Australians at War Film Archive

Ronald McDonell (Ron) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:47 **if you can by telling us where you were born and grew up and a little bit about your childhood?**

Well I was born in Leeton in 19.., 13th of the 11th, 1921 and

01:00 from there my parents had bought a farm at a place called Matong, M-A-T-O-N-G. Consists of twenty-eight houses and a school, a pub and wheat silos. And I was reared until I, the last part of my schooling I spent twelve months in Saint Patrick's College in Goulburn while my parents shifted, sold the property and went to Moonbi in northern New South Wales,

01:30 and where I stayed working on the farm with my brothers until the war broke out, and that's the early part of my life.

What do you remember about growing up in Matong?

Oh I still remember. I remember our school, as an example, one teacher and six classes, and he controlled that we children down to the, taught us

02:00 social, moral ethics which are not in society today I suppose. He also taught us all sorts of things such as he lined us up one day, I still remember as a small child of about six I suppose or seven, and said, "I want you children to remember this, that I'm going to tell you, for the rest of your lives." And the statement was, I have to remember it now, and the statement was, "I cried because I had no shoes, until I met a man who had no feet." And I

02:30 never forgot that, that was the type of upbringing we had at school. But when I was quite young I milked cows at home and all that sort of thing. We were brought up on no running water or sewerage or anything of that nature, no electricity or anything like that at all, but everyone else lived the same way. So what? So what? And that was...

So what did you use instead of electricity?

We, it was all kerosene lighting,

03:00 and that was basically all. See there was no such thing as refrigeration or, we didn't get a radio until we shifted to Tamworth, and it was a battery radio. And that was just the way, kerosene lamps everywhere, Mum had, the stove was wood, as stoves were. And you, the sewerage, there was no such thing as sewerage, so it was the ordinary toilet out in the

03:30 paddock sort of thing. And life went on, the big thing about life that I remembered very strongly is how we were brought up and our education produced us, when we left school, we were produced with self discipline, which is, as you know is a bit slack today. But that was the design of education and your parents followed the same. No motor cars, or tractors, all horses, Clydesdales [horse breed] for

04:00 farming and the nearest shopping centre was seven miles away and we had a horse and sulky to go there. We used to walk four miles to school 'til eventually we got a horse and sulky, yeah, no trouble.

How long did it take you to walk to school every day?

Oh about an hour and a bit, hour and a quarter I suppose, yeah around that hour and a quarter I suppose, and just walk then walk home. And irrespective of

04:30 what went on in the weather practically, you still went to school. Tremendous dust storms went through that area out there and then of course the big hail storms and thunder storms of great violence. And I can look back when lightening hit our place, when we were on our way home from school, and killed two draught horses and blew

05:00 the complete telephone off the wall in the house and killed a dog and two WAS DOUBLE QUOTE

CHOOK s under the water tank outside. Yeah that type of storm was quite...

Did you see that happen?

No, oh well we saw the lightening when we were coming home from school. It didn't over worry us, we hid behind, under some trees I think it was and we didn't know this happened 'til we got home. No problem.

Did you have a telephone at home?

Yeah we had the box telephone on the,

05:30 I think there were five of us on the one line. And you, we, our ring was three, I remember, and then we answered the phone, and our neighbours were four, five and six and what have you, rings. That was a...

So how did that work, can you explain how that worked?

Well from, it came from the switchboard in town, they, the call for McDonell, and the switch would ring three rings and we'd answer the phone, they'd connect you, that's how it worked in those days.

06:00 And it was quite efficient, well, for those days it was efficient. And same as the radio, it gave news too... I can remember as a kid, the first radio I ever saw, Mum and Dad drove us over to our neighbours where I was able to hear the test cricket in England. Our neighbour had built a, I forget what they called the radio, and we heard them playing cricket in

06:30 England. We couldn't believe it as little kids so far away round the other side of the world, you know. That would've been in the 20's, in the 1920's. And the, no life just went along and no such thing as refrigeration. We killed our own sheep, killed our own cattle and the meat and what have you lasted a fortnight sort of thing, at least, without any form of refrigeration.

07:00 **So where did you keep the meat?**

Some, in a bag hanging off a tree outside, yeah a chaff bag. No problem. And today of course if you did this you'd need counselling wouldn't you, or suffer from trauma or something, the way the world has gone round. But of course the world was going along very slowly and quite sensibly of course,

07:30 and the war changed the whole thinking of people, and then came the great surge in technology, which is still going on.

So how big was your farm?

Six hundred and forty acres it was, that was the standard, one square mile was the standard size of the property. And no, there was a few bought the property next to them making twelve eighty acres but six forty was the standard throughout

08:00 Australia in those days, and you could make a living off six forty. Nowadays, I've been speaking to people, young, oh fellows that I went to school with, and they've got as many as just on four farms they've bought out to basically make a living sort of thing, with the changes of pricing and the lack of demand for certain things. But the wage structure of course was the one that

08:30 sort of killed the farmers to a great degree, wage structure.

So who worked on your farm?

Yeah we, well we, when we moved to Tamworth, my eldest brother, who joined the navy eventually, he became a school teacher at Coonamble, so my other brother and I were left at home. Well we ring-barked trees, we ring-barked about a thousand acres of trees, nowadays the greenies'd [environmentalists] have a fit if you mentioned such a

09:00 thing to them. But where you run, say, we were on sheep then up round the Moonbi ranges, we run one sheep to every four acres. By ring-barking the trees out you were able to get down to running them one sheep to the acre and less than that, so why wouldn't you kill the trees? And this is how it was done up in all that, well in the grazing country. And this argument is still going on, you notice, about

09:30 ringing trees. And...

And what about in Matong, who actually worked on your family farm?

No-one else but Dad did all the work. And only, but in harvest time we culled a lot of hay and built haystacks about with a hundred ton weight in them, because the race horse market in Sydney was being fed by the hay off our properties through those areas out there.

10:00 Wheat and hay and oat and hay, we employed people then for stoking and putting the, that's the only time you employed them. And they were what could be, a lot of them were known as hoboes because they were, they came round knowing that this time of the year there'd be hay cutting and stacking and that available. And they just lived off the road, these people, and with a swag [nap sack] on their back and that's how they lived. And

10:30 a lot of them, strangely back in those days were men from overseas. We used to employ, I remember

when I was a kid, people from, men from Denmark for God's sake, who had arrived in Australia and heard about this sort of employment and they fitted into it by... they would then move on from our areas to fruit picking and things of that nature down in Leeton and those areas. And then the growth

11:00 of those areas of course surged on and... when the, cause then you've got to think in those days, if I was going to England I'd, three months to get there. Look at the world today, seventeen hours and you're in England.

So did you and your brothers help your father on the farm?

Oh yeah we, this is what I say, ring-barking all this, and we'd start off in the morning at about seven o'clock and you'd ring-bark 'til six o'clock at night.

11:30 Then when shearing was on you did, because naturally we employed shearers and they were brought... during that period of time mustering and all that was required. Well we each had our own horse and we used ponies that, well with pony divide they were bred by polo people at Walcha, but they were beautiful horses and they were very sound in steep country for mustering and that sort of thing,

12:00 very, very good. And that was the world that, in those days, and nothing was any problem. My mother was a bush nurse and she used to get all the problems around the place, both down in Matong and up at Moonbi, stitching people up who'd been cut with axes and all this and no anaesthetics or anything, just took it. And when I look back, my God, and the things that she was

12:30 involved in, she just went on as a nurse after she'd married, you know.

So as a bush nurse...

Bush nurse.

how did she travel around?

On horses, in her day she was a nurse in Eastern Victoria and she rode horses. I don't know whether you, well you being the Victorian, you may know, she used to ride a horse on her own from Buchan over to Telangatuk, over the top of the Omeo area, on her own, no

13:00 problems. And they had, in those days, very few doctors and the nurses basically did everything up to the major ops operations] like appendix and that. They didn't do that, but they did other tremendous jobs they did, no doubt. And in 1914, there was an enormous outbreak of influenza, no, diphtheria swept Australia and killed a hell of, well, a lot more

13:30 than people thought of, in the hundreds. And Mum got a letter from a doctor, leading doctor in Melbourne in the mail to say that she was to inform all people, male and female, children, to gargle their throat with a glass of warm water with half a teaspoon of kerosene, which they did and they stopped diphtheria in a week, back in those days. When I was a kid, diphtheria, ah

14:00 kerosene was a standard anaesthetic, for all sorts of things. At schools and that three drops of kerosene in a half a teaspoon full of sugar for sore throats, we used to do that. No problem.

Did your mother have any other sort of special remedies for illnesses that..?

I can't, I'm trying to think, but cleanliness of course was one she was obsessed with. And the, no, but she looked after

14:30 people, she was very good at, I remember a young fellow (Nahyua...UNCLEAR) came in, the axe had put a cut in his leg from there to there on the side of the bone and Mum put eighteen stitches in it. Sterilised horse hair stitching it was in those days, and that sort of, no problems with it. And he just sat there and had it, no anaesthetic or anything. And no they, because personal discipline in those days

15:00 was a hell of a thing when you look back, if your mother said you'd do something you did and that was it, and if your father said something, you know, you did it too, and that was it. And no, the world, the change has been, well that I've seen in my eighty-three years, it's been, over the last... enormous change in the last twelve years that's occurred.

So what sort of people were your mum and dad? What was your mother like?

I've got some

15:30 photographs, I can show you.

No if you can tell, what sort of character did she have, what sort of personality did she have, what do you remember about her as a child?

Well she was a lovely mother, quite strict that you upheld the social moral ethics, you upheld those and that was it, and my father was the same. They of course went to church every Sunday and you went to church too, drove the horse and sulky for miles and miles, and that was a part of life in those days to everyone,

16:00 our neighbours, the normal neighbour, they're all the same. They were only, you gotta look at the fact

they were only one generation removed from coming from overseas and brought with them. Now my mother's mother was Irish and my father's father was Scots from Fort William in Scotland my father's side, and mother's was from the same place that the Kennedy's came from in Ireland on the other side, and their name was Kennedy

16:30 too. And that was just part of life in those days, everyone had a form of discipline within them, and disobedience of the common law was not acceptable by anyone. The local policeman, if there was one, was highly respected and he'd have no compunction in smarting young people up if they did the wrong thing, and the parents

17:00 would stand by him. And I'm not saying that young people were not possessed of the, what we are, what they are really today. Without juvenile exuberance I don't think you'd have a country, and you certainly wouldn't win a war without the disrespect for safety that young people have within them, without having experience

17:30 in life. So, you know, they were all, they came from a strict family, my mother and father both did and all my neighbours and that were possessed of the same. And you always spoke, you didn't use the Christian name to your neighbours when you were young, your every, anyone older than you was Mr or Mrs, and you did it. And today's world is quite, you know, absolutely different, different.

18:00 **So what did you used to do for fun as a young boy?**

Well in Tamworth area I set a hundred rabbit traps a night then I went round them with the lantern at eight o'clock in the dark and then in the daylight and shift the traps over to reset them the next day. I whistled foxes and shot them, you've heard of that have you? With a bent piece of tin, whistle them up and shoot them.

18:30 And when we were in Tamworth we had written permits for shooting kangaroos, I'd shoot a hundred and fifty a year, minimum, and that sort of thing. Rabbits, well they were shocking in those days and trapping them was, well you got, and twenty cents a pound, six skins weighed a pound. And kangaroos, I think from memory we got, they were

19:00 ten shillings, a dollar for a skin, that's for a big skin. And the foxes of course, they were the good… you'd get over two, you'd get a pound for, in winter time for good fox skins with the tail on them. That was the sort of fun you went on with, there was no such thing as television or anything of that nature. And you'd visit your neighbours and there were young fellas and you'd have talk and that's about all,

19:30 you weren't allowed to smoke or drink. And I didn't have a beer 'til I was twenty-one in the air force, I took an oath, told Mum and Dad that I wouldn't. And I didn't have a cigarette 'til I was twenty-one, because I'd said to Mum and Dad that I wouldn't. And no that was life…

So how old were you when you moved to Tamworth?

Sixteen I think it was.

So prior to that, in Matong, did you do the same sort of thing

20:00 **for fun?**

Basically yes, we, also when you're little kids, I remember we had a scooter and we'd go and find some level ground to operate the scooter on. The only piece of bitumen in our area in twenty miles was in the main street on, not Matong didn't have it, but a place called Ganmain was eight miles away, and Narrandera, and the only place they had bitumen in the streets. You just

20:30 didn't have it so scooters were very hard to pedal in the rough country. And we used to get, in summer in our, the mail delivered once a week to a box down on the road, so we used to go and get that. And harvest time Mum used to get three, four loaves of bread once a week and that lasted a week to, for sandwiches and funny things. And we used to, as kids, when we weren't as school,

21:00 you'd take, had a billy cart, we used to call it, and take the sandwiches and tea, and the tea had a big bucket thing about that high, down to the blokes working in the thing, give them morning tea sort of thing. But oh, that was life. And girls were highly respected, the, sort of the word sex wasn't even allowed to be mentioned without anything else.

21:30 So you had, the female was highly respected in society, whether she be a child or an adult. Not like current factors, we used to in the, when I was flying, civil, I don't know, have you ever heard of the mile high club? Right. I have an article there taken out of a woman's paper with a full description of it

22:00 and how to do it, and what have you. I've got it there in my desk, I can show you.

So what did you know about sex when you were growing up?

Only animal sex really, which a bloke in the country could see and what have you, you know what I mean. He was, he or she was more associated with what sex meant I think, because of being… where the town girl wasn't really, you know what I mean. And it was a forbidden

22:30 discussion factor, not only at school level but up into... well in those days a very strict part of life was turning twenty-one, right, and that was viewed very, very strongly by all of society. And you became a man and when I was at, I always remembered and we were taught at school,

23:00 have you ever heard of 'The Seven Ages of Man' by Shakespeare? Quite, absolutely incredible. Bawling in his mothers arms at the age of seven, fourteen's in his teens, twenty-one he's in the, has achieved authority, and so it goes on through life. And the, showing the seven ages of man, when you reach the middle age at forty-nine, and old age keep adding sevens.

23:30 And that was basically a part of practice, could be taken back into the European level where it came to Australia, that's how people lived. And it was, all possessed, you were taught at school as I said earlier, to leave school with self discipline, and you listened. I see it now in my life, as I try to point out to politicians and people who think they

24:00 know everything, I will firmly confirm that I have learned eight hundred times more in the last forty years of my life than the first forty years. And this is where nature leads us in the world with the elders in the boong [indigenous] society, and the whole fact is true, it is positively true.

24:30 I, and things you learn, as I say, my good wife Joan is Jewish, her people, and she treats me like a Palestinian see, so you've gotta keep those things in mind all the time too.

So Ron, what about sport when you were growing up, what sort of sport did you play?

Well I played all football when I could, from in the bush. And when I joined the services I played both rugby and rugby

25:00 league, union and Australian Rules until I left at the age of thirty-five, I was still playing it. And I played at very high levels of rugby I must say, because during the war we had the leading rugby players were, you know... and I was an ardent supporter of Carlton in Victoria. And yeah, sport, very vigorous in sport. In Monaro, played sport, for God's sake,

25:30 twice a week, played your rugby, and you didn't start 'til five o'clock because of the temperature. But we played rugby and I played a lot of tennis.

And as a boy in Matong did you play...?

As a little, a small kid I played, well the nearest tennis court was at school, only one in the district I think. And mainly, well horse riding and things, and then I forgot later, round the town there we used to do buck jumping of

26:00 course, and thought nothing of the danger associated, wouldn't do it now. But that's when you're young, you don't, as I say, the exuberance of youth.

How do you think the Depression affected your family?

Well that's a good question because we were very fortunate. Dad banked in the, it was the Bank of New South Wales which we still bank in. Our neighbours, the greatest number of neighbours the poor wretches banked, but the state

26:30 bank of New South Wales. And when the premier closed the bank, all the poor beggars, our neighbours, were out on the roads working, had to work to get the dole, and we were absolutely so fortunate being in the different bank. And we, it didn't, well we, you had to remember of course, we had our own milk, our own meat, and the basics. And Mum used to bake our own bread, so everything was

27:00 there for you at home, that was during the Depression years. And the Depression was devastating in New South Wales in particular because the bank, the major bank had closed and that was under the premier, Jack Lang, that's right. So it, we were damned lucky to say the least of it because the other poor beggars, it took the steam out of them. Talking farms, all farms, nothing else.

Do you remember anything being in

27:30 **short supply during those years?**

No, we didn't suffer from anything, because first of all you gotta remember, we didn't have a car, so there was hardly anyone had motor cars, all horse, so you had your own feed for your horses so that covered your transport. As I say, we were able to get flour, my Mum baked the bread, we had our own milk and there were really, we hadn't to depend on say, electricity like people have today or anything, you didn't have to...

28:00 on that. No, everything was in, far as we were concerned, it...

What about clothing?

No, well you just went on. Now for instance, I wore my brothers' clothes as they grew out of them. See nowadays the kids wouldn't do that but see, you did that sort of thing in those days. And I gave away, I wish I hadn't now, a pair of shoes, my first pair of boots, I

28:30 still had them here, and they were handed down from my two brothers, it went, that was life in those days.

How old were you when you got your first pair of boots?

I think I was four or something, three and a half I think, Mum said it was, yeah, still had them. And it, you can, I can remember those things meant things to you, where today, there's so many different things you get involved in, you know, doesn't mean that much.

29:00 But...

So what was Christmas like for you when as were growing up?

Wonderful, marvellous. Cause you believed in Santa Claus and you held, you hung, your Christmas stockings were hung on the mantle shelf above the fire place every year. And I forget what we used to get for presents but very limited, you know, in those days. And I think my eldest brother, he got the first scooter we got when he was, he would've been

29:30 probably nine or eight when he got it. And life and the way it, gave, when you look back on it, fascinating. And today...

What about Christmas dinner, what did your mother make?

Yeah, used to have turkey. Yeah we have our own WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [chickens] of course, our own eggs, remember in the food business. Kill a turkey for Christmas, be number one, and every Christmas dinner had to be a hot dinner, you know, despite

30:00 the outside air temperatures down there getting onto fifty degrees Celsius and you, no form of cooling. We had a safe, an old Kalgoorlie safe with the water, had hessian on it and the water used to suck out of the top down, and that was supposed to keep it cool but, oh, you know. But any thing, our neighbours had a, dug a hole in the ground under the house,

30:30 in, and days, and we used to go over there as kids in summer and they'd give us a drink of water they kept... beautiful we reckoned it was, you know, cool. A cellar they had in the house, yeah. And the neighbours were so co-operative in everything that went on, you know. The, in the harvest time, the help you got from everyone and our horse and we used to take, had to take the wheat in summer time about

31:00 five miles to the silos in bags with two horses and a, or a wagon with eight horses and that sort of thing. And that changed and now they take it by bulk, you know, sort of thing, which is logical. So, and the wheat all had to be tested every bag for FAQ, fair average quality, and before they went to the silos, and God, when you look back on it the,

31:30 that was, in Matong was the closest one to us.

So in that summer heat, did you have anywhere to go swimming?

We had the local dam that, two dams on the property, dug down into the ground and they were mud water, we used to swim in them. And teach us, taught ourselves to swim, no-one there, just got in the water about twelve feet deep, you know, and they were not fenced or anything, the dams, that was the normal procedure. The nearest river

32:00 to us was the Murrumbidgee, I think we were about eighteen miles from the actual river, and Dad a couple of times went fishing down there to catch, with someone else, to catch cod. In those days there, one of our neighbours caught one weighing a hundred and twelve pound, course they're not there now these huge fish. And the rabbits were one of the big problems right

32:30 through in those years. I remember a rabbit plague, our neighbours ringing us and saying, 'They're coming past our place at the moment.' And we, it was a Sunday or a Saturday or something, I remember we rushed out and coming down through the paddocks adjoining our neighbour were rabbits in a frontage of about half a mile wide. And they'd come to the netting fences and build up in a mass 'til the following could go over the top of them, and smother them, into the next paddocks and on.

33:00 And they disappeared almost, they were there for about three... ate everything of course and disappeared again, you know. And also another one I remember as a kid, we, our wheat crop was about that high and a grasshopper plague came in and next morning I think it was, or two mornings later, wheat crop was that high. Ate the lot, of all, the whole frontage throughout, lost the whole income for a year on wheat. And

33:30 that was... but I hear recently a big plague somewhere out near Goondiwindi. Unbelievable to see them. The, even make, actually the density of them causing the sun to shadow, that, the grasshoppers. Amazing. And they can live underground, I believe the eggs, for seven years without coming up, seven years and then up they come, under...

34:00 amazing.

You said it was a long time before you had a radio, did you have any form of music at all when

you were growing up?

No, no. We had, later in my growing up we did get a wind up gramophone, the old seventy-eight records, you know. No, that was one thing I was, we, my parents were not really musical at all in that way that, I always regretted that they weren't, because I have very little form of rhythm

34:30 or anything of that nature. I like old time music because the... well you take Irish music, there's a story in every song where nowadays, well what's in a song, I wouldn't have a clue but... and that had enormous affect on people. Like having annual ball in the local town, people'd come for miles and miles to them and enjoy the massive

35:00 feast they'd have and the dignified dancing that went on with, you know, absolute dignity, the whole thing. The women in their beautiful dresses and that sort of... the males had to be well dressed, they weren't in, and that sort of thing, it was very, very good to see, there's no doubt about it.

So how old were you when you started going to those dances?

I, well I didn't go down, cause weren't allowed to 'til I was, well

35:30 about nineteen, eighteen nineteen, yeah. And they'd, see another thing back in those days, was you go to a country church on a weekend, on a Sunday, and find eighty people there or ninety people. The, the people upholding, well, social moral ethics were attending. And we retained those right up 'til

36:00 a certain ex-air force person caused the problem.

So as you were growing up, what did you know about war?

Well we were taught history, going back to the days of Julius Caesar we were taught in school, and all the wars, right from there up to the present day, the Second World War, ah, First World War. And but we, the change I think, well in weaponry, that was a

36:30 big change, but the change in the domestic running of countries like France, Germany and all these countries, were coming more and more educated, you could see it as they come up the line. The only thing is, didn't have things like the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or... I always remember that about the CIA, they get the blamed for everything now. When Julius Caesar fell down the steps of Rome with a knife in his back,

37:00 he said in Latin, "I didn't know you were in the CIA, you bastard Brutus," you know, that, always remembered that.

Did you know anybody who had been in World War I?

Oh yes, yes, yes. All our, a hell of our neighbours were from World War I because there was land allotment to ex-service men, same as after this Second World War, you knew that did you? To where there was blocks of land drawn

37:30 and my brother drew one, he was down at Bombala. And that, the First World War was very strong in that, and in consequence the six hundred and forty acre square mile, a high percentage of area are all First World War men.

So did they talk about their experiences?

Oh yes, they did.

What do you remember about what they said about...?

Oh I can vaguely remember about the landing on Gallipoli, you know, how they saw all the blokes being shot dead. And but they took it

38:00 with a very, a far different attitude than today, having lived in that era, they took it with a high to extreme sense of loyalty to their nation, that we helped to save our nation, where today, there's a quid [money] in it. Post traumatic stress, right, this sort of garbage, pardon my expression but,

38:30 has taken over humanity. You know, when I joined the service, I joined for, if there was any danger it didn't worry me and that was it. Nowadays you have the effrontery or the media has the effrontery to say the war's dangerous. War's dangerous... God, that's the first I've ever heard of it, you know. This sort of thing is ingrained into society today, it was a, using

39:00 the expression, 'there's a quid in it.' And...

So those people back then, your neighbours who spoke about the war, what did you think of their experience as a boy when you heard their...?

Oh God, we would've, you know, as a boy, you thought, 'God I wouldn't mind being there,' you know, that was the feeling. And probably that influence inspired we three of the family to join up, you know what I mean? That was there, but loyalty was

39:30 taught very strongly in schools, I must admit, very strongly, and that is somewhat lacking today. Course

the world is changing.

When you say loyalty, do you mean loyalty to the country or to the Empire?

To the Empire, was to the Empire, the loyalty. And part of which though you were taught at school, part of the Empire was your country. And history, see that, I always felt was one of the things that bred loyalty, was

40:00 having to learn ancient history. And then you had, we learned ancient history followed by Australian history and knowing who was the first person to land in Australia, and you had to pass exams on it. And another thing was you were taught, very strongly at school, was geography, which to me is, should be one of the most prominent things to be taught.

40:30 Because with the, the change that's happened in the world has been as one and one thing only, communication has changed to the speed of light. And where I'm selling wheat in Iran and I think, 'Should we, on behalf of Australia, be selling wheat in Turkey, next door.' Then you, you would know, when I was a kid at school, how much wheat Turkey produced,

41:00 they produced quite a lot, and all this sort of thing, and build the, well the trading values are the big thing of the world today. And the average kid just doesn't know who lives next door or what his country's like. As an example, France is an enormous wheat producer, a lot of people wouldn't have a clue on that.

That's true, I'll just stop you there...

Tape 2

00:31 when we were kids, we were sort of educated more in those lines of understanding the world in general. I, today's world, if America is given one hour after hearing certain information, they can hit any target in the entire world, in the three hundred and sixty degrees of our globe. Now a

01:00 few years back, when I went to school, you would never imagine, but do you know what the speed of light is? Can you tell me? Now we were taught this, I was taught this in the 1920's, and you're not aware. Well it is rather surprising, light is a hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second, six hundred and sixty million miles an hour and, now we were taught these things. Why

01:30 isn't the ordinary person today? Because the speed of light is being sought after but man can't achieve it. Now I know that.

So how did you enjoy school when you were growing up?

Well good, oh wonderful. And...

What did you like most at school, what sort of subjects were you most interested in?

I liked geography and history when I was a kid. It seemed to fit more into when I went down the paddock somewhere and saw a, we had funny holes in the

02:00 ground, dips in the ground, about twenty feet across and four feet deep and they were called gilgai holes, an aborigine name. Now when I learned geography and things at school, these things were sometimes mentioned, you know what I mean, and these things that the country kid did like very much indeed.

It was a one teacher school you said?

Yeah, one.

How many children would've been at the school?

About thirty-eight kids in the school.

And of all different ages?

02:30 Oh yes, going up. And when you, when we reached sixth class, you couldn't get into a high school unless you passed an exam, called the qualifying certificate. And that standard, I was told recently, would now give you entry to a university, that standard. So that, but you couldn't, if the poor wretch couldn't pass, they had to pass with eighty percent I think it was,

03:00 you couldn't go to high school, you couldn't.

So in the primary school, did you have separate classes?

Yeah and separate classes but only in one big room with a dividing sliding door, that's all. And you were... homework was most important, was very important. And in those days, parents dare not say one word about homework, they dare not assist, the kid had to show the lot. And the

03:30 way standards, are those life, of my, I've got a book there of my mothers, 'Service as a bush nurse,' where they detail all the expenses, and they spent more on the horse than they did on the patients. They had to, those sorts of thing, but that was life in those days.

So what do you remember about war breaking out?

Well I, we remember, I think our neighbour told us because they had the radio and we didn't have

04:00 it at the time, that broke out. We were expecting it to because we followed all the moves by Hitler at that particular time and we were expecting war to break out. And it broke out and the sense of loyalty jumps straight up, 'We're gonna join the...' And we rushed in to Tamworth, about twenty-five miles, and put our names down and was on the waiting list sort of thing to join the air force, and

04:30 eventually, we waited twelve months before they, we got called in. My brother was a school teacher then at Coonamble and he got called in to the navy. And I've got a beautiful photograph there, and I show you, about, he and I with, purely for, show you the standards of photography in those days, where there was no coloured film.

So by that time of course you were about eighteen when war broke out?

Yeah, yeah.

So what had you done since leaving school?

Slaving on the farm.

05:00 Shearing sheep, catching rabbits, shooting foxes and all this sort of thing, it was part of life. And mustering sheep all the time, and of course when you got sheep on the property you've got to be equipped at all times riding the horse, for cutting maggots out of the sheep when they're fly blown. And carry your, always carried a bottle of disinfectant and the shears and that was part of, daily work, practically

05:30 every day you went out to...

And you talked about shooting the animals?

Yeah.

At what age were you using a rifle?

Oh about, well I first used when I was about thirteen I think, or something, or less. Oh yes, or less it was. Had twenty-two calibre rifles and Dad had a shotgun. And of course when we're down in Riverina in the Leeton area, the duck shooting every once a year, of course all the farmers went to duck shooting

06:00 in the local areas and the, it still goes on of course the duck shooting and I agree with it, I don't... Because if you want to see in the rice farms the damage that ducks do is incredible. And they're so clever, the duck, after you plant the rice in, the seed in the rows, ducks, when they put the first covering of water over about that deep, over the rice fields, dead level, the ducks land

06:30 in thousands and they run their beak along the direct straight line of where the rice is planted and eat all the grain, this sort of thing. Incredible, their knowledge is, so you can see why the farmer is on to them.

So you, I mean you killed the rabbits and kangaroos because they were in plague numbers?

Oh yeah, oh the kangaroos yeah, the damage they do, kangaroos. You get them, they'll come into the paddock at night we'll say to eat out the crops.

07:00 And they go under the bottom wire of the fence and the size of them, they destroy the fencing and you only got to clap your hands and they jump six foot fence to get out. Why don't they jump it to get in, you know, and that sort of thing. And they, kangaroos are generally, they're almost always in plague proportions. I think I've never shot a female kangaroo without a joey [kangaroo baby] in the pouch, whether it's January or December of the next year, always have a joey in the pouch. So big, to, can look after itself.

07:30 And they, oh God they cause some damage to property, kangaroos do. And the foxes of course killing lambs and the other thing, crows, you know, the ordinary house... we used to, of course, shoot them cause they pick the eyes out of lambs so as to, without doing... crows. So they can get this, able to kill them, that sort of thing.

08:00 **So when you were shooting those animals as a boy, did you have any qualms about killing animals?**

No, none whatever. No, you never, when you're reared in the bush I think these things just don't count, you're part of some... See now, if you go overseas today, particularly we'll say from the Suez Canal back to New Guinea, one thing you see that the average person is not, doesn't really see, is the fact that

08:30 those people survive, they live on survival, and they live nine, eighty percent of their life is on total

survival. And how they achieve their survival is... that's their business.

Did you have much contact with aboriginal children as a child?

Yeah, not at those years we didn't have, we didn't have... yes I went to school with some in Narrandera, that's when I was able to go to high school, we had two in my class. They were full blooded

09:00 Abos [aboriginals] too, full blooded Aborigines. And I believe they're still living in Narrandera, I was talking recently about them. There's not many survived down in that area, well there wasn't many tribes in that area, they were more where, on the coastal fringes I would say mainly because fishing and things like that. Because the Australian Aborigine never ever saved his food or anything, such as dried food or, just lived from

09:30 today 'til tomorrow and that's it. But they were very nice blokes and the true Aborigine, when I went to go in the air force, they were the real Aborigine, they were top people, really were. They, and they display social moral ethics in their levels, you don't get the common thief or, you know what I mean, or the rapist or anything of that nature.

10:00 Never see it amongst them.

So you said that when you heard that war broke out, you suddenly felt loyal. What was your reaction in terms of what did you think about the future?

Well there was the thing I think we were buoyed with was that we're gonna kill this bloody Hitler, that was what it was. And of course the devastating blow then came later when I was in the serve, when the Japanese came into the war. When the

10:30 Germans came to the war, you viewed with seriousness the manner in which they were treating the Jewish people but when the Japanese came in, the brutality and completely unethical standard of life, really shook our nation to the core, really did, and particularly attack on Pearl Harbour [American naval base that was bombed by the Japanese], from the very beginning showed it. And that really brightened us up, and that,

11:00 I think I was at Point Cook when that, and it really made you think about it, are we going to survive? And as the time went along with the war progressing, I can say one thing, and one thing I, for the rest of my life, 'Thank God for America,' because they saved Australia, they did save Australia from an invasion and I'm very grateful for that. But our, the original was Hitler, we were on to him.

11:30 And we had of course, if you lived in those days, you would've seen the world's greatest director. The world has never seen anyone to equal Churchill [Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of England]. Take the statements, 'Never in the field of human conflict has so much been owed by so many to so few.' Now I've said the words, but the manner in which those words were said, were quite incredible. 'We will fight on the beaches, we will fight in the hills,'

12:00 the way it was said. He was brilliant in his method of producing and controlling loyalty to the crown and what have you. He was brilliant, Churchill, there's no doubt about him.

Were you able to hear him on radio?

Yes we were able, in the services, to hear him yeah, on radio. And even in the sergeant's mess or that, they'd stop to listen to what he had to say, where, which

12:30 today it would be unusual, but in those days no, his influence was like that young American writing that, you don't see those sort of words used today do you? It's a thing of its own. And the change in, well then again after the war, the change that occurred in the average human is very marked, there's no doubt about it. But when we were children, I, it was the

13:00 private and social discipline that kept the families together. The, I never heard of a divorce 'til basically after the Second World War, yes never back in our day. But the only thing I remembered hearing was of the silly action of first cousins marrying and committing suicide as a result, you know, and

13:30 that was not uncommon back in those days. But the word divorce was never known amongst, as far as we were concerned and the, but there was a degree of what I've spoken of, and suicide. But then again suicide, not only I think the parent, the background of the people, so great

14:00 as in those days extreme worry was not accepted as a means of suicide, where today it's part of life, and we didn't see that back in those days.

So Ron, just going back to the day that you and your brothers went along to sign up, can you tell us about where you went and what it was like, what the atmosphere was like there?

Vaguely, I was trying to think the other day about where, but we went to Tamworth. And I have an idea they had an office opened, recruiting office

14:30 immediately opened in one of the big shops in Tamworth itself. And we were put on the waiting list and we were given a lot of communication in the time we were waiting and doing exams and what have you. And the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] were looking for, strangely enough at the time, for farmer's

sons, country people more than the city, to join up, it was quite strange to...

Why was that?

Something to do with, in those days you didn't have psychiatry

15:00 but something in that line, they got better results. I think it was possibly discipline was something they found the country people aligned with discipline easier than the others. And our neighbours, there was ten kids in the family, of which all the boys joined up straight way. And oh not uncommon to, in

15:30 those days, they have these great heaps... oh see, families in the country when I was a kid and that, not uncommon to, eight, up to thirteen kids in the family, some of my kids I went to school with, thirteen in the family, then, children. Well they immediately, a high percentage of them shot straight off and joined the armed forces, straight away.

Were there many people there at the recruiting office?

Yes, great queues, had to stand in a queue for ages, you had to, you know, for say twenty minutes to get up to the

16:00 desk sort of thing. And the, we knew too, another thing was part of life, we'd go straight to Sydney. And I had only once seen the Pacific Ocean, Dad took us to Sydney when we were kids when the Harbour Bridge just joined at the centre, and we were astounded at the ocean and what have you. No, back in those days and that was the days too, I remember, when I was a kid, and I still remember

16:30 the pyjama girl murder [mysterious murder that gripped the nation], can, did you, heard of that? Yeah, well we had a friend who was a policeman in Sydney and he made certain statements that turned out to be true too. And I wouldn't repeat them...

So when you signed up there were quite a few people, what were people saying that day when you were... ?

Ooh yeah, 'I want to get, learn to fly,' and this sort of thing. The air force mob were all, we all wanted to fly aeroplanes, and that was basically what it was all about, you know.

17:00 And...

Why did you want to join the air force as opposed to the army or navy?

So I could fly an aeroplane, that was all about. And I was, I got to the flying part, my brother became an air gunner, and yeah, so I achieved what I wanted to do and that was... And the thing was to get to the front line as quick as you could see, so you'd get the best aeroplane's to fly, and all that sort of

17:30 attitude. When you're young, pardon me, you, the exuberance of youth is such that you, you do things and think of things that you wouldn't think as you get older, you know, it's difficult to explain. I point out, when I was stationed at Strathpine, only young, and another fellow who was my number two,

18:00 he always flew number two as fighter, we flew under the Story Bridge and we got caught. And we had, I think, three weeks orderly sergeant or something, not allowed off the unit for three weeks, whatever. We thought nothing of it. If anyone did it today, I'd say, "You bloody idiot, you'll kill yourself." See, in those days, it didn't matter a dell to you, things that... and that was life in the beginning of the war years and what have you. And

18:30 that fellow too, about going to great altitudes which was so uncommon back in those days, and having sort of, you can see he's had Christian belief this fellow, 'Put up my hand to touch the face of God,' type of thing, and that's how youth is. And particularly when we lived on the land, you didn't see, you saw your neighbours once a week, no, didn't see anyone else during the day or anything for your life. And then you started to mix with mob when you're

19:00 young, this was a great encouragement to you wasn't it. It's one of those things how life goes by. Oh things I've learned in my life, when you find the unusual person, in life, it's, makes a big impression on you. I've met, I had a lot to do with a prime minister, Mr Menzies [Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia], and

19:30 what an extraordinary individual he was. Photographic memory, obviously, astounding ability to speak with a king or a beggar, and that now, he was quite... I also had a thing to do with the Prime Minister of England and Sir Anthony Eden [Prime Minister of England], and he was also. And the other one we had in the cockpit

20:00 of the aircraft, we coming back from Broken Hill one night, we had Cardinal Gilroy, and he was beyond belief. His history and that when he told it to you, 'Oh my God.' He was in the first boat I think that went ashore at Gallipoli, you knew that did you? Yeah he served through the First World War but his knowledge of modern weaponry and what have you, you know. And that makes your life, when you

20:30 listen to these people, and you think, 'My God, they're smart aren't they?' And it's true. And I think the more experience you have in life too, I'd use the expression, 'the more you know...' isn't it?

Sure. So Ron, just going back to those early days when you joined up, what did they say to you

after signing up about how long you might have to wait?

Oh they just said,

21:00 "We don't know how long you'll just have to wait." And then we got, I got a letter I think it was, yeah we got a letter saying that to, I think it was about three day's notice to get... and in it was a train ticket to go from Tamworth to Sydney. And when we got to Sydney they were at central station, we were met and taken down to Woolloomooloo where... and on the same day, who was in the queue with me signing on was

21:30 Chips Rafferty [actor]. And he put his age back and they caught him out and they wouldn't let him go on, but he was with me in the queue. And oh, what is his name?

So how long had it been from you time you signed up to the time you got that letter?

About, nearly twelve months.

So why had it taken so long?

They couldn't cope. First of all the accommodation for bringing people in, they had to, they were building madly at Bradfield Park. And I think up here

22:00 they were building in Brisbane, and Melbourne, the showground took a hell of a lot in Melbourne, plus, where else were they? Oh of course you had Point Cook and those already established there. And that was one of their problems was trying to get accommodation available. And also they had to train what they got in as quick as they could to get some of them up the front, see that was another thing. And that all

22:30 held up the move when in... another thing too of course that had to be considered was the making of uniforms, for thousands of people. Now the air force, I think during the war, had a hundred and eighty-eight thousand members. You gotta make uniforms plus flying jack, suits, plus the long, we had to have those long boots and all that, and they had to be produced. And that was, logistically... that word's been invented since, I think it's extraordinary, it covers a multitude of sins that does,

23:00 logistically it was a big problem. And those, once they got settled in then of course away we went. And we went to Bradfield Park where, from there you went, you were trained initially on all the disciplinary training and then you went, I was sent to Temora, my brother was sent to Parkes, that's right he, cause that was an air gunner's school up there.

So during that twelve month period, were you, what were you thinking and...?

Oh hoping I'd get the

23:30 letter every day, that's what your thoughts were. And our neighbours too, they came down on the horse from next door, about a mile and a half away I suppose, and you know, 'Have you got your letter yet?' That was the big thing. And everyone, of course some of our neighbours got the letters and went straight to the Middle East in the army and were killed in the Middle East sort of thing, you know, and cause the death rate was fairly high then and the survival was the big thing.

So you

24:00 **were hearing stories about some of the people you knew being killed? Did that cross your mind that that could be a problem for you?**

No, I always remembered something about that. I was with my flight commander and we were operating out of Gove on convoy, top cover, up in the Arafura Sea area. And we, he and I were flying along, I was number two him, up at an altitude above broken

24:30 cloud, when we suddenly saw an aircraft go below us, and we thought, 'Bloody Jap.' And we, he said on, quickly on the radio, "Follow me." And I, he rolled on his back with full power on and we were going down at about oh, four and five hundred miles an hour I suppose. And we went through the cloud and the water was about two hundred feet, three hundred feet below us, and he

25:00 went into this steep, he was in this violent steep turn, diving turn, we came down from about ten thousand feet. And I yelled out to him, I was more, had more experience than he, and I screamed out, "Break out!" He said, "No, I'm right." And with that, whether he was shot or not, something anyhow he got, flicked, went straight into the sea, at about five hundred, and I was so close to him in the turn that I hit the water that come up off him, okay. And there was nothing left, never saw him again. And

25:30 anyhow I went home, back to base, I pulled in to, we had blast pins where two aircraft parked in case they dropped a bomb, they had high sand bags around, it only hit this lot. And when I pulled up and my rigger, the fellow who looked after the aeroplane, was a man about forty, he was years older than us but a wonderful person, and the way he worked on that... And he, soon as I pulled up he jumped up on the

26:00 main plane and helped me undo my harness, and said to me, "Where's Nigel?" And I said... He said, "When will Nigel be back?" And I said, "He won't be coming back." And he said, "What?" I said, "No, he's gone in." He said, "Killed?" And I said, "Stone dead," just like that. He broke down and cried. And I was stupefied, you know. And I reckon I grew up fifteen years in the one burst. I was young

26:30 growing up to the way he was eventually thinking. But I was, and I then saw how stupid I was to say this. But until I said it, I would never have believed that the thought that that man had in we blokes, you know what I mean? And that's life isn't it, sort of thing, and I always remembered it. And since I've seen people killed and what have you and in the service and that and I've felt more growing up than I was

27:00 then, and that's exactly as life is.

So in those early days of the war, when you were hearing even about neighbours who were being killed, it didn't bother you too much?

No, no. No problems. And danger is the same, you join, you're in an organisation that lived in danger all the time. And oh no, psychologically I don't, I think it helped me grow up

27:30 in life, these sort of actions. The, I was involved in a violent accident at Mildura when I was training. Aircraft turned over, the right leg broke off and it skidded down the runway backwards and inverted for about two hundred yards and it wore the aircraft off 'til it wore the top out of my helmet, and the hair off my head and stopped. And I was pinned underneath it and oh

28:00 got some very severe injuries. And when I was, they eventually got me out into hospital, they had written on my medical documents there, 'He doesn't remember being unconscious,' and I love that. Typical of what it was in those days. And I'd, never let us, that's the different thinking of people at different levels. The, take example of

28:30 I always remember when Newton [Flight Lieutenant William Newton], VC [Victory Cross] in New Guinea there, they were out of a Boston, and a navigator with him. They executed Newton straight away with the sword, the Japanese did, and they made the navigator, who was a sergeant, stand up in front while the Japanese executed a bloke, his wife and child and a nun. And then he was ordered to be bayoneted to death in not less than fifteen minutes by the Japanese, which

29:00 they did. And poor wretch, he never, no award was granted to him whatever, Newton was VC. Yeah, I thought you may have heard of him but nevertheless. That was life in those days, and was the methods the Japanese used. And the whole thing, no I look back I'm glad I grew up the wrong side of... well that case of the ...

Sorry Ron, just be careful about rubbing your...

29:30 **...to the early days when you did finally get that letter, do you remember how you reacted when you got that letter?**

Oh full of cheers, top of the world, you know. Mum was not very impressed of course. Well we walked off that property and left Dad and Mum without any assistance whatever. None whatever. And they, well you couldn't employ people in those days, they weren't available, so they were left on their own, poor beggars. And sort of with the

30:00 three boys away it must've been a... if I was at age they were, it would be a hell of a load on people.

So how did your parents react to you all joining up?

Oh thought we were wonderful to do it. And I never saw Mum cry really, she was so determined. The only time I saw her cry was when she came and saw me going to Malaya after the war, to do a session there and she did cry then. But

30:30 she was a lot older person but Dad and Mum, they were straight as they come, you know. And our neighbour's families never sort of showed signs of emotion and they just went on with life, having look after them. The property and things that we used to do as kids, feed our dogs every night, our sheep dogs, with half a rabbit and Dad had to do all this sort of thing as well as feed the

31:00 horses and milk the cow, where I used to milk the cow in the mornings and but oh, you, they just accepted it as well. That, I'm talking the country person, not talking about the person that lived in the town.

But your parents were quite happy for you to join up?

Oh yes, yes. They knew the danger, extreme danger. But they, once again, they felt we were helping Australia, and that's how people

31:30 thought in those days. And look at the difference when the Vietnam War act, and I mean act too, that went on in the streets and that, and the different thinking of people. And the world has, the thinking of people has probably been influenced greatly by technology, you know.

Absolutely. So can you tell us what it was like

32:00 **making that trip to where you went to do your training?**

To go to Sydney? Oh well there was a great heap of blokes, I forget how many in my carriage but say there was forty, and all chatting about how they were going to learn to fly and whatever, where we

could go and all this sort of thing. And in those days a high percentage of the air force trainees went to England straight away, or the Middle East,

32:30 if, so they were all hoping to get amongst that, you know. But oh no, and then when you got to the first forms of discipline appeared when you got to Rushcutters Bay, and they had people in uniform, which you hadn't seen, you know, and warrant officer disciplinary people were there. And you formed up, had to march 'til you got in the bus in lots of three, I remember that, and when we

33:00 got to Bradfield Park the discipline was on, you know.

And what did that mean?

Well you had to stand at attention and stand at ease. You're allowed to, you went immediately they'd go and draw out a palliasse [straw filled bedding] and we had to say what you wanted and so use only the words correctly. And then you got sent to fill it with straw, that's right it was straw, and then you got your blankets and

33:30 taken into a huge hut with, I think it was twenty-eight in each hut, where we slept bed beside bed. And then the first meals, you know, you had to find, go and, to the mess for those and found the food, I found, I remember far better than I thought it would be. And oh no, and then you settled in to, within about four hours you're out on the parade ground doing marching

34:00 backwards and forwards, and oh marching, God, did you ever do that. And all officers were spoken to, and the warrant officer is sir, you know, things that you accepted, that's all, you accepted it straight away. Nowadays you'd find it difficult to get people to accept it, sort of thing. Well we had no authority back in those days say to have a motor license at sixteen as you do,

34:30 whereas you didn't have in those days. And then of course, then we got onto weaponry at Bradfield Park, they taught you the first go with machine guns and all that sort of thing.

How did you like that?

Well the kids loved it, the country kids, oh yeah. My oath. And the 303., I knew of it, that was the main weaponry. When I was a kid some, Dad knew some friend of his was

35:00 using a scoop or something down Victoria when a fellow fired a .303 [rifle] about half a mile away and hit the side of a tree and ricocheted and went straight through this fellow's back and killed him, and when they, they didn't know why he fell down dead. And apparently the bullet went through from behind and hit the buckle and when they disrobed him they found the bullet in his pants, had gone... and I remember that, that was the power of a .303, I always remember it.

35:30 And no, it was wonderful to go in the first... then the big thing in your life was when you got posted to do pilot training, oh, you know, we were sent to Temora then. I think a bunch of fifty or something, or sixty were sent there.

How was the decision made about who would become pilots?

They just get the, they want sixty of you pilots and they just go through the list, straight down, right. When it chops off the next lot will be navigators and so

36:00 that's how it... and I was lucky to be in the pilot lot. And when you end up a navigator, I always felt because you could end up being one of the worst people that, the world.

Had your brother John gone down with you to Sydney to do that?

Yes, yeah, both of us went the same day. We went right through everything the same day up 'til the chop off and he went to Parkes then.

So how did he react to not getting in to the pilots...?

Oh he didn't worry, no. Just, my luck and he,

36:30 he had an extraordinary war history, unbelievable.

Were you sorry to be separated from him?

Oh yes, but they were very keen in those days that brothers didn't serve together. You had to wait, probably would've had, if he was selected as a pilot he had to wait the next course, not to be together, they were very keen on that in those days. And the, not the psycho side, but it was the

37:00 well respect for, we might say the parents and things like that, which was quite, to be accepted. I thought it was very good of them.

And your older brother had joined the navy by then?

Yeah, he'd joined the navy and he was down at [HMAS] Cerberus, you remember Cerberus down below? And he rose, I think he was extraordinary, he rose from an ordinary mate low to a lieutenant commander. Which is, he was a fellow who

37:30 didn’t drink, smoke or swear, can you imagine? And got up through the, and he was respected in the navy. Very, had a very positive attitude and once again upheld all the things that were...

Ron, do you remember what your thoughts were when you arrived in Sydney at that training?

Yes well the thoughts were that everything was on, going to become a pilot, right? The

38:00 factor of a war being on, didn’t matter how, not to anyone in those days. As I say, when you grew up you thought of certain things, but not ‘til you got older. When I look back now I can see, God, some of the silly things that... why weren’t you alert to? And you, and when, back in those days too, having to do something, you think, ‘How stupid?’ And but there was a reason for it. And no,

38:30 the factor of danger or that, sort of doesn’t enter the mind of the younger generation, no fear.

So what were your first impressions of the air force?

The discipline was the first thing that showed up, not that I didn’t like it, I thought it was going to be marvellous to be able to do the marching and things that, you know, the discipline you... and that did impress most I think, with most of the people too that. And

39:00 the pride of wearing a uniform was another one. If you went, oh I think we were allowed in once into Sydney while were in Bradfield Park and to wear a uniform in there, impressing girls, get me? That would’ve been behind a lot of it. But the uniform was a big impression, there’s no doubt about that.

How old were you by the time you got into the training?

The flying, I think I was...

No, no, no, just into that rookies training, at Bradfield Park?

I think I was

39:30 about the nineteen, getting the nineteen mark.

Had you had any experience with girls before that?

No, I would say, now let me see, I gotta think back, no. Oh I, that’s right I knew a girl in Tamworth, I went to school with, but other than that, no, not really. And they, to me, they were secondary to my air force career, there was a hell of a lot of that too.

So you hadn’t had any girlfriends back in Tamworth?

No, no, no, no, no, not true girl friends, no.

Or gone on dates with?

40:00 No, because we, see we were twenty-five miles from Tamworth where we lived, so you didn’t get into town very often. I, we were, when the war, Mum, I got it there somewhere. The fuel certificate, we got, I have an idea five gallons of fuel a month and we had a utility by now and Tamworth was twenty-five miles away, and we were getting about

40:30 twenty miles to the gallon, so you had to be cautious about the fuel you used, so you didn’t... and we had, some of that had to be used for the shearing machines. Yeah, so people got very, got down in the bottom limits.

Sure.

Tape 3

00:31 **Temora, a little bit about that trip, when you first got there and the impressions and everything?**

Yeah, we of course we came and saw, the thing was staggered, the bus I think, when we arrived was just to see the aeroplanes flying, Tiger Moths. And I was allotted to an instructor by the name of Montgomery, and I always remember, I’d never been near a plane of course, getting in the,

01:00 the cockpit of the Tiger Moth. And they took me up, he took me up in the air and flew round the aerodrome I think twice, that was my initial opening. I was not, a thing that sort of buoyed me about flying aeroplanes, which I forgot to mention, was when we were kids, Kingsford-Smith’s [Australian aviator] aircraft landed in the paddock beside the school at Matong, and that was back in the late 20’s I’d say, somewhere around there.

01:30 And that sort of influenced the kids around the area about aeroplanes cause they, I think it would’ve been one of the few aircraft in Australia at the time. But nevertheless then...

What do you remember about that day, that’s really interesting?

I always remember this thing. We were, heard this terrible noise, and the school teacher said, “Quick come out! Out! Out!” And we all rushed out and here landing in the paddock was the huge, the three-engined aircraft the same as Smithies [Kingsford-Smith]. And from there on aeroplanes

02:00 met up in the mind, you know. Also one day when we were kids at school, an auto gyro flew past. Now have you ever heard, an auto gyro is, it looks like a helicopter, but the blades on top are not driven by an engine, it’s only the aircraft going forward with its motor causes these to turn, and there was an aeroplane without wings on it, because we were really taken back, in those days. And then at Temora, of course,

02:30 we had to do both writing and all this sort of book work plus the flying to learn, in the first phase of meteorology and things of that nature. And then we advanced in flying to, I always remember the day that we did a couple of circuits I think. And we drove,

03:00 taxied back towards where the main office was and Montgomery said to me, “Righto, now you’re going solo. Well I’ll wait ‘til you come back and all the best because I think you’ll do alright. Now away you go.” And I was stupefied and I took off, and I wrote an article on it I’ve got in there, I can show you, about how it was amazing to think that I could fly an aeroplane. Came back and landed and probably did the best landing in my life when I came back. And that was it, I was

03:30 solo. So you think the world is made and then I…

What were some of the things that you talked about in the article about that solo?

What were they? Such as loving to see Mum and Dad see me and how they couldn’t probably believe that, when I was up in the air I could see the whole of our farm, when you’re, you know, they couldn’t. I think that sort of thought was there. But then again, the big thought started then,

04:00 ‘Where am I gonna go from here? I’ll have to go, I know I’m now going to go to either Wagga [Wagga Wagga], Deniliquin onto Wirraways and then sort of thing up to the front line,’ this was the big thought. And I stayed in Temora, so what did we do in Temora? Oh we used to go to the local pub on a weekend, I think it was Sunday you were allowed.

04:30 But I didn’t drink then, cause I wasn’t twenty-one but I used to see the other blokes getting drunk. And we knew a couple of girls there, I don't know, I can’t remember who they were. But they’re, course WAAAFs [Women’s Auxiliary Aaustralian Air Force] weren’t very prominent in those days, they came later. And no, I enjoyed the life, made friendships that’ve lasted ever since.

What were some of the other blokes like at Temora?

05:00 Oh good fellas, you know, a lot of guys I was saying earlier, country people, young fellas and from different farms around New South Wales and, mainly New South Wales. But beyond that the discipline was quite strong in, we were disciplined by an officer who was a, from the First World War, see and that made a big impression on we younger blokes,

05:30 and he had his ribbons and what have you. And there, we used to, we were taken in to Temora on a couple more occasions and marched through the streets, as sort of a recruiting business. And the marching was magnificent, and was magnificent to be one of the ones marching, you know what I mean? And that’s, I can remember those things.

What was that instructor like, what sort of character was he?

Oh very nice bloke, very, he,

06:00 not, oh he was just a nice person and spoke well, didn’t use any abusive language or anything like that. That was forbidden in those days too you know, you couldn’t use filthy language or anything like that. I’d even get in trouble using the word ‘bloody,’ back in those days. There was, he was quite a nice man, there’s no doubt about him. I don't know where he ended up, whether he ended up

06:30 being killed during later section, when he went to the front line, but they were very good operators those instructors, by gee they were, there’s no doubt about it.

How did you qualify to do a solo flight?

That he, that you could demonstrate to him that you could handle the aircraft in the air, you could, recovery from a spin in the aircraft, that was an essential, and that you could do your circuits

07:00 accurately and touch down accurately, and that’s what they taught. And they were very vigorous about it too, they scrubbed quite a lot of people and they, a number of people taken, who’d been scrubbed in flying, one was Bob Hawke [Australian Prime Minister Robert Hawke], and didn’t meet the standard. But taken all in all, it was a very, very thorough set up to produce. Now we had to do

07:30 cross country flights in the Tiger Moths. I remember when I did it was, we ran into snow somewhere out round Young, at altitude, and something I’d never seen my life. And that’s about the score there.

How would a day go at Temora, from the very start of the day, what would you do at Temora?

Well first you're out of bed for breakfast, then straight in and have breakfast. Then you had to have, when you had breakfast you're out, formed up in lines and marched

08:00 to your different flights, we were marched there and that was it, you come to a halt, you know, and what have you. 'This lot, fall out,' and then on, go to the next lot, and the next lot, 'Fall out.' Oh yeah, had to, just, well looking back it's hard to remember because everyone accepted what was going on. For instance today, the

08:30 warrant officer disciplinary, he's known as WADs [Warrant Officer Discipline] and that, today they're not allowed to use the word, 'bloody,' where in our day they made sure you were told what you… and looking at it, in all fairness, that's the way to do it, and I mean that. And no, things that today's people would say, 'God help me,' to us was nothing, nothing, no just go on with life as… And

09:00 I, and you respected the discipline that was given you too, by gee you did. I, and then when we got through Temora, Temora was open landing fields of course where, as you progressed you got onto runway work and that was different. And I went to another, well a bunch of us went to Deniliquin from there. Now Deniliquin's a property, do you know where it is in New South? Deniliquin's a

09:30 country, oh quite a considerable country town, south of the Wagga area. And we got given the, a new order came out in the air force about the length of legs of people flying, so we were taken up and… what the hell for, I don't know. But we then were put off, we were scrubbed from Deniliquin and sent to Point Cook onto twin engine aircraft, so that was the way the world went.

10:00 **Was that disappointing?**

We were. I was disappointed we weren't on fighters, and then went to Point Cook and learned on twins and from that they immediately sent me to single engine aircraft at Port Pirie, instructing gunnery pupils.

Was the Tiger Moth the first plane that went…?

Yeah. Brilliant.

Yeah. Can you just describe the Tiger Moth to us?

Which?

Can you describe the Tiger Moth?

The Tiger Moth's a beautiful, twin engine, ah, single engine

10:30 aircraft with a bi-plane, the two main planes. And magnificent to fly and open cockpit of course, you're sitting out you had to wear a helmet and goggles, but beautiful aircraft. And its maintenance standards of where it, just go forever, the old Tiger. And its maximum speed, I think, was eighty miles an hour, yeah, I think it was, because we approached

11:00 at thirty-five miles an hour, it was something of that region. But they're a magnificent aircraft and brilliant, no doubt about them. And they're still flying odd ones about, still flying. And they, as the time moved on they got the closed cockpits and things with different types of aircraft.

What was the hardest thing about flying the Tiger Moth

11:30 **or learning to fly?**

Well one thing is recovering from a spin, you put the aircraft into a spin, like that. Now to recover, you have to put on, if the aircraft's turning that way you put on full left rudder and hold it on 'til the aircraft stops, then centralise the rudder then get the control column in the centre to get clear of the ground and what have you. That is the most hazardous thing in light, well any aircraft is to get into a stall. And

12:00 the other thing to do aerobatics accurately, rolls and loops and things, do it accurately on Tiger Moth. But they're a beautiful aircraft, there's no doubt about them. And they take, for the pupil who holds off too high and hits the ground hard, they take all that, they're so strongly built, beautiful aircraft, De Havilland.

How were people being scrubbed?

For not reaching, for not being able to recover from a spin. Not being able to

12:30 judge landings and bouncing heavily and that sort of thing. But the, and aerobatics, but mainly it's on landing, in the early parts of aviation is landing, and not being able to land property. Some people just didn't have the judgement and that's it.

Do you remember what happened when they got scrubbed?

They were terribly disappointed, terribly disappointed, the poor fellas. And they went off and joined another level of air force,

13:00 such as in maintenance or orderly rooms or anything, they took a job otherwise, we didn't lose them in

other words. They were excellent people.

Were they told in front of all the other guys?

No they were just themselves. And they'd leave the unit, you know, soon as possible. And they'd be told immediately they reached that level too, they wouldn't wait 'til the end of the course, no they were told. And the scrub rate wasn't extremely

13:30 high, it wasn't very high, really. And then got up into the other levels where people were scrubbed when they got the faster aircraft and things like that. But oh no, it was a, the big thing about comradeship of course was outstanding, outstanding. Now...

After...

on air speed Oxford aircraft and I completed my training at Point Cook, which was

14:00 marvellous. The, a twin-engined aircraft of course, a different thing altogether and all of us sort of went off to, hoping to go to the war from there, but they sent me and five or six others I think it was, to Port Pirie where we trained navigators and gunners. Navigators were bomb aimers as well and we, these, they, we trained them and they went straight off

14:30 to war these fellas, mainly teaching the bombing for the bomb aimer navigators. And there I trained with, oh at Point Cook, I always remember the chief justice of the high court, Mr Justice Helsham, and I've found some photos that I, sent me, these are the sort of fellas I met.

He was at Point Cook?

Yeah, at Point Cook.

How was it different at Point Cook to where you'd been?

Well Point Cook was

15:00 the old established first movement of the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] after the First World War and Point Cook was, you know, had all their quarters were in order and we had runways we landed on, and things like that, where we did a lot of night flying, and which was the new thing, night flying, which is quite a change. As a matter of fact, I remember a fella, oh the pupils they were, and were flying

15:30 one night I was down at... we stood on the end of the runway, didn't have radio in those days, you operate it by green and red lights. And this aircraft took off, I was waiting for aircraft to come in, and this aircraft took off and they went straight out over the bay, and you can see them, and eventually the aircraft rolled over onto its back and straight in. And obviously didn't have the instruments turned on in the cockpit, because the artificial horizon, I would say it either failed

16:00 or they didn't unlock it.

So it went straight into the bay?

Straight in, straight in, yeah. Of course, killed them of course, they were about eight hundred feet when they went in I think.

How did everyone react back at the base?

How did it react? Oh nothing much really, they got the rescue boats out straight away, they stopped flying for that night, that's about all. But what is at Point Cook too, I remember one day... oh, by the way, our

16:30 disciplinary manager, Point Cook, was Sir Hubert Opperman, the great cyclist, the world, he was, Opp he was. There was a man who didn't drink, smoke or swear, and had the total control of all the people under him, he was an extraordinary personality, there's no doubt about him. Nevertheless, one day we had, they stopped flying, I think it was about

17:00 eleven o'clock in the morning, and everyone was called in to the hangar and where they made an announcement that an aircraft had gone in at Geelong, or near Geelong, and in an army establishment, and they were wondering why the air force hadn't done anything about it. And the air force asked, "Why?" These blokes were missing, but we didn't know where the hell. And they said because another aircraft was there,

17:30 it flew round after they went in, and we thought, 'Oh my God.' So they called Oppy, got all the mob together and said to us, they told us the story and said, "There's two of you here who know about this accident and I'm going to let you go back to your huts, and I want you, the two of you, whoever you are, to come and see me." And about twenty-five minutes later we were called out of the

18:00 huts to go back to work and these two had given themselves up, and that's the type of man Opperman was. And unfortunately these two people got quite severely dealt with, and both of them have now turned out to be people in very high position, in life. Amazing isn't it? And that's the sort of thing that went on and operations went on that other...

Why wouldn't they report it?

Because they were outside our flying areas. Get me?

18:30 And this is how life ran along in those days, you didn't, you weren't sort of taken back much with people being killed or... It, like today, of course today one has to admit to one thing that we didn't have, thank God, was the power of the media. This is where the change in life has been enormous, there's no doubt about it, the change of media.

How was daily

19:00 **life at Point Cook different, did you have a ceremonial dress or meals or anything like that?**

No, we were, as trainees we just had high quality meals and it was the old high echelon of the air force. Everyone saluted people and the whole thing, that's where it went. And, remind me after I'll tell you a small story about Point Cook in it's early days, I wouldn't tell you now. And...

You can tell us, we've heard some great stories.

But

19:30 this one...

Go on tell us, we've heard these, all sorts of stories.

Alright, well in the early days of Point Cook, it was unsewered and they had it taken down to the back corner of the huge aerodrome area where it was buried. And one day an airman, driving the sanitary truck past head quarters, a piece of paper blew out and went through one of the windows, so he stopped the vehicle and rushed in and said to the adjutant,

20:00 "A piece of paper's blown out of the sanitary truck and I think it's gone through the CO's [Commanding Officer] window." And the adjutant said, "Oh my God," rushed into the CO's office, and came back out and said, "It's too late, he's signed it, but don't worry about that." I thought it was lovely that. Yeah that's the early days of aviation. But the, when... then Point Cook was sitting there as the pride of the Royal Australian Air force,

20:30 with all senior officers and people. Then I was posted to Port Pirie where we were flat out [busy] with Fairy Battles, was flying the, these pupils. And whilst I was there I saw an extraordinary thing happen and the person involved, he's still alive, he lives on the Gold Coast down here. So we had, if you can imagine three huts I think it was, or yeah, one

21:00 over there, one there and one there, and they took bearings on whether the bomb hit in relation to the target, and I forget what we called them. And when you flew out to start bombing, you waited 'til the aircraft before you had finished, you're bombing from about eight thousand feet I think if I'm right. And they change a big signal and that allowed you to go, it was no radio in those days. And I'm waiting up top with these two pupils and the other aircraft that in front

21:30 of me, I saw him fly across that way and then he turned and next thing I see him coming straight at one of these huts, which he cut off with his wing, completely off, and a bloke's dived out just before he hit, they were up about that high off the ground see. And he got the aircraft down to land in a paddock, with only half a main plane on one side, and no-one was killed. I never witnessed anything, you know... unbelievable. And he's

22:00 Freddy Knudsen is his name, he lives on the Gold Coast down here. And then Port Pirie was flat out flying all the time, trying to get the pupils out. The goings on were something, eventually I got a posting to Mildura.

Before you go to Mildura, can you tell us a little bit about, you were instructing at Port Pirie?

No we, well we were flying aeroplanes in the right fashion

22:30 for the bomb aimers and the gunners to operate, that's what it's about.

Were there any accidents in that time?

Accidents? Oh yes there was, I remember one morning when we were on parade, pardon me doing this. An aircraft took off, everyone's on parade in the morning, seven o'clock, and in front of us, he just dived straight into the ground, killed the lot on board. And the, had chocks left in the control,

23:00 they hadn't taken out prior to take off. That was one of them. Oh there was several if I remember I was there, but it didn't go to your head.

And what were some of the other accidents, were there accidents with the gunners?

Not really, the, I had a forced landing while in gunnery but I luckily land on a bank right through a swamp, with the wheels down, got away with it,

23:30 and that took a terrible time to get the aircraft out of there. But there was, oh I can't remember really there the number of accidents but there were accidents, there's no... Oh I have an idea someone was, if

I remember right, he was cut down by the air screw of an aircraft too, walked into it, you know, sort of thing. I knew a fellow who walked into a Hudson while they were starting it and he was left, it only chopped his arm off, he was lucky to get

24:00 away with it. But the, but in those, today people would, the standards of safety, they'd have a fit compared to what went on, we didn't worry about things when we should've, I suppose, and didn't Another thing was, when I look back, the amount of excess drinking that went on at night in the mess and the blokes flying first thing in the morning, you know, this sort of thing. And

24:30 this went on right through the war of course and the lack of accidents from it, just proves really that alcohol hasn't the affect that they claim in accident rate, both in motor cars. Same as similar to today's world and the cigarette causing the problem, the cigarette wouldn't cause three percent of the problems than the other ninety-seven percent of respiratory problems caused by motor

25:00 cars. But the world accepts it, that's it.

And when did you first start drinking?

When I was twenty-one.

And where were you at that point?

At Port Pirie I think I was.

So can you tell us about your first drink and how that felt?

Yes, I think I overdid it the first time, and I swore I'd never do it again. But I did. And I, through the rest of my life, I've met more sincere and earnest good friends over a glass of beer than

25:30 at church, far better. And I smoked for, from then 'til I gave it away about forty years ago, sixty a day. And I played rugby twice a week still smoking, and even in all sorts of flying and that. But I don't agree with smoking, but by the same token I disagree with the anti smoking lobby, because if all the do-gooders

26:00 go to heaven Saint Peter'd be up to his bloody arm pits in them, that's, the world is today. So I've chain smoked since...

So you had your twenty-first birthday at Port Pirie?

Yeah I think it was at Port Pirie, yeah.

How did you celebrate with the guys?

Oh in the mess at night, the sergeant's mess, yes. That was whenever a birthday occurred, that sort of happened. And then...

Did they have a cake or was it just drinking?

No, no, just drinking, yeah. Oh no, no cakes or anything. In

26:30 those days standards, acceptable or non, were a lot of, the expression 'sissy' was used, right. Now you'd never see a bloke walking, holding a girl's hand, oh God he'd be, he'd be kicked to death, you know, that sort of thing. The Americans brought that in and we used to sort of belittle them for doing it. So, you know, things have changed so considerably and that's...

Did you come across many

27:00 **Americans in those early days of your air force career?**

No the, see they didn't come in 'til the Japanese War started, and that was when they first came out, but oh it was a good association with them. But the thing was sticking together, a lot of fellows that I trained with at Bradfield Park and Temora, they went straight off to England, and were killed in Bomber Command the poor beggars. And of course a lot of our Australian blokes,

27:30 early mob, went off to the middle east into flying and they came back to Australia, a lot of those. The CO at Mildura when I went there, he was straight from the Middle East, Peter Jeffreys, and the service staff was growing in numbers so greatly then. So yeah Port Pirie was, you know where it is there in South Australia? It was a bit smelting area, tremendous amount of smoke and rubbish there

28:00 at all times. And our flying was constricted, restricted to the gulf area and they, that's where we had the bombing ranges, the other ranges.

How did they set aside a bombing for you to practise on?

Well the government took over, say, eight hundred acres of land and put the targets in the centre of it. And ideal place though, adjacent to the sea, because then you can have one side where you don't have to worry

28:30 about protecting, the other side you keep people away from it, and that's it. Same as at Evan's Head

was another big one. And Point Cook had a gunnery range but that was on the water shore at Point Cook and they closed it down when the war started. And Laverton was next door across from us, air force there. And no, things were just building up sort of thing, in those days. And but

29:00 we were still, I was still possessed and so were the others with the, 'I want to go to the front line,' that was the, every desire was. And if you got the posting to an OTU [Operational Training Unit] as they called them, operational training units, that was the way there, how to get there.

So how would you keep trying to get overseas?

Well all you could do is hoping your name comes up and then you're right.

So you couldn't apply for a posting?

No, not then you couldn't, no. Today they can apply for things but you couldn't then.

29:30 And they just sent them in mass, in hundreds and hundreds to Europe they were going and getting into mainly Bomber Command, a very few into Fighter Command, and that was the difference in it. And then again the advancement of aircraft, see Australia only made the Wirraway at the beginning of the war, then they made Beauforts and Boomerangs, and particularly the Boomerang is a beautiful, was a beautiful aircraft. And Australian

30:00 aviation servicing grew like mad. When we bought Hudsons from America our crew, our maintenance staff were highly trained on them and they were operating out of Darwin on Timor and those areas as bombers. And the service was growing like fury in relation to maintenance, and that was the thing that was there. But...

What were you flying at Point Pirie?

30:30 Fairy Battles. They brought them from Europe across to Australia. They were single engined aircraft, there's a photograph of them somewhere there. And ...

Can you describe what it looks like?

Yeah, it's a big, quite a big single engined aircraft, low wing monoplane with a very sharp nose. Probably...

Oh it's for people that can't see the photo, yeah.

There's a photo there. Yes, they were used as bombers by

31:00 the British Forces in France prior to Germany taking over the area, they were used. And they were the, one of the leading bombers on Bomber Command pre war in England, single engined of course. And we carried, it carried a pilot and air gunner and a navigator bomb aimer, that's what they carried. And he could see through the bottom, they had a hole there with them. And they carried, I forget how many bombs, cause ours were practise

31:30 bombs they were carrying. And the gunners could use the guns out the back on the big long turret on the top, the big sliding hood on the top and you'd use it for gunnery, that's what they use it for. We used to do air to ground gunnery and when we used them, we could, we did use them also for air to air gunnery on toad targets. Toad targets as well. And the, oh,

32:00 they gave good service, they were a typical English aircraft, couldn't stand the heat very much. And they'd take the, a lot of the cowlings off the engines to keep the engines cool enough to fly them at Port Pirie, because Port Pirie in summer time, oh outside temperatures going very close to fifty degrees, you know, so we had to do that to keep them flying.

So was it frustrating being at Point Pirie when you wanted to be overseas?

Oh yeah. Oh we're most

32:30 infuriated about being kept there too to do this, though at the time, I can see now looking back, at the time we were short of gunners and bomb aimers. Not only in Australia but overseas they were, so it was vital to get these people trained, vital. But when I look back too, we, no radio in the aircraft at all, all done by light systems. Landing is given greens and reds, and take-off

33:00 too, same, green for take-off. And the danger, I was very close to a collision one day when I was coming in to land and I wondered why I got a red light. I couldn't see anything and I looked up like that, and there's the wheels of another aircraft just above my bloody head. Oh, frightened six months out of me. And he didn't see me because I was under him, see, and naturally I wasn't looking behind and oh, we dived out

33:30 here and got away. And those were the dangers associated with not having radio, to have immediate contact. But...

So what was the light system, what sort of lights were you...?

Right, green called veery, no, veerys were the, when they fire the cartridge, green or red, these are aldus lamps. Green or a red one, had them in the control towers, that's, they were the lights. Green for

you to go, take off or land. Red,

34:00 don't move, you know, that was what they used, and of course they'd be watching. Say, one of these fellas are gonna see it as sure as... and sure and they didn't, we were only at about four hundred feet when I suddenly saw... 'What! God help me!' The other fella said to me he never saw me at any time on the way either, so that was, oh that's life anyhow. And today of course you'd need counselling wouldn't you? Something, anyhow, yeah.

What were

34:30 **some of the other experiences that you had at Point Pirie with the students there, were they good at learning that fast?**

Yeah the students, we didn't have any problems other than, as I say, that silly character knocking the hut down. And no we, oh they, the standard, they came out of there acceptable for war and that was it and away we went. I think they only did about four weeks there I think they did, four weeks of gunnery and

35:00 bomb training. And we dropped these acid filled bombs, about so big, they, I forget what was in them, but they gave off a brilliant white smoke when they hit the ground there so they could register the hits. Some of them were very, very good, there's, some of the bomb aimers. It's on the, 'left, right, left, right, steady business,' and sort of thing, you know, and that was it. But oh no, the change they came over.

35:30 Then when we went to Mildura to get amongst the Spitfires, Kittyhawks and Boomerangs, and I trained on Boomerangs there. And we, it was a much quicker and tougher life that was because all the fellas, the instructors, the ones that were ex-serve, they're ex-frontline blokes. And the,

36:00 and with the aircraft like Boomerangs, that, you were just sent off solo in them because they're no two seaters, that's the thing, that had just the single seater aircraft. So there were quite a few accidents there.

So the Boomerang was a fighter aircraft?

Yes, yes.

Yeah.

And the two cannons and four machine guns. And then the Kittyhawks were being, feeding to 75, 76, 77 and 78 Squadron up in the islands. And the

36:30 Boomerangs we were going into army co-operation, that was given close support of the army. Or like we were put on fighter control on, out of Darwin, on the top end in coastal patrol. And then the war trangled along.

What was involved in learning how to fly the Boomerang and how different was it?

Well you learn the cockpit where the position of everything is, and they flew in Wirraways to see if you had the

37:00 ability to fly aeroplanes. Then you took off and flew them, gone solo, and when, the moment you'd gone solo they indulged in strafing and all this sort of thing, and high level flying which we weren't used to, passing the twenty thousand foot mark. And very tight formation flying, formation flying was very, very, one of the things you had to learn,

37:30 because fighter defence or fighter attack, you do it in twos, you know, number one and number two, so you had to learn very tight formation, under the most adverse circumstances.

Like what circumstances would you have to learn that in?

Such as in bad weather conditions, in gunnery practise and all this sort of thing, you had to learn it. And it required, when you,

38:00 in those days our formation flying was overlapping wings, you know, overlapping. Which, and travelling at high, and manoeuvring, violent manoeuvre to the way that that was life in those days. Now with the different speed of aircraft, they stand apart more, of course. And had to fly in cloud in formation and all this sort of thing, and which was quite good.

How did they

38:30 **train you to do that Ron, because you'd have to do it gradually?**

Well not really.

You couldn't just all of a sudden do the overlapping of wings?

Well get in formation and either tell him to come in closer or to stand out, stand back, sort of thing. With radio, of course, you could do all this. And then landing in adverse conditions such in high cross-wind conditions, landing on runways and all that sort of thing.

39:00 And getting off the ground quickly, you had to be taught with one, either taking off in pairs or coming straight onto the runway. And we could get our squadron off the ground, say twelve aircraft off the ground in, from when you were sitting in the crew room, be off the ground in there in two minutes. Yeah, you had to run like hell through the jungle to where the aircraft was, and the siren would've gone and the ground staff blokes would be on the main plane ready to

39:30 put your belt straps on. And you had the parachute in the aircraft, and that sort of thing, and that's how it operated. And you had to, now when you're learning, you had to learn to be smart in what you were doing, quick in what you were doing. Another thing too when you can't... with Spitfires, an example on Spits, you don't loiter too long on the ground in summer time or else the motors'll boil see, so you gotta get off quick, and all that sort of thing. Spitfires, you didn't put your gear down,

40:00 Mark V Spitfires coming in to land 'til you're basically on final, short final, coming straight in. Because when the gear came down, one leg was in front of the radiator and caused the temperature to go up like mad. So if you're a long way round flying with the gear down, you're in trouble, so you had to be taught to put it down, all this sort of thing. And it was, not so much, not telling you to do it, you were looking how to do it

40:30 best, this is how things operated then, how to do it best. And you were out to say, 'I wonder can I do better than that?' And that was it, so.

Tape 4

00:30 I've still got mine inside, I carry my boot polish in it, after all those years.

So tell us about the escape kit?

Eh?

Tell us about the escape kit?

Well the escape kits were there to, had in them, I forget what drugs in them, or something, to keep you awake for forty-eight hours, so as to give you a chance to get away. It had escape maps and also in there, there was a big sheet, you opened up and it was in, I think,

01:00 six different languages. And in, was written in each of these languages, 'I am a,' I don't know whether it said, 'Australian subject and I am, I something do...' in other words, telling, 'assist me in escaping and you'll be paid for it,' you know, they had these, and then they had beautiful silk maps of the areas. And I gave mine away years ago, unfortunately, I should've kept it, but still, that was it.

01:30 And...

When you first started learning on the Boomerangs, what was happening in the war at that point?

If I remember rightly, that was when the, just before the Japanese, no, Europe was our big mind, when we were kicked out of Europe, that was the big mind, that was in everyone's mind. And we were showing, the British Empire was showing some strength in the Middle East then, starting, and that's where we had a lot of our pilots in there with the 6th Division,

02:00 Australian division, from what was developed the Rats of Tobruk and that. And as a matter of fact, there's an old chap lives next door, he was a Rat of Tobruk, and that, where the first moves started to bend the Germans a bit, sort of thing. But the, another devastating thought I remember was when the [HMAS] Sydney was sunk off west of Wyndham there, and that had been, I remember

02:30 what an impact it had, that did too, sort of, 'God help me.' And of course the big attack on American, Hawaii was a really big mark where everyone was determined to get up the front line, sort of thing. And we then saw the advent of Kittyhawk aircraft and higher performance aircraft, that was the big thing that came in.

Did you fly the Kittyhawks as

03:00 **well?**

I once flew a Kittyhawk just to see what it was like. And no I flew, I've flown, flew Spits, Boomerangs and Mustangs and oh, Lincolns and Catalinas, the flying boats, which was interesting, later on in peace time. And made the Catalinas in the air force, and how they ever wished to take, get from Rathmines, our head quarters in the Cat [Catalina],

03:30 seventeen and a half hours to get to Darwin, that's what takes the normal aircraft to get to England now. Yeah, that sort of thing, God, dear oh dear.

What about the Boomerangs, were they fast?

They were quite fast, yes, fast aircraft. Very underestimated aircraft, and they were built, I don't even know, they were built by the CAC [Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation] at Fisherman's Bend. The fastest

04:00 built aircraft in the world, ever been built, in fourteen weeks from when it was drawn on the back of an envelope it was in the air at Fisherman's Bend. And to buy... and a funny thing, the main designer was a German, he was a Mr Boulton, no Boulton was number two, I forget the other fellas name. But he was a Jew and he was a designer for

04:30 Fokwuf [Focke-wulf aircraft company] in Germany, and course Hitler got on to them and he escaped and went to Japan where he found that the Japanese was building Zeros and all these sort of aircraft and they hadn't... the war wasn't on. But luckily he informed Australia and came to Australia, left Japan, which was wonderful. And when they want, we wanted an aircraft of this, something of the ability to have a go at Zeros and

05:00 Japanese aircraft, he produced this. A German. He died, I had the good fortune of meeting him in Melbourne before he died, I think in about the 50's or 60's, he was then in his nineties. And the other person who built the aircraft to the quality was a fella named Boulton, he died recently, he was an Australian, he lived in Sydney, he was a top bloke. But there you are, that's how the world goes.

What did you find difficult about flying the

05:30 **Boomerangs?**

Nothing, I never found anything difficult about them, some people reckon they did but I think I survived my flying career because I always carried my beads in my pocket, see.

What are the beads and where did they come from?

My... where do you think? Don't you do the thinking? On my rosary beads. That's a good old Irish statement, that was.

So you did, did you always carry rosary beads?

06:00 Oh when I was, in the early part of the war, yes I did, cause my mother made me carry them, that was it. And there again, through all these forms of life I have stuck to my religion, I find no difficulty in sticking to it, even, I go to church every Sunday and that type of thing. I think it has given me that standard of

06:30 social moral ethics that I feel I should have. No, I find it's, as I read recently, they reckon the older the person in society, you find they are people who go to church. Why, I don't know but there you are.

Did you go to church when you were training as well?

Yeah, right through my service life and...

Did many of the other men do that?

Oh yes, there was, oh enormous, during the war years

07:00 any church, whether Catholic, Church of England, the number that went to them was very, the padres always had large quantities of people, by gee they did. The manner in which the deceased were treated was really of our standard of life in Australia at the time.

Did you have funeral services for people that died on, in the training?

If anything happened, the

07:30 padres did the service for them, oh yes. Didn't stop the war while they did it, but they did it, and that was it. Oh yes the conduct of the average airman and exemplary really. We seldom ever had any form of trouble, we had thieving on a couple of occasions only and the reason for thieving was generally for money, but

08:00 the money wasn't for drugs or anything like that, it was just to get money I think. But, and another thing that was looked on seriously, when a misdemeanour was meant, carried out by these particular people, was homosexuals. Though we knew we had them but they were only dealt with, and severely, when they did something that was not within the standards.

That's in the air force?

In the

08:30 air force, and the army too yeah.

And did you know any yourself?

And we, they were, if they were in trouble they were generally put out of the service immediately, homosexuals. And instead of now accepting them and glamorising, which is...

Did you know any yourself?

Yes. I had, as a matter of fact I had about four of them thrown out of the service, through stupid things they did. And out, and that was it, it's forgotten

09:00 about too, you know.

What sort of things did they do that got them thrown out?

Well such as getting into bed with people and things like, at night, late at night and when they knew the party had been drunk, right, all this. Oh I forget the others, other things that we... oh, and strangely enough that sort of thing was always watch for it in the messing staffs, it was watched

09:30 for closely. And...

Why them particularly?

Don't know, they seemed to fall into that category at all times. I think also that, well I heard too at the time, that in the say, messing sections of big hotels and things in those years it was very prominent there. And this is, they came into the service into the same section. And...

Did it surprise you, had

10:00 **you ever heard about it before you joined the air force?**

Yes I had heard but in the bush, you know, sort of thing. Mainly I suppose why it got in the bush is the fact that equal sex animals acting in a certain manner, see, and that sort of set the boy in the bush alive to a lot of these things. And as we were saying earlier there about what did, when did you learn about sex, well

10:30 really you saw it amongst animals, and that's different to the city dweller and all what name, and that. But no, so we were very fortunate to be free of... but it's discipline, once again, it's a reflection on discipline.

So if you knew it was happening, you would go and tell someone or someone would report it?

Yes, yes report to the adjutant or, and they would immediately put them on a charge. And

11:00 oh that was the best way out of it too.

How did the other blokes treat them?

Oh if they knew, they'd treat 'em roughly, if they knew anyway. But oh yeah, afraid we used to keep, sort of, at arms length from any of that sort of thing. Then again, we, soon as we got WAAAF into the air force there was a fairly strong view of a similar thing. And it was a little,

11:30 by what I understood and saw, was a little more prominent, and they, what they used to do is quickly post one girl, say to Darwin or... separate them as far as they could.

With the girls?

Yeah, with the girls, yeah, yeah. Let em know that's how that was. But now of course it's a different world altogether.

So what about when, say for example, a man would be having a relationship with a woman, where would they go to have sex and how would they...?

Well that wasn't

12:00 condoned at all until the years when I left the service in the 50's. That sort of thing was, once again, looked on at the moral issue involved and you didn't do it, right. If you, for instance you wouldn't live in defacto-ism, they wouldn't let you. I was a CO of a unit, and I was single and I was made to live on the unit, get me? That was the law and that was carried out.

And you couldn't bring women

12:30 **back to your room or anything?**

Ooh no, ooh no, God you'd be kicked straight out, be court-martialled, oh yeah.

Did you know any men that broke those rules?

I just, I'm trying to think of something I, somewhere, no I can't particularly recall, but I did hear of somewhere that they were kicked out of the service over it. And no, that, your social conduct was viewed with your service conduct,

13:00 and nowadays of course it's a different thing altogether. And no, that was one thing that was in the service at all times was the disciplinary factor, the rules are this and you abide by them or else you're gone, and that's it. Some of the people, you know, did something outside the service of reasonable magnitude and they were thrown straight out, never, never condoned.

13:30 And the women, when the WAAAF coming into service, were kept completely separate from the males,

and that was it. And the, well, what they're doing today in civil life I think should be done and should've been done, and that is, you know they're gonna carry out, I think it's national too, international, international. How much a woman can

14:00 say she's equal to a man, physically, mentally and in other matters, have you seen that? Yeah I believe that's United Nations I think are going to do it, to try and prevent problems of, as the western world's finding, such as the, being in the law business in relation to hurting themselves physically within doing a male job,

14:30 when it's claimed they shouldn't be. Well I, and I understand that women in the air force flying jet aircraft have to wear special G [gravitational constant] suits because a female cannot take the G of a male, because of their physical structure. Now there's a case.

What did you think when the WAAAFs came in?

I thought it was a good thing because I saw them during the war take a man's job and send him to the front line, which was wonderful. In aircraft maintenance,

15:00 and particularly fabric stitching on Tiger Moths and things, and they get no recognition for it and I, it makes my blood boil, to think that the things they did, the women, and that. We have a lady here in the unit, eighty-six years of age, operated as a sergeant in the army at South Head in Sydney for four years, she doesn't get a single cent of a pension or medical help or anything.

15:30 Didn't go overseas, you see. Now I disagree with that and the WAAAFs did a marvellous job they really did, the things that they did and the way they took it too, in circumstances that were not easy either and they did a marvellous job. But I don't want to see WAAAFs though lifting wool bales and things like that. And this, I think it's got to be put before the world, it has to be.

When you, how often

16:00 **did you manage to get back home to see your mum and dad in that initial training time?**

Initial, oh I think once every twelve months it was, I think it, yeah, twelve months it was.

Were they proud of what you were doing?

Oh yes, yeah, we kept in contact by letter. And in the interim, I was not the real worry, my brother, the bloke in Darwin, he was the one, the things that he did and survived, it was amazing he survived.

He was in the air force or...?

Yeah, he was a gunner.

Yeah.

He

16:30 was on his fifth operational tour when the war ended and the average operational tour was less than one, for survival, I believe, yeah it was, less than one. And he was in, shot up and in prangs [crashes] and all that sort of thing. He came back and went on the land, went as a farmer, no pension, nothing, sort of thing.

What did your mum say when she first saw you in uniform?

Oh she, course they were thrilled,

17:00 she was thrilled. And I, when I later, no it was during the war I, for some reason was, had, was at Tamworth and I went and we called, 'beating the place up,' 'beat the house up,' and Mum and Dad were astounded, yeah. Because you thought you were the greatest thing on earth doing it.

So you flew over the property?

Yeah, and straight past the front door of the house, you know, that sort of thing. And no,

17:30 that's just life, when you're young, the exuberance of youth, it wins wars, it wins everything in my book.

After you learned the Boomerangs, where did you go after that?

Well the war ended, we were just, we were being converted on, we were going to be converted on to Mustangs. And when I went to become CO of Evans Head where we were putting, storing Mosquitoes,

18:00 Hudsons and Boomerangs and what have you, and I stayed there while that, and I was posted from there onto Catalinas, that's right.

So this is after the war?

This is after the war.

Yeah, we'll back track a little bit.

No I ended up the war on Boomerangs.

You ended up the war on Boomerangs?

Oh Boomerangs, yeah, we were just going to get the...

But after your initial training on Boomerangs, did you actually do sorties on them?

Yes,

18:30 oh yes, did...

Can you explain what happened after?

Well I went to Strathpine where 83 Squadron was setting up. We had Aero Cobras and then we got some Boomerangs and took the Aero Cobras away and then we went straight to Gove. And Gove was then just a strip cut through bauxite, then we were picking up convoys from Darwin round the cape and vice versa. And that was when

19:00 the Japanese bombed Darwin and we'd operated as far, we were on Millingimbi Island which was up, we had a flight there at all times. We'd spend a fortnight there I think it was and then we'd come back to Gove and then we operated boat out of Gove and Millingimbi. And then...

What was 83 Squadron like when you first joined them?

What, what?

What was the squadron, 83 Squadron like when you first...?

Oh just, as I say, it was just forming up and we had a handful of,

19:30 I think four or six Aero Cobras, and then they were hopeless aircraft so they swapped over to Boomerangs. We were Strathpine just up the road here, you know Strathpine, and they've named all the streets after aircraft where they put over where, not one of them named Boomerang, none of 'em. Did a Spitfire and Lancaster for God sake, never was there. And we operated around, we used to meet all incoming air-

20:00 craft into Australia, they had to report over Moreton, over, oh what's the, on the north end of Stradbroke Island, ah, anyhow... Point Lookout, where they, we had a beacon there, they had to report over there and we watched any doubt at all of aircraft approaching and we went out and met them and all the American aircraft coming in were coming in through there. And also the submarines, Japanese

20:30 submarines out there, had to watch for as well.

Did you see any of those?

No I never had the luck of seeing one at all. The irony of it all being, when our squadron came back from Gove, the airmen, we flew the aircraft back, the airmen came back by ship, around Cape York and back down under naval escort the whole way. And none of them were granted a pension because, do you know Bob Piper [RAAF historian] by

21:00 any chance, Canberra? He stated there was no dangerous Japanese submarines in the area, none of them got a pension as a result of that the rest of their life. And yet all the ships that were sunk up there, and these airmen got nothing. I tell you about acts that go on, we've tried out might, the pilots have, to get them. And I'm still working on it, I think I might win now cause Dana Vale [Minister of Veterans Affairs]

21:30 leans a bit towards the evidence we've got, where the others wouldn't. I just can't follow it.

Did you ever come across enemy aircraft?

Yes we had a Japanese aircraft came over Gove and reconnaissance aircraft, well to best of knowledge. But this one when we dived down and Nigel was, we didn't, was killed. Well I don't know, you wouldn't know, we just came out of cloud in this (mel...UNCLEAR) turn, he was hit

22:00 with the broadside. Because I got out of the road as quick as a flash with the water on me and back into the cloud because I was on my own, and I thought, 'Oh, not gong to, that's the way,' you're not gonna be game on your own. And he could've probably, I often thought that this probably would, without seeing anything, this is what happened, is in the turn like that when he was hit, yeah. Boy.

In a situation like that when you're in a really fast aircraft and you take off on your own,

22:30 **how do you then re-navigate yourself back to...?**

Oh well you're trained to know, basically know in a fighter aircraft where you are at all times, and from that point you can find your way back. Today's mob too, gotta remember back in our day, we didn't wear G seats and we were suffering blackouts oh, practically all the time, in fighter aircraft. And now...

What did you wear?

No didn't, didn't wearing anything, just this sort of

23:00 well that, what I showed you sitting in the crew room, that's all.

Can you describe what you'd wear?

Oh and you wore your Mae West [life jacket] as well but that was on you all the time sort of thing, but. And you had the dinghy under your bottom, between you and the parachute. And I was saying in this, in the dinghy there was a gas bottle, only about that big, and of all places it was put in the dinghy where you... and it put pressure on your coccyx.

23:30 And after the war, I had to have an operation together with lots of the others, a huge, they thought it was cancerous, formed between your anus and coccyx, if I can explain, right, and yeah from this pressure. Another thing I must say to you was, the Boomerang was built without a urinating tube and you'd go out for four hours, changing altitude at terrible rates.

24:00 We got a, the squadron doctor said, "Urinate in the cockpit, because otherwise you could do your bladder damage and if you had an accident you'd kill yourself." Yeah, they didn't put a tube in them.

So you just urinated in the...?

And in the cockpit, if you got... The main thing what used to be too, we used to land down the strip and pull off the side of the runway and jump over the side of the aircraft, this is what the doctor was worried about. And

24:30 but, you know, those sort of things, they didn't amend them either. You would've thought the complaint, they would've... but no, no. And in fighter aircraft that's essential, and the, even back in the old days there was some funny stories about the tubes in aircraft, I've heard. And but nevertheless then the, as talking on this

25:00 subject, I'm glad I stayed because I not only went on flying boats, and on Lincolns and big aircraft and DC-3s, I was able, reached, got into the world of jet aircraft flying and saw the difference in that. One, a good experience in my life too was, I was OC [Officer Commanding], officer commanding the unit at Richmond where we had total

25:30 command of CSIRO [Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation] in rain making and cloud physics, and which was quite an experience in life. We made rain and investigated inside of clouds, something you wouldn't want to do, well, no-one'd do it today cause we flew into severe cloud storm conditions with DC-3s, C47s and almost disintegrate the aircraft just to

26:00 learn what was going on inside them, sort of thing.

That's risky.

Oh yeah but, now it is but then it wasn't. And then as I said I had the wonderful experience while... so I went to Korea and places with transport, taking stuff up there, we used to do through Guam, Iwo Jima and Japan and then over to Korea. The atom bomb testing, I was, luckily I was appointed to do that

26:30 and that was the, a marvellous experience, there's no doubt about it. To witness something of a scientific advance of that nature because it, the things I learned as a result. Getting massive radiation readings over the continent of Australia, where white man's never been, sort of thing. And we, and have the word of people who knew what nuclear was

27:00 the British scientist fellas. And the bomb to go off, and we flew right... it atomised a frigate, completely atomised a frigate, fifteen hundred ton boat. And the shock wave knocked some of our tents down ninety mile away, but across water, so where there's very little friction, you know what I mean? And so life has been kind to me in that direction. But I've kept

27:30 up with the rain making, I've written to the prime minister on several occasions and the minister for science. I can't, they just wont, when the intensive drought is on I feel we should've been into it very deeply but they wouldn't, I don't know why.

We want to talk about some more of those experiences later, but can you tell us what happened when you got to Gove?

Yes we got to Gove, moved into our tents and immediately had the aircraft on stand-by in the... the blast

28:00 pens had been built and we had our twenty-four aircraft in stand-by.

Where is Gove and what was the point of you going?

Gove is in the far eastern tip of Australia in the Northern Territory, part of there, and there was nothing, there was a mission there and he was a Fijian, the missionary. And all the natives of the area went to the mission for support and they were a very

28:30 bright mob of natives. Still alert, they carried spears and all that sort of thing and they were quite co-operative too, cause for a cigarette they'd do anything. And the same over at Millingimbi, there was a

missionary, a lot bigger one, and they were quite co-operative. And I had the unique experience of being

29:00 the orderly sergeant one night when, one day and night at Gove, at Millingimbi... Millingimbi, where they had a corroboree for the death of a child and was able to attend it, which was something unique.

What do you remember of that night?

All I remember was the singing that went on and the dancing, you know and the crying of the adult women. And

29:30 it started at about five o'clock, went through 'til about eleven at night. Yeah and hundreds of abos [aboriginals] that turned up, you know, the great majority, greater majority being basically only with a loin cloth. The missionary ones, who were working at the mission, had clothes on, but the others, no. And it was really something, the way, routine that was carried out, something

30:00 quite unique. It was, apparently, and they have different forms of corroboree for the death of a child, the death of adult or some other, birthday or something, whatever they do. Course that area the crocodiles were very thick there, and yet they never attacked the abos at all. And we were, another fellow, about six of us in a boat, fishing one night and a crocodile slid down

30:30 out of some, the trees but right past the side of the boat when... we nearly died of fright, and the crocs. We used to strafe them for practise, crocodiles, in the rivers up there, when the tide's out they're all laying in droves on the mud banks, and we used to down and strafe them. And they could accelerate from the first burst hitting them to about a hundred miles an hour in one flash, gee they were smart on their feet. But there was

31:00 thousands of them, crocodiles, in that country. We used to do that for gunnery practise. And the, I, in all, with the Boomerangs, mainly in Gove, I flew I think one of the highest number of hours flown in Boomerangs, five hundred and thirty-eight hours I think it was, in Boomerangs alone.

So what exactly would happen on a sortie with a Boomerang in Gove?

Just sit there and watch for

31:30 intruding people, and we'd then, as we're leaving, and a relief mob come in, we'd all dive down on the shifts and fly straight past them and off home. And you had your power well back on, to conserve fuel of course while you're out there. And when you look at it nowadays they wouldn't do this, because with one motor and you're two hundred miles off shore, and you had something happen, it'd be too treacherous, you get me, they wouldn't be in it.

32:00 But we didn't, didn't worry us about it, but that's the thing today, you know, they wont be in it, on single engine, you know.

So you were flying with the army craft, was that right, you were following the army?

No, no, no, we were flying as air force, totally as RAAF in convoy duties.

So what...?

Protecting them from being attacked.

Protecting army convoys?

No, well the naval convoys, naval convoys.

32:30 They were all merchant ships under naval... they'd have escort with them as well on the waters, such as frigates and things like that. And so, oh, and see and a lot of it was, as I say, taking personnel from A to B that, they were ordinary ships just made into passenger carriers for the troops going to Darwin and taking blokes back home from Darwin, out of there. And then again ammunition, a lot of them were carrying ammunition of course. And the,

33:00 the only one I remember, we got out of Menangle down on a call one morning, very early, and the Japs had torpedoed a merchant ship off Jervis Bay, it was sitting in the water on the way down when we got to it. And the Liberty ships from America, one of them it was, and yeah they appeared anywhere the nips [Japanese], they got quite a lot of ships around Australia.

You saw that,

33:30 **what happened there then, you saw that?**

No, we didn't see what happened but the ship was there going down, disappeared. And navy rescue ships had picked up the personnel from it. But the, I, they were lucky there in Sydney Harbour when they came in those two... the one that sunk the old ferry at Garden Island and killed those,

34:00 I forget how many people in it. If he'd have come up the other way, behind him was the [USS] Chicago, that was what he was after, and he came up pointing the wrong direction, or else they'd have got a ship with all hands on board. And you know, that was fortunate to think that, well of course the navy flattened them within short time. But that was fortunate, my word it was, cause I think the Chicago had

about eight hundred blokes on it or something. Would've

34:30 been a big blue [fight], wouldn't it?

How did the war, how was the war affecting communities, like the aboriginal communities up in that area?

Well they, the New Guinea ones were quite aware, of course, but the Australian Abo, in Darwin he was aware after the bombing occurred, naturally, that's the Darwin bloke. But the bloke out where we were, he didn't realise what the danger

35:00 of war was, but he was willing to help you at anything, they were willing to help, and that was the difference. And the Darwin ones, a lot of them left the area when the bombing, although the first lot that saw war were the mission station on Bathurst Island and they took it well, I believe, they took it quite well. And they, see once again,

35:30 there could be, what, tribal people and had no real knowledge of scientific advance in the world, and consequence it was, the word was 'war' and that was what was happening, it didn't.... Where you and I heard the word 'war' we hear it, as an instance, I think if you heard a war going to start, your first thoughts today, with mine, would be, 'I wonder will be any nuclear business go on?' Because the dreadful affect of atomic weaponry.

36:00 But to them, well, 'So what?' sort of thing, and that's it. They, when you look, we had one Aborigine in the air force, he was a fighter pilot, and in the army we had, you know we had one Aborigine reach the rank of colonel I think, wasn't he, did he, he may, I knew him as a, when he was a major. They don't, they

36:30 weren't fitting in. But then again, when we were young, and as I say, now up at Gove we slept in tents of course, like anyone else, and but the food was very good, gee they were good. I remember, another fella and I one, we had some time off, we went down to go fishing at the beach, and we saw a turtle, big turtle run away from a place and went over and found it'd laid

37:00 a great heap of eggs. So we got 'em all up into our haversacks and took 'em back to the mess, and the cook cooked them for dinner for the mess, and they were beautiful. And he said, the cook, that he drained the white off the eggs and only used the yolks. We had about thirty eggs though, and it was beautiful to eat, and that was the sort of good cooks we had, by gee they were good cooks. And no

37:30 doubt, anything, you know... we'd catch, we had our own fish traps set, we'd put a fence out in the ocean so's the tide come up and filled it, and when the tide went out left the fish behind. Another fella and I went down one day again to go fishing and the tide was out, and we left the jeep and our 303's in the jeep. We just start walking over the sand and a bloody crocodile rushed out of the fishing net and did a circuit around and a

38:00 big turn and just missed us, and he went out in the ocean again. Oh dear, we nearly died of fright. Oh God, he was a big crocodile, I tell you. And they used to inhabit these fishing traps we had and eat the damn fish, some of the fish, you know. But the mess used to run them, and feed us wonderfully well with fish. And from, periodically, we got meat from Darwin, they flew the DC-C47s, the transports come across with food,

38:30 sort of thing. And no, the food was excellent, the climate was beautiful and Gove is quite a... now of course it's... It was total bauxite and the runway was brilliant red, almost as red as that gravel, the runways, that was bauxite, the whole thing. And they apparently, dug the total, no, they still got one runway left

39:00 I believe now, cause they put civil flights in. But they've made millions and they transport, yes they transport the bauxite from there to Gladstone, to where it is. But the, we had our own saw mill and the work those men did was absolutely extraordinary, you know, for any timber they wanted. And, oh no, they were excellent, the

39:30 whole squadron. And we went up, when we were there we had Roy Goon, the Chinese bloke, the CO. And he was a wonderful, he was taught to fly by Kingsford-Smith and he lived in Ballarat, they came from Ballarat. His people came to Australia with the name, you wouldn't believe it, in the 1800s of Fook Yuen, F-O-O-K Y-U-E-N and the ship,

40:00 the immigration people, as you call 'em in those days, couldn't spell, so they called 'em Goon. And of course Roy's father, who couldn't speak English too, being a Chinese, said, 'Yeah, yeah,' so they took the name Goon. Yes and they were herbalists in Ballarat. His brother was a professional musician in Lennons Hotel here in Brisbane for years. And there's a very good story

40:30 about that.

I'll just stop there.

Tape 5

00:31 Oh Roy Goon, yes Roy, a wonderful man. His brother was a professional musician. And one evening the management approached him here in Brisbane and said to him, Roy, now he told me this story himself. And he said that, they said to him, “Could you stay a bit longer because some special guests are coming and they love jazz.” And Roy’s brother was wonderful at jazz. And he said, “No,

01:00 no trouble.” He said, “Their aircraft’s been delayed by two hours, Sydney.” So he said he waited on and in comes a bunch of about five or six men, and the management said, “These are the people see.” So he sat down and played, madly played the top jazz that he could play, and when he finished it and they clapped madly and clapped and cheered and what have you. And one bloke jumped up and rushed up to him and said, “Oh that’s the best

01:30 jazz music we’ve heard in the tour, in our trip round the world, and I absolutely...” He said, “Where did you learn?” And he told them. And he said, “What do you do for a living?” And he said, “Well this is my living.” And this fellow with him said, “And what’s your name?” He said, “Goon.” He said, “For God sake,” he said, “my name’s Harry Secombe” [comedian on the ‘Goon Show’]. It was Harry Secombe and his mob.

That’s a good story.

Isn’t it? I think that’s excellent, yeah.

A good story.

Yeah.

02:00 **So can you tell us a little bit more about the CO, Roy Goon, and what he was like as a CO?**

Wonderful CO, highly respected by everyone and always dressed the top, as the CO, and over very, very top squadron leader in regard to flying, in operations. He was tops, really was, a very experienced man and he was liked by everyone, you couldn’t help but like the man.

02:30 A real Australian of course and everyone was very disappointed when they took him from us at Gove to begin the... He had to, became the commanding officer of the big radar set up, fighter radar we had in Darwin, he was the boss of it and on interception around Darwin. And then we got another CO and everyone was quite disappointed. But since then in squadron reunions and that we’ve had, we’ve

03:00 had Roy attend ‘til he passed away. Cause he’s not a young... he was as I say, he wouldn’t, I think he would’ve been born in about, somewhere in the region of 1910 or something, you know, that, so it put him in up in a fairly... age. And there was a family of them and their, some of his family still lives in Ballarat, in Victoria. But he was a highly respected man and course one of the major boys in aviation,

03:30 Australia, because he grew up in aviation, that was it, and that. And they, he didn’t, learned to fly down in Victoria all, really, and that’s where it was. A top man.

How unusual was it at that time for a Chinese person...

Oh yes.

to be in that position?

Oh yes, any, foreigners of course were looked on as being in the opposition. That was not the type of opposition we’ve got today but then we’re, that... that word annoys me today.

04:00 And, you know, he did all his flying down there, Roy did. And that, we had unique people in aviation during... another fellow, the top stock brokers of Sydney, was a fellow named, oh, now wait ‘til I think of his name... He, anyhow he died in recent years, though to ninety-two, in England, still with his flying license.

04:30 And now that’s the, some of the old, this is talking world aviation, I’m talking about fellas from way back. Joe Palmer was the fellow from Sydney there , the stock broking business in Sydney, they were the first stock brokers in Sydney. And he learned to fly with Kingsford-Smith and he had his own private aircraft pre war, and since the war he’s had, Joan and I flew with him in his private

05:00 aircraft. And I gave him, I watched while he did instrument flying practise so he’d get his license renewed, he was then seventy-odd, seventy-four. Incredible person. And when the air force sold the Dakota aircraft, the DC-3 as the public know them, he delivered to Ethiopia and to I think it was to Hong Kong, he delivered the DC-3s,

05:30 at age of eighty I think it was then, yeah. Extraordinary person. No but he was one of the original aviators back in those days. Of course they came into the air force, these people, cause they knew how to fly and that was it. Joe was an instructor of course. So the air force history has changed a hell of a lot since the beginning of the war, whereas the same...

Sorry Ron, I wanted to ask you about 83 Squadron, can you tell us

06:00 **exactly how the squadron was made up, how many people were in it and so forth?**

I can't tell you exactly but I think we had two hundred and twelve personnel, that's includes right through to the cooking staff, and the mess men, all those, I think it was, oh could be two hundred and twelve or...

Oh that's okay, just your recollection.

I can't remember off hand. But that was a fighter squadron's, amount of people in a fighter squadron. They were, all the squadrons were similarly equipped, twenty-four

06:30 aircraft and then the main, then the staff, complete staff.

What sort of relationship did the pilot's have to the ground crew?

Well fuelled by the people who serviced your aircraft. And...

And how close were you with those people?

Oh practically mates, well we're mates but the only difference was you slept in one lot of tents out here and they slept somewhere else.

Would you like a break? Hang on we'll just stop for a... Perhaps we might talk about

07:00 **him later cause...**

Yeah, yeah, not now. No he nothing to do with us, no.

No that's alright. So just talking again about the relationship you had with the ground crew,

Oh yes.

you were saying you were good mates.

They, oh yes, they were, all spoke on Ron and Jim's measure, you know, that type of thing. And as they say, that early incident I spoke to you about was of the fellow crying, when Nigel didn't... that was the type of person

07:30 they were. They, we at the time really didn't realise how much they thought for you, while you were away, and you could see the look on their face when you taxied in, that you came home, type. And they really were, and we're still deep friends in 83 Squadron, what's left of them, but they were top people, there's no doubt about them. And armourers handling

08:00 ammunition the way they did and, sort of, the danger factor was never looked on, in the way they handled. I, this, the reason I've got only hearing in one ear, was due to one of my armourers caused this. I was leaning on the barrel, with my elbow on the barrel of a cannon, pulling my parachute off the wing, when he said to me, "You haven't used your guns." And I said, "No, no I haven't." He said, "Oh, thank God for that,"

08:30 or something. And I turned round and as I've pulled, the barrel of the cannon's like that, as I pulled the parachute, he pressed the tit in the cockpit and the, all the guns went off, the cannon, and I lost all the hearing in my ear for about a fortnight. And you wouldn't say anything cause they'd send you home, so you wouldn't say anything, keep quiet about it. And then I got over that over the years, completely over it, well... And when I went civil flying I was getting a medical every six months

09:00 and my hearing in my left ear was below a line on there all the time, when the other was higher. And I asked them medically about it, they said, "Don't worry about it, it's remaining stable in on a line and means your hearing might be down a bit, don't worry, it's common." And then about five years ago, woke up one morning, total loss of hearing in my left ear. So I rushed to the doctor thinking about a stroke, and they sent me to specialist, and after

09:30 questioning me for, ear, for about an hour, he's saying, "You've had something happen to your ear." And I'm thinking in the last twelve months, six months or something. And eventually he said, "No, no, no, get back fifty years." When I told him this he said, "That's it, you'll never get your hearing back because of hardening of tissue." And total...

So did that happen while you were with 83 Squadron?

I didn't have it, I had it but only for a fortnight.

No I mean, but the accident...

10:00 Yeah, yeah.

it happened while you were in 83 Squadron?

Yeah, yeah, I was on, I'd just come back from a job and this is what happened. And oh lucky, the thing was, the tanker driving in with the fuel was just going to come, turn in front... And strangely enough Roy Goon and the adjutant, the CO and the adjutant were driving around the dispersal area in a jeep

when this happened. The poor armourer got, I forget what he got,

10:30 three months confined to barracks or something, as a result of it, three weeks or something, yeah.

So can you explain to me a little bit more about how, why he did what he did?

He, I asked him, “What the hell did you…?” And well he said, “The guns were switched off,” and I, you had to switch on before the control column button would work. And he said, “I don't know why but I switched the bloody things on and I had my hand up on the thing and I pressed the…” that’s all he did. Only fired about

11:00 two rounds, but six hundred rounds a minute, so yes. Poor fellow and he’s such a beaut bloke too, he was.

So it was just an accident, he wasn’t, he didn’t mean to…?

Absolutely, absolutely, out of the blue accident. And I had another incident where...

Where did the guns fire into?

Pointing straight out into the bush, yeah.

Nobody nearby?

Well as I said, the CO was about two hundred yards up the road in the jeep and the petrol tanker was just out here, about to turn in.

11:30 Yeah.

So it could’ve been a really big disaster?

Oh yeah, yeah, could’ve been, you know. And I had another incidence of a, having a cross feed in a magazine with a twenty millimetre cannon, and in the nose of the shell there is a slim, brass piece of metal that covers the detonator. And when the, naturally when you press the thing in, it explodes as well as going through something, high

12:00 explosive incendiary. He had a mark on this piece of material in the nose, and the armourer said to me, “Bloody hell you were lucky, the magazine jammed.” He said, “That should’ve, that shell should’ve gone off.” He pulled it out of the magazine and said to me, and the round, that was like there, round was pointing in that... and this section was bent at right angles, and this was the one that had... Now, so another

12:30 bloke, Brown, my number two, we went down to the main armament section in the bush and there’s an armourer there working on some ammunition. I said to him, “Have a look at this,” and he took it, the shell’s about that long, took it and said, “Why, what’s wrong?” And I said, “The cross feed, see the dent in the detonator?” He said, “Oh they’re not as bad as the people make ‘em out to be.” He said, “For instance,” and he picked up a pair of pliers to unscrew the detonator, see, and we ran like the clappers out of the

13:00 tent. We’d gone about fifteen yards when there’s a... Next thing... all gone, you know. Armourer, you know, those things used to happen.

You mean he lost his hand?

He lost his, half his hand off there, yeah. And...

So why was he doing that?

Why the hell he’d ever put a pair of pliers... he was gonna show me why they weren’t as dangerous as they look. But the, another thing that happened, we were in Malaya,

13:30 standing in front of a Lincoln that just had fourteen one thousand pounders put on it, for a night sortie. And an armourer jettisoned them, pressed the button, the whole fourteen fell on the concrete in front of us, right. But they hadn’t time to turn over, they were flat. “Who did that?” “One of the armourers did, pressed the jettison button.” See, and familiarity breeding contempt, this, with the ammunition, this is a dangerous thing.

14:00 Even when you’re a kid out in the bush shooting rabbits and things, you’re liable to do some stupid things and not realise what you were doing. And armament has been this, over decades, not decades, don’t use that word... over centuries, where frightful things have happened, by armament mishandling.

So just going back to while you were at 83 Squadron at Gove, can you explain to us what, how, what sort of preparations you

14:30 **would do before you went on a sortie, exactly what happened?**

Oh all you did, you sat down in the crew room, type of thing like that, and you had your breakfast or whatever it was, and sat down and talked, smoked cigarettes and waiting for if, this is when you’re on stand-by. The other one was you were detailed, names of so-and-so, on the job today on sorties, well you’d be just ready for it. And say you’re taking off at eleven o'clock, you’d be there beside the aircraft,

or sitting in

15:00 at eleven o'clock and the maintenance blokes'd be there, and away you'd go, and that'd be it.

I know you talked a little bit about what you wore, what equipment you had earlier. But can you just tell us in a bit more detail exactly what you were wearing and carrying?

Oh yes, well first of all, when we were in that area, you wore gaiters, long sleeve shirts, and if necessary gloves that fitted over the slit in your shirt, all for protection

15:30 from sand flies. Now sand flies in those areas up there, you wouldn't believe unless you were there. Now we had, we didn't sleep under mosquito nets, we slept under some form of cheese cloth, right. When you breathed in and out, the sides went in and out, to try and stop sand flies. Sand flies were bad from eight, they, about eight o'clock in the morning

16:00 'til four in the afternoon, beyond belief, and between those hours and after, outside those hours. And if, they reckon they wouldn't go above, a hundred feet above ground, but I was at twenty thousand feet one day when a sand fly bit me on the back of the hand when I had my hand on the throttle. He'd been in the cockpit when we took off of course, that's how he got up there. But the sand flies were at a level that

16:30 you wouldn't believe, you saw it. Now not only were they, the itching, you could develop sand fly fever from them. The mosquitoes weren't a great problem because they couldn't get into the sleeping quarters, so that was one thing you had to look at very seriously, was the sand fly problem. And we used to sit in, before I'd go and stand-by at day light, we'd sit in smoke of fires we'd burned

17:00 white ant nests in, the smoke pouring off them, we'd sit in the smoke and it'd keep the, keep 'em away. And, cause we learned that from the Abos, that's what they did. And then about eight or nine o'clock you could say, well they've gone enough now not to worry you. Then about four o'clock in the… 'Oh my God,' something shocking. And yet the Abos, a lot of the aborigines up there, by the way, on Millingimbi mainly, and also on the shore,

17:30 built their beds up on logs of wood, four in the ground, here, and lit those fires under them at night. You'd see rows and rows of them, to try and offset the sand fly, and the mozzie [mosquito] wasn't so bad, so that's what you had to offset. Nothing else really.

Did anybody in the squadron get sand fly fever?

I think there was some blokes, yes, did develop it.

And what was that like, how did it manifest itself?

It's similar

18:00 to malarial style of thing but not as bad as malaria. And nowadays of course, we'd have the added advantage of the rub-ons that would, are now far more effective than they were in those times. But rub, cure it, eucalyptus was one thing that'd keep those sort of insects at bay. And we, but didn't have over much trouble, our,

18:30 up there, the things run well, we used to fly at low level across to Millingimbi to change, your fortnight there or whatever it was, I forget now. And while maintaining the other it's, it was, the cover for the convoys on there.

So just getting back to what you were wearing and the equipment you had, what else would you carry with you?

Well we had

19:00 the kit, we carried on there, we had the Mae West's of course and that's about all.

A weapon, did you have a weapon?

Oh yes, we always carried a revolver, pilots did. We carried two rounds in them, one to practise with and the other to shoot ourselves with, that's all the good they were. And that's what, that was, reckon we'd, fright, yet oh, they're dread,

19:30 they were dreadful thing, you couldn't hit that wall from here, sort of, with them. But they were, I suppose if you put it to the test you might have… I shot a cobra in Malaya, just pulled it from the hip and fired from the hip and shot a cobra, it was standing up at me like that, you know. So you can do things, normally I couldn't hit the wall with it. But we carried that and what else? Oh course we always had sun glasses

20:00 were part of our flying kit, it become very habit forming wearing them, but nevertheless they were of good value. Not, nothing else I don't think except as I said, you had your parachute in the seat, on top was the dinghy, then you sat on that and the straps came over the top. And no, I don't think… Oh…

Can you describe…?

we carried

20:30 a jungle knife about so long down the leg of one side, that's purely for survival factors they were, those sort of things.

So what was the idea of that, that if, in what situation would you need that?

What, that jungle knife and that? Well if you bailed out and landed in the bush somewhere, well it, a good thing for, well for cutting your way through jungle and what have you. And the other thing for defence if necessary, you could use it, that's why they were

21:00 issued. And the revolver... of course we had the water bottle, we carried a water bottle as well, sorry about that. Yes, and it had about a litre of water in it, that sort of thing. And oh no, it was just a normal stage of life and...

Can you describe a little bit more for us about the aircraft itself, the Boomerangs and sort of walk us through it as if you were a sort of camera, what it was like inside and...?

Well

21:30 it was quite a modern equipped aircraft, had a sheet of armour plating behind the seat, that came up to above your head, and that was behind your seat, at the front of the aircraft to protect it from bullets from the engine type attitude, from behind. And I owe my life to this armour plate, when I had this frightful accident at Mildura. The armour plate bent, cause I was skidding backwards and pushed my head

22:00 down 'til it was almost in the bottom of the cockpit. And as I say, then the aircraft stopped its movement and I had the top out of my helmet, the hair off my head and the aircraft stopped, and the armour plate was just above my head here like that, pushing my head, and that's how good the armour plate was. So it had an armour plate, it had good instrumentation of those days, artificial horizon, rate of climb,

22:30 what else, of course the altimeters and turn and balance indicators and things. We had, what else, we had, course they had the control, the gunnery control switch for the canon and machine gun separately and the actuating switch on the control column, where you fired from. It had a gun sight, quite a big gun sight in the cockpit, as a matter of fact, which was rather dangerous, if, in fact. You saw, you remember John Gorton [Prime Minister of Australia], that prime minister?

23:00 You see his face, the way it was? That was, he crashed in a hurricane in Malaya and got hit straight there with it and smashed the whole of his jaws and everything, straight in, and they pulled back what they could. That was, he was the result of the gun sight. The gun sight was quite a brilliant job, there's no doubt about it.

What do you mean by that?

The gun sight? Well it was very, very accurate, that was the good thing, and it had the ring sights in it to judge

23:30 the relative speeds of aircraft, of targets approaching in and what have you. It was very, very good but it was big, it sat out about that far. Yeah, John Gorton paid for it, and he was RAAF in, CO in Malaya. And you ever heard of Grace Brothers, Mick Grace? Yeah, he was the big boy, he was the wing, commander of 3 Squadrons up in Malaya, up in New Guinea and he served in the Middle East as well. Oh yeah,

24:00 he was a funny man that fella, no doubt about him, and very experienced character. But the Boomerang was a metal main planes then general metal, but the fuselage was covered in ply, and you wouldn't think so but it was ply painted, three, five, four ply I think it was. And there's one of them still flying at the moment, Matthew Dennings flies it.

24:30 And it was an aircraft that was not easy to land, it had a tendency on landing to swing madly because of the short distance between the main under cart and the tail wheel, and your brakes, you were very dependent on your brakes, to keep it straight. And I had an incident at Strathpine, I just, I wasn't sent home after coming out of hospital for this

25:00 accident I had there, I was sent straight to Strathpine. And I, they wanted someone to test fly Boomerangs, I said, "I'll test fly it." And when I came back after a major inspection, come back to land, found that one of the brakes they'd forgot to put a pin in it and the aircraft swung straight out into the scrub, wiped the aircraft off, and I survived that one too.

You had a few close calls.

Yeah, oh yeah. And then when I got to civil I

25:30 got worse.

So what about the guns on the Boomerang?

The guns, we had two twenty millimetre cannons and four .303's, and the cannons of course were

Hispana Sweeza [Hispano 20mm], they were made in Czechoslovakia, the cannons were. And they were a wonderful piece of... the machine guns fired at twelve hundred a minute and they fired at six forty,

26:00 but they were a big shell that came out of them. Not as big as the original Cobra's we had up at Strathpine, they fire straight through the centre of the prop., a thirty-seven millimetre, about this long. And oh, but the motor was behind the seat in those, but that was a big one. And...

While you were at Gove, in what circumstances did you fire the guns?

Only on, I only had the pleasure of firing them

26:30 in practise, we were ready all the time with them switched on. And as I say this day with Nigel when he went in and, well we, I'm a bit suspicious what happened there. You know, we didn't see the other aircraft when we got through, they could've easily been sweating as, you know, and got him. But the aircraft were, we were fairly close to the water and course I don't know whether it exploded before it hit the water, or it exploded, cause I

27:00 was trying to break away, when it hit me. And the, other than that, the Boom...

So what was the sensation like, to fire those guns in the Boomerang?

Oh wonderful. And if one cannon stopped, the aircraft pulled to one side madly, if the cannon stopped. You knew if a cannon stopped, by gee you did, pulled to one side, you know. And the, we, that twenty mill. cannon is, I have an... no, they're gone to thirty mill. They use

27:30 now I think it is. And the Lincolns had them as well, they're a world wide piece of equipment and yeah, it's Hispano they were, and the others were Browning, the English machine-guns. Now they have, we had bullet proof front windscreens on them, about oh yeah, about getting on an inch, two inches

28:00 thick, they could withstand any form of ammunition straight in the windscreen. And the, I saw an incident, when I was at Strathpine, another fella... my number two and myself were flying outside of a bloke in the centre, a fella named Jim Haggerty and we were up, something, out over sea here. Anyhow we came boring down at

28:30 Strathpine, Haggerty, and straight down this Pine River, we were doing about four hundred I suppose, four hundred and fifty or something. And what should we, we didn't know at the time but there was a blinding flash and the, we, I went that way and Browning went that way, and Haggerty went to the left. Anyhow he, we were just near the aerodrome at Strathpine, about a minute away from it. And he got in and landed,

29:00 we didn't know what happened. We went back and landed too and found we'd flown through three high tension wires, with thirty-three thousand volts in each, Brisbane to the northern section, chopped the power off these people. And that front windscreen didn't break, it had the break, the shatter mark straight across the centre but it didn't come back in the cockpit.

29:30 And it cut the rudder off his aircraft and the four, the three blades on the prop were all scraped, they'd bent back over the thing as it went through, and this is what it was, the big flash. But that windscreen, we were amazed, didn't actually disintegrate, held together.

When did that happen?

Up at Strathpine in, I forget, '43 it would've been, '42 or some, '43. And yeah, a bloke named Jim Haggerty it was, flew straight into 'em. The

30:00 power lines, see, went across the river from one side to the other, with the dip in them, we were down there come, boring in from the east, went straight through them. Yeah, I always remember Haggerty, smartened him up no end. And...

Were there any repercussions for that?

Oh he, yeah he got into trouble over it, in a big way. But still, while we're out there, see we were lucky it didn't get us. And we had a couple of blokes killed up there, yeah, while we're at Strathpine.

30:30 And the way, one bloke dived into Bribie Island, we don't know why, from a great altitude, that was one of them, out of the blue, just went straight in. And I forget who the others were. But we, God there was troops in this area here before we left, Americans, thousands and thousands of them. And up at Gove the Boomerang proved a very, very good aircraft and reliable

31:00 in the lack of unserviceabilities in the aircraft, they had a wonderful engine, a Pratt & Whitney 1830-B they were known as. We could get altitude over a thousand, three, thirty thousand out of them and things like that, they were wonderfully well built, there's no doubt about... No, lovely aircraft to fly too, very manoeuvrable, you could do aerobatics, oh so simply in them, sort of thing, without...

31:30 And another thing, they carried tons, plenty of fuel, that was the big thing. And where a lot of the, well the British aircraft they were always short of fuel because they only flew short distances between, whereas we had to go long distances to do things. And no, the Boomerang was a very, very well built aeroplane, there's no doubt about that.

What would you say was the significance of what 83 Squadron was doing in Gove?

What the significance?

32:00 Well someone had to watch out. See the Japs, at that stage, when we went there and, the Japanese were, had made an impression that they were intent to come into Northern Australia. Alright, now, a lot of people don't understand but during the war with the Japanese, the person who made the decision was the Emperor of Japan. Irrespective of what, whether they had generals in the field, they had to refer to him

32:30 for these directions. Now when they bombed Darwin, they should've themselves, they should've come straight in to Darwin, because Darwin's a long way from here to get any defence behind it, and similarly, see he authorised the attempt in the Coral Sea, to come in. Now we were always suspicious that they would probably make a run down between New Guinea and Java and come into Australia like that. And in consequence

33:00 we didn't, we had to give a cover to our, what we were talking about previously, our troop ships, ammunition, what have you, passing through to Darwin. Because there was no train from Alice Springs to Darwin in those, like we got at the moment, although we had enormous trains going through there. But this is, was a big, a very big set up, because we had to look at Darwin and then we had an odd go where the Japanese come in,

33:30 tried to come in down by Broome and those areas, exploratory for the emperor to make a decision. So we, our business was to protect those, that shipping in that area, 'til we got a better grip of the situation. Well, which we did eventually cause the Japs failing in the top of New Guinea and things like that, so we were doing a job that had to be done, and that was it. The shipping viewing, now

34:00 see, submarines were sighted down, round South Australia and all up round through there. And the number, you know, you've seen the number of ships sunk around the east coast of Australia, did, have you see that? I'll show you a copy. And people are not aware of what they were doing. But still...

How much did you feel, or the squadron, how much were you briefed about the real possibility of a Japanese invasion into Australia?

We were briefed

34:30 by our intel [intelligence] officers of what the thinking was and our intel officer was a very smart, good thinker too. And the, as I found out, working in intelligence later that it's not what you know, it's who you know, as the world is today, and that particularly counts in business doesn't it? And we, Australia was alert

35:00 to what we thought was going on 'til the sudden collapse occurred in New Guinea of the... well we proved we had better equipment and were more determined. Well the Kokoda Trail, I think, showed the Japanese something they didn't realise. But the emperor made the decisions, and this, when, which was in their place was rather stupid but it did, too. And well kamikaze [suicide pilots] was

35:30 the emperor's decision, asked for volunteers, apparently, by what I understand. And that's part of their life, is kamikaze.

When you look back at your time with 83 Squadron what is your, what are your most significant memories of that time?

Oh well...

Or what's the lasting impression you have of that time?

Well the comradeship that's remained, course would be the most impressive thing. The

36:00 most wonderful bunch of people and their wives and families, that this squadron formed this, by having us luckily posted together. The other parts are flying Boomerangs, close calls in certain fashions that I can, that I almost bailed out once by being misled in a cloud by, I flying number two

36:30 overlapping the CO, wasn't Roy Goon. And I thought, 'There's something going wrong,' we were climbing in cloud. And I suddenly realised I had my right rudder full extended, my right leg, which meant that I was flying in formation like that, and the rudder was operating as elevator, lift my nose. And the aircraft stalled and spun in the cloud and I recovered it in one direction, it spun the other way around, just recovered it and I

37:00 got the canopy open ready to bail out, when I came out the bottom of the cloud, about six thousand feet, got it back into gear again. I can remember that distinctly. And I remember...

Did you ever panic in that situation?

No, no. When you're young, I don't think you panic, you don't panic, no it's, because you don't know. You don't panic because as I said, the things you learn in the rest of your life where,

37:30 well you don't realise the dangers involved in it, number one. Number two is that you don't really know

the answer to it either so it's just, 'Something's happening,' isn't it. It's just one of those things that happen I think and no, I don't...

You said you carried your rosary beads with you, did you pray?

Not, no, not really. Mum made me carry them and

38:00 I've still got them in there somewhere, inside, that sort of thing. But it was a favourite expression, you know, 'Always have your beads with you,' an Irish expression. And stories of that nature were in the, sort of things you hear. I remember in latter years, like the service life, I was, my big boss in Melbourne was a group captain named Cumming,

38:30 Group Captain Cumming. He was the leading bloke in aircraft research and development, a wonderful person, single bloke. Was coming back onto the unit one Saturday, this is since the war, and when he came to the gate at Laverton where's he's the boss, the airman on guard duty said, "Yes, what, who are you?" or something. And he said, "Wing Commander Cumming." And the airman said, "Thank Christ I'll keep an eye out for the bastard."

39:00 He told this story and it was printed recently in there, Gerald Cummings thought it was the greatest joke that he'd ever heard in his life, yeah. Airman said, "Yeah, I'll keep an eye out for the bastard."

So during those close calls that you had, you never felt the need to pray?

Oh well as I say I was, yes, I said my prayers and things. Of course, when we were kids, you're taught, had to say your prayers before you went to bed and that. Yes possibly. I did, I still lean on

39:30 a sort of, 'Well who built the universe?' sort of thing. I believe in the super natural to, I will until I'm proved, I'm disproved. Because I do feel that when you look at outer space at the moment and things of that nature,

40:00 who controls it? I don't think Allah does, but that's one thing for sure. But no, I do, I have that suspicion of there's something higher than I am, sort of thing, higher than we are. Because you can see in modern science how they are becoming dumb founded at certain things, you know, 'Why,

40:30 why is this?' And I still live in that world, I love listening to scientific stuff on TV [television], I always watch for any scientific stuff. And aeroplanes have always put people, I think, in another dimension, haven't they by, well the advancement of aeronautics at the present time. I've, and the advancement that's occurring, I heard or read somewhere recently where

41:00 some American scientist, military scientist, say that they will achieve Mach 18 within a very short time. Now that to me is inconceivable, but they think they will. Well Mach 18 is eighteen times seven hundred and fifty-four miles an hour at fifteen degrees Celsius. Now they'll be able to produce

41:30 the things that, well the power, hydrogen probably that goes with it, or nuclear. Now these sort of things that are in the world today that are, there is a lean to say, 'Yeah, oh God, I wonder how that works?' You know, isn't there, in the highest degrees of science.

Absolutely.

Tape 6

00:32 brought back to Menangle, outside Sydney, to re-equip with Mustangs, when the war ended, and just as we were about to get them. And then all the fellas shot out of the service and I stayed in.

So where were you the day that war ended?

We were at Menangle the day war ended and we were, because the goings on, and the CO was ordered to close the unit, we weren't to go off because they wanted that

01:00 squadron formation, so we had to wait 'til next day to get into Sydney.

So can you tell us what happened with the squadron formation?

Oh what, oh the squadron formation, we were just told to do it and the direction I think, came from RAAF head quarters in Sydney. And we were told to fly the appropriate formation and so we, next morning, you can imagine what went on in the bloody unit that day, that night. And

01:30 we were, just got up in the morning, had a talk that, about, 'You'll be number one, two and so...,' and it turned out magnificent formation. The true photograph is better, better than that one. And that's, when we got back we were allowed to leave the unit, so that's it.

So just for the camera Ron, can you tell us what formation you had to make, and what the day was?

Well the day was August the 16th, 1945 and were ordered to fly a 'V-

02:00 J' formation because in those days it was Victory over Japan , it's since been altered to, for the do gooders, called Victory in the Pacific, and behind it's the do gooders. And that's what it was all about. And it was really a top formation that we flew, and straight down Martin Place in Sydney, above Martin Place, I think twice we went along there. We wanted to fly under the harbour bridge but they wouldn't let us. And

02:30 **Was that in Boomerangs?**

Yeah, yes and it was a magnificent formation.

How many of you were there?

Oh I'd have to look at the, count the number up, the 'V' and the 'J', I've got the, we'll see it later, I forget how many. But it was very well done, there's no doubt about that.

So you didn't have a practise for that or anything?

No, no, just do it. And everyone was determined to do it in case were kept in camp any longer. And my girlfriend at the time took the

03:00 box brownie camera photograph, she was in Martin Place there. And Sydney was, well it was mad to see it from the air, the way people carried on. And it was a wonderful day, there's no doubt... Of course we were more amazed at the word atomic bomb, most service people were. And we were not aware of what the frightful results could be achieved from it.

03:30 So but it, it ended four yeas of carnage by using it and one has to be fair about that, it definitely did. And then we started to learn about it 'til afterwards you know. Cheshire [Group Captain Lord Cheshire] was the British VC [Victoria Cross] winner, he was in the aircraft that dropped the bomb as well, he was in it.

And did you know him?

No, I didn't know him but he, his name

04:00 now wells into the world. He's taken over, he's deceased now, but he took over the Mother Theresa, you know, the care of the poor people of the eastern world, and it's known now as the Cheshire Organisation, and the RAAF support it. My niece, who was a squadron leader in the air force, she's just retired about six months ago and she's gone to Timor to operate the Cheshire

04:30 for nothing for two years, and she's a single person, she was an air traffic controller. And so Cheshire name is well made in the world.

So what was your feeling at end of the war, and how did everyone in your squadron react?

Yeah, everyone was quite astounded, put it this way, that when the bomb was dropped, we were quite astounded. But and the Japanese'd have to give in, that was the thought, and sure enough it happened. And that was,

05:00 then, sort of thing, all the fellas went home, mind you quite a percentage of them were married, I wasn't. And then the, as the world rolled on, Russia occupying Germany even brought some of our fellas back in, back into the service, with the thought of what was going to happen, because that was a dangerous phase indeed. And but the end of

05:30 the Japanese War was oh, you thought of, we... and then it came home to me more because I flew a lot of the prisoners back to Sydney to put in hospital. Unbelievable that they survived.

Can you tell us how that, how did that come about?

What?

You, flying...

Well they wanted anyone that was available to do the jobs, that was it. And to see a person laying down and see his vertebrae through here, and he was alive, you couldn't

06:00 believe it, you know, the poor beggars that were released.

What was their demeanour?

They were sort of in a stupor, that's what, all you could say, in a stupor. The odd one was so pleased it was over, you know, but naturally they all were but they were in a sort of a, came back into a world that they once knew, nothing else. It must've been an awful feeling, really, to survive under those

06:30 circumstances. And wasn't very well known at the, right at the end of the war, the way they were treated, not really known, but they knew they were badly treated because we... And no, the thought of the people, you could see when the war ended how it changed them tremendously, tremendously.

Where did you pick them up from?

I've been trying to think where we picked them up from. I

07:00 think at Darwin was where we picked them up from, they were brought there and brought back to, I think if you were Brisbane you were brought back to Brisbane, if you were Sydney, ah, New South Wales you went to Concord Hospital, poor buggers.

Do you remember what you first thought when you saw them?

Well really I think our thoughts were, 'God, how'd they survive?' You know, sort of thing, and that was it. And still in those days the, you

07:30 must remember that the personal side of life was kept to the person, wasn't distributed as it is today. And what today would be considered as horrendous, wasn't then, it was, 'That's what happened.' Different attitude altogether. And the service attitude then, as I say, as it went on, I was made live on the unit, sort of thing, well nowadays

08:00 that's gone, it's gone. And the loyal, oh well I have to say it, the loyalty and comradeship of the wartime, is far more intense, it meant so much to your life, but it isn't now. With everyone, I think it's the same, but particularly in the service. And it was, when you, I look back over my career in the service, how this wonderful business of loyalty

08:30 and discipline, they went together in life.

Why do you think it's changed so much?

Technology I think has changed it enormously and then you had a surge of, I think television's changed, changed the ethical standards of social moral ethical standards of people enormously. But we in Australia suffered dreadfully when that,

09:00 what's a word I can use, got to think about it... Whitlam [Gough Whitlam, Prime Minister of Australia] was in office. Now that illegitimate was a navigator in the air force with me, he was. And he...

When was that? Just be careful of your microphone.

Oh.

It's alright. When was that?

Oh, up at Gove, he was in 13 Squadron, we were in 83. And he was that, what do you call it, the female dog, Germaine Greer [feminist] who was with him, those sort of

09:30 people, set out and achieved a ninety-nine percent disposal of social moral ethics, and that's where our rot set in. It's been furthered of course, as you must admit, by the right of the child to tell the parents to go and jump in the bloody lake or divorce them. These sort of things, I think have... and that, now that child is in the armed forces, and so you go. And that's life.

So what happened, after you were bringing POWs [Prisoners of War] back, after the

10:00 **POW job...**

That was after the war yeah.

what happened for you, what did you go on to?

I then went from there to Evans Head, I think it was, and then after Evans Head was closing down...

What did you do at Evans Head?

I was at Evans Head, it was a storage depot for aircraft, and then...

Can you tell us a little bit about that job and what you did there?

Yes well we, these aircraft were being brought in from down, oh all round the place and but mainly,

10:30 the main aircraft we were accepting were Mosquitoes and Hudson, Oxfords and Ansons, that's right. And the odd Boomerang was brought in there prior to going to Oakey. Oakey was the big destructive centre where they were burning them out there. And the Mosquitoes were made in, you may not have known, they were made of wood, totally of wood, yet they were the fastest aircraft we had in the war system. Beautiful

11:00 aircraft they were.

How were they constructed of wood then, did they use a...?

Just did the same, just built them out of strips of wood and what have you. And during, I don't know whether you heard one, the Lewisham Hospital in Sydney is across the railway line from the Petersham Public School. And one week an aircraft, it was a

11:30 a Fairy Fire Fly I think from the, one of the aircraft carriers, English aircraft carriers, dived straight down into the hospital, into the laundry of the hospital and killed about six people, what have you. And I think it was a couple of weeks or a week later, a Mosquito, the kids had all gone in at eleven o'clock into the school, remember, eleven o'clock, a Mosquito wing fell off and it went straight into the school yard in the Lewisham Hospital, Lewisham School, didn't kill anyone. But the

12:00 wing fell off it, and this was the trouble, the main planes were snapping off them, the ones made of wood, and that was, the end of the war came, thank God. But they were a beautiful aircraft. And but no, the changes that occurred in the, we, where we, as I say, I repeatedly say, where we had discipline, whether it be social, moral or any other way of discipline, in the services, that's what held us together in friendship,

12:30 comradeship and all sorts of ship was held together by discipline, and this has slowly slipped out. And then I think the business of women doing the same jobs as men or something, took the dignity of the lady away, the word lady's gone, isn't it? And that...

So as a CO did you implement discipline at Evans Head?

Oh yes, my word, we had...

13:00 **Oh sorry...**

they were having a phone call one night, the guard rang up from the guard room one evening and said that there was a fellow down there wanted to see me, he was an ex wing commander. Went down and met for the first time a fella named Charlie Scherf, S-C-H-E-R-F, came from Glen Innes, he was a farmer. And he put his age back ten, no five years to get in the air force, he had a

13:30 wife and family. He changed the eight, thirteen on his birth certificate to an eighteen, imagine the three and not eight. And he got in and he went to Europe and he shot down twenty-eight aircraft in Mosquitoes, twenty-eight aircraft, second highest of Australia.

So he would've been fifteen by the time he got there I suppose, fourteen or...?

No, put his age back, instead of being eighteen

14:00 when he joined up, he actually was thirty-three, twenty-three. Opposite way round.

Oh sorry, put his age back, you're right. I apologise, yeah.

And what a wonderful individual. He was killed in a car accident a few years later, and they flew all the fighter aircraft out of Williamtown, flew over his funeral at Glen Innes. But he's a most remarkable individual and he, a real villain too, with it. And

14:30 but he eventually got court-martialled in the air force for flying a Hudson, not a Hudson, a Beaufort up to his property at Glen Innes. They landed in a paddock and pushed the, eight of them I think there was, and they pushed the aircraft into this hay shed so it couldn't be seen, and they had a weekend on the grog [alcohol] up there. And flew back into Williamtown on Monday morning after about two hundred aircraft searched for them, I was amongst the ones that searched for it. And yeah, Charlie,

15:00 and he got court-martialled for it. But a brilliant individual, as I say, a man of enormous ability and things that he... like rescued people in Europe by flying into Sweden and that at night and picking them up, when another person would've been shot down and killed, Charlie got away with it, and that was his life.

Did you know about him before you met him?

I'd heard of him of course but I'd never met him. And being a bloke from a farm, of course, we were close

15:30 friends, and he's still the farmer, he was.

What sort of character was he, was he loud or quiet or...?

No very quiet, unassuming and a very pleasant, very nice bloke to talk with and tell stories. And a typical farmer, yeah, and everything about him, yeah, amazing, amazing man, no doubt about him. He, one of the top, well to me he was the top ace of the air force. The bloke that took,

16:00 shot more aircraft down was Killer Calwell [Archibald Calwell?], that's right, I think he had twenty-eight and a half aircraft, shot down. Poor Charlie was all just, he did his job and that was it. And he flew into Germany in broad daylight to, and bombed, dropped... no strafed a German aerodrome and shot down four aircraft in the circuit area before... and got away too. In broad daylight too, no night stuff. He was a remarkable man and had a wonderful personality

16:30 about him, no doubt about him. A real, when I say a villain, a bloke who couldn't care less. If Charlie was gonna do it, he'd do it, that was it. Yes...

Did you hear stories about the aces while you were in the Second World War, did you hear stories coming back about the aces?

Yeah stories came back, and they also...

How did they get...?

Printed small documents, one was called TM. You, have you heard of that in the thing? That,

17:00 it was written by comedians but in it, it gave good news as well. But they, one of their type of thing was written in where, they said, we're, every month there was an award for, what, how did they... 'The holy derogative order of the irremovable finger.' And in this there was one of a fleet air arm lieutenant commander, or something, said he took off from the carrier [HMS]

17:30 Ark Royal and was away for two hours and came back. He held off so high on landing that the aircraft crashed to the deck and smashed under carriage off it. And being questioned as to why this happened, he said, "The tide went out while he was flying," so there you go. And I thought that lovely humour, typical Pommie [English] humour, and that sort of thing was published every month. You can still buy, they got the whole of the ones they produced are now in one booklet, you can buy. There's

18:00 some wonderful jokes in it about flying, PO Prune, Pilot Officer Prune was the main bloke they had in the book. And typical English humour which the other countries can't match I'm afraid, there's no second thought about that. And that was another thing that kept the service people bright, was the Pommie humour that came in. And

18:30 Harry Secombe, was Harry...? Yes, the Goon Show [popular radio comedy] mob, they were wonderful, the humour they... I forget, they had a show and in it was an Australian and his sister too, I forget the name of that. They kept the service people alive with service humour, was wonderful to see, and that was a big attribute, contributing factor. Spike Milligan, that idiot,

19:00 he was another one, and Harry Secombe, Spike Milligan and I forget the others, they were remarkable how they kept the service people alive with humour, and it was good to see. We don't get it now and not talking service humour, in ordinary humour we don't get it. If the foul words have got to be pushed in to these things when you, it could be told without them. And that's another reason you're asking why have things gone this way? That's one of the reasons.

19:30 **So what happened for you after Evans Head then, where did you go from there?**

I went on to Catalinas at Rathmines, and we used to operate Darwin, Timor on, for the government, taking stuff over to Timor, and air sea rescues we operated on. And then...

Do you remember any significant air sea rescues that you were involved in?

No, I didn't. They did some remarkable things during the war that I knew of. I knew of a fellow, his name

20:00 was Shilling, a gunner, and he was commonly known as Two Bob Shilling, can you imagine. He, my brother was in this mob, they were bombing Japanese fleet between Timor and the Celebretes area with Liberators. And he got shot down, they got shot down and he fell in the water, parachuted, and a Japanese destroyer tried to, ran over him, but luckily the bow wave tossed him to one side and missed.

20:30 And with that a Catalina rushed in and picked him up, and the Catalina just went to get off the, he got off the water about two hundred feet, and got shot down immediately, back in the water. He was shot down twice in fifteen minutes this bloke, and survived it. As a matter of fact, he died in Brisbane here only about eighteen months ago. Yes that's where the Catalinas were unbelievable some of the things they did. Even, was it, yes, a great story, no, yes, of a Catalina

21:00 finding the Japanese forces coming out of Guam, I think it was, heading towards Rabaul, and the Catalina sent a message back, number of all the ships and what they were. And then on the end of the signal they put, 'Would you please, inform our next of kin,' they never ever saw them... Yeah, that was, I thought was typical Catalina. And I

21:30 enjoyed being on them, I was astounded at how slowly they travelled but they were... And then they decided they, to pull them out of the air force and we were put on Lincolns at Townsville with long nose Lincolns for maritime service, had extended noses on them and things. And so, oh then, I had to do, another bloke and I were sent to do an air traffic controllers course at Point Cook. I was posted then to Adelaide,

22:00 to their liaison, living with the army in Adelaide, flying, oh we used to go up to Woomera and things. But then, whether that held, oh gee, I think I...

With the, when you were doing, flying the Catalinas, having flown as a fighter pilot...?

Oh well that's it, that's what I say, I, it's mainly because I was single, they could post someone, resigned from the air force so who can we send, a single bloke there, because they had to think

22:30 about accommodation for the wives, and that was quite a thing.

But was it hard to learn, could you pretty much fly anything by that time or did you have to...?

Oh yes, getting round to getting to flying, you know, most anything. And we would then, tide down to

transport service, which was the Dakotas, or DC-3's. We had 36, 38 and 33 Squadron, 34 Squadron and Lincolns were, the Lincoln was 1, they had 1 Squadron then at the time.

23:00 We also brought in some Pommie aircraft too for transport but it was, they were then refining it down to, 'What do we want in peace time?' Which, I don't blame them. At the moment see, we're up against the big problem in the service, which I don't altogether agree with, is getting rid of the F1-11s. If I were in charge I would go to America and buy more of them that are sitting out in paddocks in America,

23:30 because they're the top aircraft of the world, of the world too. And we've of course invested in this new one that the Commonwealth Government, that you tax payers put the money into, called an F-35, which I don't think flies for another two years I think it is, course high tech. And then by this time I feel, we'll, all fighter aircraft will be out, finished, will be all pilot-less platforms.

24:00 Armed, not a fighter aircraft or any aircraft in battle is a platform loaded with ammunition that you fire at the enemy, and that's all that matters to you, so I can see it becoming pilot-less in peace time. But in my further service there, it was interesting to see the things that were going on at the time, see the Berlin air lift came up, I unfortunately

24:30 missed out on going to that. And then I, by all this time, immediately after the war, I was, did a big course in Melbourne in intelligence, we could see the problems developing with communism and I became influenced in what I was seeing and passing cert., you know, our information, what have you. And I fully expected that we would probably enter into combat in the Berlin area,

25:00 and things of that nature, but fortunately we didn't.

We've heard about the intelligence courses before and they are quite involved.

Oh yes.

Can you tell us a bit about your experiences?

Well only the fact that we listened to CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] and what have you, had big lectures from them.

Were they particularly worried about communism in the CIA?

Yes, very, very. We were, we had, Australia, I'll use the expression, we had, I was in the section had great interest

25:30 in, we were watching the border of Korea, China... this is before the Korean War, long before it. We had, getting information from Ulan Bator, you know, that province between Mongolia and Russia, up in there. We had information coming from the complete western boundary of China, right down to the Pakistan area, which became Pakistan afterwards. And we had information

26:00 that was very strong in Russia, and without doubt the greatest mongrel the western world has seen from the 1900s on was Stalin [Josef Stalin], his history and the dreadful things that he did, he was worse that [Adolf] Hitler, worse than Hitler. And so the average person wasn't, well he was a, supposed to be an

26:30 ally of ours in winning the war, you see, didn't look at that side of him but that's the type of person we had. And we had, also at the time, a very strong views and very strong means of looking at certain Australians, and which the average, ordinary person didn't know of. But we were looking at them, America was looking at them, and that sort of thing. And we saw the...

Politicians or just...?

No, people.

In what areas were they?

Yeah political as well

27:00 but back in Australia,

Academics.

Trade union, terribly, terribly. And we were expected, and it did happen, the crumbling of India, became India and Pakistan, Bangladesh and what have you. And the, Ceylon, the collapse of Ceylon, those sort of things, was of great interest to us. And while I was still flying jet aircraft by this stage, and what have you, you could see, I want to keep smart because this is what we're going...

27:30 And so...

What interested you about the intelligence area?

I beg yours?

What interested you in the intelligence area?

Oh well what, it was, basic interest, my greatest interest was the, combating communism, not only in Australia but around the world, but in particular Australia we were concerned with. And the public weren't aware that the teacher's federation basically was communist, since about 1937, '36.

28:00 Where a neighbour of ours down in Riverina, their son became the first president of the teacher's federation, and he was one of the first communists in Australia, that's how long he was in the teacher's federation. People weren't aware of this, I wasn't, 'til I saw what was going on. And other things of certain methods, things we did and I don't talk about them, I took an oath that I wouldn't, and I won't. A lot of things

28:30 we did, the intelligence organisation did, talking particularly in the east when I went Malaya, Indochina and these things, were things that were done, were absolutely unethical, absolutely, but had to be done. And that's...

So did you, in the air force, as an intelligence officer in the air force, how did your job change, and did you do things like take photographs of countries, or how was the intelligence information bought back?

Through certain means we had of doing

29:00 it.

Photographing, or...?

Yes, and verbal. Photograph, verbal and messages that were coded messages, and that's how we existed. And as far as we were concerned, I remember having to brief intelligence, I'm talking of, brief the Prime Minister. An army bloke and I did in Malaya, Mr Menzies,

29:30 and yeah would be informing Australia of the outbreak of the Korean War, certain information that we gathered, and that sort of thing. We also worked strongly on subduing the mongrel communist mob that were trying to take over Malaya and the British forces eventually beat them. We

30:00 had oh, in that eastern area, Tamils and strange people from the India area and all that, had to keep an eye on them. And luckily, through some information that we got, the British and us got, British intel and our intel, we were able to save a lot of things, through certain means.

Great.

You see...

How did Mr Menzies react when you first met him and what was involved in

30:30 **that meeting, that briefing?**

Oh he was an outstanding individual and listened to everything you said too, didn't interfere, and thanked you for everything or anything we had. And his brilliance in talking to a king or a beggar, I always remember, he was up there on this occasion and held, stood the squadron down at Tanga, and they all had to go to the airmen's mess where he turned on

31:00 free beer for them. And I remember another fellow and I were near him when he said to one of the airmen, "Oh, how are you?" And this young fella says, "Oh good sir, good." He said, "You were a school teacher weren't you?" And this young bloke said, "Not me sir." So Bob says, "What did you do?" He said, "I was a cane farmer." He said, "Well they go hand in glove don't they?" This sort of... and the young fella collapsed with laughter. And

31:30 every bloke he spoke to and that, he had this attitude. And he quoted something that we were amazed at, we were having trouble with the arming veins on a thousand pound bombs, and I had been, in my statements, intel that was delivered to Melbourne, this was mentioned. But anyhow, when he came, old Bob, he mentioned, said, "How are you getting on with this business about...?" And this other army bloke and

32:00 I said, "How the bloody hell do you know about it?" He said, "It's politics," he said, "I was being briefed by the chief of the defence department and he mentioned this, he read a letter that you'd written and he said, your name was mentioned." So I thought to myself, "Now I'll remember that." And when I say it to these fellas they'll think, 'By Christ, what else does he know?' And he said, "I don't know what I'm talking about, what was it?" But anyway he

32:30 shook us when he said it, and, "This is politics," and he was quite right. But now the Australian Government at the time, we had them to thinking very deeply in our problems of communism, and likewise we were, I had a great talk one night with Sir Anthony Eden, the Prime Minister of England prior to the Suez business, and amazing what you learn, absolutely.

33:00 **And what do you remember about him?**

Oh a very, very clever bloke, yes. I was absolutely amazed at some of the things he told me, which I thought, such things as you might call political and social bribery. Where, he told me the number of cars that the British Government, Rolls Royce's they gave per year, I'm talking up in terms of twenty or

thirty, Rolls Royce's, new ones each year, to Sheikhs

33:30 in Arabia and places, keeping them on-side. And some of the thing he told, you know, and I said to him at the time, "God," you know, "You shouldn't be telling me that." He said, "Oh, don't worry about it," sort of thing. And well to me, I wouldn't have told anyone, and other things of that nature he told me, very, very... but nevertheless, that's diplomacy.

So what sort of information did you have to talk to him about then?

Well we talked, were discussing the problems of communism, in a big way.

34:00 The...

But from an air force point of view, what would, how can you help him, or help the situation?

Well we, well on the types of, where should we base heavy bombers, fighters and what have you. Cause see this is, we would, India at the time or Pakistan didn't have any fighter aircraft of any... so you'd concentrate more on medium to heavy range aircraft which we were ready... the advice would go to government to do this, so that's what you discussed.

34:30 And in intelligence of course, one of the deepest discussions is always on politics, on the political factor, because that's where the... well see what happened to Russia when communism collapsed, right, crashed to... right? Didn't matter what sort of an army you had, they crashed, and the important things of politics, the way its intelligence is a part of politics,

35:00 how you govern your country, you've got to, there's no doubt. And the diplomacy, when you had a person like Paul Keating [Prime Minister of Australia], he had about as much tact as a kick in the shins when it come to diplomacy. They're still talking about the way he insulted the Muslims in Malaya wasn't it, and I think in Indonesia, through lack of, well, diplomacy. And you've got, and in a high percentage of these positions they have to lean

35:30 politically in directions they don't like, but they got to. And this is one of the things in war time that you can support what you're thinking with bombardment, but you can't in peace time, it becomes a difficult problem.

So when you went to Menzies, you were working with the army to get information?

No no, we had, well I was working with army because we had, on our base in Malaya was an army unit, British Army unit, of course they had their

36:00 intelligence as well, we worked in together. And things that came against, people sort of can't see how your determination and frustrations, if you don't control them, you can bring to bear in a bad way. One incident in a rubber plantation, owned by Dunlop Malaya, there was a husband and wife with a three year old little girl. And they went

36:30 off shopping in a car one day anyhow to a local village which was about eight miles away. I don't know whether they went to KL, Kuala Lumpur, no I think they went to Kuala Lumpur. Anyhow while they're away, these mongrels got into the plantation and shot the guards that they had over them. And we had, I was at the Royal Marines at the time, we got in there later and they had, I, by,

37:00 people gave us evidence of these, two of these Muslim took the little girl, three year old girl and they pulled her hands out, arms out like that, and her feet come off the ground and the other one blew her head off with a double barrel shotgun, and they laughed their heads off about it. And because they are of this... didn't worry them in the least, that type of thing they did. And killed about six other guards.

37:30 And we were, luckily we got the Gurkhas [regiment of Nepalese fighting under the British Army] in, a Gurkha mob from KL [Kuala Lumpur], they came in and followed these bunch, there was about, I think there was about twenty-eight of them, through the jungle for four days and they eventually caught up and killed them. But now that killing the kid and laughing, is just the standard of this type of person. Now if you're in, you're going to talk to a country

38:00 with those of people in it, you've got to use a lot of diplomacy, a lot of diplomacy must be used. And I think our present minister for external affairs, has got the ability to do it, I really do, I think he's...

So how did you find out about Korea breaking out?

How we found out, from information coming in from China. The Chinese were down in south of China, were getting their forces together to move up to the Korean border. We found

38:30 that out.

So did you hear that directly from Chinese...?

Yeah some, we got the information through the underground movement that passed the information on. We...

And then you passed that on to Menzies?

Yeah, we immediately get it through to Melbourne as quickly as a flash. And the, all sorts of things like that come in. Now the first issues, the problems in Indochina that I had anything to do with was when the French owned Indochina,

39:00 and they had that, massive problems they had, and the rot was setting in. We had information during the war, that came from during the war, of a lot of our information was being given by Burma to the opposition. See, did you remember, you probably wouldn't remember, they built a massive road from China through Burma, the allied forces did, most incredible act, by hand with something like three million Chinese involved in it.

39:30 And you know now how Burma went since the war, at the moment even, they're still the same. Well they were a treacherous mob of people, there's no doubt about them. So all these things were filtered through. The Americans gave a lot of very good information and, well, that was just life. That was part of the armed forces then, now the government and, allows people to print this stuff.

40:00 You shouldn't. It should be kept to that organisation. And, well Hitler's mob, they were smart, my word they were, under [Heinrich] Himmler, I think he was the basic one, we learned a lot from these things. But the old, the RAAF and that, when peace time, I must mention the air force too in the latter parts, when I was on the transport squadrons...

I might hold you there.

Tape 7

00:31 particularly in floods. When we were going, they were going to Malaya with the, to Changi with the, I think it was 38 Squadron, we had to turn half the squadron back to Sydney, again to take place in flood rescues on the Darling River between Goondiwindi and Adelaide basically. Now that was floods. I remember when I was on Catalinas, the enormous floods I've never seen the like of since, around

01:00 the Hunter area, but in the Grafton, Kempsey and that, unbelievable the floods, the levels they reached, through just torrential rains in those areas. And then damages, and we were, we'd be out for eight, nine hours a day in the Catalinas dropping life saving gear to people stranded on roofs of houses. And most extraordinary, and it sort of went away, that change in climate has gone.

01:30 And see, showing where bush fires were in those days, of course we didn't have the fire fighting equipment of today but the floods were unbelievable, to see them. And the Hunter Valley were, during the war, copped it very, very badly. And I always remember the Hunter Valley because there was a coal strike during the war, I think it was, yeah, in the Hunter Valley,

02:00 the union went on strike because a pit pony had a bad breath. They used ponies for towing the underground... yeah, he had a bad breath. Yeah, good excuse, but they went on strike, yeah.

So what was your involvement with the bush fires?

Only purely observing where they were, that's all you could do in those days. The flood was different because we were dropping masses, hundreds of tons of hay to stranded animals, cattle and horses, particularly in the Richmond area up here round Evans

02:30 Head. And to uplifting passengers, for God sake, from Lismore to Brisbane, the trains were cut off, and taking full aircraft loads of people all up and down to get them out of the way, and it was just unbelievable. There's been quite a bit of flood mitigation gone on such as putting in weirs here and there, sort of thing, but the air force, oh boy did we do some work on that. And it showed, it

03:00 really showed the full value of the aircraft in emergency. And one fellow who was involved in that, he's now retired, but his son's a minister in the federal government, is, was Doug Anthony. His son is now one of the ministers, the minister for... oh I forget, one of the things, any, young. And funny thing, him and my, our son and Joan and I went to Lord Howe Island, we went on a holiday, and who should

03:30 be in the next unit to us but Doug Anthony's kids, they were grown up, sort of thing. But no, they saw the value of the aeroplane strongly, and then slowly came in the helicopter since, which has given the full value of what aviation can do to the safety of Australia, sort of thing. And particularly in far flung areas, look at the flying doctor service, right, that sort of thing.

So you had the opportunity

04:00 **to fly several different types of aircraft in that time?**

Oh yeah.

What was the aircraft that you enjoyed the most?

Well I felt the, one thing I felt the Mustang was a beautiful aircraft to fly and also Canberra, and I enjoyed Vampires, the jet aircraft, I thought they were beautiful to fly. Spitfires, during the war years,

yes, and I did a flying instructor, gunnery instructor's course on Spitfires

04:30 down at Cressy in Victoria. No, the Spit. was a beautiful aircraft to fly but always short of fuel, they didn't have the fuel on board. We lost, thirteen Spitfires ran out of fuel in a dog fight in Darwin during the war. How about that?

Were you near there when that happened?

I wasn't there when it happened, I was at Gove, I think, when that happened, or somewhere. Yeah, a dreadful thing to have happen. And yeah, short of fuel in long distance operations see, that's the trouble.

05:00 But beyond that I thoroughly enjoyed my life in the air force, wonderful comradeship that's lasted all my life.

What was it about the Mustangs that you liked so much?

Why did I? Well they were, had on a big, held a large quantity of fuel, they were fast, beautifully manoeuvrable and could get great altitudes too, they were very, very good. In

05:30 Korea they proved themselves before they got the Meteors there, you know, they did a good job in Korea, there's no doubt about that.

When were you flying the Mustangs?

I was flying them in, after the war with, at Williamtown, 75 Squadron, where I had the great pleasure of meeting Prince Philip [Duke of Edinburgh], yeah.

What what were the circumstances of that?

Oh he came out, he and the Queen were out here, the Queen and he was. And

06:00 he, he's a real ex-serviceman, and he liked, apparently he's, he had something to do with the RAF [Royal Air Force] in England and he wanted to go and meet the boys of 75 Squadron, and I happened to belong to 75. He was so different than what I think most of us expected. He again, talks just like a, well, in those circumstances, just like an ordinary ex-service bloke you'd

06:30 talk to, you know, mate of yours. He was really good, there's no doubt about it. And yeah, Prince Phil.

What were you doing when you met him?

We were invited to be there on a Saturday and he was coming to meet us, so we all turned up there, at Williamtown. And then what the devil else I, what the, I did afterwards at 75, I forget now. But anyhow I then decided,

07:00 oh I went to ARDU, I became an ARDU, aircraft research and development unit. The OC [Officer in Command] at Richmond, as I say, on that wonderful experience of rain making and cloud physics and that sort of thing, where you did the actual flying for the CSIRO, the radio physics division of Sydney University. And in charge of it was a Doctor Bowen, who's one of the first, more or less, inventors

07:30 of radar during the war years, and he was a brilliant meteorologist as well. And it shows the value we considered in Australia but when he turned sixty-five, because he was a government employee, he had to stand down, right. The United Nations immediately took him to head quarters where he directed rain making in Israel, we were

08:00 tied up with rain making in Chile, and they unfortunately had to get out because of the political situation existing in Chile after it started. And Chile's one of the driest countries in the world because of the steepness of the Andes Mountains and we had to, we're on the plan of reducing, oh not re, yes, reducing the snow level by allowing the snow to set at lower levels on the mountains, so as

08:30 it would run into rivers and give 'em rain, which it doesn't.

Did you travel over there at all?

No, I didn't I was just about to go when this political business that happened. And we did send a, I didn't go because I had to go to Darwin or something on one... when we sent aircraft to Hawaii where to demonstrate rain making and cloud physics and what have you, which has gone. We, CSIRO sent people to Florida

09:00 to start the initial interview into the formation of tornadoes, right. And the means of controlling, the thought of in those days was to cripple the cyclones, because they spin off the edge of cyclones. And then it was come to the conclusion, I think, rightly so, leave nature alone, because the cyclones were actually giving rain to America, and so they stopped. And I can't understand

09:30 why they don't fire eight hundred thousand pound rockets into these tornadoes where they reach the cloud, and cut them off. Amazing and that was the thinking of some of our fellas at the time. And I've experienced water spouts, went out looking for one of a CSIRO aircraft, it had air force flying it. And a WAAAF,

10:00 her first ride in an aeroplane, they disappeared off Wollongong, east of Wollongong one day, hadn't reported, and I was on stand by at Richmond for air sea rescue. I was called to go out on this so we went, we thought, 'We'll just start out here and the buggers'll turn up.' And after we'd done a big search, I said to the navigator and the signaller with me, it was in a DC-3, a C-47, "Go down the back and

10:30 tell the head quarters that we're going to do a creeping line ahead search on the inbound track of these people." And these two'd just gone down and sat down at the nav [navigation] table, what have you, when it was raining, and we were heading North West into Sydney. And the sun, beam of sunlight came through the clouds onto the water about half a mile away, straight on top of oil, and I immediately turned round and there were the life jackets and that floating in the water. That's

11:00 where it was. You wouldn't believe it, out of the, but once again about having your beads in your pockets, see. But the point... such a coincidence to have this happen, that was where it went in. And anyhow we flew round there for about, oh, seven hours I think it was, got, before they got crash boats out and what have you. And during that time water spouts set in, they were going into cloud at about eight hundred feet, I flew round one the wing tip just off it, it was oh, three hundred

11:30 feet across, easily and almost solid water into the cloud. Imagine the force lifting that amount of water into a cloud. Going in, naturally, being in the southern hemisphere, which way would it be turning. Do you know?

You tell us.

Well it has to be turning clockwise. If it's in the northern hemisphere it's got to be turning anti clockwise. Now some fella up there who organises this, I don't know who it is, but nevertheless....

12:00 And I flew in, and I've never ever seen a thing like it. We had a feeling that these people may have been descending through cloud when they hit it, that's what we... Only we've had a couple of parts that was in four hundred and fifty feet of water, brought up by fishing trawlers, brought a couple of pieces up as though, well, the aircraft exploded in flight, sort of thing. And I took over, the boss was, of ARDU

12:30 was flying it and they posted me then to be the CO of the mob.

So the WAAAF and all the...

Yeah, she was in it, yeah.

crew were, they were all gone?

All gone, two scientists, two pilots, a navigator, signaller and the girl passenger, she, that was the ones that went in. Such a sad loss because they had equipment on the aircraft and in the aircraft that we required for scientific development again, we had to rebuild them.

13:00 But nevertheless the experience was extraordinary about this water spouts, Oh my God, there's no doubt about it. And then I went, in ARDU we did aircraft testing and that in Melbourne, where the main, the head quarters was. They did mainly aircraft testing. Had an incident at the time I was there, a Lincoln coming in to land at Amberley put down

13:30 full flap, and when he put down full flap, the nose of the aircraft went straight up like that and it rolled over and went straight into the middle of the runway and killed everyone on board. I think there were ten people in that thing. And that's the sort of thing they investigated and found out why it happened and all that sort of thing, down there in Melbourne, where we did the scientific development up there in Sydney.

Did you see that happen, that accident?

No I didn't see that one but we, the boss, we found

14:00 out what it was. They put very heavy engine parts, well the engine blocks in the back door of this Lincoln when it was taxiing out, they told them to hold. And the centre of gravity was out so badly that the moment he put the flaps down, the lift became excessive cause the tail went down and they couldn't, no matter what they did with the controls they couldn't stop it, and it went straight in. It was a terrible thing.

So Ron, can you tell us a bit about the lead up to going to

14:30 **Malaya?**

Well the lead up was, if I remember rightly, I was suppose, that's right, I was supposed to go to Malaya on transports with 38 Squadron. And apparently, for some reason, Melbourne found out they didn't have any, at the time, intelligence officers in. And because I'd been involved in this type of area they immediately grabbed me and (kent...UNCLEAR) and I was disappointed when they wouldn't let me go in the

15:00 DC-3s, because we were going to do supply dropping and what have you. And I was dragged out and sent to Malaya, and otherwise.

So can you tell us about first arriving there and what your impressions were in Malaya?

On arriving, well I first of all went to Changi where we saw the POW camp. And the way things operated was so different to ours. In Malaya, at the time,

15:30 the RAF used, had, you didn't operate after four o'clock in the afternoon, up 'til four o'clock and then everything was finished, you had a meal at four o'clock and the day was finished. And the very prominent statement was, 'Mad dogs and Englishmen are the only ones go out in the noon day sun.' That aptitude was, they hated the sun. To us it was staggering, you know, after seeing what we

16:00 do in Australia, that were, became very marked. And we also were very impressed at the, their messes and that, that were all pre war, follow, when they were built for servants and all this, we were quite taken. And then I got, had to go over to Tanga, which was on the western side, where we had, well the old pre war mess and thing, quarters, and being modernised

16:30 up the present day. And when we got over there to Tanga, well we had, one, two, we had four different types of aircraft in squadrons, RAF, based there as well of course, which was quite different. And the bombing was being carried out just across the straits in Malaya, see. And we settled in and then got to learn that Kuala Lumpur was the, KL was the

17:00 capital of Malaysia and how it was going ahead, and it lived off tin, the biggest tin mines in the world were there. Those sort of things, we were quite taken. Course the rubber plantations were staggering, how they, on Singapore and that, to see the way they put the half coconut sort of thing and, or little can, about half, a litre in size or a bit less, half a litre or more, and how that filled up every night, filled up with

17:30 latex . And the way Singapore was governed, extreme money and those sort of things started to settle in on us. Until later on when I was in Singapore there were, in Malaya, we had riots in Singapore, over gross, once again, political and diplomatic management, gross mismanagement.

18:00 There was a little girl, was born to a Dutch couple in, just before she was a year old or just, no wasn't a year old, I think she was nine months old, when the Japanese took over Sumatra. And this child was picked up by the, well, by the nanny, her parents were both POWs. And the nanny kept the child and raised it

18:30 as her own child and because she was so attached to it, when the war ended she disappeared with the child. And by a fluke, these people found out where the child was and the government immediately handed the child back to the parents and which, though, because British law ruled then. And then of all things, during the proceedings of the court case over, very leading court case, they put the child for a night into the

19:00 local convent in Singapore, to be cared for, and the bloody adopted mother was a Muslim. You can imagine what was said. And consequent to this, the Muslims versed the Christians in Singapore and even the police, all the Muslim police, refused to do any duty. And they killed people right, left and centre, luckily not the child or the parents or anything like that. But we had terrible trouble,

19:30 we didn't get in to Singapore because of the danger. An RAF [Royal Air Force] crew went to pick up an aircraft that was at Singapore and they were done over, in Singapore main civil aerodrome. And that night they were forced to bring the Gurkhas in, and the Gurkhas lined up in a big, open street area we had there, and with all the Muslims in front of them, not you know, a thousand of them. And they, the Gurkha chief called them to

20:00 put down their arms and things like this and they refused to, and started to advance. And the Gurkhas opened fire and only killed Chinese, the only people that were killed were Chinese. They, and that stopped them and the whole thing folded up, but that was the danger then, we knew of the Muslim. See by, they should've used their brains and not done such a thing but there you are and that was, we saw a touch of the seriousness, of the Muslim versus the Christian.

20:30 And as far as we knew this in intel but the locals weren't aware really of it. So that's what we saw there. And then, generally speaking, with the break up of India and all these, see they split up the Buddhist and the Muslim and formed Bangladesh and all these things. We had the fold up of the tea unit of the world, that was Ceylon, went from

21:00 British. And I went over to Colombo and saw it and oh, they were in absolute, didn't have a clue what to do, the locals. And the beautiful plantations that employed say, fifty or a hundred, they didn't have anyone employed or anything, and so Ceylon generally collapsed. But they, I was surprised how they were still remaining, a hell of a lot of them, loyal

21:30 to the British Crown, they had that attitude, where in India and that they didn't have it.

Did you go there as part of your work?

Yeah, as part of the work, yeah.

Was that part of the intelligence work?

Well I went yeah, so I went as a crew member to, in a Lincoln, we went across, I forget what reason it

was. And then we had going on, of course were, I always remember going into Jakarta as, which was Surabaya then, and we had, the aircraft

22:00 broke down, it was a Dakota, something went wrong, we had to spend the night there. And in the morning we were astounded to hear the people, thousands in the street, screaming, 'boong Sukarno,' see, and thought, 'God, there's gonna be trouble here.' 'Boong, boong Sukarno.' And I learned shortly afterwards that in bizarre Malay, that's the chief Malay that's spoken right through the... boong means big brother. And so that's what

22:30 we, that was Sukarno. And we could see the rot setting in, in those areas then, intel-wise the, how they were losing, when they lost the Dutch management, they were losing, they didn't have anyone to manage. Like New Guinea happened when they stupidly owed independence to New Guinea. And look at it now they think, I, other day I heard that they think there's gonna be a collapse in

23:00 New Guinea. I have, I hear a lot about it because I got a cousin who's a missionary, he's been there fifty-odd years. And I remember asking him what he thought about them getting independence and he said, "About sixteen generations before they should get it cause they haven't got any intelligent persons in the country to run it." Sukarto and those, those mob, yes,

23:30 but no-one else, he's being quite right. And these things are verging on Australia's, why we need intelligence desperately, and keep it to ourselves, look at the immigrant business that happened. And of all stupid God damn things is to allow civilians to do surveillance. Now when you got a service man to do surveillance, you've got discipline, which is forced on him, made

24:00 him, and he follows it, and you've got a very high standard of keeping things to yourself, alright? Confidentiality, if requested to any member of the services, they will exercise ninety percent of it, and some a hundred and twenty percent, but we'll say the ninety percent. And yet Australia allows our country, the surveillance, to be carried out by civilians. And

24:30 to me, to an ex service person, that's wrong. I hate saying this but some of the things I've seen, in civil and that, it's back into the requirement for intelligence, the requirement for intelligence.

So Ron, can you tell us a little bit more about your role in the Malayan conflict in Malaya, and the work you were doing?

Well I was intelligence and I also flew with, in the Lincoln crews, and I also

25:00 did some, went up into Malaya and joined some of the British forces, see the British had a hell of a lot of forces in Malaya, on the ground as well as the RAF. But so I went up there, I went with the Green Howards, they were a British regiment who were operating south of Malaya. They were unique, the Green Howards, in as much as they were then, they wore a badge on the front of their cap and on the back of their cap.

25:30 The reason being they fought a wonderful retreat, way back I history, and one of the Queens granted them to wear the other. And they had also, they wore three black stripes, two short and one long, on the back of their neck of their shirt because history was that the King or someone in,

26:00 inspected them in, back in the end of the 17s or 1800s, in the 1800s they were going to Africa for some reason, the regiment. And some, the King picked up a couple of blokes for having, not having a hair cut and they will wear pig tails for the rest of their life. On their mess dresses and everything, they wear them, these, so history, that was behind... Now I spent time with them going out in the jungle and seeing...

So you went out, into the jungles with them?

Yeah, oh

26:30 yes. And then we went north to the royal marines, the 42nd Royal Marines, they were based in Eepo which is in the top end up near Burma. And went out with them on patrols and oh God, in the jungle in, getting through water up to our arm pits and leeches, God, you got no idea. And the, luckily we were

27:00 carrying the Australian Owen machine gun, it was the only gun that is that you can hold it down under water and shoot with it. It's a most extraordinary, it was built during the war and most countries in the world use it, the Owen, and it carries light ammunition. And so, see the big thing if you went out for three days to carry ammunition and your tucker [food], you'd have to give one of them away to survive.

27:30 So this is why the smaller ammunition, where you can carry a whole heap of it. But nowadays I see they've even got guns'll fire at sixteen thousand rounds a minute. How the hell are you gonna carry ammunition to feed those guns, you know what I mean? You'd be out for half an hour and back home again. So we carried the Owen and our kits, sort of thing. The leading British fellow who led the mob,

28:00 he carried a shot gun, ordinary shot gun, and instead of having your shot, which is little tiny micro stuff you carry, you know, and it goes, 'whoof,' for shooting ducks and things, he had ball bearings, six ball bearings in every cartridge. And when he fired, it cut the jungle down as it went, you know what I mean? And he shot six or eight opposition blokes with it at the same time.

28:30 He was a very smart character, no doubt about him, he was a Pommie of course. But they were the royal marines and we learned a lot with them.

So while you were with them on patrols did you have contacts with the terrorists?

They had it if we wanted it, they carried the radios. I didn't.

But did you have contact, any contact with the terrorists?

Oh yes, yes, there were terrorists in the areas. But in that jungle warfare, see you can only see about,

29:00 well you're lucky to see me to the front door. And one thing that we were feared of, briefed by them on, was the fact that, two things you had to watch. One was tigers, you're liable to step on them but they, if you kept away from bamboo and that, you were fairly clear of tigers, they lived in the bamboo as much as possible, cause there's stripes on them, the tigers. But monkeys,

29:30 you'd be on, we were laying down in a ambush area, and in the trees were oh, about eighty, a hundred feet high, all through jungle. All of a sudden appears a flock of monkeys through the top, going like hell, and they all stopped and started screaming and pointing down at... we had to get up and go. And this is how the marines were saying they give you away, but by the same token they belted a lot of, stumped the opposition by the monkeys giving them away,

30:00 the monkeys screaming. So they'd go like yell over to where they are and sure enough, here were the other fellows, so shot at them from there. But the monkeys were the one to give you away. And the speed they travel through the top of the jungle, these fellas, Malayan something gibbons I think they call them. So see the animals there and...

So did you come across any terrorists?

We, I didn't but the mob separated from us, they did. And

30:30 they were getting away or... of course they did all their brutality and that through sneaking in on people, you know, catching them unawares, that's what they're like. And we, the service eventually closed down villages at night, curfewed them, and that stopped them feeding these people and things like that. But oh they were a rotten bloody mob, there's no doubt about them.

How long were the patrols that you went

31:00 **on?**

They went out for about forty-eight hours maximums, because carrying ammunition and food was the thing, particularly the ammunition. You could run out of ammunition because these rapid fire modern weaponry, rapid fire.

And can you describe the conditions in the jungle for us?

Yes, it was wet of course, intensive trees, masses of trees, and inter-coupled

31:30 with extraordinarily strong creeper systems. You know, that thick and terrible hard to break or, and growing to the top of the trees. And the low level stuff was quite dense too, fed with the torrential rains of course. And everything you, in that area of course, you've just got to live with water and that's it, and

32:00 that's how it... A lot of the, like the rubber plantations too, they were areas you had to watch for the opposition because of the ability to cross through under the rubber trees for miles, you know. And our blokes did the same thing of course, but you kept a bright eye out.

As a pilot who normally, you know, performed operations from the air, how did you like being on the ground in that sort of situation?

Oh

32:30 well we were , our concentration... but they never, the bombing concentrations were operations after say, three or four or a week's scrutiny of their, the required method, and we had to bomb, whereas the others called in support rapidly. Because they had big aerodromes at Eepo area, Butterworth which is now Australian basically, well Tanga shifted up to Butterworth, then they could call them in rapidly for

33:00 support in that regard. Likewise they could call in supply dropping too, as quick as a flash. But I went out and did some operations with the Pommies in Brigand aircraft, twin engined aircraft that carried, we carried two thousand pounder bombs I think it was, all external, and did dive bombing on what I mentioned. And they were called to hit these areas by lat [latitude] and long [longitude], and on the map a reference, and we dive bombed

33:30 those one and only situations. Where the heavy bombers like eight Lincolns dropping one fourteen one thousand pound each, you could hit an area as big as the heart of Brisbane, you could imagine what it could do to it. So we learned that they may be having a camp there, see, way deep in the jungle where no people would see them, so you'd then go and flatten them sort of thing, like that. And where had a lot of problems developed

34:00 in our bombing and gunneries in Malaya, in as much as pieces of shrapnel and that remaining in trees, you can imagine with the crashing. And people being killed sawing the timber afterwards, the blade of the saw hitting the piece of shrapnel, and two years afterwards, you know what I mean? And that caused some concern. And we also, instead of having our armament,

34:30 you've seen the nose of a bomb with the spinner on it, when that spins off the bomb is armed on the way down, right. We were, first of all started with bombing on an earth contact, then we got a, the one I was talking about, ammunition about doc, ah, Bob Menzies, about the one he spoke about. We got one that armed in the nose of the aircraft that would explode at, I think it was, oh it could be two metres, a metre and a half above

35:00 the ground I think it was. And you can imagine a thousand pound exploding with metal, and what it did, chopped the country down, you know, from every one of them. No, they were dangerous, they are dangerous to the poor fellows with the trees, but it couldn't be helped and that was it. No, they went back to cutting timber, what they used to do, they'd have a big pit with the log laying across it and they've a bloke in the bottom on one end of a cross cut saw and one at the top and they saw it by hand.

35:30 And...

So when you were dropping those bombs, what was that sensation like?

Well if you dropped the lot, at one drop, the aircraft went straight up in the air, it was fourteen thousand pound, and that's a... But if they were dropped in a row, like most of it was directed, I, we, well you knew they were dropping, that was it. Then the Lincolns would go down and strafe with the gun turrets at tree level too as well, so anyone that was in there

36:00 copped it in a big way.

So you were piloting the Lincolns?

No I, when I was in (aown...UNCLEAR), DI, I was an intel bloke, I went...

You were intel with the Lincolns?

with them to go and see what went on.

Right. So what would you see if you were in the air when the Lincoln was dropping those bombs?

Well we were dropping them from about, if I remember rightly, eight thousand, around the eight thousand feet mark, I think it was. So you could see all the countryside with, the countryside being solid trees in the jungle see, solid trees.

36:30 And you could actually see the rubber plantations because the different colour of the rubber trees in there.

And when you dropped a bomb, what would you see?

Just this enormous, 'whoof,' of huge explosion each one made as it hit the ground. And if you dropped 'em at once, they all exploded at once, and put eight aircraft in together and drop them, dear oh dear, it used to tear the hell out of the place, yeah.

And what would be the aftermath?

Well the aftermath, it'd all fall down and

37:00 die, the trees'd all die of the hot weather, whatever it was. Then wouldn't be, I would imagine, they reckon, within six to nine months it'd grow up again, be coming up again.

So what would it look like afterwards?

Oh chaos of holes in the ground, you know, and dirt and trees massed and what have you. But mainly that was done in the south of the Malayan peninsula and up as far as KL, Kuala Lumpur area. And the, we also did a

37:30 great heap of hitting in the corner of where Malaya joins Burma, because actual, the communists were working their way down through there and under strong Soviet sponsorship too they were, those people coming in there. And over on the east coast, that was on the west coast, it's on an angle, over on the east coast is at Kota Bharu. Well there was a lot of plantations built there so

38:00 you didn't go around bombing them, not for the sake of the people that owned them. But we, it was very political, and we reckoned, we used to call them, what are the opposition now called, Doctor Evert's friends, that's right, Doctor Evert was our deputy prime minister at the time. And course he reckoned we were doing the wrong thing defying them, and he was an idiot anyhow that... he died of brain haemorrhages and

38:30 he was an odd bod, there's no doubt about him. And he supported them, silly bugger.

What was your view at the time about the need for Australia to be there?

Yes well mine was purely for the defence of Australia, to stop and... We spoke, and I still say, when we, well Gough Whitlam did it, when we took, gave Timor to the East Indians and we were

39:00 in New Guinea, and we were in Singapore we were cutting the tentacles off the communist octopus. Right, now we knew perfectly well, or we felt that Whitlam should never have granted Timor to the Indonesians but he was perfectly right on the grounds of, 'It had to be done,' to cut the tentacle off the octopus. And every... Indochina, in the Vietnam War was cutting the tentacle off the octopus.

39:30 They came down the, when Timor was handed over, not the current time, back when Whitlam did it, there was a political body by name, and they were the communists. And same as Jakarta was getting damn close to getting caught, Malaya was coming down, we were on to that one. And wherever you looked the communist octopus was moving, moving and moving, and Russia

40:00 was, of course, the one behind them.

So just a question about when you were in the Lincolns and serving the, dropping the bombs, did you have any thoughts or considerations for the people below?

No, basically only that I hope we kill the buggers and that was all. And no, no consideration whatever. That has been bred of latter years, that attitude too, as you can see,

40:30 well our case is a bit, but see how the criticism of Tony Blair [Prime Minister of England] about killing Muslims in... can't you? Now go back to the days of Churchill and that, and you wouldn't, the people wouldn't think in that manner. You're there, there's no second prize for war, you can win the peace, ah, win the war and lose the peace too, which we know a lot about don't we, in the world. So, no, consideration for

41:00 persons was not, it wasn't there no, we were there to... Well why you think the ex-serviceman talks about slope heads [Asians], you've heard that expression haven't you? And that is, there's still the bitterness against the Japanese and Chinese, slope heads, and I think it's a very good expression. I'm racist, that's what I am, yeah, and I'm proud of it.

41:30 **Well that's a good point...**

Tape 8

00:33 I was proud to be a member of them but no I can think...

So you don't want to tell us about any of your working...?

No, no, not certain things that we did, no. No, no, no.

We're rolling now so if there's anything you want to say about that?

No, I'm for this sticking to my country and I'll stick to it. Where I get so infuriated by certain things that are said by certain people, it's absolutely uncalled for. That, you just...

01:00 **Yeah, I guess with this archive, we're trying to get historical events that happened.**

Yes, history, I appreciate, but can't you get history of someone who wouldn't tell you. Do get me?

Well we can't get history from people that won't tell us.

No, so I, what I've said is what I was involved in. And the, today's world, as I say, it absolutely infuriates me that there should be knowledge kept, not given to anyone until, I'd put an

01:30 embargo of one hundred years from when it was done. Such as...

Can we just stop? That's alright. So what happened for you after you left the air force?

I joined civil aviation, Butler Air Transport, which was a wonderful airline in New South Wales, and we unfortunately were taken over by Ansett later, because our shareholders, leading shareholders was ANA, Australian National Airways, who were the original

02:00 interstate airlines of Australia, they sold their shares immediately to Butler, to Ansett. And Butlers was a financially wonderful airline and we were giving services to, in fact every town in New South Wales, with modern aircraft, Viscounts and all this sort of thing. And then Ansett took over and they changed the name to Airlines of New South Wales, went onto Fokker Friendships [type of aircraft] and things.

02:30 Before Ansett folded up, the only way you got from Bourke to Sydney was by Tiger Moth, if you ever got there, type... Went completely down the drain.

Did you miss the air force?

Yes I did, after I left it, I missed it. I was single though and I had slight social problems in my mother

and father were getting awfully old, and so I built a home for them in Sydney, when I lived with them, and

03:00 'til they died sort of thing. And then I married a girl who lived up the street, happened to be my wife now and she, but I met her first as a hostess in Butlers as well. And the, I enjoyed the civil flying, I wasn't into it so terribly long, when I had a, involved in a shocking accident at Bourke. One day we took off, I was first officer with a mate of mine, who was an air force mate of mine, Wally Ives, and had a motor

03:30 failure in take off, it's mid, just before Christmas, hot as all hell, as you, the expression is. And we only went about, got about three hundred feet and the aircraft wouldn't fly, and we went, had to land straight ahead and we hit into trees, straight into scrub. We hit a tree and the aircraft caught on fire, and we went, we then hit the ground with the wheels up and skid, with logs going over the top of the cockpit, and we hit another tree that turned us

04:00 round and went back the other way. And I was first out, the aircraft was on fire, and I got to the back door and tore it open and the hostess put a hat on, a cap on, got up and said to me, "What seems to be the trouble?" Poor girl. She said she didn't say it, it came out. And the people, we had fourteen passengers I think it was, and I'm saying, "Out! Out!" And no, wouldn't make a move. And a thought come to my mind that I was, we learned in the air force,

04:30 was, under circumstances of this nature, use the most foul language you could, and the average person would be so shocked that they'd snap. So I used the foulest language I could think of... immediate reaction.

What did you say? You can tell us, we've heard the foulest language around.

I couldn't, no, no, no. "Out of the," you know, "get out you f-ing so-and-sos," and at the top, screamed it repeatedly at them, and they immediately jumped out. Prior to this...

05:00 and the fire is in the cabin, and they're sitting there in a stupor. And the poor girl, got her out, and we survived with, all I did was broke a tooth off in front, and all that was left of the aircraft was the toilet and tail plane, was the only thing left. And I always remember, the things people do. When this was on fire, the aircraft burning and the passengers were, and us were all in a bunch away

05:30 over from it, a fella appeared in his underpants and singlet, with a briefcase, and said, "What?" And he was a doctor who, the ambulance took to the wrong side of the river, and they could see it across, there was bends in the river like this, see, and they could see the aircraft on fire. And he whipped his clothes off, swam the river with his case, came over, I thought was... We recommended him for an award, never got anything, recommended at state level for

06:00 an award. And then the other thing, the first thing that appeared just before the doctor arrived, a vehicle come screaming through the scrub, it's all bush in there, broad sided up and two jokers jumped out of it. And on the side of this, it was a van, was written, 'Jesus Saves You,' and it was from a Seventh Day Adventist, just down the road. We couldn't believe what we read on it. And but anyhow we didn't get badly hurt, they flew an aircraft out from Sydney and took us home that night.

06:30 And it was just before Christmas because Joan and I were engaged, and she had a day off, she come back out of the party and everyone's waiting for us, saying, "Haven't you...?" Joan never heard. And we arrived in the aircraft, yeah, she nearly died. But in civil aviation I made some wonderful friends. And I was put on flying boats, on

07:00 Lord Howe Island and New Zealand and up at Hayman Island, it was wonderful experiences those were, the old flying boat. Cause we had two decks and the cockpit was isolated from the cabin below, you had to come up the ladders to it. But the things, corrupt things that were seen between Australia and Lord Howe and those areas,

07:30 of big expensive cruisers picking up floating objects in the water, fifty and eighty miles off Sydney. Report them to customs and you were told to mind your own business.

What's a floating, what's in a floating...?

Yeah what they do, they drop these things off the sides of ships and they have so many pounds of salt in them. And they stay down to allow the ship to get about eight kilometres away, right, then the object comes to the surface. And course you know what'd be in them.

08:00 **Drugs.**

Of course. And I knew customs blokes who almost got sacked for talking to me, and talking to us, who reported them. Now there was no surveillance between Cape York and Sydney. And if, don't tell me, right, I believe in my own heart and soul that two divisions of our Commonwealth were deeply involved in it, or else why would they be doing it and getting away with it.

08:30 Go down to the outlet at Surfers Paradise, I've been down there fishing at eleven o'clock at night and see luxury cruisers heading straight out to sea, right? And this went on so blatantly that oh, I don't know, make me sick to see it. Not so much on New Zealand, we, used to take us nine hours to get to New Zealand mind you. And the, but out in this

09:00 north, where the Chinese fishing boats come down too, and where shipping, delivering coal and bringing certain odds to the steel works at Wollongong and Newcastle, and those sort of things you learned. Also you were talking about turbulence earlier, had an incident in a flying boat, we got a message, we were coming out of Lord Howe Island, to expect turbulence and give a latitude and longitude on our flight direct to Sydney.

09:30 So we called the steward up, our steward and hostess on and said that, "Don't give anyone any meals at the moment," and it was quite calm, we were only fifteen hundred feet. And said, "Make sure they're all strapped in, and you sit, get in your seats and strap yourselves in and we'll just see what happens." So about oh, it'd be say, four or five minutes, four minutes after this, we

10:00 were suddenly swept straight up into cloud with the power hard off on the four motors, the air speed rose like mad, and we were in cloud in this and going up with fury, and suddenly we stopped, this eerie feeling. And we came down at such a rate, fell down, that the flight engineer's tool box and three meals, that was the flight engineer's meal, mine and

10:30 Wallys, on the nav table went straight through the top of the aircraft out into the Pacific, all our aerials torn off. But we stopped falling at about a hundred and fifty feet off the water, we thought we were going in. And two motors stopped, the engineer got them going, and we staggered back to Sydney, on to Sydney for another two hours. No aerials, all torn off the aircraft, turbulence. And if

11:00 it was an aircraft of lesser G [G-force] effect, strength, than the Sunderland flying boats are stretched to thirteen G, cause of deceleration on landing on the water, they would, aircraft would've disintegrated.

And you had a...?

And that's nature, nature, out of the blue. And no sign of it, no indication, just one wallop and we were gone.

You've had a few accidents in aircrafts at varying times?

Oh yes different things that happened.

How hard was it

11:30 **to then go on and fly again the next time?**

Oh it's never worried me, but other people, take as an instance that poor girl who was the hostie [air hostess], but she never flew again, and I don't blame her, she was a lovely person, beautiful girl, and that sort of thing. We had an incident coming out of Adelaide one night, a Viscount, where we lost control of it in turbulence, about twenty-three thousand feet, and we got control

12:00 at seven thousand feet. And during this period we were travelling, going down at such a rate that the fire extinguisher and our navigation bags were being held in the ceiling above our heads for the whole time too, so we were going down backwards that way. And they, that same aircraft we, about a month later, a wing fell off it over Botany Bay one night and killed all the people on board, went in,

12:30 in severe turbulence too, I must admit. So the weight, loads put on by nature, you know, they reckon they can... you might have people like Paul Keating they reckon they got a strength, but nature's strength, there's no doubt about that.

With your marriage, how did that change your life, cause you'd waited 'til you were quite a bit older than other mates?

Yeah, well

13:00 the air force stopped me from marrying. When I say, I, well there was no permanent stationary situation. And I could see by my airmen I had under me, some of the problems that were developing with their children in education, being posted from Melbourne to Sydney and up there three months and then posted back to Melbourne, you know, that sort of thing, I could see that. And it is definitely, the armed forces are definitely a single man's life, there's no second thought about it, where they did these postings

13:30 so far as I was concerned, that should be available. Now the other night, the other night they showed, you may have viewed it, of that army fella flying helicopters with both his legs chopped off, did you see that? Now whilst my sympathy goes to him and everything about it, if you're a person in the armed forces, first of all they deserve and they need a hundred percent of your efforts. And if I'm flying an aeroplane and I'm also supposed to be run

14:00 from here to the shopping centre as quickly as possible with ammunition for someone, or something, you know what I mean? And that didn't add up, that business of allowing the poor fellow to go on. I think it's wonderful to think he can go, but in the armed forces, the armed forces own you twenty-four hours a day, and they expect to get one hundred percent from you, for what they want to do with you, not what you want to do, what they want to do. And I, this is where they've, from when I was leaving I could see the rot

14:30 setting in, the acceptance of, as you say, bringing women onto the unit, and all this, was not acceptable

in my day but it started to sneak up, I could see it coming. And the world changed, hasn't it?

Did you like being married?

Do I like being married? Yes.

When it changed, it must've changed your life quite a bit from being single?

Oh yes, it did change enormously.

Was there a big adjustment for you?

Yes I would say considerable adjustment but not

15:00 really when you see other people, because I've upheld the sort of special things in life I was reared to. I've never at any time attempted to give them away, do you follow, it's, that's my standard of life. And Joan is, as I say, Jewish and they, her mother was Catholic but they upheld their Jewish religion and the fashions,

15:30 and the world used to work that way, doesn't work that way now. We've been married just on fifty years, sort of thing, but I, no I see no difficulty. I feel, I believe the female is, are ladies, today people don't but, the ladies themselves don't feel they are, but they should. And ethics, the upholding of social moral ethics is what our country needs,

16:00 in every avenue, because now we're paying for all these misdemeanours in every way you walk, everywhere you walk, aren't they? And that's my opinion, and...

So what were you most proud of in your war experience, do you think?

What was I most proud of? I think I was most proud of serving Australia, of saving Australia, and I think our mob were. And the other thing is, I think you also have to be careful

16:30 of your own physical situations. Such as don't take up excessive drinking or excessive smoking or all this sort of thing, and I think those are the very things that people are made up of. I couldn't put up... I also, since I left flying I, for an experience in life I bought a taxi in Sydney and what

17:00 an experience in life that was. The conversations, the things you see, the conversations in the back seat, people tell you things that, you say to them, "What, you didn't have to tell me that," you know, sort of thing. Unbelievable. My operation was in the days of Neville Wran, the premier. Talk about crooks. Through Randwick, Bondi, Coogee and those areas, at night,

17:30 almost murder committed, in your, in and out of your cab, but that was life. And I put down as one of the greatest experiences of my life. Unbelievable, and the survival, I was, how they discuss things, seat belts and all this, you know. I was driving in the Cross [Kings Cross] one night in traffic down a lane way lead, at the back of the Cross and

18:00 in a stream of traffic, and they stopped and I stopped in front of a lane, and I had two passengers in the back seat. And I was leaning on the door like this, thinking, and I saw a car coming on my right with its lights on. And two young, three young fellas had pushed the car to start it, up this lane way, it started and the young fella jumped in and put his foot hard on the accelerator instead of the brake and came straight in the right hand door of the taxi. I, and because I wasn't wearing a seat

18:30 belt, he hit me so hard that I went out through the left hand back door up against a paling fence, and all I got was three broken ribs, because I wasn't wearing a seat belt, get me? And I stressed this to the police when they came round, I wanted that clearly known that if I was wearing a seat belt I'd be dead, and they had to agree. Taxi drivers don't have to wear seat belts, right? Now the two people in the back, young people in the back, they were hurt cause they were both sitting on the right hand side of the

19:00 car. But that was an experience in itself. Some of the, but the passengers... the first person I picked up when I got my license, in North Sydney, was a lady of easy virtue, I had to take her to a brothel, I grew up over night, that sort of thing, you know. But by gee I learned, I really learned what life was like.

Did you miss flying?

19:30 Yes I missed it, although then I had the opportunity of flying with this old stock broker I mentioned earlier, Joe Palmer, he used to get me to fly with him out of Bankstown. And you know, Jeff Harvey, the muso [musician] on Channel Nine with the beard, do you remember Jeff? He was married to Penny Spence, who was also on TV. And by the way, Penny, her father was the CO [Commanding Officer] of 77 Squadron in

20:00 BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Forces.] And when the war went out he was shot down and killed the first week in Korea, you wouldn't believe it, Penny. Anyhow Jeff Harvey had, used to go flying, so I used to go with him, he was our neighbour, and he's now retired of course. But he was a brilliant musical person who was the chief organist of Salisbury Cathedral at the age of seventeen, brilliant, gifted musician, but he was electrician by

20:30 occupation. But anyhow that was life, and yeah, I got to fly with them. And since I've been up here, I

can get a flight about once every second month out here on a weekend for five dollars twenty with this bloke here, and I go out there, up at Redcliffe we go and just fly round the countryside in ultra lights and things. But I'm glad I stayed on and had the advent of the jet motor which changed

21:00 aviation beyond belief. Greatly, I think more so in safety, because the engines, they're just complete circular movement, so there's no, anything in them, so the life is a lot longer and you don't have to look at the oil pressure and that like we used to in piston engines, and that sort of thing. That's all went out the corner and the amount of power they produce, of course is

21:30 extraordinary, like the F1-11s, now they can fly at Mach 2.5. And to give you an idea of the advancement there, an American SR-1, which is a spy aircraft , it fly, will fly, they're not in now at all, but they were operating at ninety-eight thousand feet at Mach 3.3, three and a third times the speed of sound. Now the main plane temperatures at that speed

22:00 where no cloud, nothing, rise to five hundred and fifty-eight degrees Celsius, right. This is why the Concorde only flew at... because its temperature, they wouldn't let it pass a hundred and eighty, or a hundred and eighty-two I think it was. Now this is how science has advanced, and I'm glad I saw the beginning of it, you know.

Yeah do you, talking about the beginning of it, do you go to ANZAC [Australian and New Zealand Army Corps] Day or how do you...?

Yes. I've had fifty consecutive years at

22:30 Sydney, I went down this one too. I met the old blokes that I was with and you know, even I was civil, I always organised to go to Anzac Day.

What does it mean to you?

It means tremendous, it means, well, I'd have to, if I, I don't know whether I can manufacture the right words but... historical loyalty it means to me, it really does. Whilst it remains as a history it portrays

23:00 the loyalty we need, even if we weren't Australians, the loyalty we need to hold our country together. I do, I feel very solidly in that regard. And I hope that we change our educational system to get this deep into the younger generation so they can keep it on, just loyalty in Australia. I'm livid about the rights of the child,

23:30 it shouldn't be, shouldn't be, not to those lengths at all, there's no doubt about it. When we were service people we used to use an expression which was very lonely but now it fills the bill to a tea. And that was, we used the expression, 'As happy as a bastard on Father's Day,' that's well worth saying today, in our days it was looked as, as an insult.

Why is that important today?

There's so much defacto-ism, isn't there?

24:00 Right? And those, that's the sort of thing that annoys me to see a poor child who doesn't know... On the Gold Coast, Joan met a lady, we knew her, we're talking, her daughter was I think in third class at school, a public school. Twenty-nine kids in the class and only nine knew who their father was.

24:30 That is dreadful on those children.

How important was being a father to you?

Well it was important in the fact that you upheld your family name, what was passed on to you was upheld because of your father. And when you were young, as a male, you looked to your father for all sorts of directions. If he said, "Don't do that," and you said, "Why?" He'd tell you because this could happen to you, he knew because of experience, and he was the father of you. Similar

25:00 with mother and the daughter, "Don't do that," and, you know.

Has your son gone into the field that you were in?

No, no, he's in the trade field, trade business. No I wanted them to, I still say to young fellas today in particular, to go into the... Do you know, did I tell you the wages in Iraq, the lowest paid service man's wage? Sixteen hundred and seventy-eight a week, free of tax,

25:30 free of all charges. Spend six months over there, not doing too badly are you. See they're paying such ludicrous things today which I'd refuse to pay, is danger money, two hundred dollars a day. Danger money, what the hell are you gonna do if you joined the armed forces? You have to accept it's an occupation with a danger in it, you know, this is the world today. It's like that story

26:00 of a little girl said to her school teacher, "Jonah was swallowed by a whale," and the teacher said, "Who told you?" And the child said, "Dad told me." Teacher said, "When you go home, you tell your father, a man wont fit down a whale's throat and it's all rubbish and to forget about it and don't talk to people about it." And the kid said, "No Dad doesn't tell lies, he said when Jonah was swallowed he went straight to heaven and when I go to heaven I'm going to ask him if it's true." And the teacher said,

"What if you went to hell?" And the kid said, "I'll get

26:30 you to ask him." Do you like that? It's the world today, right?

So with all of your war and life experience now, have you got a final comment that you would wanna make for future generations that would be watching your interview? Just a final closing...

Yes I would say, make every endeavour to uphold social, moral ethics

27:00 in society. The meaning of the moral and social ethic is tied up with the government that says you will drive on the left hand side of the road type of thing, you won't do it your way, you'll do what the government has legislated for, I'd say that to them. I would say, 'And do endeavour to uphold the dignity that is not only unexpected but is part of a lady's life, don't belittle the female of our life.'

27:30 The other thing is, do everything in your power to sustain or generate individual and social discipline, and stick to it for God sake. It'll make Australia, make Australia, if you do that, that's what I feel. And the other thing is stand up for Australia and if it comes to the point, fight for Australia,

28:00 and I mean that. It annoys me to see the world going the way it is today. The, it wrong, so wrong to do it. And television's brought a hell of a lot to bear, I'm confident, they have, there's no doubt. And be respectful in what, in my book, be respectful, don't use foul and filthy language in front of ladies.

28:30 I can tell a story in a pub that I would never dare tell in front of a lady anywhere, I don't care. And as for some of the words that the present ladies use, oh, dear oh dear oh dear. But that's the world today isn't it, what do we do? Still that's it.

You've had some great experiences though.

Yes, I must admit and I've been, I think I put down the greatest experience I've had in my life was

29:00 participating in the atom bomb testing at Montebello. I saw the advent or taking place of the world accepting another form of energy which can either be used abusively or used sensibly, weapon-wise abusedly, sensibly in energy-wise. France I believe at the moment, every power station's nuclear, in

29:30 France, and which we should be in Australia, to cut down the smoke. And the British power stations with the smoke on the south west as it blows through to Germany, partially destroyed the Black Forests of Germany, the British power stations, from coal. That sort of thing, dreadful to see it happening, where nuclear, I think, is a wonderful thing, no doubt about it. And

30:00 I'm not talking about bombs, don't worry about that, that's a different thing. That'd be having nuclear bombs exploding be like having the Labor Party win the vote in Australia, I expect's a bit similar, be similar.

Well thank you very much for talking to us today. It's been a...

Yeah well it's been lovely talking to such intelligent and lovely ladies,

Thank you.

I think it's such a change. Because there's a fellow, was a hundred and five,

30:30 they said to him, "How do you put down you've lived so long? Were you married?" He said, "Yes." They said, "Well what do you think made you live so long?" He said, "Listening." You know, which I thought was quite applicable. Yeah, and...

Well it's been great to hear your experiences.

Well I hope you have a lovely life you people because...

You too. Thank you Ron.

I've enjoyed my life and I still do. Well I,

You've done some amazing things.

the, to retire here is a good spot too because

31:00 it's close to what you want.

Yeah and you're close to your mates which is great.

Yeah, what you want. But if I won Lotto, I think I'd go back and live on the central coast in New South Wales. I really, I think that's, we lived there once...

Nice spot.

it's, oh, it's out of this world.

INTERVIEW ENDS