Canberra crews as they could get on the mainland because the ferry used to stop at night and of course when they needed you on the aeroplane that was not the best place to be. Half of that I think was a political answer and half of that was what suited the housing people to get me out of the house and into this flat. But we went over to the flat and enjoyed ourselves over there

40:30 except when Paul was about to be born and we caught the last ferry across to Penang Island to get him into the British Army Hospital in time because the last thing you needed was to get caught short there.

In general how long do you think it took for you guys to settle in and feel comfortable?

Because the air force and the squadrons have, the squadrons

41:00 particularly, have a very strong esprit de corps. 2 Squadron had two elements, it had the Canberras and it had transport support flights. So the Dakotas, there were five Dakotas I think, as part of 2 Squadron and when they needed a navigator you could go and fly in the Dakotas as well as fly in the Canberras. In fact,

41:30 if you did a minimum of five supply dropping trips in support of the armed forces who had pursued the Communist insurgents, CT, Communist terrorists, they would recover back to the border and there were army camps just inside Malaysia and if you supplied drop to these army camps I think you then got a minimum of five trips then that qualified

42:00 for active service.

Tape 4

00:32 **Sorry, Peter, you were saying if you did five?**

If you did five supply dropping trips and these were in support of the base camps that were nominally holding back the Communists terrorists along the Timalae border that qualified for war service and you got a war service loan, potentially. It was one of those things you did along the way.

01:00 **What nationality were the soldiers that were dropping to?**

Australians as well as Brits as well as Malays. Malaysian armed forces.

What were you dropping to them?

Food, supplies. I presume there may have been other things amongst them, parachute containers, there were some heli boxes, little boxes that spin and have little flip out wings that fly down

01:30 themselves.

Were you assisting in the dispatch as well?

No, just the navigation, navigating the aeroplane to the release point and the pilots would call "Now!" and the load master would kick the boxes out the door which was off, take the doors off before you went.

Nearly twenty years on and still using a DC3 to drop supplies to the troops.

Yes.

02:00 The old gurney bird did a remarkable amount for the Australian services. Argun even scavenged the last five Dakotas that were air force service but that's another story.

Those supply drops up at the front line qualified you potentially for a war service loan, were you not flying any combat operations in the Canberras over there?

No. The Canberras were never committed to combat operations

02:30 while they were in Malaya. We trained for them, we were briefed in quite specific detail, crews were assigned particular targets during confrontation should there be a need to do that, fortunately there wasn't, but we trained for those things.

What sort of scenarios were you training on missions?

03:00 Maximum range and high explosive bomb load type targets, interdiction targets.

Were you trained with live bombs?

Yes.

What was a typical load on?

Six one thousands but you usually only drop one at a time against an HE [High Explosive] range,

03:30 to practice your weapon delivery. You would normally not have done stick relations like we did in Vietnam.

How did the, we touched on it a bit before, but how did the climate effect the performance of the crew and aircraft?

The cockpit got very, very hot. They started

04:00 to record temperatures and loss of body weight and they were talking fifty five perhaps up to sixty Celsius on a daily basis. I can't remember how much, from memory, was weighed before and after a trip and he lost something like ten kilos. It had really ripped it off him. The moment you went on the aeroplane

04:30 your suit went dark green because it was soaked. They used to have these carbon monoxide generators that they put in to blow cold air on you, they were coming off a compression, it wasn't supposed to be carbon monoxide, it just felt like it. They used to try and blow them and they had sunshades for the canopy and all that but once you buttoned up the aeroplane it was just a big heat sink and

05:00 on one trip that I did in Vietnam we went down to Ton San Nhut [airport] in Saigon and we joined, after the aeroplane was buttoned up, we joined the string ready to take off and we were number thirty five in the take-off list, so we just sat there for forty five minutes and just heat soak and it was debilitating. It was hot, very,

05:30 the air conditioning was very poor, even during the trip there was no cool air unless you went up to altitude and when we did go to altitude you'd ice up inside the cockpit. Some pretty savage extremes in temperature. The oxygen system was limited to forty eight thousand feet. On one trip we had been

06:00 out to Ghan in the middle of the Indian Ocean which was a staging base the Brits used to use when staging between the Gulf and landing at Ghan, the island was five thousand two hundred feet long so it was a runway then from Ghan to Butterworth and we pushed the aircraft up coming back from Ghan because we were running low on fuel and we couldn't go close to the top of Sumatra you had to go

06:30 around it because the Indonesian Air Force didn't want you going to close and we pushed the aeroplane up over fifty thousand so it was bloody cold on the inside.

So with those extremes and particularly the humidity as well affect the actual aircraft performance or maintenance?

Not a lot. I don't know about the maintenance side. I don't think it affected them too much. The groundies [ground crew] had the hard job, they were trying to

07:00 work on the aeroplane and when you touched the metal you virtually burned, it was very uncomfortable. They did a brilliant job; the servicemen who supported the aircraft really did a great job. They were usually on the flight line in boots, socks and shorts and that was it. Sometimes, hats if they were lucky but hats near aeroplanes is not a good idea, particularly vacuum cleaner aeroplanes.

07:30 Those guys supported the air crews remarkably well and in Vietnam even more so.

Did you mix much with the ground crew?

Not a lot. I used to play basketball with a lot of them and got to meet a lot of the guys around the base doing various things. Playing basketball or volleyball against them, usually it would

08:00 be the aircrew against the ground crew and we'd get creamed. It was a lot of fun and you got to meet individuals and in fact I caught up with a guy only just a couple of months ago who I used to play basketball with in Malaya. He was a corporal at that stage.

08:30 There was the separate messes, the officers' mess, the sergeants' mess, the airmen's mess. All your messing facilities were independent and therefore your social activities were directed independently. It's changed quite a bit now but that's how it was. It was out of that era and that's the way in which things were done.

What was the ex-pat [expatriate] life like there for you and

09:00 **your wife?**

We were pretty conservative and I guess by nature we both are. Joanie was pregnant not long after we got up there although she used to go along and help weigh the babies

09:30 at the local baby health centre in the local kampong [village] and do those sorts of things. I had taken myself back to doing correspondence matric, physics and mathematics. So I used to spend a fair bit of time with my head down while doing the promotion exam. I spent, I probably didn't take as much as an opportunity as I could have or should have in

10:00 exploring around Malaysia. Other guys did, we lived pretty well on the allowances that we had but we just enjoyed doing what we were doing and it was mostly pretty much conservative things. We did a bit of travel, a little bit, not a lot. We were not

10:30 social butterflies, we would go along to all the mess functions but normally on a Friday night the guys would go to the bar and I'd go home. I couldn't see any point in standing up at a bar on a Friday afternoon when my wife was at home. A lot of the guys were single and the fighter squadron were up there as well so a lot of singles up there but I didn't think they were as lucky as I was, so I used to go home.

11:00 **Other veterans I've spoken to who were in Butterworth around this period said that it was often difficult for the wives to be left at home during the day and out of the context of their family and home environment.**

It could have been. I guess we worked on that. We were fortunate that we had other friends who were newly married in similar

11:30 circumstances on the squadron and the girls got together and all got on well and lived close enough to each other to be able to go across and do the shopping and go to the markets, those sort of things. I am not aware, there were times obviously when Joanie missed her family particularly, but

12:00 there was no stress in our relationship or she ever made apparent, she wouldn't want me talking about that but she's good value. It's a pity she's not here to learn.

When you were doing your training in the Canberras what sort of tactics and experience were you developing about bombing in the jungle?

Mostly it was

12:30 navigating over lots of green to try and identify precisely where you were at low level, under the clouds, keeping away from the rock filled ones and your bombing of course was all confined to bombing ranges so normally Song Song was the practice bombing range, there was some HE done in Song Song.

13:00 Mostly the big HE ranges there was one over just north of Borneo or in China Rock, sadly 111 ploughed into later. Most of it was just low level navigation in and out of the cloud.

I guess in a situation

13:30 **where you've got small terrorist groups and then later in Vietnam very small cadres of men, not the big battalion size concentrations that World War II saw, how could you ensure the accuracy of delivering your bomb load in these circumstances?**

You are always competing against yourself and the other crews in the squadron

14:00 for the bombing, and one of the jobs I did in Malaya was to analyse the results of each aircraft after every flight to be able to try and determine whether there was a consistency, whether there was some systematic error in the bombing system and correct it and I did that for the last, I don't know, a year in Malaya to try and

- 14:30 improve, take any systematic errors out of the aircraft. We tried a couple of different bomb sights and those sort of things and I guess that's really what led me down that particular path with the weapon systems bit. It was looking to try and be as accurate as you could and sometimes it was a bit like a handful of barley against a wall. It wasn't as good as it should have been and you worked pretty hard at trying to improve it.
- 15:00 High level bombing at night was not a good idea, not as accurate as it could have been, or, as the books would have you believe it should have been. That's what you did. When I say low level I mean we were down in the weeds, and it was with one guy on a trip, Bill Carruther, and we
- 15:30 came across the top of the jungle and there was a bend in the Buhang River, and he actually bunted the aeroplane down, the jungle tree tops, down on to the river surface so that we could keep below the radar, that was the whole objective was to keep below radar detection, and visual detection if we could. So to get down below the tree top level. I think it was
- 16:00 on another trip on the east coast of Malaya, there are a set of lagoons that run parallel to the coast and a set of palm trees and we were formatting on each other looking through the sticks of the palm trees with the canopy above you. We were on the beach and I took a photograph of the other aircraft when he came out and the shadow of the other aeroplane was closer to the aeroplane than the height of the fin, the fin is twelve feet high.
- 16:30 **You've got to hope you don't strike any tall weeds.**
True. Or kids on the beach throwing fishing lines at rocks.
When you were doing this training were you usually, the tactics were they usually involving individual aircraft or formations of aircraft?
Mostly individual, we did a lot of multiple aeroplanes and also pairs,
- 17:00 fours and then we would sometimes take on the fighters where the Sabres [fighter planes] would try and get in a position to attack a formation and so you'd do similar aircraft tactics to make sure they could never get in the firing position. We did some of that back in, no, that was after Malaya.
What did you know about the political situation that was going on
- 17:30 **when you there?**
We were given intel briefs and we were kept up to speed on the political situation particularly where it affected us.
Were you interested?
Yes, absolutely. Partly if it got too hot we were going to send the girls home, just going to take all the families home and send them home from Malaya. That would not have been a good idea, but it would have been a good idea in some circumstances of course. We were kept up to speed with the intel
- 18:00 brief.
What would you see was the attitude of the locals towards you?
We got on pretty well with them. They saw us as a source of revenue. We had some guy come through the house, presume a guy, and he had been right around the bedroom, the walls were painted with
- 18:30 calcium carbonate [?] and so you could see the white footprints all the way around the bed when we were both asleep and he nicked some stuff and the local policeman came along who happened to be an Indian guy, and about two weeks later my wife was coming to pick me up from the base for some reason or another, and she managed to run into the back of a wedding party in a car and sent this wedding party into the
- 19:00 monsoon range and they were Chinese and things started to get a bit agitated and the local policeman appeared who happened to be the same guy who recognised my wife and sent her on her way to which I am eternally grateful. The local church across the road, he was an Indian; he was a black enamel Tamil, absolutely jet black Tamil Indian.
- 19:30 **So in general you thought the local population were okay with you?**
They were fine, they saw us as a source of revenue. We had a cook and an amah [nanny] for a little while. There was not a lot to do, we sort of inherited the cook, she came with the first house we moved into when we moved across to the flat she came with us. She must have been seventy not out.
- 20:00 You can't, I mean, they are almost totally reliant upon the income they get from you and they live separately in your house. How can you say to an old lady like that, "You are not required anymore"? It's very difficult. She was Chinese, Ahoi, the local guys who used to support
- 20:30 the squadrons driving the buses and those sort of things, Haroon and I can't remember the other guys' names. They accepted us and recognised that they had a job and they got paid. A lot of money went into

Butterworth when you think about the number of guys that were up there. Never any friction.

You said you didn't really get into the social life that much because you were

21:00 **newly married, was there a bit of a lads away from home atmosphere around Butterworth?**

Yes, the singleys, they had a great time. They had a great time. Why not? I mean, it was a good place to be, most of them bought sports cars, there were all sorts of stories. There were the Brits who were running a mess when we first go up there and they said, "There will be no

21:30 shorts in the bar after five o'clock". So after five o'clock all the boys just dropped their shorts.

Why on earth would you put the British in charge of cooking?

There you go, they were there first. British Air Force you have to remember. 60 Squadron were flying their Javelins [jets] and they had their trash haulers used to come through there and all the

22:00 Valettas and Beverlies and some of the world's worst looking aeroplanes, Falcons, Valiants, used to come through, 60 Squadron was always busy. The fire alarm would go off and they'd say, "There's a fire in 60 Squadron". Okay, back to playing cards. It was just 60 Squadron on fire again; the Javelins used to always catch fire.

Your son was born in Malaya, what were the

22:30 **facilities like for that?**

We thought they were reasonable at the time but in retrospect they could have been better. Let's leave it at that.

Was he born in an air force facility?

No, it was a British Army hospital on the island of Penang, south of Georgetown, I think it was Minden Army Barracks, I am not sure if that's the correct name.

23:00 Forgettable, eminently forgettable.

What did you know about what was cooking up in Vietnam at the same time you were in Malaya?

We knew quite a lot about that. We were briefed on it and the transport support flight had the unenviable job of supporting the guys and bringing out

23:30 bits, bringing out bodies through Butterworth. The army guys who were flying the choppers in Butterworth also went on the deployments with 9 Squadron up into Vung Tau. The political situation was

24:00 different because Far East Air Force and South East Asian Treaty Organisation were two quite separate political entities. South East Asian Treaty Organisation had three protocol states, [South] Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The commitment under SEATO [South East Asian Treaty Organisation] was if any of these countries were invaded then the other signatories in SEATO including America,

24:30 UK, Australia, New Zealand, would actively participate with them in repelling the boarders as it were. That bit of political commitment seems to have escaped what was going on domestically politically. I will come back to that later

25:00 perhaps. But, Far East Air Force and the five, which ultimately became the five powered defence agreement, was a completely separate political entity. We had fighters based up with 79 Squadron in Ubon in Thailand. Their families were mostly in Malaya. Politically, never the twain was supposed to meet.

25:30 I had better be careful because I am not sure how far I can go with that. Essentially, we were doing navigation exercise from Butterworth up to Ubon and perhaps stay there overnight if we needed to and then the navigation exercise back again. Tucked under the wings of the Canberra would be a saver on each side so you'd fly up and fly back so the guys can get home. But it meant we got up and down to Thailand a little bit but when the consideration

26:00 was to send 2 Squadron to Vietnam there was a base just north of Ubon called Crown and we looked at operating from Crown rather than Phan Rang. At the time the new south they were flying out of Ubon as well, flying Phantoms out of there, on missions into Vietnam, yes, into Vietnam.

Into South Vietnam

26:30 **or North Vietnam?**

North and also across through Laos. So we were pretty well attuned to what was going on there and what was happening.

It sounds like there was a little bit of black work going on in shifting assets around the

different countries?

Not black work, it was just convenient to do that.

27:00 Effectively, you weren't abrogating the responsibilities of either of the treaties' organisations. You were not abrogating your responsibility or abusing the treaty's responsibility. There was no, to my knowledge, no preclusion, it was just sensible not to broadcast it. What would happen

27:30 is you'd go up there and one radar of this Canberra aircraft going up into Thailand, going to Ubon and a pair of Sabre would get out of Ubon and do a strike on the aircraft and as they rolled in, as they passed two aircraft would leave the aircraft and go and land at Ubon and turn around and come home again. You'd swap over two aeroplanes and two pilots. But you'd bring the birds back for servicing, back to Butterworth, where there was a (UNCLEAR) support activity. Bring the guys home,

28:00 give them some home time. So you weren't tripping over the political niceties but you were facilitating those sort of things for the betterment both parties so it really wasn't hurting anybody.

I know that you obviously received intelligence briefings about the situation in South East Asia from an academic point of view, at the time, what personal opinions

28:30 **did you hold on the situation?**

On South Vietnam, pretty much that we had an obligation. The obligation under SEATO was far stronger than our obligations under ANZUS [Australia New Zealand United States]. Our obligation under ANZUS for an attack on any party to the ANZUS treaty is to consult, no more. Our obligations under SEATO

29:00 were to respond. So our SEATO obligations were very much more a stronger political commitment but we were simply an avenue available to the government as an exercise in diplomatic responsibility. So I didn't see any particular restriction, limitation,

29:30 danger, not danger, in participating in support of those obligations. That's what we had been trained for. We were given pretty long and strong briefings about what our obligations were. We were reading, through copies of the Australian press, all of the conscription situation and the conscientious

30:00 objectors. The bit that really got to us was that predominantly the Labor Party and its activists were inciting the general populace in Australia to vilify the troops who got sent there and were brought home. The troops were the ones who were being vilified by the local populace when they had been doing the government's bidding on the government commitment

30:30 just seemed to be totally out of whack, and whether or not the briefings we were getting were biased in one direction so we didn't get the whole picture is a different question. But, by and large, we didn't see a limitation in doing that. We were doing what we had been trained

31:00 to do. We were lucky, we were part of and this is sort of getting into the Vietnam situation a bit more, we were part of an organisation and a squadron situation with an esprit de corps which in those days was very, very strong. The whole of the services was towards,

31:30 you are here as an arm of the government and to support each other. When we went to Vietnam, the squadron for example, identified various individuals who would look after your family while you were away. So that Ivan and Pat Grove looked after Joanie and Paul at that stage. Then Sally was born while I was up there, looked after my family brilliantly while I was away. There was always

32:00 somebody that she could call on. They weren't disassociated. By contrast the poor old conscripts that were in the jungle fighting one day and put on the Qantas aeroplane with an all-male crew the next day and flown back into Sydney were taken to Randwick, taken out of uniform and put out the front door, with, as I understand it, essentially no

32:30 consideration. You know, you gave me that Vietnam Veterans' [counselling service] brochure, there was none of that. These poor buggers had absolutely no support system to come back to and they went out into the general populace who had been incited to vilify them effectively. It's no wonder that half of those guys went off their trolley and very few people I think in this country recognise that most of the money

33:00 for the Vietnam Veterans' memorial in Canberra on Anzac Parade were actually raised by the Vietnam Veterans' Motorcycle Club. These are the guys who raised the money for that thing and that support group, and the army did it far, far better, and still do it better than air force, I don't know about navy, but if you were a member of a corps in army that was part of your support mechanism. They still do and know

33:30 where all their corps members are and look after them. But the conscripts went in and got spat out the side and got no support. I mean they were out in the jungle fighting for their lives one day and on the streets of bloody Paddington the next. So my attitude towards the inciting of our nation against the servicemen is pretty steep.

34:00 **What did you yourself at the time think about concepts about the domino theory?**

It was a concept, whether or not it would ever have been able to be fulfilled as far as the Brisbane Line [a fictitious line of defence during the Second World War] was concerned, I still find wholly debatable.

And at the time you found that debatable?

34:30 Yes. I mean, none of the things that I've done, I am not sure if it was in Malaya, your promotion exams do involve a lot of reading of that sort of material and you have to do examinations in international studies and those sort of things. Doing that gave me a very good insight into those things. Into

35:00 the political hierarchy in Vietnam and all that was being misused perhaps, the best way to put it. The domino theory was certainly a move down into the region and I think we are still seeing elements of it in a different form with the establishment of insurgency

35:30 camps in Southern Philippines. I think the next big conflict is going to be over the Spratly Islands where China is now said it's going to send out oil rigs to drill on the Spratlys. The Philippines and Vietnam both claim ownership of the Spratlys as well. There is that sort of continuing search for resources by nations all over the world. That doesn't

36:00 answer your question about the domino theory much.

Well, it did because you did say at the time that you found it debatable.

I thought it was stretching a bit. There was a large Chinese population in Indonesia. There still is but the massacres that went on during Soekarno regime, they talked about three million people. Whether that would have slowed

36:30 down that, or whether that influence was there I don't know.

When did you come back to Australia from Butterworth?

Christmas '66.

How did you feel, you and Joanie, feel about leaving that lifestyle and coming back to Australia?

I think we sort of had a couple of years in Malaya and that was okay and we wanted to bring our little man home and

37:00 come back to Australia to normal living. Normal European living.

Again I will ask because having spoken to other veterans who were at Butterworth, they said sometimes the families found it hard to come back with a reduction in the standard of living as far as the hired help goes?

When we got back, yes you are right. Joanie freely admits that suddenly she was back in Australia with a young son and having to fend for herself

37:30 in all the domestic bits and pieces and that was a challenge. But as I said, I was the youngest of three boys and I learned my domestic trade very early on in life and we just applied them. That was, we just got on and did it. She found it a bit hard to start with, she's brilliant, she picked that up without any trouble at all.

How did you feel about leaving the squadron up there?

38:00 I think it was just another phase. I had been posted back to 82 Wing, pre-selected to do F111 training. I had already been pre-selected for the 111 so I was off and running. It was a good move as far as I am concerned.

You didn't feel sad about leaving the esprit de corps?

The esprit de corps just transferred wherever you were. When they were pre-selecting

38:30 guys for 111 they were taking mostly fighter pilots off the Sabre and Canberra navigators and crewing us up to see how we could work together because that was a learning curve and I flew with a fighter pilot called Kev Merrigan on the Canberras and the Canberras are nowhere near as responsive as the Sabre and Merro found

39:00 it a bit of a challenge flying this bucket around that didn't respond to exactly what he wanted to do.

Sorry, so you were crewed up with fighter pilots and put on Canberras as some sort of initiation to go into 111's?

Yes. Then when 2 Squadron went to Vietnam predominately they were the crews, as much as they could, could go up there together. So that was the concept anyway.

39:30 **Where were you based?**

Amberley, back to Amberley. Amberley was sort of home in those days.

What did you think about, or, what did you know about the F111's?

We were all reading avidly and there was a text called the Leding of the TFX Contract [?] which was the tag given to it when it was in its concept

40:00 form, tactical and experimental, the fact that I think there were five, I maybe wrong there, every time General Dynamics bid against Boeing 1 except the last time and General Dynamics were awarded the contract. General Dynamics built the aeroplane but some of the

40:30 changes that went on, it makes some interesting reading but that's another subject. So we were all reading everything we could get our hands on and we'd never looked through a radar before and this aeroplane had not only an attack radar it had a terrain following radar and heaps of goodies in it. So a lot of the limitations that we had on the Canberras were met with the 111. The Canberra, they tried it a warning radar in

41:00 the Canberra called an orange putter [?] but it was only ever trialled and never installed. But it meant that effectively the Canberra had no defences, no radar home and warning system, nothing to tell you that you had somebody behind you and about to shoot you down. The 111 had all this brand spanking new gear, it had all the latest radar and homing and warning equipment.

41:30 It had chaff [anti-weapon system] and flares and all that sort of stuff that you could stick out to seduce missiles. All of the things you dreamed about, good.

Tape 5

00:35 **Alright Peter, so you were back home and being pre-selected for F111s, did you immediately start working with them...**

No, not with the aircraft.

or there was a training process without the aircraft?

There was a ground training program running in parallel to the

01:00 production that was going on in the [United] States. Australia had invested very insignificantly in ground training equipment which was installed in a new building up at Amberley and there was the start of that sort of activity. Most of it was still Canberra flying for the guys who had come off the Sabres and teaming up selecting guys. The 111 was initially thought to have

01:30 a very high sensitivity for the cockpit ejection module, the whole cockpit cuts itself out of the aeroplane and ejects rather than the seat that goes out of the aeroplane. There was a consideration that the body weights of the two crew members had to be within very tight tolerances to the extent of the other guy carrying jockey weights to balance it up so when the module came out it didn't roll and cause all the design activities to

02:00 go out the window. They were predominately selecting guys who were about the same sort of size. Whether that ultimately came as truism in the end I would doubt very much, but that's how it started out.

So that meant you crewed up with...?

I crewed up with Kev Merrigan at that stage, he actually heavier than me. He is now retired in

02:30 South Australia, he's been running the ground training program for British Aerospace's flying school out of Parafield, of late. Merro and I flew around in Canberras for a while and then when Hugh McIndave [?] arrived in country and Nola got sick they sent him straight home and I went up there. Merro wasn't up there at that stage so I flew with a guy called Bob Montgomery for about the first four months.

So

03:00 **how long were you back in Australia before that happened?**

The squadron went up in April and I went up in June '67.

So only a few months that you were doing that training?

Yes. That was really just Canberra familiarisation and that sort of thing.

Had you had a chance to get your head around working with radar at that point?

No. I mean they were still building a simulator and those sort of things

03:30 so that hadn't arrived yet. When we went up to Phan Rang it was a new chapter.

How did you feel about the news that you were being taken up there for a new chapter?

A lot of the guys have said when I fronted back to work after coming home from Malay and had leave, "Where have you been? We've been looking for you".

04:00 There was some indication that they wanted me to go up in the first push. That didn't happen because they had identified the crews that were available and crews coming straight out of Butterworth, the ones coming out of Amberley, as I said, I just went back to the squadron, Huey McIndave went up and then had to come home and I said, "I will go". They were short touring the 111 guys, the pre-selected guys to go on 111, so we got short toured in just on

04:30 six months. I said, "I'll go because that will mean I will be home for Christmas". At that stage, Joan was just a couple of months pregnant with Sally. Pretty much the feelings that I expressed previously are those that applied. It was a challenge. To be fair, I guess there was an air of excitement and you are actually going to do what you were trained to do all that time.

05:00 There was an acknowledged risk that it's never going to happen to me sort of thing.

How did your family feel about it?

They were concerned of course. More concerned for Joanie than me, rightly so. In fact we bought a house and didn't get vacant possession until after I left and the night Joanie moved in,

05:30 two rats the size of cats run over her feet so I was not particularly (UNCLEAR) at that stage. But her parents and an aunt and uncle of mine came up to clean up the garden and clean up the house and all that stuff. It was a dilapidated 1930 vintage house that we bought but we wanted something of our own and we hadn't been able to do that before and that was the situation.

What were Joanie's feelings about

06:00 **you going to Vietnam?**

Pretty much that. Concern, let's get it over and done with and go from there.

So was there any special training that came to you for that post?

No, we had already had all that. At that stage I had probably four years on Canberras and I guess I was getting to be one of the experienced navs

06:30 and particularly having done so much work with the bomb sight system in Malaya I guess that's one of the reasons they were a bit interested. Brian Hicks was the bombing leader, he was a Pom and he joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] but he was good so they didn't need me particularly so let's get it out of the way and get home and get Christmas at home.

So how did they get you over there?

07:00 Civil, flew by Singapore then to Saigon civil. Then Wobbly Airlines, Wallabies. 35 Squadron Wallabies came by, better known as Wobbly Airlines if you are in country and flew up in a Caribou.

How many of you took off from Australia? Were you with a big group?

No, I'm (UNCLEAR) at that stage because the other guys were already there, they went up in April and

07:30 it was only I was doing a single replacement.

Which squadron were you to be joined with?

2.

First impressions of Saigon on arrival?

Didn't see any of Saigon thankfully. Just Ton San Nhut Airport.

The climate, the smells, even the airport?

Not dissimilar from Singapore, from Changi

08:00 Airport, the bigger airports. A lot busier, a heck of a lot busier. Lots of revetments, lots of aeroplanes going all over the place. But not unexpected. It was a busy, civil/military airfield but doing it for real.

08:30 **Was there someone there to greet you?**

The movements guy were always on hand, you just look for the guy with the red armband and the yellow wheel on it and you front up and say this is who I am and he says, "Yep, over there". That was it. They arranged a night in Vung Tau Wobbly Airlines and Caribou going down there stayed in Vung Tau for the night and

09:00 there up to Phan Rang.

What were your impressions of Vung Tau?

Heightened degree of sensitivity, very much a guarded closed camp although there was a guy on the gate and there was a guy I learnt later used to go out the gate and come in after curfew and say he was Wing Commander Paul, and Wing Commander John Paul was the CO [Commanding Officer] of

09:30 9th Squadron, he hid behind the gate one day and waited for him to come in, found out who he was, went out the gate, waited until it was after curfew and went back in and said he was Pilot Officer so and so, this guy. He kept getting these nasty grams from Comm Raffy, Commander Raffy, saying he was breaking the curfew and there was no point in saying it wasn't me because he knew who it was. It was very much on a par military footing

10:00 but I only saw the air force side of it, I didn't see the army side of it, the guys who had the hard job. Went out the next day to Phan Rang and got off the aeroplane, they said, "Throw your bags over there, pick up that shovel, pick up those green bags and start filling them with that mountain of sand we want to build a revetment." So we started filling our own sandbags and putting revetments around the admin and office building.

10:30 You were there and into it and filling bags and you hadn't had any sleep yet but that was still going on whatever it was a few weeks after they guys had arrived when I arrived. About six weeks, something like that.

So what was the setup at Phan Rang?

There was a small civil operation on one side of the airfield, the main military runway

11:00 had been built by the Yanks [Americans]. There was a number of squadron F100's and the Sabres operating out of there. 21 Squadron was operating out of there because we became the element of Seventh Air Force. 21 Squadron was sort of a name squadron because it was a combination of 8 and 13 bomb squadrons that were operating out of Clark [air base] in the Philippines, Clark Air Force Base, and 8 and 13

11:30 used to rotate their crews through so they called it 21 Squadron. They had a club on top of the hill and at the bottom of the hill their ACS [Airfield Construction Squadron] had built the accommodation for two hundred and fifty guys in 2 Squadron. The guys, as I understand it, the guys in ACS had done all they had to do for construction squadron, had done all they could do at Vung Tau and just about to jump on an aeroplane to go home and they said, "Just before you do

12:00 you've got to build accommodation for 2 Squadron at Phan Rang". So they quickly built and did a good job of building us accommodation but there was, you are supposed to have seven buildings, so you got seven buildings. That's all you got, you didn't get any paths between them or anything else. They did that, finished it off and ACS were out of there and then the building that we were in,

12:30 I mean there was two buildings parallel with a shower block in between and the guys had built a sandbag revetment bunker just beside the building. There was the sergeant's quarters, two of those, then there was common messing facilities independent of rank, and those guys did a

13:00 brilliant job. There were three cooks who ran a twenty four hour kitchen seven days a week forever. Then there were the blocks down on the other side of the mess and then there was a picture stage because we ran movies most nights. Jack, the cook, big guy,

13:30 he ran the kitchens and because we were part of 7th Air Force we were rationed by 7th Air Force. The USAF [United States Air Force], US forces, had a system whereby if today is Monday you are getting turkey and it doesn't matter where you are in the world if it's Monday you are getting turkey, if it's Tuesday you get whatever it is etc. So we were rationed by and it meant we were getting this American cake type bread, and you didn't get decent bread. So the guys, the cooks

14:00 organised with some of the troops, and I don't know to this day whom to go down to the local village to buy veggies [vegetables] to supplement the ration. Similarly, the same group of guys went down to the local village and realised they didn't have a decent water supply so they went and dug a well in the village. This was the sort of interaction where we were trying to win the hearts and minds as well

14:30 and do that sort of thing. But it meant that the activities, our rations were far better than anybody else's on the block as far as we could see and it was all supplemented. While I was up there, there was a requirement to bring another aeroplane up from Australia. Joanie organised

15:00 with the squadron through the contacts I talked about earlier to buy a nine gallon hog's head of red [wine] which they decanted and bottled in our back garden at Ipswich and she spoke to the local milkman and in Queensland in those days they weren't allowed to put anything other than flavoured milk in a carton, it had to be flavoured milk and plain milk in bottles. So she told them what it was for so they cleaned their

15:30 machines and sent us up crates of fresh milk in cartons together with butter and Christmas cake and

the girls got together and this Canberra bomb bays, we built panniers to put in the bomb bay in the Canberra and the panniers were stacked wall to wall with all this stuff. It all arrived up and so it was really bread from home and it was Australian bread, fresh bread.

16:00 There was a party to be had?

Absolutely. But the efforts that Jack and the other guys went to, to supplement the rations, were brilliant so that was the set-up. Beside the sleeping quarters was the road that went up to the American quarters at the top of the hill to get to the other facilities up there. The buildings were built with louvres, the bottom three or four feet and only fly wire

16:30 from there to the ceiling. We were flying on night ops and every truck that went past filled the sleeping accommodation with dust and dirt. So the nav leader who first went up there had this bright idea about making sure the crews didn't get tired. So he had this board and it was called the sleep board and you had to log how much sleep you've had because we were flying on these night ops. One of the guys

17:00 wrote he had two hours' sleep but it was in Wally's bed because Wally's bed was away, and that just caused chaos and away it went from there, you know. So everybody just scribbled it, it was a silly idea but the motive was valuable and...

So sleep was hard to come by?

Yes and we liberated some air conditioners from somewhere. I am sure it was the NCOs [Non-Commissioned Officers] that did all the work on liberating these air conditioners. We eventually plugged them into

17:30 each sleeping quarter because a crew were in a room so that when the guys from the orderly room would come and they'd come and wake you up and say, "Get up, time for breakfast your briefing is at so and so." So you could sneak into the block wake up a crew without waking up everybody else. So we went and liberated some lining material from the American

18:00 store and panelled each room and then air conditioned each room and then painted them all ourselves so that it was just somewhere a bit nicer and you didn't get covered in dust and you could actually sleep regardless of the time of day or night. A lot of self-help went on and there was a fair bit of pride in getting your little hoochie to yourself.

You personalised your area?

Yes, everybody did. You just made it as

18:30 good as you could make it yourself in the circumstance and that's what I was saying, I saw this concrete truck go past and dump these palings off a job and said to him, "I will do you a deal, you give me a phone call and you can dump the palings in here, I will do all the form work and we'll make some paths to the shower so we don't have to wade through the mud or the dust" whichever is prevalent at the time. So we put some paths in and as I said the NCO,

19:00 or Jack, the cook, organised it so that he actually intercepted one of these trucks on the way to the job and gave him a case of VB [Victoria Bitter - beer] and he just stolen most of the load, this nine cubic metre truck, because they only had nine cubic trucks, every job was nine cubic metres and he put paths around the dining room and kitchen so you could keep it halfway clean because it must have been a bugger to try and cook and keep the food in that condition when you've got

19:30 dirt and dust everywhere, and then filled it up with water and sent it on its way.

Did you have to seek approval for that sort of improvisation or you could pretty much initiate yourself?

No, ourselves, we just, we told the boss of the squadron this is what we are doing, we are just going to put some paths in and he was happy with that. We eventually started a little garden area just to green it up a bit.

20:00 Ron Bidel [?] found one run of cooch grass in amongst this mountain of sand we had to fill the sandbags with when we arrived. He took this one run of cooch grass and planted it in a six foot by six foot area he boxed off at the end of the building and it was watered out the drips from the air conditioner and he eventually, he used to cut it with a pair of nail scissors and he built himself a six foot by six foot little piece of grass to lie on out in the sun to get a suntan.

20:30 But we, there was an aeroplane going backwards and forwards to Butterworth and we got, I think that was (UNCLEAR) the CO at the time brought back a whole bunch of hibiscus and other sort of cuttings like that which we just planted, God only knows what the immigration and quarantine laws might have been but we planted those just to try and make the place half liveable and reasonable. That seemed to have

21:00 Grown, I don't know whether its flourished and we've probably used more concrete than we needed to which wouldn't have been a good idea if we had been hit if we had something incoming it would have ricocheted off the concrete. Probably wouldn't have moved it. Those were the sort of things we did when we weren't flying or briefing or whatever or cleaning up the grounds.

What other things would you do when you weren't flying? What other recreation was available?

There were a couple of tennis courts which the Yanks had built for

- 21:30 themselves which we were free to use. I can't remember, somebody begged, borrowed, or stole some tennis racquets from somewhere. Like all American bases they had a base exchange like a commissary, the whole of First Air Division were camped on the western boundary at Phan Rang. The Republic of Korea had a contingent on the northern boundary
- 22:00 and ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], the Republic of Vietnam forces were on the southern boundary. So it was, with that number of American ground troops on the base as well as the F100s and Canberra squadron there were a lot of Americans. I think about five thousand come to mind, it might not be true, but those sort of things. Australian welfare sent up on the Vung Tau ferry [naval ship from Australia to Vung Tau]
- 22:30 a couple of sailboards, you know a board with a mast, and they had a boat, so the guys, most of them would take a truck down to the beach which was twenty minutes away every now and then and there were sea snakes in the water and that sort of thing, let alone who else might have been along the beach in the meantime,
- 23:00 but those are the sort of things. But mostly, you know by the time, we flew pretty regularly, you weren't on the flying program only once or twice a week, and that kept you pretty well busy by the time you get up and have a normal feed and go to bed and get up at one, two, three, four o'clock in the morning, you'd have a light breakfast, you'd fly, come back, have a
- 23:30 big breakfast, a couple of beers, so by the time that sort of cycle went on, but I found that if I could sort out this garden and put in concrete paths, it wasn't me, it was everybody pitched in, it's just somebody had a go and here's a good idea and we'll go for it. Everybody, that's how it works, everybody pitched it and it was good.

Where would you go for your few beers?

In the officers' mess.

- 24:00 We had our accommodation block for the officers and then the officers' mess. The sergeants' accommodation block and the sergeants' mess. There was a common recreation facility, if you like, but again it was based on the old separate rank system and they were pretty much independent. I think it was single storey, I am not sure, I will have a look at the photograph later on.

So you had your own bar?

Yes, which ran most of the

- 24:30 time, although it had certain opening hours. But most of the time it ran. You could always get a beer off the intells after a trip if you were on debrief, that sort of thing.

You mentioned there was a movie theatre?

Yes, theatre, they ran, I think we saw Texas Across the River every night for about two months.

Was that indoor or outdoor?

No, outdoor. You sat out in whatever you could find.

- 25:00 Whatever chair or whatever else was there and it was on a big screen. The aeroplanes that had been out defoliating during the day they'd fill up with mosquito repellent at night and spray them all over the base keep the mozzies down so these things would come by.

Had a little misty rain [spray from defoliants]?

Yes, a bit of that. As far as I know I got out scot free so I am a country mile in front. I don't know whether it's having any effect on the kids

- 25:30 and that's my only concern.

Was there any process of testing that you could undertake?

Not that I have ever been aware of. Mind you, I haven't really pursued the Vietnam veterans' area but there was certainly nothing been provided that I know of.

So what sort of missions were you there to carry out?

- 26:00 Initially we became a squadron and tasked by 7th Air Force so you'd get your frag orders everyday, fragmentations of the day's operations. To the best of my recollection there were ten thousand strikes sorties a month, ten thousand transport sorties a month, and God only knows how many chopper sorties
- 26:30 a month so you'd get your fragment of your order, your frag order would be with a target details on

there and a time on target and a bomb load and that sort of thing. The bomb load would have a fusing for the bombs and that stuff. Initially we were using World War II reserve stock some of which was in pretty pristine state

27:00 and you could always tell where the wing tipped bombs landed because they glowed a lot more than the others when they hit the ground, an interesting characteristic. We were doing what they called night sky spot where the Americans had a high precision radar that they would locate on the ground call MSQ77 and it would give you effectively an airborne DC8.

27:30 These radars were designed so that for bombing practice and training you'd fly around and you'd set up a tone and then when you got to the release point you'd stop the tone. Which they would plot on the radar on the ground and say if you released at that point therefore this is where the bomb would have hit. We just turned it around and said, "We will tell you to get to there so we can get the bomb to hit where we want it to." So the night officer who did the sky spot in the first few

28:00 months were all we'd just do that and strap an aeroplane on, go out and do as directed and then release the bomb when told. The navigator would get out and do down the nose and have a look and see the bombs leave the aeroplane as best he could, see the impact, see how many flashes he got on the ground, see if there were any secondary explosions

28:30 and then go home.

How many bombs would you be releasing?

Either eight 500s or six 1000s.

Were you taking photographs of those drops?

At night by the time you get the flash and take a picture it's all gone before the camera records the flash. We did during the daylight once we got onto; we convinced the squadron convinced the 7th Air Force

29:00 that they could better use our aeroplanes when the monsoon rolled in. The American 57 and most of the 100s could only do high dive angle parabolic releases which meant that they were visual also and couldn't see through the clouds. All our training had been in the weeds under the cloud, low level bombing. We demonstrated this to them on a couple of occasions and they

29:30 thought, "Better than sliced bread". So we were then tasked on for day trips, day sorties and we'd go in support of the Australian tactical air operations or anybody else up and down South Vietnam. The Australian government had limited our operation to within South Vietnam. We were not to be tasked to go beyond

30:00 South Vietnam.

With those night sorties what sort of targets were hitting?

Concentrations, VC [Viet Cong] concentrations, VC supply depot, identified bunker areas, those sorts of things. Known choke point, that sort of stuff. Interdiction predominantly.

30:30 **Do you recall your first sortie when you arrived? Was that an event for you?**

It was eventful in that it was different and listening to the direction from the radar from the ground.

This would be the first time you were dropping the bomb for real?

No, we dropped lots of live bombs in

31:00 Malaya.

On human targets?

No, they were on designated target. These were not necessarily human targets; they might have been all sorts of things. But we were tasked by 7th Air Force and I think Australia had the right of review on the target type so that if questions ever came up they were just accepted targets

31:30 and predominately the idea to try and keep everybody awake at night and make them tired. That was the trick. We also had, we were also wearing a nine mil pistol under your armpit, the armourers had been smart enough to fit it up with a little butt extension and with a nine mil pistol normally you might as well throw it at somebody than try and hit them by pulling the trigger.

32:00 With the little butt extension you could get some stability and took them out on the weapons range to practice and you could get a remarkable degree of accuracy so what you were looking for if you did wind up on the ground by yourself some time if you really had to get your beacon running and get picked up by a chopper, so that was the philosophy, but the idea was to hide as much as you could and let your beacon do the work. But if you really needed to,

32:30 God only knows what would have happened to you if you did try and do it though.

So those night sorties were you going out solo?

Usually singularly.

Could you take us through a typical night sortie as far as the whole process from briefing?

33:00 You'd get dug out of bed as I explained, go down and have a quick feed, get cleaned up and go down to the briefing ops room, getting a briefing from intello, identify your target, which in the MSQ77 you were working with all the frequencies, plan the

33:30 trip as much as you could beyond that, wander out to the aeroplanes.

Who'd be present for the briefings?

Pilot and the nav and intello.

That would be it, the three of you?

Yes. Then you'd do the walk around on the aeroplane and check it and make sure all the bits and pieces are where they are supposed to be. Navigator in particular checks the bomb load, make sure all the arming

34:00 wires and everything else are where they should have been for the fuses.

How long would that process take you?

Fifteen or twenty minutes.

And typically the briefing would be for how long?

Initially it sort of dragged out a bit but after a while you got used to it. Fifteen or twenty minutes sort of thing. You knew what you had to do. You go the aeroplane, check it out, then you'd go through all

34:30 the pre-flight checks to make sure that all the aircraft things were up and running. Fire up the aircraft at the right time, to meet your control time on target and then the pilot would follow the instructions from the traffic control taxi out to take off point, lining up behind a number of other aeroplanes,

35:00 get airborne and then go from one radar to another radar. Predominately under total radar control, get handed off to the MSQ77. He would then give you a running direction and the rest of it if you didn't have it before and then he would call down, 'In

35:30 sixty seconds, thirty seconds, ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.' to the release point. Then you'd clear off target then you'd come back. There was a designated return order queue so that you'd join back in on the rejoin track and Phan Rang was built so that you actually had to fly at a mountain and then

36:00 turn in front of the mountain and there was usually a bit of ground fire coming from the mountain and then land then taxi back and get a debrief, tell them where you'd been, what you'd seen, if anything. You'd debrief the ground crew when you first got out of the aeroplane about serviceability and bits and pieces, debrief with the intello and have a beer and that was it sort of thing.

36:30 You got caught up in some situations where there was a, you'd be on a target and you'd just be held off and held off and you go into a holding pattern and watching quenems [?] going around you and you wind up in the middle of these quenems and you have to go and punch into a thunderstorm before you get the bombs off, those sort of things became a bit interesting from a weather perspective.

37:00 You'd try and out climb them but you couldn't. So you'd have to punch through them again to go back home again. We had a few, those sorts of things.

Were any of those operations dangerous for you?

Only that there was a bit of ground fire around usually coming back, but not a lot. There was some ground fire

37:30 on taking off when you are full of fuel and bombs.

That was just a given?

They went and talked to the guy who was doing it and he said that he had to do it because if he didn't the VC was going to take out his family. They only gave him tracer to fire which is how we could see it. He said, "I won't hit you but I've got to keep doing it otherwise they are going to come and take out my family". He

38:00 used to do it and we left him alone.

You left him alone?

There we go. That's how it works. The veracity of that story I don't know but that's the sort of urban

myth that was around at the time. Whether it was to make you feel better.

Did you have a name for him?

No. Just he's there again.

How many hours would a typical night sortie like that?

38:30 Only an hour and a half or two hours, something like that. There were so many aeroplanes about that the biggest risk at that time was running into somebody else. Our Canberras had a much better climbing performance than the Americans. The Americans, one American crew in particular, saw that we went off and turned left, and he tried to and went into the mountain

39:00 because he didn't have the climb rate that we did. I've had aeroplanes go past in the other direction and all I have seen is the glow with the filaments and they are down with lights through the top of the canopy. In other words we must have been within a tiny amount. So, you get away with it and you count your blessings.

39:30 **How many hours would you feel you needed to get through the day if you knew you had a mission coming up that night? To feel like you were rested and you hadn't fell short?**

I don't think ever, I don't think anybody ever counted it, it was just, "I've got to get up in about five or six hours, I am going to bed". That sort of thing. Everybody is a bit different. I don't think there was a need

40:00 for a particular mathematical approximation. The night trips were just, Blue Connor, was the guy who used to come and wake us all up. He was good value. He eventually got his commission with TPI [Totally and Permanently Invalided], I think, he was good

40:30 value.

How were you, how was the chemistry with you and the pilot?

Pretty good. We all got on pretty well together. My situation, once we started daylight bombing there was a fair amount of euphoria associated with particular trips and flying with this guy and he said, we'd been down supporting

41:00 the Australian tactical air operation and he said, "I've never done a barrel roll". We were actually flying in a pair and the guy in the second aircraft, the navigator was down the nose with a video camera and he said, "Why don't I try a barrel roll?" I said to him, "All the other guys who ever done a barrel roll that I've been with in Canberras, you've got to get the nose really high". Anyway, he didn't, he rolled it down

41:30 and we wound up pointed just about vertically into clouds with mountains underneath it and the guy in the second aeroplane bugged out and he said, "I am not going to follow you down through there". I just caught up with him on email only this week and he said, "It's not often you get the mach, critical mach number." In other words, that's as fast as the aeroplane will go when you are doing aerobatics. We could have wound up in a smoking hole in the ground for a bit of being silly. Sadly that happens

42:00 with aircraft accidents sometimes. We got away with it.

Tape 6

00:34 **Some weapons questions. You said you were carrying different amounts of five hundred and thousand pound bombs, if you are carrying a large number of bombs, where are they stored on a Canberra?**

The aircraft was designed to carry nine in the weapons bay, the bomb bay, and three triple carriers

01:00 as I think I mentioned earlier we thought that's how you could load the aeroplane and get away with it and we operated fat dumb and stupid in Malaya on that belief. When we first dropped nine out of the weapons bay, the first one would come off and then loosely float back into the bay and being HE, that's a bit interesting.

Why would it do that?

Just the aerodynamics created the turbulence created within the bomb bay. With

01:30 the centre lower bomb coming off first, it would fly back into the bomb bay so that's why we went to eight by five hundred which was seen in the logbook as a load rather than nine. We put the wing tip stations on as well and carried a bomb on each wing tip as well as what was in the weapons bay, the bomb bay. You could put the six one thousand pounds in the bomb bay so

02:00 you could mix and match a bit. It boiled down to later on when we ran out of bombs, effectively we were

buying bombs off the Americans, buying seven fifties and fitting a load with seven fifties with one each on the wing tip as well. We used up the Second World War reserve stocks and then went to the seven fifties. So it really was what was available,

02:30 and as I said there were some five hundreds and I think they were mark eights and mark thirteens if I remember correctly. They had a different birth characteristic.

How did you find out about that situation, the first bomb out floating back up again?

There was some peculiar patterns on the ground and then they rang a bell

03:00 and aircraft assessment development unit went out and did some flying and they found exactly the same and they did some fancy wiring of the different racks of the sequence of release and came up with a recommendation that it was better off to leave it out of there and changed the sequence of how the other bombs came off the triple carriers.

You mentioned that those wing tip carriers would glow in the dark as they went down?

No,

03:30 the mark thirteens, they would, no, the burst would have like an afterglow, it was just a different explosive mixed in, whatever the mixture was, I can't tell you what that was, for high explosion in each of those. I think the mark thirteen just glowed a bit; it just seemed to have persistence about the burst that was all. That was initially confused with being a secondary, in other words, you'd initiated something else on the ground

04:00 which was then exploding or burning. It turned out just to be the characteristic of that particular batch of bombs.

On those night missions what would you eventually know of the results, if anything?

Very little. You got very little feedback, very little damage assessment. We started to get some out of the daylight trips.

04:30 I don't know that I ever heard of any feedback on the night ops, you would report to the intello, Johnson, any secondary explosions that you got and that's when we picked up the mark thirteens. I think they were, had this peculiar characteristic.

Because everybody was claiming secondary?

Yes, it seemed like that

05:00 was what was occurring. It's a bit odd.

It seems a strange way to fight a war, you take off in the dark, drop your bomb, push a button at the right point, fly back, and you don't even know what's happened.

True.

Did that ever frustrate you a bit?

Yes, a little. Particularly with my background, it did. Particularly when you spent four years getting so many yards or metres off the target for every bomb that you'd dropped

05:30 and suddenly, what's occurring. That was 7th Air Force was conducting it and that's how they were doing it. I don't know where they came up with their intelligence whether that particular target of that nature was at that particular location. Perhaps one of the reasons we didn't ever find out it may have betrayed their sources. You never know. You've got to take a lot of those things at face value and on faith.

06:00 **From your experience and expertise, how accurate do you think that bombing tactic was?**

That's hard to say because it's been controlled by somebody else, but if you had a CAP, circular air probable, of a hundred metres it would be, I would have thought that would be about, sort of thing.

So if you were trying to hit a structure?

You'd be lucky

06:30 or unlucky.

The daylight missions, how did they differ apart from the fact it was daylight?

Because the daylight missions were all under the control of the forward air controller. Australia had guys on detachment with USAF as well as their own FACs, the guys on

07:00 detachment were flying AV tanks, Broncos, they really did an enormous amount of high pressure, high value work. Bronco is a good aeroplane to fly. Big twin fans, high tarpo[?], do you know it with a twin beam? But they'd be listening to four radio nets at the same time as well as controlling rockets

- 07:30 and smoke so that they'd be talking to you, talking to the ground, talking to the army, talking to naval gun fire support, talking to the tasking agency, and flying the aeroplane, firing rockets and putting down smoke. So, he's got his work cut out and Ken Mitchell, one of them, and they had an FAC reunion for the Vietnam FACs in San Antonio late last year and
- 08:00 about a hundred and seventy of them got together. But you would call up the FAC and he would say, "This is the target, what is your weapon load and this is what I want you to do on my smoke." and he'd put a smoke grenade in and he'd say, "I want thirty five metres up the valley,
- 08:30 north west, whatever, from the smoke point of impact." so he would take out his error to the best of his ability and that's where you'd aim to put the centre of your stick. You'd do a single pass, put down the stick that you had, usually with minimum spacing. You could dial up the spacing you wanted, and then he would give you a bomb damage assessment as you pulled off
- 09:00 target and were going home. He would tell you straight away what the results were, which would then be confirmed through the next later on. It was not only daylight, it was level, usually under the monsoon, under the clouds, and if you had a clear day, I think we had a couple, you could get up above ground fire. Eighty five per cent of the aircraft losses were from ground fire
- 09:30 below four thousand feet. Most losses came from ground fire and if you could avoid that you would improve your chances pretty significantly. That's for the 7th Air Force operations throughout Vietnam, not just South Vietnam. That's what it was at the time; I think those were the numbers that stick in my mind.
- So when you took off from Phan Rang on one of these missions, did you know what you were going to be doing when you took off?**
- Yes. You knew you would be working with an FAC
- 10:00 in a particular corps. South Vietnam was divided into four corps. On a particular, in a particular area and target. That didn't mean to say it couldn't be changed on the way. You know, you'd get down there and the ground situation would have varied and that's what you would do.
- So you could be given in your briefing a rendezvous area?**
- Yes, you would go to this point, talk to the FAC and go from there.
- Would you know exactly**
- 10:30 **what the target was going to be?**
- You would have a brief target, but whether you got to bomb on that target or something else would depend upon whether or not there had been any changes to that ground situation.
- How many aircraft would be flying in towards this one FAC?**
- He would just whistle you up when he wanted you. You might be a singleton or you might be one of half a dozen or so.
- 11:00 **Would you be on the ground when the call came or in the air?**
- No, you'd be in the air, in the area.
- And he would say, "It's your turn".**
- He call you up and say, "Magpie three five, this is where it is, have you got it on my smoke?"
- He would designate the target with a smoke?**
- He would put a smoke bomb under.
- With the terrain and jungle canopy and so on how difficult were some of these targets to get into?**
- Depending on how
- 11:30 low the monsoon was.
- I was asking you about whether the targets were difficult to approach with terrain?**
- Yes, some of them were. If the monsoon was down finding your way up the valley was a bit of challenge but that's what we spent a couple of years in Malaya doing. It's always fraught with a bit of danger of course. But
- 12:00 you eventually could get in there hopefully and one of the trips written up about the guy I was flying with, the CO of the squadron, was during the assaults on Khe San and Duc Do and we got called in off another target. Got called in to support, they had troops a hundred metres in contact,
- 12:30 putting recoilless rifle on the troops, and recoilless rifle is an anti-vehicle, a big round, it's not just a

rifle, and we ran in to do it and the pilot was having a bit of trouble in keeping the wings level and steady and bombing only a hundred metres from your own troops, you want to make sure you don't have any line error, so we went around again,

13:00 probably not the most sensible thing in the world to do, and they were under a cloud base of nine hundred feet, our fragmentation envelope for the weapon that we had was fourteen forty feet, so we were bombing on smoke again, and as soon as I saw the first bomb come into view, when they are going at .09 of a second interval I shouted, "Pull!" and he pulled up and disappeared into the

13:30 clouds to try and get out of there. Got away with that. Because once you are in the cloud you can't go back down again because you've lost your reference, your visual reference. The Americans' reports on that were pretty encouraging, that was good, they were happy. The recoilless rifles seemed to be quiet for a while, gone awfully quiet.

The

14:00 **feedback you would get from the forward air controller, what would that consist of?**

Just a running commentary. He would be talking to the ground troops, that's on one of the four nets he was radio nets operating on, they would be telling him and these guys were shouting and roaring and singing praises and all sorts of things. At this stage we were trying to find our way out of where we'd got to and find out way back.

So he would just

14:30 **relay a message from the troops to say if you had been on the money?**

Yes, he would say the bombs were on targets, the recoilless rifle fire has stopped, hang in there, we'll keep it up, sort of thing.

What is the danger of flying within the fragmentation envelope?

Getting hit by a fragment of your own bomb. So you try and get out of there as quick as you can. That's why hydra bombs

15:00 were invented. You have probably saw a lot of footage from Vietnam where bomb has a flip out petal at the back where the four fins pop out of the back and that slows the bomb down so it separates the bomb from the aircraft so you can drop at low altitude and stay clear of the fragmentation envelope. That's the danger but sometimes you don't have that luxury.

Besides the danger of

15:30 **being hit by shrapnel from the bombs, does the shock wave cause any problems with aircraft control?**

No, not that I am aware of. There is usually too much going on to be worried about a bit of bumping around.

You mentioned that the forward air control might also be co-ordinating naval gunnery support?

Yes.

Does that constitute a flight hazard?

Yes. He says, he tells NDS [Navy Directive System] to hang off while

16:00 you run through and then he calls in the NDS again.

So you could be flying in a situation where there might be mortars, artilleries and anything else whistling through as well?

Yes, potentially.

You'd have to be unlucky?

That's right. But that happened to a Caribou, it got its bloody tail shot off and they lost the aeroplane and the guys on board.

Shot off by what?

By ground fire,

16:30 I think it was, I might be aligning the Kiwis [New Zealanders], but a fire battery and the aeroplane happened to go through at the wrong time and lost its tail. Aeroplanes don't fly well without tails.

Neither do Kiwis.

No.

17:00 **I was going to ask about the ground fire, what was the ground fire, hostile ground fire consist of mainly?**

Mostly small arms. You were aware of it but ignorant of it at the same time because you can't see it.

17:30 By and large I think you could probably count on one or two at most hands the number of strikes aircraft picked up from ground fire apart from the two aeroplanes we lost. We think they were surface missiles rather than ground fire. But you put enough lead in the air and somebody flying around you might get lucky, or unlucky, and get a hit.

18:00 The normal is one in five is a tracer which are visible but you don't see most of it.

It must have been difficult for somebody to actually target an aircraft at that speed, at that height?

Hopefully. I mean there are stories about the rule of thumb is, if you see a helicopter

18:30 lead by half a length then fire. There is a case, I am told, one of our choppers in a dust off landed and the Viet Cong stood up and pointed straight at the pilot, led half an aircraft length and put what would have been deadly fire, half a chopper length in front of him and didn't even touch him. This is not a healthy place to be. It was rules of thumb that they were working from. If you've got

19:00 poorly trained insurgents then that's one of the direct effects, but if you've got enough of them and they are firing enough in the air then somebody is going to get hit sooner or later.

When you were operating, what about heavier anti-aircraft artillery and stuff?

Not that I am aware of. The two aircraft that 2 Squadron lost I believe were both operating right up near the

19:30 DMZ [Demilitarised Zone], the demilitarised zone at the top of ICORPS and we believe that they were both hit by a SAM [missile], one crew got out of it and one crew we've never heard from since. Sadly.

They are still missing?

Yes. A couple of young guys, Carver and, his name's in the book.

How do you rate the American

20:00 **aircrews that you saw in their performance?**

Pretty hard to be drawing parallels because we weren't usually in the same area of operation. They were going off in the north and there was a lot more hostile fire. The professionalism I think of

20:30 aircrew everywhere is pretty much on a par. Everybody spends a lot of time and effort to make sure there is that degree of professionalism. Some of these guys would come out of the National Guard in the States, weekend warriors, and were thrown into that situation. I think they would have had a harder time than we had simply because we were

21:00 flying practice, lots of experience, and that's the best way to stay clean get out there.

When you were in your bomb aiming compartment down there, flying that low and fast over the jungle must have been quite a feeling?

Yes, you are just down the nose. You are looking for the last bit

21:30 of navigation to get you where you need to be and try and get all the bomb systems sorted out and ready and ensure you haven't lost anything along the way. The gyros are up and running and everything is all set up. You've got all your time intervals set on the bits and pieces. It's pretty busy; you don't have a lot of time to think about the feeling or what sort of a day it is. Got to get all this done.

Did you feel a bit exposed there?

Yes, a

22:00 bit. I am looking through a piece of plastic, the pilot is sitting in an ejection seat on an armour plate. What do you expect? I think Nev Dowse got a bit of something through the lower DV panel that whistled past his ear. I mean, we were in an exposed position.

What photographic duties did you have?

You also had a camera down the back. So that when

22:30 you would let go the bombs at low level you then grabbed for the camera button which is also set up as well, and primed all that, so you could take photographs of the impact. You had all that to do as well. It was just one of the things you had to get lined up to make sure you had all your ducks in a row. If you had it all there it was just routine, it just made it pretty simple. You weren't panicking about

23:00 missing something. You knew what it was, that's what you were trained for, that's what you had all that basis of experience to rely on.

What sort of rivalry was there between crews and navigators, especially over the results of bombing?

Not a lot in Vietnam. More on the application ranges where you are betting a beer on each bomb as to

23:30 how close you can get to the target and all the rest of it. It's mostly on practice ranges. Once you are in there it's very strong camaraderie in supporting each other. I wouldn't have thought there was a lot of rivalry, not in my time anyway. There may have been subsequently for something to do.

In its operational bombing role in Vietnam, how was the Canberra holding up to the wear and tear?

Pretty well.

24:00 In fact the accuracy improved during Dave Evans' time. He was the CO after Rolf Harrison. They got the accuracy down to a pretty commendable degree, I was pretty happy with it towards the end. I mean, the bird held up well, good aeroplane.

Was there a feeling that it was perhaps getting a bit out of date by that stage? It's a World War II aircraft essentially.

24:30 Yes it is. But no I don't think so. I think the government had recognised its limitations on the advice of the department by limiting its operations to South Vietnam. I think if the government had not limited its operation then it would have exposed the aircraft and the crew to a lot more because it had no self defence capability. It didn't have a gun,

25:00 it didn't have radar warning, didn't have anything to keep you out of trouble really.

It had no counter measures of any sort?

Nothing, nothing at all.

Against a (UNCLEAR) in North Vietnam it would have been?

It would have been history, simple as that. No brainer.

When you weren't flying, I guess

25:30 **Vietnam at that time had a reputation for lots of sorts of entertainment, different substances and different things to do?**

There was to my knowledge absolutely no use of any substances on 2 Squadron in the time I was there. Not amongst the troops and certainly not in the aircrew.

We can classify alcohol

26:00 **as a substance.**

Okay, if you classify alcohol as a substance, that's a different issue. Yes, we certainly had a few beers and after some trips you had a few more beers than others. But no I thought you meant marijuana or other drugs that sort of things. There were stories about them being around 1st Airborne Division, 'Big Red One', the Americans, but I was never aware of anything

26:30 and certainly not amongst any of the aircrew. There was a local brothel at the end of the runway called The Strip that was frequented by some people. Again, the only recollection I have was, there was a visit made by

27:00 one groundie, he fronted up to the doctor and the doctor told us these quite remarkable stories about this idiot, but that was all. So nothing that I am aware of, nothing of any significance, certainly nothing that's prevalent. But I am sure if the media got hold of it they would say, "There was, everybody had". We had the local girls used to come in and clean the rooms and

27:30 do laundry and things but there was never any fraternisation, for want of a better term, that I am aware of. Why? It's stupid. There is nothing going on that I am aware of. There were plenty of magazines and books and Playboys and centrefolds and we had centrefold pictures plastered everywhere. To the extent that the first CO felt obliged to

28:00 put out a routine order, that's an official document, saying that the proliferation of these nude studies had become so great that they had become a distraction, particularly when he had visitors to the base. We actually had some of the Australian nursing staff who were doing a brilliant job down in 4 CORPS out in the sticks away from army support, the nurses visited us for some peculiar reason and I think he was

28:30 pretty embarrassed that all these nude pictures were around the place. So he put out this order saying that the proliferation of all these things are over the top and henceforth the nude studies would be

limited to one working area and sleeping quarter and furthermore these must be tastefully mounted. Bad choice of phrase and it just put the cat amongst the pigeons and I will leave the rest of it to your imagination.

Okay.

29:00 I should have kept a copy of that but I didn't.

You mentioned that you had local workers that would come in and clean your hooch or whatever, what other contact would you have with the local people?

A little. I was talking about the supply of groceries and digging a well and those sort of things. There were some functions whereby several guys would go into town on

29:30 invitation of the local mayor for various festivities and things but that was about the limit of it.

Did you go out of the base much?

Not a lot. Couple of the guys did. I remember one of the guys volunteered to go on an overnight sortie with the Montagnard tribesmen on the ground, not for this black duck [not for me].

30:00 He thoroughly enjoyed it and we did go on a weekend up to visit one of these ground radar operators, MSQ77 operators up at a place called Da Lat which was one of the mountain resorts for the French in their imperial period and we jumped a lift with a couple of aeroplanes that went through Na Trang and eventually out to

30:30 Da Lat and visited these guys. To get to understand what they were doing and what did they know of us and the governments have set these things up and we are working with them but you don't know who they are or what they are on about or how good their system is and how it works and all the rest of it so we wanted to go and talk to them. So we did that and I think, there were four army warrant officers who were part of the training team who had a villa up in Da Lat as well. The night we were there the

31:00 VC satchel charged the thing with the CO's quarters and nowhere near me or us. The four Australian warrant officers actually employed Chinese mercenaries as guards, so Chinese mercenaries were guarding the villa, but one of the Australians had a python as a pet I am told,

31:30 and the VC rolled the Chinese mercenary and turned the M60 [machine gun] inside the villa and this guy wound up underneath his bed with a very agitated python. How much credence is in that story I don't know. But these are the sort of stories that we are told by the guys who are up there. So it was not a healthy place to hang around. We stayed there one or two nights and then jumped a lift on a bug smasher going

32:00 back to Phan Rang.

What's a bug smasher?

Light aircraft. There was an observation aircraft or a communications aircraft I think.

Besides the official name, what did you refer to your enemy as?

Charlie. Just Charlie, that was it.

Were you always flying on the same aircraft for your operations?

No. Aircraft type? It was always Canberras.

32:30 **No, I meant the individual?**

No, not the same car number.

Were you always flying with the same pilot?

No, well, predominately with one guy. I started off flying with Bob Monty and I wound up flying with the CO, Rolf Harrison. So that was predominately, there were a bunch of other guys

33:00 I flew with on and off depending upon the availability, guys might get crook, or they might have called on an extra sortie or something.

Because you were on a short tour in Vietnam, what leave did you get? Did you get any rest in country or anything?

No, they did offer a week in Taipei for R&R [Rest and Relaxation] and I thought about doing that

33:30 but financially that was not an option with a little family and trying to buy a house and the rest of it back in Australia. What am I going to do? Stand around and look at a pub, drink beer, I can do that here. So I took my R&R when I got back. I got back after six months, I just did six months and got back and did it that way. It seemed like a smarter

34:00 option.

How much did you keep in touch with home?

You couldn't. I used to write letters and you'd get a letter, the mail call you'd look forward to on a daily basis. When Sally was born I got a telegram and because of time zone differences, the time zone, date time group on my telegram

34:30 back to Joanie was before Sally was born saying, "Congratulations". You were only allowed to send three number groups, which one, two, three, meant well done, one, two, four, meant well done you or something or other. That's what you were allowed to do when sending a telegram, that was the limit of the traffic that you were allowed. But you could write pretty much freely. So you would write letters home, post them and hope they got there. Most of them seemed to

35:00 have.

Any censorship of the mail?

Not that I am aware. But the telegrams were only three number groups and provided its own inherent censorship.

So you just picked stock phrases?

You could pick this one, that one, one from each of the columns, like a Chinese manual, that's what you could do.

How much kind of news media from back home did you get?

We used to get the clippings from the paper.

35:30 They would arrive about a week later, they were published in Australia. You'd go through all the clippings. I mean, you didn't have all the ads, they weren't all the full newspaper, they were selected pretty much a comprehensive coverage. We did have some visiting press people and if you were unlucky enough like I was, you could have a press man come with you on a mission on a sortie. Missions are more than

36:00 one aeroplane. Because you have to get out of the ejection seat to get down the nose and you've got this guy sitting there so you've got to climb over him which means the time for you to get back to your ejection seat should you need it is going to be extended. Now if he tries to get back to the ejection seat before you do there is going to be somewhat of a bit of a confrontation in an aeroplane. It's just difficult to move around in parts when you've got another body

36:30 in the aeroplane. It's not what the aeroplane is designed to do in operation. You take these guys along and show them what it's about effectively. We got caught up in a thunderstorm and gave him some interesting times. He had his hand on the panic handle and we had St Elmo's Fire [electrical discharge] around the cockpit so you wind up with this blue electric hand he didn't like very much and a few interesting

37:00 bits like that, so he got a good education. We also had the nose wheel stuck up as well and we ended up having to punch down the nose wheel and he wasn't too sure about this aeroplane ride.

What's the panic handle?

Just a handle bolted onto the point where the canopy is bolted on to the aircraft you can get hold of it to actually lift yourself into the aircraft. The guys who were sitting in the jump seat always had hold of it.

37:30 **Were you deliberately frightening this guy?**

No, that's just how it was. It was just one of those circumstances, weren't trying to frighten him anymore except I didn't want him in the way.

St Elmo's Fire must be quite a funny thing to see?

It is. It's just static electricity and you can actually wipe a handful of it off, fascinating.

At the time you were there in Vietnam in '67,

38:00 **is that right?**

Yes.

What was your gut feeling about how the war was panning out?

It was before Tet [the Tet Offensive], Tet was early '68. Fortunately I was home before the Tet but there was so many political restrictions being applied to the operation. You know, you couldn't attack anything that was in a rubber plantation, for example. So you know,

38:30 they could have camped in a rubber plantation and playing merry hell in there and you weren't allowed to attack them. They could fire from the rubber plantation on you at the outside. That sort of nonsensical arbitrary limitation. The bombing pauses and those sort of things. You had to wonder about

what was this really going to achieve.

39:00 I mean, we had a saline passage, we'd take off from a safe base, we'd land back on a safe base, we weren't concerned for our own personal security during the time we weren't flying. Poor army guys really had it rough. They really did. They would go out on an operation and they were really living by their wits second to second. Totally different

39:30 circumstance. The way they were being treated probably I think was appalling.

So do you think you kind of had it easy?

Absolutely. Absolutely. There were some risks but I think we probably as a high an accident rating in peacetime as we did in war time in the losses that the air force suffered.

Do you recall

40:00 **any accidental losses around the base? With ground crew, I am talking about men with big fast powerful machinery moving within the same space.**

Not significantly, nothing that springs to mind as to any hiccups on the ground. Our groundies were very careful. They looked after everybody, they looked after themselves, they looked after

40:30 us. Our senior NCOs [non-commissioned officers] particularly are the unsung heroes of the air force in Vietnam. They were the guys that made sure that the aeroplane was all put together and doing what it should do.

Were you glad to leave?

Yes, let me out of here, let me get home.

Why did you have that feeling?

Just that I had come to the end

41:00 of the tour, it was a short tour. Just to get home a brand new baby daughter I had never seen and a son who had grown up a lot. In retrospect he and I both missed out on all that early bonding. You're two years old, you would know how on a day to day basis things change. You suddenly take out those large lumps and it continued because

41:30 it was six months in Vietnam and something like April to December, no, April until about October, that's another story.

Tape 7

00:36 **Peter, you mentioned that on base there were a lot of American guys, did you have much to do with them socially?**

Yes. We used to get, I was saying about 21 Bomb Squadron, eights and thirteens operating out of Clark, the guys used to come down and we'd go up to their officers' club

01:00 and they'd come down to our mess. We got the ROKs, the Republic of South Korean Officers, used to come down and we met them. So there was a fair bit of interaction, particularly amongst the aircrew.

How did everyone get along?

Good. We used to beat them at combat volleyball and all sorts of things. Combat volleyball is if you can reach it, you can hit it. It doesn't matter if you are swinging on the top of the net or not.

01:30 We used to have weekly competitions with them. They got a bit brutal. We were winding up with all sorts of cuts and scratches. Yes, got on well with them, they were fine. I think I only spent a couple of months in country and then rotated.

Did the Koreans like a beer?

We only saw them a couple of times just after they arrived, to my knowledge.

02:00 They were the quietest, smallest, littlest, little guys you will ever see. This guy was about the age of, on average, about the age of a fourteen year old with soft hands. I said to one of these guys, "What's the white patch that you wear with the clasped hand?" He had five of these little clasped hands on this white patch. He said, "Fifth

02:30 hand black belt." I said, "I understand". Yet he seemed to me to have soft hands, quiet, quite unassuming, unpretentious. Their officers all seemed much of the same mind. We weren't concerned about the northern boundary at all with the Koreans on the northern boundary.

So they were considered good at what they did?

Brutally good.

03:00 **What about the ARVN, did you have much to do with them?**

We put a line of our own air defence guards inside the ARVN line. Does that answer the question?

I guess so.

When I say "we" it's the squadron's decision, I didn't make those decisions, that wasn't mine to make at that time. But that's where the ground defenders were.

Did you

03:30 **personally ever have much to do with them?**

With?

ARVN, did you ever?

No. We met a few of the officers, no, only socially, not involved with them on an operation basis at all. I don't know that many of our guys were. The air defenders, the ground defence force guys did of course. They worked with them on a pretty much day to day basis

04:00 but were sort of removed from what we were doing.

Did you ever get entertainment come and visit?

Yes, the entertainment people came by. I suppose every couple of months sort of thing. If I recall correctly there was one village that had a little [rice] paddy in it,

04:30 there was one of Bing Crosby's production exercises came by. When he repeats the same joke nine times to get the take he wants, it has sort of lost its humour a bit by the time and you get fed up with that. That didn't attract my attention for very long. The Australian entertainment was to look forward to, they came by, did a good job.

They would come

05:00 **straight into the camp?**

Yes, fly to Phan Rang and they'd be taken off the aeroplane and looked after by the boss and senior guys, not near the great unwashed aircrew. Then, they'd do, I don't know if they ever even stayed on the base, they all left that night and went back to wherever they came from.

05:30 I am not aware of them ever staying on the base. Not in my time, no.

Did you end up getting back to Saigon?

No, on the way out yes. Wobbly Airlines to Vung Tau and across to Ton San Nhut and on board a Qantas 707 with an all-male crew and we were out of beer before we got to the top of

06:00 flying. So a long dry trip home.

How long did that trip take?

Seven or eight hours, something like that. It was just one hop from Saigon to Mascot, that was it.

I suppose the atmosphere on

06:30 **board was damp once the beer had disappeared?**

Well, it was, they had enough beer I think, on quota one and a half beers for everybody on the aeroplane. Well, that just ran out so quickly. The guys who had been, the army guys, good luck to them, they needed a beer more than I did. Everybody was just pleased to be out of there and on their way home.

07:00 It's as simple as that. We were met by customs from Immigration and those sorts of people but they were only interested in your bags and what you brought back and if you had a copy of that nasty Playboy magazine. Pretty much that was it. The army guys either went back to their units but the poor old conscript guys went to Randwick Barracks and got tossed out on the street. The Prime

07:30 Minister, that the Defence Minister of that day became Prime Minister can now vilify Australia's position in Iraq just appals me. [ex-Prime Minister] Fraser is a has-been Prime Minister and he had the opportunity when he was Prime Minister to do all sorts of things with this country. He had the money, the stability, the budgets, the rest of it, and I think history will look very poorly at what he has done from my perspective. But that's

08:00 a (UNCLEAR) perspective.

Just to go back to the drinking side of things, do you think the amount of drinking you did in Vietnam was out of character from what you would have normally been involved in?

No, I don't think it's any different from what I drink now. Perhaps it was.

08:30 You would usually come back and have a beer but I don't usually have a beer a day. So if I had two beers I'd usually be on my ear anyway. No I don't think, it certainly wasn't an issue. There weren't guys who you would question if they were fit for flying. One or two instances perhaps. Never any pilot I got in an aeroplane with.

09:00 We would have had a discussion at that point.

So when you got back, were you, how did you feel about the level of protests that was around at that stage?

I don't have a difficulty with protests in the democratic system in which we live,

09:30 I do have a difficulty when people want to shove that down my neck and they want to disadvantage the freedom that me and my family have in moving around and doing what we want to do. I am quite happy to let them do what they want to do but when they make physical assaults on the guys that have been up in Vietnam and have a return march, for example, and they are getting paint

10:00 thrown at them and that sort of thing, and being incited to do so by the opposition political party, I think we've lost it. I think democracy has gone out the window under those circumstances. I think that that's appalling and the fact that it took them until we got out in '72 and it took until 1990 for them to have a reconciliation march that's just, I know some Vietnam

10:30 vets who were on the ground, army guys, who suffer terribly. There was no national warmth for their return, quite the contrary I think is bloody reprehensible, absolutely. People ought to be ashamed. They talk about reconciliation with the Aborigines,

11:00 and to my mind it's all been done for political purposes rather than the reality of what they are trying to achieve as a nation.

Were you ever directly exposed to any protests when you got back?

Not directly, not personally. The fact that I wore Vietnam ribbons on my uniform you get the

11:30 occasional snide remark when you are walking because you rarely wear your uniform in public anyway when you were walking at that time. They weren't worth thumping.

What sort of a state do you think the war was at when you left? What was your feeling that things were going?

That's what we were talking about before when I said I thought that there were so many political

12:00 constraints that you were hiding nothing effectively, and all the Australian forces could do was hold their head up high in what they had done in achieving some level of democracy within the areas that they were operating. Both the 1ATF [One Australian Force Vietnam] and the support that was being done by 35, with the Wobbly Airlines, the Wallabies, and

12:30 the Canberras and 2 Squadron and the choppers in particular. They guys out of 9 Squadron did a brilliant job. So I think Australia and Australian servicemen did a lot to make the country proud but that was not the reaction and not the general feeling of the populace. I mean if you don't agree with having troops somewhere you take the government out you don't take out the troops when they come home. That's fair in democracy, that's what democracy is all about. But services

13:00 are just an arm of democracy, just an instrument of the government when it boils down, that sounds like a political speech.

Did you have any inklings at the back of your mind that perhaps you would be going back to Vietnam at some stage?

Not really, once the 111 program kicked off on schedule. Some of the guys who did a full year there went back on a second tour.

13:30 Not my idea of a good idea at all. Not something I wanted to do.

How come?

Just the circumstances had changed. The Tet Offensive had been successful for the North Vietnamese in early '68, you know, it was a totally different, political climate,

14:00 (UNCLEAR) had been deposed, [UNCLEAR] had been deposed, Kalkel [?] had been deposed, all these, the regime was shown to be pretty well corrupt and if that was the regime under SEATO [South East Asian treaty Organisation] we signed up to support. I don't know what my feeling would have been at the time, I can't answer that. I was not placed in that situation but I think I was sufficiently aware of the change in

14:30 circumstances to be able to reconsider it.

So I assume it was rather nice being reunited with your family?

Brilliant. It was lovely to be home and meet the little six week old girl and our little fellow. He was then two years and five weeks old. But as I was saying earlier,

15:00 you can't replace those days and months without, I missed out on that bit of it and then went to the States for seven months or so and missed out on that bit of development and then when I got home they sent me away for another seven months. In that growing together with your kids as a family, those times were irreplaceable but the

15:30 impact of that only comes in retrospect. You only realise when other guys are bringing up their children and enjoying those times so much you think, "I missed out on that". You can't go back, that's history. That's circumstance.

So how long was it before you were told you were heading off to America?

We got back just before Christmas and fronted up to the

16:00 squadron after Christmas and they said, "The first push is off in April." or something. I can't remember the date now, whatever. There was a list of it, of guys, the names got shuffled around a bit, the first six crews on I was in the second six crew and that was just a case who was there and available and they wanted to mix up some of the experienced as they went through the

16:30 sets of crew. I can't remember the day we left, whatever it was.

What was your destination over there?

We went to Sacramento firstly to make our air force base on the southern boundary, the south side of Sacramento. We did a month's radar indoctrination training. None of us had appeared down the radar shoot so we got to do that.

How did you find that?

Pretty good.

17:00 It was a good education. The pilots got to do it as well which was good education for them. We went from there to Cannon Air Force Base in [New] Mexico. There was no point in running away because they could have seen you for five days, it was that flat. We did weapon systems training at Cannon and that's where they started off going through all of the systems so you came up to speed. We did that with the

17:30 Harvest Reaper Crew. Harvest Reaper was the name of a program for the USAF crews who are going on the 111 for Vietnam. One of the guys was a Chinese guy and he said he was going to wear his black pyjamas under his flying suit so if ever he bangs out, "I am on their side". "What do you mean which side are you on?" They were some sharp guys. After a few months there we went to Nellis Air Force Base, just outside of Vegas,

18:00 twelve miles out of Las Vegas. We did our flying training there with 4/27th.

Was that the first time you were in the...?

First time we sat in the seat of the aeroplane. I mean, we had flown the simulator, they had a simulator at Cannon and it used to operate around the clock and depending on when was available you were back to being dragged out of bed at some ungodly hour of the morning to go and fly a two or three hour trip in the simulator to learn how it all worked.

It was quite a lot of new instrumentation

18:30 **for you to learn and come to terms with?**

Yes, the 111 was a very good cockpit for its time. It had all manner of new instrumentation in it, with the radar and the rest of it and the radar homing warning and all that sort of stuff. So we spent months flying in the simulator and doing ground school and all the rest of that before we went to

19:00 Nellis to fly the aeroplane. We also, I can't remember, it must have been, we did our flying at Nellis.

You were with the same pilot through the whole thing?

Yes, with Kev Merrigan. Merro and I wandered through all that together. As they used to say, once you are in that program you might as well be married you guys, because you have to live together, eat together, fly the aeroplane together, go to the simulator together, do everything else

19:30 and we rented houses, in fact, a couple of crews shared a house, Merro and I shared apartments. We were literally hand in glove in that situation. Probably bad choice of phrase, for the whole period. When we finished the flying training and the carry through box had cracked, they said "You guys are here for another year".

20:00 That's when I rang up Joanie and said, "Come on over". So she brought the kids over. Sally who I had seen as a six week old baby and for a couple of months walked off the aeroplane to see me and I had left my car at field, the civil airfield in Las Vegas, we went up to Sacramento then because we were going to be all based at Sacramento then go from McClellan Air Force Base on the north side of

20:30 Sacramento, to go down to pick up the birds from Fort Worth and take them back to McClellan and shake them down and do the sorties back to Australia to fly them back across the Pacific.

Just before we go further, can you explain the situation with the carry box being cracked?

They were trying a new metal called V6OC metal.

21:00 They found that when they were doing the welding on the box they were doing some stress concentration in the corners which they hadn't realised, and the carry through box cracked. It was, Air Nautical Research Laboratory is down at Fisherman's Bend, ours, which resolved what it was and how to overcome it with heat treatment so it wouldn't be brittle under high stress, high G,

21:30 because when you pull high G the wings loaded the pins, the trains that hold the wings on, about an eight inch pin and that loaded it within the corner of the carry through box and caused it to crack. It came off and so did the wing which wasn't all that successful.

For the uninitiated, can you tell us a bit more about the carry through box?

It's an

22:00 eight feet long, possibly two feet, by two feet, very roughly, dimension box, like a coffin, and it has a trunion pivot at each end and an eight inch pin sits down in this pivot and the bit that is in the middle is the pivot, that holds the wings on,

22:30 also a fuel tank, anywhere there is a space in an aeroplane you fill up with fuel if you can. So it's the large structural member that holds the wings to the fuse line. Is that...?

That's great. So the process once they discovered that problem was to come up with a new form of alloy?

23:00 They actually used the same one, they just heat treated them, an ARL, the guys down at Fisherman's Bend, so Australia really helped out with dynamics, with heat treatment requirements to be able to heat treat these boxes. Whether they made new ones or replaced them I am not sure now. They treated them to overcome the problem so they couldn't be brittle and crack off under high G.

23:30 **Sorry, just to go back to where we were, you said the family had arrived and you thought you were going to be...?**

Thought we were going to be working another year.

Quite a while?

Yes, and of course that was totally at our cost, accommodation, food, transport, the whole lot. The air force, in fact when we got back the OC of the base was a bit out of shape because Joanie had brought the kids over because it didn't have his approval. He didn't pay for it and

24:00 there is nothing to be approved. In fact there were photographs in the local newspaper when Joanie was packing up so he should have known about it, from that if nothing else, because Joanie brought over a photograph of Flo Wearing and their new baby, Bob was in the States with us but sadly he was subsequently killed in a Phantom crash just off Evans Head some years later,

24:30 but there was a photograph of Joanie packing and this picture of Flo and the baby to bring over to Bob and that would have been the first picture he seen of his newborn. So it was in the local paper and therefore the fact the boss didn't know about it surprised us. He was taken aback and not happy about it.

Did any other partners or family subsequently come over there?

Yes, I started the lot.

25:00 Some of the guys brought their wives over. Only a few months later they said, "Oops, we are not going to take the aeroplanes home, GD aren't going to fix them, you can all get in the back of the Starlifter". So having very carefully kept four lots of crews separate so if there was an accident they wouldn't wipe out the totality of the trained personnel, they stuck us all in the back of a 141 and they said, "It's not coming in to McClellan,

25:30 it's going to leave from Travis Air Force Base just out of Oakland." on the other side of the bay from San Francisco. We wandered around Oakland airfield in a bus looking for an aeroplane and eventually found one parked in the middle of the airfield but no crew around. Pat Doyle had been smart enough to bring a bottle of scotch which he shared around. We sat there in the freezing cold and then we got a

26:00 map, flew to Hickam, Hawaii, Hickam Air force Base. They said, "The crew is off on a twelve hour break,

you can look after yourself". We wandered around the beach and all the rest of it and all the bars and got on board the aeroplane and it arrived in Western Samoa. We said, "Where are we? In Fiji?" "No, you are in Western Samoa". A whole bunch of locals got on board at that stage,

26:30 got airborne after another several hours and we thought we were headed for Australia and we landed in Christchurch in New Zealand. We said, "What's going on here?" They said, "We've got some stuff here that's supporting Operation Deep South". Which is the Antarctic. I swapped a cleaner an American dollar for a New Zealand shilling because only New Zealand shillings would open

27:00 the door to a shower. So fifty of us filed through this one shower on this and then we got back on board the 141 and wound up in Richmond after several hours. Not back at Amberley, we wound up at Richmond out here. Got off that and customs guys were all there and all he wanted was the latest copy of Playboy and when some guy owned up he said, "While I look at this, if you've got any other bits and pieces". We were then put on

27:30 two Caribous and we arrived somewhat unceremoniously back at Amberley. So instead of being back in bright and shiny aeroplanes we got the world's tour, anyway. There you go. But Joanie had flown home in the meantime; she was well and truly ensconced and good to be home. After that they said, "You haven't been away often enough, you can go down to Sale for another seven months for an advanced nav course". That's what I did.

28:00 **How was that course?**

It was pretty good, it was a good course. I went there with the single-minded determination that I wanted to do the aero systems course which was across in the UK, the old Spec N course, specialist navigator course of which Australia used to buy a couple of places on every year but almost invariably

28:30 all the guys who had cracked that course had been college graduates and there was only one way I could crack that iron ring, so I set about doing that with a vengeance since I was away from home and that ultimately came to pass three years later. Got through the course pretty well and wasn't posted back to 111 as had been expected, I was sent off to aircraft assessment development unit so I was

29:00 one of three flight test navigators at aircraft assessment development unit in Laverton.

Were you disappointed that you were being taken away from the F111?

Yes and no. At that stage Australia had decided that they were going to release the F4E Phantom in the interim and they would have been good to fly. The F111 were all in storage at

29:30 General Dynamics in Fort Worth so ARDU [Aircraft Research and Development Unit] was unexpected. I was a little askance at the posting because I thought I was going back on 111 and went back down to ARDU and thoroughly enjoyed the three years down there doing all sorts of interesting flying.

What were the highlights?

30:00 At ARDU regardless of your category, pilot, navigator, whatever, you were project officer. So you actually got to manage your own project and you were given a project to manage and to see through and write your reports so that there was a recognition of individual skills and capabilities. Fundamentally if you look across at anything that's written by the air force it's all

30:30 "the pilot did this and the pilot did that". There is little consideration given to the other crew members and I say that generally not specifically rarely did it affect me in a two place aeroplane because you got to know the other individuals pretty well and usually there was a due recognition. But even in the air raids when the Canberras were first brought out

31:00 the chief of air staff took the pilot and whisked him away for an official reception while the navigator was still in the aeroplane. It's been a long standing situation, I think it was by accident but it typifies the attitude. No navigator was ever to hold the command appointments and that sort of thing. Fortunately, that's all been overcome since but it was very much an attitude that

31:30 only pilots could hold these important positions. Regardless of intellectual capability, mechanical skills, yes I will give them all that. Separate issue.

So to be project manager was a very...

Yes, project manager was then you could stand up and be counted about and at the weekly reviews by the boss, "Where is your project up to? What are you doing? What do you want to do? What are you going to achieve this week? Where are you at? Where is the report?

32:00 When is it going to be done?" You know, all of the basics in project management were given to you as a responsibility which was a nice attitude. I enjoyed the challenge. I enjoyed my time at ARDU.

So what was your project?

There were a number of projects.

32:30 Sometimes I was assisting other guys, sometimes I was managing. One of them was to, it sounds to be a

peculiar project, it was to determine a paint scheme for target aircraft for assessing development purposes. In other words, what sort of colours and configuration should we paint an aeroplane if we want to see it on with (UNCLEAR) lights and using either

33:00 black or white or colour film. Because colour film was a lot different. If you are using high speed cameras, and at ARDU we used rotating prism twenty four hundred frames a second camera. Do you want me to get rid of that cat?

So...

Colour schemes for the target aircraft.

So that was an example of one of them, one of the projects?

Yes. So we wound up painting this

33:30 Aeroplane, a Mirage. We had when it first flew up from Avalon over Laverton, a normal painted Mirage beside it and it looked like two and a half times the size of it. I had to work with the camouflage people in the research laboratory to do counter activity. So those sort of things, it was interesting, fascinating work.

34:00 Another one was we had hired the Phantom and they had hook wire across the run way at Amberley and the hook wire was like on a carrier, it is supported by rubber donuts that held up off the run way so when the aircraft lands the hook catches it, otherwise it would be lying on the cam of the runway. The first time we did it with a Phantom you'd loop the wire which is an inch and a quarter of clad of

34:30 cable off the top of the drum, kinked it and broke and sent the Phantom sideways along the side of the runway, which was a bit untidy. The guys actually rebuilt the aeroplane at Amberley and had to send it back but the job we had then was to sort out what was going on. I assisted Ron Green who was the project manager. It was a case of working out what was wrong with the thing, the computer was

35:00 very agricultural, so some pretty interesting tramping. You got a Hercules with the nose wheel is protected by a plate, which actually comes down slightly below the fuse line and behind the nose wheel. When the nose wheel goes over this cable which is held up on rubber donuts, it bounces up and it could have bounced

35:30 up and caught the nose wheel. So all sorts of problems like that, you know, practical applications.

Now, next for you was England?

Yes.

What was in store for you in England?

That was the air assistance course. That's the one that I had set my sights on and that's, the course starts at nine o'clock on 1st of January you don't get New Year 's Day off.

36:00 You work five days a week and mostly evenings as well. Study one day of the weekend, two weeks off in August and you finish at five o'clock on 12th December. You walk into a room and there is every hour for the next year of your life plotted out and you think, "Good grief". But it was probably the best course I've ever done. The RAF [Royal Air Force] recognised the need to take aircrew

36:30 like me with the objective of giving us specific training to be able to talk to engineers, or to understand what engineers were trying to tell us about aero system and capabilities so that we could then go into the operation requirements branches knowing what was possible, or potentially possible, in the time scale it takes to bring an aeroplane out of service. It's usually about a ten year gestation period. These guys

37:00 were brilliant. They had the senior specialist education sub branch of their education office in the RAF and these were the best teachers I ever had. They didn't just lecture you, they taught you. They made sure you understood it and we did information theory, radar theory, electronic theory, all sorts of stuff like that. It was just brilliant. Our motto was,

37:30 "My brain hurts". It was just one of those courses and at the end of the year I thought I was coming back to Australia and they said, "No, you are staying on the staff for two years". Then they realised how little I knew about anything because suddenly I had to learn a specific area and teach that and run a cell of guys who were brilliant guys for the next two years. That was good and that was in Lincolnshire in England. Then

38:00 got posted back to ARDU, back to aircraft research and development unit at the end of that which was a nice surprise. The house we built and sold we left on election day in '72, we built the house and sold it for twenty one thousand, it was on the market for fifty six thousand, because the inflation during the [Prime Minister] Whitlam years and I couldn't afford to buy it back. So I set about building another house in the same street because there was one block left.

38:30 Three weeks after we signed contract to build this house they said, " ARDU is going to move to South Australia". So I set about completing the garden and doing all the garden while it was being built three

weeks before we were to move in. Three weeks before we were to move in they said, "You are not going to ARDU, you are going to Staff College in Canberra". So we didn't ever get to live in that house but we sold the house, brand new with a completed garden. You should have seen the people who turned up to buy it,

39:00 so we got our asking price which was good. Again, went out on a limb as far as possible and bought a house in Canberra. One place we signed a contract with we lost on a deal, that's another story. Bought a house in Canberra and lived there for quite a few years. It was great. Did Staff College in '76, air force staff college, the whole year. Good call. Then went

39:30 into operational requirements weapons systems in air force office.

What was involved in the staff course?

Staff College. It's a whole bunch of essay writing and that sort of thing. Writing skills and all the different sorts of bits and pieces. Lots of politics and democracy, lectures,

40:00 I can't remember what else. All sorts of military studies aligned to taking up staff appointments in air force office and defence or command appointments out on the squadron. It's twelve months of stop and catch your breath and have a look at the wider world and stop thinking about aeroplanes and think more about the world at large and politics. Staff positions, because you would

40:30 go in as a, I was on Wing Commander then, on promotional, going in to write what we thought were aerodyne papers to convince bureaucracy to do things about aircraft capability. So I guess the posting of operational requirements weapons was a culmination of pretty much all the training and experience I had been given to then suddenly

41:00 say now you know what the deficiencies are and you've been given the education to look far enough into the future as to what might be achievable by the engineers, now you've got to put pen to paper and justify all of the things that need to be done, what you believe need to be done, or propose things. Then that went through me to the group captain, the direct aircraft requirements, the air commodore, the director of general operation requirements, the Air Marshall,

41:30 chief of air force operations, to the chief of air staff. I was well down the chain still. I had a lot of people to convince but I was very fortunate I had flown with most of these guys in Canberras, two person aeroplanes, so they knew me and that gave me an opportunity to communicate with them that I would think was pretty unique really.

Tape 8

00:34 **You talked before to us about when you were in Vietnam initially, you were using World War II stock and indeed World War II aircraft to some extent, when you went to operational requirement weapons how would you describe the state of Australia's aviation systems and equipment?**

Aviation or air force aircraft weapons systems?

Yes.

Pretty much

01:00 the air force in Australia had followed an aircraft replacement syndrome where they had an aircraft come into its life of type and they got a replacement aircraft for the same sort of role. So when a fighter needed a replacement like a Sabre, they picked another fighter and eventually settled on the Mirage. When the Canberra came to the end of its useful life as a bomber they picked the F111. When the Neptune

01:30 came to the end of its life they picked the Orion. But predominately they had accepted the weapons systems and flight carriage and release clearances of the weapons as per the maker's manual, without question or qualification. That left Australia in a situation where,

02:00 when I wrote the brief to my boss about the current status of air force weapons assistance within a couple of days of my arrival, or weeks of my arrival, his covering note to his boss, the big jarra, was that this was a parlous state, that was his term, and these are the things that we need to do. When that bounced off

02:30 the chief's desk with this note that had been endorsed by the next two senior officers in between time the chief, who as I was saying earlier I had been fortunate enough to fly with in the Canberras, walked up the stairs from his office and my office door was right opposite the top of the stairs. He walked in there and sat down in the chair, no it wasn't, it was the Chief of Operations because Dave Evans had been the CO in Vietnam

03:00 just as he arrived I was leaving, and he was the Air Force Marshall and he walked around the corner, walked into my office and threw himself in the chair and said, "What's this about? What are you on about?" I said what I had done and the research I had conducted, where I had got to and what the conclusion was. He said, "What are you going to do about it?" I said, "Well, I've got two papers to write. One what we are currently doing about it, which I don't think is enough, and

03:30 one that I want to do about it". He said, "As long as it is on my desk by close of business tomorrow that will be fine." So, then he sent it down to the chief and the chief repeated the exercise. Then I had to tell my boss that his boss's boss had been sitting in my office telling me what I was to do. So it sort of went around the loop like that a bit. But we had essentially used up

04:00 our World War II stocks in Vietnam, it meant that our strategic reserve stocks, to say the least, were low. You need different sorts of fuses for different sorts of bombs for different sorts of targets for what is called weapon to target matching. Because if you want a bomb to go off after it has penetrated the surface of a bunker

04:30 you don't want it to go off on the outside for example, so you need different sorts of fuses. The fuses that we had were limited in their capabilities and their reliability. At that stage there was Fuse Development Laboratories, FDL, did some remarkably good work increasing the reliability of fuses. Through the efforts of

05:00 a number of people we bought some surplus USAF fuses on the scrap metal market in Korea. The aircraft that went to China, to take the bulls to China, remember we gave bulls to China in about 1977, '78, they came home through Korea and picked up this lot of scrap metal which Fuse Development Laboratory reworked in improved their reliability

05:30 and made them very useful. We had a 111 aircraft but we had no bombs that could get off at low level. So the aircraft would fly in at low level using (UNCLEAR) radar and then have to pull it up to expose itself to the fragmentation envelope that I talked about earlier at fourteen forty feet, to get a bomb off and completely negate all of the low level capabilities

06:00 in the tac, to put itself up where it was exposed. We acquired the hydrag fin production line from the States which are these step out things which let you keep at low level and get the bomb off and provides the aircraft with weapons separation. I had met some guys from Texas Instruments around the traps. Texas Instruments were providing

06:30 laser-guided bomb kits to USAF at that stage and wanted to sell them around the world and I convinced the boss that if we got some laser -guided bomb kits and cleared them on our Mirage aircraft we could probably come to an arrangement with Texas Instruments whereby if they provided us with the kits we could provide them with a

07:00 carriage release clearance from ARDU which is a well-recognised flight carriage and release clearance authority. They would therefore be able to sell them to all the other Mirage operators around the world. To say that this was going out on the limb a bit, it was not a very long stretch, but that's what we did. Eventually we had them out and I suggested to the boss that we take a couple of the

07:30 bureaucrats out to Woomera to see the last few drops. He said, "I've got a better idea. We'll get a Hercules and we'll fill it up with bureaucrats". I don't say the term derogatory, these are career bureaucrats and public servants in defence. We filled up a Hercules with them and took them out to Woomera. Nobody had ever taken them out to Woomera before so they had a look around Woomera and never seen that before.

08:00 We took them out to Abbots Field which is not the Woomera airfield but the flight test field. We gave them briefings and laser safety goggles and that sort of stuff and showed them that we could, from a Mirage, around the envelope. When you talk about the envelope you talk about high speed, high altitude, high altitude, low speed, high speed,

08:30 low altitude, low speed, low altitude. Around the corners of the envelope to be able to see what the limits, when can you get this thing off, because it had an early generation seeker on the laser-guided bomb kit that would home in on the reflected energy bouncing off the target from the laser and using the simple quadron detector it would then home on to the target and after we

09:00 showed them that we could put a couple of these things through a four foot by four foot piece of canvass they were pretty well convinced that this accuracy thing was a good thing to do. Because if you can use only one aeroplane you have a much greater capability for precision guided mission. Subsequent to that we got approval to buy these things and they are in service now and that

09:30 gave us the first precision guided capability. We bought the Orion aircraft which was fitted up to carry harpoon missiles, we didn't have any harpoons, but navy did. I think navy still hate me for, they had bought one complete ship set extra when they bought their ship set which they used to put on a barge from Garden

10:00 Island and float the up the river to Newington and take them out on a truck to Kingswood for servicing and maintenance. I suggested that if we put them down at Edinburgh where the P3s were operating

from, then if you needed to put this sort of capability on an anti-ship missile, on a Harpoon, you had it on the airfield you didn't need to take it anywhere, you had a much better responsive capability.

10:30 So the air force acquired de facto some of the navy's capability which gave P3 the capability.

Just to clear something up, you feel it was kind of, Australia had been taking this piecemeal approach to their procurement and that ended up becoming a severe handicap at the point?

Absolutely. An absolute handicap to our operational capability. We bought the

11:00 111 and it only had World War II bomb capability. It didn't have a precision ammunition radar capability and it didn't have the capability to do what we wanted it for. The aeroplane was, as I was explaining before, we are a large continent with a moat. We don't have the land forces to protect the land environment in large or desperate forms. We could handle a couple of

11:30 bushfires, that sort of thing. That's not trying to be too derogative to our army. If navy wanted to do it, as long as you gave them two weeks' notice to sail around to the area then it might be useful. The big advantage of air power is to be able to responsive and to do it in a pretty short time, that's not to say the army and navy are not responsive. But if you can do it in rapid time, now, if you can protect the moat by, and the 111

12:00 was bought with an M61 A1 twenty millimetre Gatling gun but we didn't have ammunition for it. If you can squirt twenty millimetre into the water you are going to get somebody's attention about whether or not they really want to continue to progress. After we had done this, made this arrangement with Texas Instruments, and proven that we could get a carriage and release clearance off the Mirage and gave them a copy of the flight carriage release clearance,

12:30 this scurrilous American I know rang me up and said, "We've just sent the first shipment of kits that Australia bought and they just left and..." Another long story. Do you remember when the Falklands War was on and Australia suddenly wasn't going to buy the Invincible [Royal Navy ship] then there was budget money

13:00 that was available that had to be spent in the last few days of the budget year to be able to sustain the budget, what you get next year is based on your achievement and a percentage. So if you underspend this year you are actually going backwards in your spending. So, the cry went out, who can spend a reasonable amount of money and get money paid and delivery made literally in the last ten days of the financial year? My predecessor had fallen over and I made sure

13:30 I wasn't going to do that and I had all these ducks in a row. There was an aircraft, Hercules, coming back from a competition in Canada. We said, "If you divert and come through [UNCLEAR] air force base in Texas we will get the Minister's approval". We said to the Minister, if he approves it, because there is an aeroplane there, they can pick these things up, so it all sort of came together in a rush. This guy from Texas Instruments rang me up at about four o'clock

14:00 in the morning and said, "The aeroplane has left, it's got the laser guided bomb kits on but I've got a box on there marked tools for Ekins". I mean, I said, "I am going to wind up in jail over this, you can't do that". He said, "Yes we can". Anyway, I eventually found out what it was and the aircraft arrived in Richmond and unpacked this box and it was four laser guided bomb kits for the two thousand pound bomb which was then used to clear the F111

14:30 for the carriage and release of that. Cleared them for the five hundred pound bomb for the Mark 82 so it had a clearance for the Mark 82 and Mark 84. So then it had the laser guided bomb capability. The 111 didn't have any precision guidance capability. So fine having the capability where it can use laser guided but if you don't have somebody designated or you don't carry a designator, you might as well just carry an iron bomb.

15:00 USAF had gone through, a guy who went through the air assistance course in UK, he was a USAF guy, a year before me, John Raffie [?], he died of cancer the poor bugger, was in the requirements area in USAF and he was looking at the Pave Tack attack system [an electro-optical targeting pod] on an F4 to put on their F111F. The F was a digital aircraft and our was an analogue

15:30 based on avionics. Anyway, through all of that I eventually convinced the boss that we ought to put Pave Tack on our analogue aircraft and put an interface unit on there so we could run it together. That would give the 111 not only a laser designation capability it would also bring with it a forward looking infra-red system so we could do long range infra-red targeting passively, so you didn't

16:00 have to fire a radar pulse to let him know you were coming you could look at him on the infra-red and get a very precise picture of his capabilities and with a harmonised laser you could actually get a long range designation on him, use a designator and range finder. That gave the 111 then capability to be able to designate. We then went to stand off guided weapons and all the rest of it.

16:30 **It sounds to me like we bought the F111 and were still thinking in World War II terms in dropping iron bombs from it?**

Yes.

Through yourself and sometimes some dubious old mates' connections and old boys' club capabilities that was how the F111 got taken through to the next generation of weapons systems in Australian terms?

Yes, exactly. There were three navigators that really

17:00 brought the 111 to its current potential capabilities. Lance Haverson was responsible for the integration of Harpoon after I had arranged for with Harvo to have some guys I knew, McDonald Douglas Electronics, let us have a lend of a Harpoon missile. These things were a million dollars a copy. He lent us one at Point Mugu and we floated an aeroplane through there

17:30 and put it on the aeroplane and cranked the wings backwards and forwards to make sure it would fit and all the rest of it. He and I sat down in the office and designed the navigation control system so you could use it, it's a missile where you can send over here first before it comes into its target. It had different terminal guidance, so we sat down and worked all that out. So Harvo was really

18:00 responsible for the Harpoons and Lockett was responsible for the reconnaissance, pallet and pack. Three navigators really independent pretty much worked out these things based upon our education we had been given by the air force and our operational skills with the support of the management guys who were working for us, who had enough faith in the three of us to support what we were doing

18:30 to kick off these projects and eventually see them come to fruition. It was good fun.

That method of doing things, is that Australian ingenuity to be proud of or a system to be worried about that it took sort of?

A bit of both. Because, I mean, the air force recognises that it needs guys who are prepared to push the boundaries a bit.

19:00 Keeping management informed, we had at that stage, chief of the air staff worked for the Minister for Air, there used to be a Minister for Air. It wasn't all totally wrapped into the Minister for Defence at that stage. CAF used to write a brief to the Minster and say this is what we are doing and why.

Tell me about

19:30 **blunder land?**

Having been in working in air force office and Defence for quite a well it became almost a hobby to misuse terminology to just to describe various parts, it just became just an interesting

20:00 sideline. It was somewhat scurrilous but the War Memorial, The Australian and American War Memorial in the middle of defence central was called the phallus and blunder land, it's just a play on words. But blunder land of defence headquarters.

Tell me about the sentiment behind blunder land.

It was called the sponge, all sorts of different names whereby you get sucked into there; nothing ever came out of there,

20:30 you got submerged and that was just, if you got posted into Canberra, then no more flying. Flying is better than working any day. So you know to get sucked into a staff job was something to be avoided if at all possible. I didn't find it that way. I saw it as an avenue of opportunity where I could try and do something to overcome a lot of deficiencies that I had suffered. Suffered

21:00 operational not suffering physical. It was just a comparative play on words.

How much of a battle did you used to have with the bureaucrats and accountants?

Enormous. The accountants by and large weren't too bad. They were there keeping the books and making sure you stayed within your budgets. The financial sections within defence are so

21:30 wide and varied that it is almost impossible for any bureaucrat to maintain a complete purview on it. If you understood how it was set up, then you could work it to your advantage. But they had set up first development and analysis under Alan Wrigley. Before him

22:00 Causley, and it seemed to all the servicemen, all three colours, that these guys were just there to save money regardless of operational capability. I will give you a specific example, during the new tactical fighter selection to replace the Mirage, it came down to a competition between the F18 and the F16.

22:30 We sat, we nominated individuals from fighter, weapons systems, operational requirements people with FDA to collectively write the papers to brief the committee to make the decision. We would sit down and write all these papers collectively and they would then produce a paper which was totally

23:00 contrary and totally ignored the advice of the specialists. I guess at that stage I considered myself to be one of the weapons specialists. It was just totally contrary to everything we said but it was slanted towards I think a predetermined position that they wanted to adopt to the extent that having gone through this loop about five times, and this is probably tales out of school,

- 23:30 we were charged, Ray Connor and I were charged with writing the paper which spelled out in arithmetic detail the capabilities of each aircraft type. Setting them down side by side and why we come to those conclusion which we did by working about fifty hours on the trot and produced this paper and delivered
- 24:00 it, by direction to the committee members which probably didn't earn us any personal brownie points. Although Connor did eventually become Air Vice Marshall Connor. He was then Squadron Leader Connor at, he and I wrote this paper which really spelled out the real capabilities of both aircraft and why one was better than the other and all the information upon which we relied to determine it. But we had to go to that
- 24:30 length independently instead of it being done collectively in concert with the defence people that said they would do it. What was really galling was that the guy who was the defence representative used to be an air force wing commander.

So you think once defence hits a certain level of politics?

Very politically driven. I don't know how it is now. This is how it was in 1980 sort of thing.

- 25:00 A long time ago.

Do you think that to your satisfaction you achieved your mission in dragging Australia into...?

I am very happy with what the outcomes were of all of those things. It wasn't only me, there were a lot of guys who did a lot of hard work to do that and a lot of it was projects that we just

- 25:30 initiated but as I was saying before, it's a ten year process that followed through and we were able to see some of those things come into fruition. As I was saying earlier a bit, that Dr Alan Stevens [RAAF historian] who wrote some of the books about some of the transitions taking place within the air force, he contacted some of the chiefs and five previous chiefs of the air staff
- 26:00 said, "The guy you need to talk to about those is Pete". I happen to be in the position at the time with people I had flown with in Canberras, who knew me, who were prepared to support me because unless you have that, you can't go anywhere. The bureaucracy just submerges you and that's why it's called blunder land colloquially.

How do you feel, compared to your day of crouched in a Perspex bubble looking through an optical bomb sight

- 26:30 **releasing dumb bombs, how do you feel about how the weapons systems are today?**

They are a lot sharper but the guys have to be a hell of a lot sharper too. As they say, it's like looking through a straw at a target through the Paev Tack system and you've got to have your wits about you, you've got to be super responsive, your physical capabilities have to be, I think better than ours in our day. With all the

- 27:00 electronics there some fellows got to interface with all of them and get it all working. It's a far more capable system. The challenge is for the air crew to be able to stay with it. You've loaded up the guy in the right hand seat of a 111 to the extent now that the pilot actually has to help do some of the tasks in managing radar homing and warning and TFR and all those other bits. Previously,
- 27:30 if you were the systems operator, sort them out. There is so much work load there now these guys are flat out like lizards drinking, they really are.

How did you feel about leaving the air force when you finally came to the end?

I was, I had three good years at Edinburgh. I enjoyed commanding the squadron. Seven hundred and fifty servicemen and a hundred and twenty civilians. Making sure the Orions were supported properly,

- 28:00 trying to improve the housing lot which was pretty appalling. It was almost as parlous as the weapons systems were when I took over Edinburgh. I had three good years down at Edinburgh and I was approached by industry being posted into defence central, into blunder land, and into the military staff. My predecessors in the job had pretty much been
- 28:30 submerged and subjugated in their line of thinking to which I didn't agree. They didn't seem to want to support the air force position at all and yet that's what their job was and my understanding of it. So I thought, "I best ring up the personnel staff and have a chat to them". The only answer I could get was, "You are a navigator". Rather than your boss has recommended you for
- 29:00 pre-selection to air commodore and all the rest of it all the answer I could get was, "You are a navigator". "What does my career hold? Where am I off to from here?" "You are a navigator". "Okay, you've made my decision for me".

So even then it was still coming back to haunt you?

Yes. So I made the decision to leave at that stage after twenty five years. I left with very mixed feelings.

I looked over my shoulder

- 29:30 often and you should never look over your shoulder, but I did. I was sad to have left and the challenges were not there initially in the industry that I thought might have been there.
- 30:00 I thought that there were other things that I could have done and achieved within the air force but I was unlikely to do that in the circumstances. I then set about pursuing things within industry and eventually I went to British Aerospace Australia and didn't see eye to eye with the
- 30:30 managing director who took over there because he was a bean counter. He left not long after I did but not after he shafted a number of other people. Went to ADI [Australian Defence Industries], went to Perth to start with, to manage the engineering software company they had bought and I ended up project managing
- 31:00 in Sydney here. Made some major bids for ADI which was just starting off its electronics division and won those against the lot and was able to turn some of those reasonably small projects into some quite major projects. One of them,
- 31:30 that I last heard of, passed seven million when it started out it was seven, so that's doing pretty well. ADI bought Stanlite and I volunteered for a project management job to bail out a major project on communication systems and
- 32:00 having sort of got enough bits and pieces on the ship to eventually not hold up air program was asked to take over Telecom's division which wasn't really my bag, but I took that on and sorted that out. Again, with a lot of help from specialists, this is not just me, this just happens to be the positions that I was put into. Then took over general manager of communications and surveillance to take over pretty much all of
- 32:30 those sort of things. All of the communications systems for most of the surface fleet in navy managing those projects until ADI was sold off by the government to the Thompson backed consortium and then left there on 17 August 2001.

What has Anzac Day meant to you over the years?

- 33:00 A mixed bag as much as anything else. It wasn't until the Vietnam veterans' reconciliation march that I started to attend physically. I would sit at home and watch it on the box. I then,
- 33:30 and I guess it was probably at my brother's behest, he lives in Cherrybrook, he said he was going into the dawn service and was I interested. So I went along and I think I've been to the last twelve, since I've been in Sydney and Joanie comes with me and my son has been with me once, to the last one, or two.
- 34:00 We go along to the dawn service and then we got across to the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, which is actually not just Vietnam, but also Korea all sorts of other, but mostly Vietnam vets, spend a few minutes quietly there and wander on home. I haven't marched on Anzac Day, I've been tempted to, this last year
- 34:30 particularly.

Why not, Peter?

Because the way in which the Anzac marches were treated by the populace at the insistence of the Labor government. That doesn't apply anymore but old wounds heal slowly. I would go now to support the guys who are marching I don't feel a

- 35:00 particular need to march with other people to have other people applaud the service. That peculiarity it seems to me. But other guys are there supporting each other and recalling the support that they gave each other in those circumstances would be the reason that I would now go. Friends of ours, he's one of the Odd Bods [veteran group]. Second
- 35:30 World War Australian Air Crew who fly with British squadrons, and their numbers are so small now and he's too frail to carry the banner anymore. I said I would carry his banner.

You obviously got a bit of a bone to pick about the way the Vietnam veterans

- 36:00 **were treated on their return home?**

Yes.

How then do you feel about the increasing public attendance at Anzac Day services and marches?

I think it's good. I think it's a different set of circumstances. I think the political party are finally smart enough to realise they did it wrong and vilified the wrong people But how much of it is being done for current political gain I don't know. Until someone can come out

- 36:30 and honest up to the fact that that was the circumstances under which they incited the populace and even that I don't know will be done just for political purposes now. It probably wouldn't satisfy me, I

would take a lot of convincing. I told you I am pigheaded.

What about do you see the same sort of danger with people who have just been to Iraq in the last year or so which is as well a semi popular war?

No, fortunately I don't. I think

37:00 that the role of the servicemen is now being recognised and the politicians are smart enough to not vilify the servicemen. If I see it happening I would have to restrain myself. I do feel strongly about that.

Do you ever get involved with reunions of your old squadron?

I am a member of the 2 Squadron Association but it meets in

37:30 Queensland where it should meet and those guys get together every year. 2 Squadron has just been invigorated, that's not the word, reformed, to operate out of Williamstown in support of the air defence capabilities and they are buying these 737 with a radar on the top. That might bring

38:00 the centre of focus on 2 Squadron back into the local Newcastle area, that may provide that avenue. I think 2 Squadron is the people who were involved at the time rather than the current physical additives. It may or may not.

Have you ever had any post-Vietnam nightmares, stress?

No, I say

38:30 no, there are times when I try and, I've been talking about it, I usually have a bit of a sleepless night. I wouldn't count that as stress, it just depends how you categorise that. I get some sleepless nights but apart from that no.

Nothing that's impacted to a negative degree?

No. My concern is whether or not there may be some knock on to our youngest daughter who is the only

39:00 one born after Vietnam. She, let's leave it at that.

Let's also leave it by asking you, because this Archive is going to be around for a long time, whether you might like to finish with any particular message, particularly in reference to service?

I enjoyed my service career. I don't think it's the same service now that it was, sadly. I get some pretty direct feedback

39:30 as to what sort of service it is now. It's a different set of circumstances, different time, different sorts of people. The officers' mess is no longer as it once was the hub of social activity, the focus of all the officers' activities, on a base. If you go to a base now you are invited to whether you want to join the mess or not. Nobody lives on base anymore; everybody is living in the community, which is probably a good thing.

40:00 Although it does reduce some of the camaraderie and esprit de corps, it's a nine to five job pretty much unless they are away on operation. Without that support I don't know the families get the support that our families got when we were away because the squadron was so close knit even though we were living in the local community because there was never married quarter for us.

You've got no regrets about your service?

No, perhaps

40:30 leaving. I don't know. That's circumstances. No, I thoroughly enjoyed my service career. The opportunities that I had and the people that I work with who were silly enough to give me free reign pretty much and I think that we were able to achieve collectively the things we did and I think it gave Australia a better defensive capability which after all the object

41:00 of the exercise.

Okay, Peter, thank you very much.

INTERVIEW ENDS