Australians at War Film Archive

Edward Sly (Ted) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:45 **I would like to start by just asking you where you were born and where you grew up?**

My father was in the Royal Flying Corps in England.

01:00 He had actually gone to England prior to the war and the war broke out, he joined the British cavalry and transferred to the Royal Flying Corps. My mother also had gone to England prior to war and they had known one another in Sydney, they got married in England and I was born in London. I was christened at Queens College, Oxford. There is a little plaque there or something to say that I'm the first son of a serving officer. My father was an observer in the Royal Flying Corps,

01:30 he crashed when he was learning to fly and we were immigrated back to Australia in a troop ship….I was born on 27/4/1918, I think. I can't remember England at all. We came back say about 1920 or something. My first memory would be…We lived at Rose Bay. I had a brother who was born, he was born

02:00 twenty months later than me and he and I are very close. There was another brother born seven years later, and that was…quite a big gap. We grew up in Rose Bay and I remember the traditional life, I was taken to Anzac Day. I can remember actually them doing roadwork there with a horse and dray, a draught horse and tip dray.

02:30 You're going back to 1923 or '24. My father was the son of a very wealthy family, he was the only son, a child of five, he had four sisters. Sly and Russell, they were very big legal people. Unfortunately, he did work in the company for awhile and then the war came and he could never settle down again.

03:00 I think his father bought him a motor car business in Mosman…And to cut a long story short, when the Depression came, we'd financial problems. I was at school at Cranbrook, a boarder, both of us, my brother and I. Then my brother left and my father went up to manage the family estate at Bowral,

03:30 or at Burradoo. It was just a big home with a lot of gardens and so on. That was Dr Sly's, that was his father. I lived with my mother's parents and went as a day boy to Cranbrook. And then in the height of the Depression, that was testing the family resources too much, so then I went to Bowral. I went to Bowral High School for about a year, I think.

04:00 We used to ride our horses to school. It was very cold, about August, with the wind blowing and the rain and riding a horse, it was about three miles, four, five miles I suppose. We'd a horse paddock at the school and we carried a bit of horse feed. I then became very interested in horses because the atmosphere up there was all horsy and when it came…

04:30 I think I would be about fifteen or sixteen. It was obvious that it was better I…I did the intermediate, that I left and went out and found work because of the family, there were three boys then, you see, to feed, to look after and educate. My father knew the head of the bank, the ES&A [English Scottish Australian] Bank in Sydney, so I was given a job in the bank.

05:00 Fortunately, then I lived with my grandparents at Point Piper, a beautiful home, they had a boat, it was luxury living from both sides of the family, except that we'd hit these rough times. I was not suitable as a banker. I was hell bent in getting up to Bowral at the weekends to ride the horses.

05:30 And it came to a head when, in those days, any big cheques had to be picked up immediately from where they were paid in and taken around to the ledger. And of course, as a boy working in the bank, that was my job. So, it must have been, I think, on a Friday, and we used to wear Alpaca coats, that was the drill in those days, and I stuck the cheque in my pocket, forgot about it.

06:00 So when I came back to the bank on Monday, all hell had broken loose, it was probably for about £20,000, a lot of money, and the whole place was in an uproar. And by chance I put my hand in my pocket and I felt the cheque. And I thought, 'I don't know…' So I went down and sat on the toilet, because I didn't know what to do, and I thought, 'Well, maybe this is the time to cease a banking career,'

so I popped it into the toilet and sent it out to Bondi.

06:30 So that was the end of that cheque, and they never did find it. But of course, I then went into the manager and I said, “Look, I’m not suitable material.” I thought, 'Well, it’s better to pull out under those circumstances.' No one ever knew, and they never found it down at Bondi, that’s for sure. I then immediately knew I had to do something,

07:00 because my aunts had married graziers in the Hunter Valley, I got a job with one of those, a temporary job. And then I was able to get a job up on the Gulf on a big cattle property, with an E.D. White. And so away I went, I think I was about sixteen then, into the cattle camps of North Queensland. And I believe that is why I’m alive today,

07:30 that riding bagged horses and living on corned beef, or pack horses, it was a very hard and rigorous life. I think that kept my reflexes very sharp, because I was a mad keen buck jump rider, and anything to do with dangerous work on horses, it fell right into my lap. I think I was there for two years. The place was sold to Kidman,

08:00 Sandersons, the cattle kings, and I always remember I was very annoyed, we all were, that Kidman stopped us using tomato sauce in the cattle camp. That’s like stopping the wharf labourer having a beer at night, you know what I mean. It would have saved him a few dollars, but you learnt with those cattle men, they saved everything. I do know that I lived with the Aborigines, I think they were…The pure bred Aborigine was fantastic.

08:30 I mean there was an old Abo there called Jubilee, he was a full blood, and when we used to go on the… There was six of us in the cattle camp, and after I had been there for a while, there would be me as the only white man. Then there would be two full bloods and then there would be three little Abo boys. We used to tie them on the horses, put a strap on the stirrups, they would fall asleep, but quiet old ponies,

09:00 they looked the same to us as a full stockman (UNCLEAR) walking along. Jubilee, I can always remember rolling my swag out, and he said, “Not there boss. If there’s a storm tonight there is a dead branch up there that’ll fall off.” He taught me to track, I could track. I could still track years later. I could pick a car that came on the property, I said, “That is not one of ours.” Those Abos lived under the Act.

09:30 All their money went to the Government and they were paid a percentage. They couldn’t touch the food. See you had to have a white man, because I would cook the damper. The damper and the corned beef, just chucked it into a tin with spuds and onions. We only had damper, treacle, spuds and onions. And when they came to get their food you’d cut a slice of damper off,

10:00 you cut a bit of corned meat and gave it to them. Now would with Jubilee, he was allowed to put his knife into the treacle jar…Not treacle, it was Golden Syrup. I suppose you could say that was an impost, there were ways and means I suppose. If a full blood stockman didn’t work too well, he only ate a bit of gristle that night, it improved his working ability the next day, but that would only be human nature, wouldn’t it?

10:30 I have never…I have always admired the skills of the Aborigines. And it’s a great tragedy today that the race has been weakened down by half casts, quarter casts and so on. Some of those Aborigines were the best horsemen I’d ever seen. I had two years up there, then I thought, 'Well, I’d better get some sheep.' This would be about…

11:00 Let’s see, if I went there in '35, '36…Yeah, I must have gone there about 1935, '36. Came down, and then I got a job with the Scottish Investment Company, on a big sheep property at Gunnedah, called 'Gooli', fifty thousand acres. That was a good life. A great friend of mine that I went to school with, Bill Hind, had a big property there, and we were mates. And I was…rose to

11:30 what you could call the senior Jackaroo, I suppose. And again, I used to ride all the bad (pea-struck? UNCLEAR) horses. Unfortunately, one day one of the horses, one of these mad horses bucked and his leg got caught up in the gate between the chain and the thing. And I said to the overseer, a fellow called Jack Deavy, I said, “Get an axe and cut the chain,” which he did. Then he threw the axe at the horse

12:00 and cut through the tendon at the back…thing. He had a glass eye, and I won’t use the language, but I told him where I’d put that eye, so we’d a fight. And, of course, I was called up that night to the manager, and he was sitting there…And what really cost me my job was the fact that….In working with sheep, there would be four or five of us working and he, the manager,

12:30 manager would come along, and I would say, “Here comes the old bludger. Do your job properly.” So he said, “They tell me you call me an old bludger.” I said, “Yes, I did. I have.” He said, “Do you know what it’s?” I said, “Yes, a chucker out in a brothel.” So that was the end of that job, he gave me the sack on the spot. The war had started, so I immediately went and joined the Light Horse, the 7th Light Horse.

13:00 There’s a picture on the wall there. Because of my father knowing someone, I was made the brigadier’s driver. And I went into camp at Wallgrove, I think in 1940. And of course, it was very glamorous to be dressed in Light Horse uniform. I had to take his wife shopping at North Sydney. I spent more times making sure the plumes were nice and flexible, with wet towels.

13:30 And I thought, 'Well, this war's the greatest thing since sliced bread.' I was getting more money than the AIF [Australian Imperial Force]. I think they were getting 6/-d a day, the 6th Divvy [Division]. I think we were getting 8/-d. a day, and then 10/-d a week for the horse, something like that. It was certainly, we were much better paid. It wasn't long before there was all sorts of little skirmishes between us…

14:00 because we were chocolate soldiers. And it was…You know, I was the brigadier's driver, and there was three standard bearers, gee, they are all dead now. Doug Lowry, Mal McKlinnan….Wonderful blokes, all from the bush. We were in camp at Wallgrove. Wallgrove was just…there was no settlement there. I used to have to drive a big six ton truck into Sydney. Now I'd never driven in traffic before in my life. And I often wondered why the tram

14:30 conductors used to get off the running board when they saw this truck coming, because I suppose I used to see how close I could go, passing the tram. So if they saw a bloke in Light Horse uniform, they took the better of the two options and they got inside. I was doing very well there, and fortunately I was on a very big parade. There was horses lined up on the big inspection day and I'm driving him.

15:00 And I saw a few mates, and I've just got my hand out saying g'day to them, and the car went into a big ditch, and he ended up in the front seat with his bum pointing at the roof, and his head in the map, and that was the end of my job as the brigadier's driver. I always remember, I said, "Well, I'm only a trooper, I can't go any lower in rank." So I went back to the horses and that was fantastic. I remember

15:30 Jeff Bate was our corporal, he was the chap who married the prime minister's wife, Holt, John Oxley, and we'd a lot of fun. I rode, because I was a fancy horseman, I rode in the Sydney Show and up Parramatta and, oh, this was fantastic. I can always remember during one of the skirmishes in the bush,

16:00 there was four of us trying to get through a gate on the horses. And a Tiger Moth came and just circled us. And I knew then, and though we were already prepared to go overseas with the horses, that there was no future whatsoever in that. So I can remember the words, I went back to my father and said, "Well, I can't see it." So he took me to a colonel mate of his,

16:30 and his words were very clear. He said, "Just get away from the shit and the dust, join the Airforce," which I did. They sent me back to Gunnedah, where I went and stayed with my friend Bill Harm, to learn Morse Code and the bits and pieces. And how little did we know…I remember Bill and I, we went and, I think we shot about a hundred possums and made flying suits.

17:00 We didn't know. I mean, I'm thinking of what happened in the First [World] War and I said, "We made need these." We used to do shadow shooting out of utes, racing along, shooting at crows. Eventually, I went into camp on the 14th of October, 1940, at Bradfield. I was an AC2 [Aircraftsman].

17:30 I went in with a great friend of mine Debben Minchin. It was a wonderful time I had with him, and we are still great friends. I'm godfather to one of his kids. Bradfield was…I think we'd six weeks at Bradfield.

18:00 And then at the end of that course we were posted to various things, and I was posted to Rhodesia, to train with the RAF [Royal Air Force]. We were put into an embarkation depot, and of course, we'd nothing to do. We drank all the beer that our wage would allow us to, and it was a sort of a false…Every now and again they'd say, "Oh, you're going on Tuesday,"

18:30 and nothing would happen. So this went on four…I can't remember the dates now. But…it went on for six weeks, but we didn't go away. And then all of a sudden, we got word to say that we were to go…We were to go on a boat called Ulysses. It was a triple expansion steamboat. And the mast was too high to get under the bridge. So I can always remember…

19:00 I said goodbye to my parents and I think about eight of us got into a little pinnace and they took us out to the ship. It was twenty of us. And she was a ship going back to England, it was full of…It had quite a lot of civilians of course. We were then LACs [Leading Aircraftsmen], which was the rank just above AC2, and we arrived in Durban. I unfortunately got tonsillitis,

19:30 and it was very bad, and the Naval surgeon said, "Well, we'll have to take you off the boat at Fremantle." Well, I went AWL [Absent Without Leave], they never found me, while I was in Fremantle, and the boat took off for Durban, and I got over the tonsillitis. And I went through hell, I can tell you. We got to Durban and of course, we were feted. I mean, in those days…

20:00 We'd done nothing, we were chocolate soldiers. It might have been three of four days in Durban, and then we went by train to Bulawayo, to a training station where we would learn to fly Tiger Moths called Guinea Fowl. And I can remember again, at this time, we'd become fairly sure that we were, almost won the war, even though we'd never seen a shot fire in anger.

20:30 I always remember, we lined up, prior to the…And there were Australians and South Africans and Rhodesians, all in this corps, in this first training thing. And the little warrant officer, he walked up and down in front of us, and he had a pith helmet on and he said, "It's only Admiral Beatty and I can wear this," sort of thing. And Debben was alongside me, Debben Mitchell, he said, "Oh, we'll fix this bloke." His next sound, he said, "Look now, another shower of shit from Australia."

21:00 So we knew then there was no second prizes. Anyhow, I did a flying course at Gwelo. We did night flying

in Tiger Moths. Then I was posted to 22 SFTS at Thorn Hill, that was at Bulawayo. That's why all my family companies are called Thorn Hill Pastoral Company or Thorn Hill Contracting, because that is the name of the aerodrome where I got my wings. And my father called his property 'Droglands,'

21:30 because that is where he got his wings in England in the First [World] War. I flew Harvard 1s, they had round wing tips. You weren't allowed to spin them. I mean, it was unbelievably ridiculous that we were being taught to fly on an aircraft that you couldn't spin. I mean, that's just…I did get the instructor to spin it and he said, "If I say get out, you'll have to get out."

22:00 And I thought the aircraft would fall apart, but he pulled it out all right. I was a sergeant, because unfortunately being with Debben and Harry Greg, we did play up a bit. We didn't do anything mad, but we reckoned every Friday was pay night, so we used to get pretty full on beer. The old warrant officers, all had been in the RAF for thirty years,

22:30 they used to take umbrage. I can always remember, Debben and I were called up before them, for misbehaving or something. He said, "Do you realise the sergeants' mess is the Holy of Holies?" I could hardly restrain myself, because…We weren't undisciplined. I suppose being Australian, he thought we thought we were swollen headed or something, I don't know.

23:00 And I've never hesitated to make the remark that had I not been trained by the RAF, I wouldn't be here today. Because they were really taught discipline, and taught me the rules and regulations. And later on, when I became leader, I couldn't do without those men, those old RAF WOs, warrant officers. Being a sergeant, we wore sergeant stripes, and the cadets of the course wore a white flash in their cap.

23:30 We all got our wings, and then we were wondering where we were going to be posted to. That night, the group captain put on a show and all the cadets went. As far as I know, one cadet made a pass at his missus or something, because in the morning, he was made a sergeant and I was made an officer. So instead of going to the desert, I was then posted to England to learn to fly Spitfires.

24:00 So I went back to…I just had time to get some tropical uniform, I had a little thin strip as a pilot officer, and there were six of us altogether, there was another Australian, I think called Ron Baines, there was a South African, a Rhodesian and an Englishman. The Englishman had been in the Abounire

24:30 flying in the…when there was a problem with oil in Iran I think. And the Rhodesian…funny enough, the Rhodesian, the chap's name was Furber, he was related to the Furbers that I had gone sailing with as a kid. His father settled there after the Boer war. And we were posted to Cape Town, and then we caught a ship

25:00 called the Christiaan Huygens, that was a Dutch boat that was on the Java run and was full of…This when in absolute luxury we lived, I had a batman. We'd…I think Bolls Gin, I think that was about two shillings a bottle or something, and I think Roses' Lime Water was about three shillings.

25:30 We just had a ball because there was no…All I had to do was watch and make sure the sergeant pilots manned a few guns round the ship. We went without escort to Canada, and lived like kings, it was ridiculous. Because the ship was going over to Canada to be made into a troop ship. And we went straight across from Cape Town to South America and followed the South American coast up. Luckily, we saw no U-Boats [Unterseeboot – German submarine] or anything,

26:00 and we arrived in St. John, New Brunswick, where again we were feted, because we'd wings, but we'd never done anything. They turned the Christiaan Huygens into a troop ship, and we went back on board after a couple of weeks in Canada, there was three of us to a cabin, there was no more batman. There was…I don't know, how many other thousand

26:30 troops on board, and there were some real troops. I always remember, we left St. John, New Brunswick, to cross the Atlantic and I have never seen such an armada of escorts. There was the big American battleships…And it was a pretty big convoy of about twenty five ships. I got up the next day and I couldn't see one, because America wasn't in the war, so they could only go to the twelve mile limit.

27:00 Then I saw a little corvette rise on a big Atlantic wave and then disappear again. We went right across the Atlantic. I don't think we lost any ships, I just…I think we dodged everything, at a very critical time, too. And we landed at Liverpool, and I was sent to a Spitfire HQ [Headquarters] at a place called Harden, which is on the River Dee,

27:30 which is just out of Chester. And there we'd batwomen, RAF batwomen, and they were fantastic, because they did our uniforms and we flew Spit [Spitfires] 1's. And we got into a little bit of trouble, not much, we started to learn discipline by this stage.

28:00 And I became above average as a pilot, and I was posted with someone else to a Eleven Group. Now Eleven Group was a group operating over France at that time of the year, and what they did, they graded the pilots. If you became above average, you were selected to go to Eleven Group. I mean, you were only better in flying skills than someone else, they could be a much better fighter pilot, but that was how they graded you.

28:30 Some went on to squadrons escorting ships and so on. And I was posted to 452 Squadron, which was then an all Australian Squadron. Bluey Truscott was the CO [Commanding Officer] and Thorold-Smith

was my flight commander, both dead now. Walking into a typical Australian mess, the comment was, “Oh, here’s some bloody cannon fodder.”

29:00 Which is nothing new for Australians greeting some other Australian under those circumstances, whereas Bluey Truscott came across…The other chap with me was a fellow called Johnny Upwood, he was killed in the desert. He used to come across and say, “Come and have a beer.” We were in a beautiful home outside Whitecliff, down at Red Hill. And then we started to learn to operate…started to fly the Spitfires.

29:30 We’d do sweeps over France. Not long after joining the squadron, the squadron was sent out to rest. What they used to do after a series of operations over France, which was high intensive operation, they then sent the squadron to, say, the Isle of Man, just to escort shipping or something, so they had a rest. And Johnny Upwood and I, who topped the course at Harden,

30:00 were posted to the desert to form the first Spit Squadrons. So once again we were going to an embarkation depot. And I can remember one incident there. The Eagle Squadron, the Eagle Squadron was an American squadron…The Americans had joined the RAF when war broke out, and they formed the Eagle Squadron, but they were in RAF uniform.

30:30 One night, when we were waiting in the embarkation depot…We’d actually been asked up to the officers' mess to help them drink their Scotch ration, which wasn’t difficult. A little WAAF [Women’s Auxiliary Air Force] came in and said, “Oh, there’s terrible strife there.” She said, “One of the Americans is standing outside the picture show and he is directing all the good looking girls down one shelter,” bomb shelter, “and sending all the others home.” So that put a bit of a damper on the night.

31:00 But that is the sort of things the Americans did. They were fantastic. They were all killed in the desert, too. Wonderful men. We boarded a ship called the Highland Chieftain, one of the Highland boats. The Highland boats, they would meet importers from the Argentine to Britain. They were ideal for carrying troops, because they swung them on hammocks where all the meat went. A hell of a place to be, but we still had cabins.

31:30 And we set off for the Middle East. We went to Freetown, first. And we were taken off the ship at Freetown because the British fleet was about to shoot…Have a go at the French fleet, the Vichy French fleet, which escaped into Dakar. So we were sent to an army camp about thirty miles out of Freetown. That is where I caught … obviously really dosed up with malaria, but I didn’t know at the time.

32:00 In case we could be called on to fly Swordfish, that is a sort of a 3rd Reserve, of a flat top, which was also amongst the fleet, which you would be crazy, but anyhow, we were there for about three or four weeks. From Freetown we went to Lagos, in Nigeria, and then from Lagos we went to Karno, Khartoum and to Cairo.

32:30 When I got to Cairo I collapsed, because I was riddled with malaria. I was put into an RAF hospital at Heliopolis. I can always remember, the doctor came along, an RAF doctor, and he was one of the Rowes, I didn’t know that, an Australian country family. And they tell me I was delirious and I would say, “Take this Pommie bastard away. I’m not going to have a British doctor looking after me.”

33:00 But I was completely delirious. Later, I was to play golf with him, years afterwards. So the period of time was quite dangerous. The 8th Army had been pushed back to El Alamein and we went to, I think, the first lot of Spits got lost, and I was then posted to a Kittyhawk squadron.

33:30 450 Squadron. And I commenced…We started to do bombing and strafing over [El] Alamein. Now I mean there was a critical time. The first sorties of a fighter pilot have to be lucky, there’s no good saying…I mean, there’s brilliant fighter pilots and I wasn’t in that category. But it’s the initial twenty five hours of flying in combat,

34:00 is probably…if you survive that, you become street wise to the exercise. I had a motor failure on take off in the Kittyhawk. Unbelievable, I don’t know how I got away with it. The Kittyhawks would take off… One squadron would take off one way, and then the other would…If they all took going to the north, the ones from the west

34:30 would take off going to the east, and so on. And I was flying to the north and I got to about a thousand feet and I suddenly looked at the oil temperature, it was racing off the clock, and the pressure had gone, and the motor failed, and I had no option but to try and turn around. And I landed amongst the other aircraft taking off. I got away with it. But if I hadn’t done that I would have been killed. I couldn’t bail out, I was too low.

35:00 I did about twenty, twenty five ops bombing and strafing Alamein. It was a critical time, we lost quite a lot of pilots there. And I always remember, when you first join the squadron you're always given the worst aircraft. And you had to earn your stripes. They wouldn’t give waste their good aircraft on a bum pilot, I guess. So consequently, after a scrap you used to get right on the desert,

35:30 because the [Messerschmitt] 109s would be lurking above you, and they couldn’t get at you right on the desert. And I always knew I had a clapped out aircraft because everyone was going past me, and they were all going for home. So I learnt a lesson. I made sure when I became a flight commander I always had the best aircraft. It was an Australian Squadron, wonderful blokes, so many were killed. They were

killed in the escape. Williams, who I flew with,

36:00 was a wonderful surfer at Manly, he was shot when those fifty blokes escaped. But anyhow, when I was there an interesting thing did occur. One day an army bloke called the squadron, said, “Look, there’s a fellow up there who is very like you.” Because my brother had joined the AIF, and he’d been in the legal game and

36:30 he had a brilliant future in the legal, and then joined up with Ken Jacobs, later to become a high court judge. And he was in a gun emplacement at Alamein. So I borrowed the squadron ute, which was a standard ute, and drove up and found him at Alamein. Unfortunately, the day that I was with him, there was a very big air battle going on above,

37:00 and I wasn’t allowed to get into the gun pit, he was firing. I had to go around behind the gun. We lost about four planes that day from the squadron. I was a…little bit nervy, because it’s not much fun standing out and walking around and a battle going on, and you can’t get in down underground. He was only a lowest rank gunner. And they took me down the officers' mess and

37:30 I had a couple of scotches, that was in the dugout, and that night I drove back. Now all you had was two little slits for headlights, you couldn’t see, and I glanced against a tank going home, and the ute rolled off onto the side of the road. It was upside down and I started to get out, and a voice came over, “For Christ sake, don’t move, you're in a mine field.”

38:00 So I waited until they got a track into the mine field, so I could get out. And they put me in a little two man tent, because it was with an Australian group that would go out and pull in pranged tanks and things at night. And one bed was empty because the bloke was out. The other bloke said “You better have a drink.

38:30 He’s a fellow called Norm Simpson, he drinks this gin.” Well, Norman Simpson I’d known at Gunnedah, he came from Gunnedah. I knew him there. Typical Australian…That was the sort of job he could do brilliant. He’d go out at night and quietly, just with heavy woollen socks, they couldn’t hear him, the Germans, and pull in pranged tanks and so on.

39:00 So I had one of these terrible Bolanackie gins and went to sleep. In the morning, the squadron sent someone up to pick me up. So I was lucky, that was the last time I saw of Ian alive, he was shot by a sniper later at Finschhafen. It was an interesting thing. They just lived on a couple of bags in the sand, cut out holes sleep in. And then having started to operate

39:30 at Alamein in Kittyhawks, I was posted to the 92 East India Squadron, which was an RAF Squadron. It was the highest scoring squadron in the RAF. A very famous squadron called the East India Company paid for a lot of the Spitfires.

Tape 2

00:32 **I would like to take up your story again. You mentioned that after the…450 Squadron. you then got posted to the 92 RAF East India Squadron.**

Correct, yes.

Why was it so famous?

It was famous because it had established a very high score in the Battle of Britain.

01:00 Stanford Tuck and some of the top British fighter pilots had been members of the 92 and as such was therefore…I think when I was in the desert, it was still the highest score. It had the most German aircraft shot down of any squadron in the Allied cause. It was a very famous squadron, the Spitfires… We’d East India on the side of our aircraft. The story was that the East India Company had paid for some of the Spits. I think you could buy a Spit, in those days, for £25,000.

01:30 But 92 was a very famous squadron. To answer whether it’s still going, I think it’s still an operational squadron in the RAF, but I’m not sure. When I was with it, of course, it had Neville Jute, he shot down twenty and a half aircraft. So even in the desert, we’d a very high score. I only got three, but the others got

02:00 six or seven. I think Neville got eleven. So you see that having a group of much better pilots than me in there, it doesn’t take long to lift the score. There was…three other Australians when I joined. We all joined together. There was John Waddy, Alf Glendenning, he was an old sheep farmer from Queensland, and Jeff Rose.

02:30 **Where did the 92 Squadron operate from?**

We were then at LG 81[Landing Ground], which was eighty one ks [kilometres] behind the line at Alamein. And our job was to escort.…The bombers would have, the Kittyhawks would also escort, but the Kittyhawks would bomb and strafe and our job was to go up higher and keep the 109s from

interfering with any of those activities.

03:00 Ours was purely fighter, and although we did do strafing, we were mainly used for safety in the air for the other aircraft, maintain that there was no 109s getting through. In those days, they used to do pattern bombing which means that sixteen Baltimores, or Havocs, used to fly

03:30 in a very set formation, and they would go across to a certain part of the Alamein line and drop their bombs. It would be patterned. That whole area underneath it would be pulverised. Of course, they were sitting ducks for ground fire because they were all flying in formation, and it was the same with the 109s. The 109s would be above us and they would try and get through, and we would have to chase them, then they would have a go at the Kittyhawks

04:00 and then the they would have a go at the bombers. The German squadrons were very good, they were top squadrons. I can't think of the name of the ace that was there, but they created a lot of problems in the early stages. And they had Stukas, too, there. I used to fly in quite a few Stuka parties, but these… went out of fashion. The Stuka became too easy a target for the RAF later in the war.

04:30 The Stuka was a sitting duck. Once he went into a dive, he was easy meat. As British air power increased, and British and American air (UNCLEAR) in the desert, so the Stuka….I didn't see any Stukas after Alamein.

What are the 109s?

The 109 Fs and Gs, they were the German fighters. A very good fighter plane. It had a cannon

05:00 that fired through the centre of the boss of the propeller. So if you pointed the aircraft at anyone you were line on. Whereas ours was…Our fire was allowed to join, say cross at two fifty metres for a maximum coverage. Whereas the 109 fired straight. They also had, I think, twenty mill cannons. And I think there was one with a forty mill. I'm not sure.

05:30 We'd two twenty mill cannons, and six or eight sheer point five machine guns, I've just forgotten. They all varied. Some Spits had two cannons and so on.

At this point in time what is your rank?

I was then a flying officer. And you automatically became a flying officer

06:00 after you had been a pilot officer for six months. And I joined 92 Squadron, and then John Waddy was then posted back to Australia, this was over that period. Jeff Rose was killed, he came from Cooma. Alf Glendenning was posted to CO Kittyhawk Squadron. Alf Glendenning, I think he was thirty two when he joined up,

06:30 so he put his age back. He was a typical Queensland country bloke. He developed a hernia in the desert, and I used to have to keep knit when he went to the toilet, because if anyone had known that he would have been put off flying. Had he bailed out, no doubt it would have killed him. He survived the war. And he used to tell me after the war, he had a big property at Julia Creek, he said, "I have found a way of turning the sheep."

07:00 He said, "If I've got sheep that are about to get away, about two to three ks in front of me," he said, "I make dumb dumbs, using my .303 with dumb dumb bullets and I put a couple up the side. He said that was as good as any dogs. A real bushy.

What was your main campaign with the 92 Squadron?

Well, 92 Squadron, we were on escorts all the time.

07:30 We worked very closely with the 8th Army. We were the most advanced…I mean, sometimes we'd land at an aerodrome only seconds away from the German aerodromes. Even sometimes without any of our transports, we would just go….We'd to be ready to take off immediately before the Germans come.

08:00 But they kept us as close as they could to the army moving, as the Germans retreated. And our main job was purely to maintain aerial cover, to protect ships in the Med [Mediterranean Sea] or the fighter bombers, or the bombers underneath us. During that period the Squadron shot down a lot of aircraft.

08:30 Sammy Samuel was a waiter in the Savoy, in London, and became a wonderful fighter pilot. We always wondered why the boys were never charged for drinks when they had a drink at the Savoy, it was because Sammy had been a waiter there. He's dead now.

Would I be correct in estimating that we are now in late 1942?

09:00 Alamein was the 20th October, 1942. As soon as…There was very heavy aerial activities up prior to the Alamein, and I can still remember Alamein, because as we got closer to Alamein, the higher ranks were not allowed to fly, in case they were captured by the…Germans, and they would reveal the date.

09:30 Right down to…they didn't worry about us, we didn't know the date either. But the higher ranks did. On the night of Alamein we were…eighty ks behind the line and the whole of the horizon lit up. I think it was about eleven o'clock at night when they started the bombardment. The whole sky was glowing, and

that was the bombardment and the break through.

10:00 The breakthrough was actually created by the Australian 7th Division. The British always said to me, “They're the finest shock troops in the world.” The British Army was a magnificent army. The 51st Division, that was the Scottish Division, they called them 'The Ladies From Hell.' They were a fantastic division. And we got to know all these divisions because they had some little thing on their uniform to identify them. And I suppose the British 8th Army

10:30 would be one of the most efficient armies I have ever seen. Typical of the British, they were very professional when it comes to any combats.

How long did you stay with the 92 Squadron?

92 Squadron…We started at Alamein and we went right through to Tunis.

11:00 We went from Egypt to Cyrenaica to Tripolitania, which is now Libya, to Algeria. That took us about….I’d have to look at my logbook, but…We’d Christmas somewhere in the desert. I think it took us six or eight months.

11:30 You know it was a campaign. The sort of thing we did, I can remember a place called Antalat [?], we’d to fill our Spitfires out of tins. They just sent us up all these four gallon tins. That gives you an idea of the skimpy…Because we were moving so quickly,

12:00 and never had a motor failure in those Spitfires. We got to a couple incidents. We got to Tripoli and I had to take four aircraft into Tripoli, as the Airforce representation. And we did escorts to the shipping, and you had to identify yourself, which was quite a ticklish business.

12:30 You had to open your canopy and pull out a vary pistol, and just put it out in the slip stream and fire the thing to identify, so you didn’t get fired on by the British. Not much fun I can tell you, getting it out to that stage. One amusing thing happened in Tripoli, we captured a lot of Chianti, Chianti wine vats, terrible stuff actually. But everyone had drank it, their mouth would turn purple.

13:00 I used to make the airman would open their mouth of a morning and see if they looked like a blue tongue lizard, from this Chianti. Everyone carried a four gallon can. But as the duty officer I had to go with the British and the navy down to…and we’d to inspect the brothels, because the brothels were still operating. They operated until Montgomery closed them. And I always remember in one brothel

13:30 we asked how many girls there were, clean. He said…there were Airforce medical blokes in there…So he said, “There are six OK, and six on the test benches.” I mean that’s a typical description when they were testing a Merlin motor. But that had happened, the Germans would move out and we would move in. Like in Tobruk, I went into Tobruk

14:00 and luckily there was a few army, and they immediately said, “Don’t ever go anywhere near the installations. There’s very fine fishing line wired across to booby traps, you won’t see them.” Because we were starting to poke around in amongst all the buildings, you know, inquisitive. They said, “No. She’s really booby trapped. Everything.”

14:30 The other incident would be, when we got to a place called Gabes, there was a big mountain range, We were assured that we’d a strip just under the range, right very close to the line. And we were assured by the army that we were quite safe. But what had happened, the Germans had been able to pull some big field guns up that mountain, and we were just siting on standby and suddenly the shells started to land amongst our aircraft.

15:00 We immediately evacuated back out of range, but we’d to keep aircraft on standby. I can’t remember how many, maybe six. And you could only take about half an hour sitting in that aircraft with your hands on the button. And the shells, now and again, a shell would come over and you could feel the shrapnel just go down the aircraft. And then it was decided….I had a nasty incident there.

15:30 I had just landed, and they were re-fuelling my aircraft, and a shell came over, and the airman jumped off and raced off with the petrol tank, but they didn’t put the top on the petrol tank, and I took off and immediately got into a tangle with some 109s. And when I pushed the button, the petrol jumped out of the tank with the recoil of the gun and the air, because I had my hood open,

16:00 the air sucked it straight into the cockpit. And I can remember looking at the instruments with petrol running down the instruments. So I immediately got permission to land at another aerodrome. Because I mean…I would have been a flaming…I would have gone And then that night, I went back to the strip and we decided to evacuate all the aircraft, it was too dangerous.

16:30 One of the chaps in the flight couldn’t start his aircraft, so he took mine. And I said that I’d stay the night and catch up. I was put in a tent, an army tent, dug a hole in the sand for my hip, nothing else, and went to sleep. And all night the shells were landing, all night, and the army blokes just played cards. I was terrified. And in the morning, I made them all walk down the strip to tell me where the holes were.

17:00 The feeling of fear was that…When you start a Spitfire, you prime it with neat petrol, and then these long, curly, blue flame comes out each side, you can see it a mile away. And I thought there would be a

bloody German up there with his glasses. Anyhow, the thing started and I got off quickly and I went back and joined the squadron. It wasn't a very happy night, especially with these blokes playing cards, and I was trying to sleep, and the shells were coming over.

17:30 But being army, I suppose they were used to it. I wasn't.

Where was that?

A place called Gabes. Gabes is a town on the coast, it's in from there…I think it's a place called El Hamma. The range was there. And sent the Ghurkhas up and got the Germans. And they brought two out,

18:00 they were completely nuts, the two Germans. And they brought out a string of balls, that counted how many men they had killed, they had castrated them. The Ghurkhas didn't play by all the rules. It was one of those things that the British…Their efficiency was terrific. What they did was quite a sensible risk,

18:30 assuming that the guns couldn't get up that mountain. The fact was that the German's ingenuity could do it. They created havoc when they started to shell that strip. I think there was three squadrons on the strip. The strips are built like a cross. There's one there, one there and one there. This lot takes off, and then that lot take off…So it's quite a good organisation, but no room for mistakes.

19:00 **And after your time with the 92 Squadron?**

What happened was, Neville Duke was posted back to take over the CFI [Chief Flying Instructor] of Spit OTU [Operational Training Unit] in Egypt, I was appointed a flight commander on 92. We got ready for the invasion of Italy. While I was in Tripoli I got a little Fiat,

19:30 took a little Fiat car from the Ities, a couple of very nice shoulder holsters. And I remember driving…I got someone to fly my Spit to a strip opposite Malta, I drove the little Itie car out there and got out, got into the Spit and flew to Malta. I left it on the strip, a nice little car.

20:00 And I was later to get it back, too. We went to Malta. I think it was at Luqa, we landed at Luqa, and we started the invasion of Sicily. I was then sent on rest back to Abu Sueir, and I became Neville Dukes' deputy back there, and I had six months instructing pupils at Abu Sueir.

20:30 Which is an RAF Training Station out of Cairo towards Lake Timsah, right on the Sweet Water Canal. That was a fantastic life there, it was a permanent RAF station. A beautiful brick building. I had two Italian batmen. I always used to make them put their finger in the bath first in case it fell off, in case they were trying to do me over.

21:00 They were very good. We'd a lot of fun there. We used to go to the French Club there at Lake Timsah. We could go sailing on the lake. There were very high winds off the desert, and we aquaplaned behind a sailing boat, it was so good, and the waves were very small, very low. And we did all sorts of…I mean flying the Spitfires there was a luxury.

21:30 One thing I learnt there, because I had never, ever had to address any group…Neville didn't like, so I would be often put in to address about a hundred students, I suppose. I always remember walking in there the first time….It reminded me of droving a mob of bullocks, they used to always just look at you. And I looked down and there was a hundred sets of eyes looking at me, I nearly froze. But I was most conscious of my responsibilities.

22:00 I always asked every man why he joined the Airforce. Did he want to be a fighter pilot? Because I thought it was terrible…I had experienced on 92…For instance, Paul Bricker that wrote the books, he joined 92 Squadron, and he was not suitable to be a fighter pilot. He didn't lack courage but he just didn't have the...

22:30 A fighter pilot was a person who didn't have time to worry, who didn't have time to get frightened. You just had to…Poor old Paul, he always got the worst aircraft, so you could always see him because of the black smoke coming out of the side of the clapped out motor. He was shot down, and I saw him shot down. And there was a German Tiger tank coming on one side and a little British gun carrier coming from the other,

23:00 and I think the Bren Gun carrier saw the Tiger tank and took off, and he was a prisoner of war. And of course, he wrote all the books. Something happened there… No, it's gone.

23:30 **Are you still with 92 or have you left?**

No, 92. I'm still talking about incidents with 92, that come to my mind. As you say, I went from Alamein to Tunis,

24:00 but there were quite a few little incidents, and I'm remembering them now.

We can keep on going and then we can come back and ask you more questions and get more details.

I can give you a very clear one when we were in Tunis ... (discussion of how they should discuss details).

24:30 There was one in Tunis…I'll go from when Paul Bricker was shot down.

25:00 It was at this time that….we were given some what they called Spit 9s, untropicalised. And Neville Duke and I went to Casablanca and picked up, with some blokes, these Spit 9s. And they were a magnificent aircraft. And we'd to go up to thirty five thousand feet to fight, to keep the 190s away.

25:30 The 9, the torque on takeoff was tremendous, the alioh leg used to go down. And a lot of blokes were killed flying them, because of the tremendous…A very long nose, you couldn't see anything until you got the tail up. In that time we were then flying tremendous armadas of Air. There would be the Spit 9s at thirty five thousand, and then there would be the Spits at twenty five thousand, and then there would be the Kittyhawks,

26:00 the American Kittyhawks…But they were very big armadas of Air. We used to take off, go to thirty five thousand…We always had to land, because we weren't tropicalised. During that period of time, I think Neville Duke shot down about twelve aircraft. I mean he shot about three out of my sights. But you see, that's where I wasn't a good fighter pilot. I didn't have that tremendous co-ordination.

26:30 I mean I was quick, that's what saved my life, but I didn't have the tremendous co-ordination to get the band of fire onto the…I mean, I shot down three, but I should have shot down about eight. But anyhow, that was just because I wasn't in that calibre. One little incident that has come to mind there, there was a chap called Louie Smith, a Jamaican, beautiful singing voice he had.

27:00 And he was so terrified he used to wet his pants in the air. That very fact, I used to take him as my Number Two, because I couldn't afford to do that, as a leader. I mean, I admired him so much, he was terrified. And when he used to see a 109, he used to start to stutter. I used to say, "Oh, Jesus, talk for Christ's sake." But I would know that there was a 109 behind me somewhere.

27:30 He used to spend a penny on the tar before he took off, and when he landed. He'd wet himself all the time. He's dead, he died recently. To me, I thought, 'Well, if he can overcome, then I have to.' So that is the sort of…Not bravado, but the sort of inner fire that you've got to pull on.

28:00 You've got to keep that sense of humour. We did so many things…a lot of things we never should have done, but that was the outlet. When we were in Tunis, I met up again with Debben Minchin. Now Debben Minchin was very like Errol Flynn. So we used to pass him off as Errol…

28:30 We'd pass him off as Errol Flynn's brother. We did that in Tunis and got into the governor's palace for a big feed. We said, "We're with Errol Flynn's brother." Debben really played the act. They were the sort of things we used to get so much fun out of. Jeff was killed, he was shot down there,

29:00 he came from Cooma. Oh, we lost a lot of good blokes. But as the war went on, so our losses definitely weakened. It was a very different story with the number of casualties at Alamein to what it was by the time we got to Tunisia. We lost a few blokes all the time, but nothing like the losses we'd previously. When I went to Abu Sueir…Well, we'd a ball.

29:30 King Farouk had some wonderful night-clubs in Cairo. Neville and I had an aircraft, we used to go and land in the desert and go pick up a couple of WAAF officers and take them down to Cairo. We really did have a wonderful time. One incident occurred there. This beautiful stone mess…One night we'd a concert, and there was a Canadian posted back to Operations in Italy.

30:00 And he asked the group captain could he shoot one of the lights out? They loved doing that. Everyone had a fair bit of booze and out came the gun and they shot down a light. So another bloke went and got his gun…It wasn't long before all the Egyptian waiters had shot through. I can still remember one Canadian, he held up a glass with a thick bottom,

30:30 and he said to the bloke, he wasn't that far away, and he said, "Shoot that!" And the bloke shot it out of his hand, he was left just holding the heavy glass bottom. Anyhow, Neville and I went to bed. We thought this is getting too much, we couldn't control them. Well, in the morning, the place looked as though there'd been a gunfight going on. All these old stone walls…It was a terrible show. The group captain was made a flight lieutenant, the boss of the RAF. Neville and I

31:00 had tried to restrain them, and the Canadian was sent on ops [operations]. But that was the Canadians and the Americans, they love those guns, they always had side arms. They were quite happy to shoot the lights out as a normal procedure. Neville was posted back to operations. I wanted to go back to Italy, and at the same time I was posted back to Australia. So I decided to miss the ship

31:30 and work on getting to Italy. And RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Headquarters got hold of me and said, "We will put you in the clink if you disobey orders." So I had no option, so I got a troop ship and went to India. Got another highland boat…That's where I learnt to play bridge. I played bridge from two o'clock in the afternoon to nearly daylight,

32:00 drinking booze, playing for high stakes. We got to Karachi, and they wouldn't allow us over the Sinai Desert [?], that is between Karachi and Bombay. There was about eighty officers, and they gave us two railway carriages to go up to Lahore, and then down past Agra to Bombay. So we took all our rank off,

we'd to, because we'd to rely on…

32:30 Luckily they were British crews driving the trains. We used to go up to the engine. We'd have a shower when they were filling the motors and make a cup of tea under the engine. It was better to forget we were officers, we'd to fend for ourselves. We'd to get the carriages hooked onto various trains. And we ended up in Lahore, and then when we got to Agra, the old engine driver put the engine U/S [Unserviceable] and we went and saw the Taj Mahal.

33:00 And then it got to Bombay, and we were made honorary members of the Parsee Club. It was the first time I'd seen air conditioning. The Parsee is for the wealthy Indians. Again, we got back into the bridge. From there, we were on another highland boat.…I was posted back to Australia. I landed back in Australia in June, '44, and I had never flown an aircraft in Australia at that stage.

33:30 **Now it's about June, 1944, and you have just returned from the Middle East back to Australia?**

We arrived back in Melbourne, it was as cold as…I remember they put us in the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

34:00 We slept on the steps of a stand, and it was freezing. And I came up by train to Sydney. Ian had been killed by a sniper in Finchsfaven, while I was in the desert. So it was a sad homecoming. And I immediately got out of uniform, and I went to the bush and I stayed with a cousin of mine. I was completely relaxed then, and I didn't have any worries. We got up to all sorts of tricks at the local town,

34:30 we were near Denman. And it was just wonderful to go back to country life. And I knew that I was going to start another operation tour in the Pacific…Getting back into civvies, it completely allowed you to relax fully. You didn't have to worry about a uniform. I mean, the glamour of the uniform was very good,

35:00 but gee it was nice just to be another bloke back at then town. Then, that was when I met Irenie. He said one night…I had to come back to Sydney and I knew I was getting posted on another flying job. And he said, "There's a couple of WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], I know. We'll take them out." One was a red head, Judy Lindeman and Irenie.

35:30 And I took Judy Lindeman, and I said, "Why don't we change, and I'll take out Irenie next time and you take out Judy." We got into all sorts of trouble, because we were late getting the girls back to the…They were camped in the Australian Women's Weekly Club, which was the old DJs in George Street, and we were too late getting them there. I had a tiny little Morris car and we'd to go and sleep in the Domain, and it rained, oh…

36:00 Anyhow, then I was posted to Narromine. Unfortunately, I was judged an above average fighter pilot instructor by the RAF, but when I came back here the RAAF…There was jealousy, they didn't like… We'd flown Spit 9s in operation, and when I got back here, they said, "There is a hush hush aircraft you are going to fly. It' a Spit 8." I said, "Christ, I flew them in operations in Algeria."

36:30 But that was sort of one of those…We were Empire Air Scheme and that was never…We weren't permanent Airforce. And I was sent to Narromine and that is where I met up with one of the standard bearers from the Light Horse, a fellow called Doug Rirwey, and he used to come and pick me up in a sulky, in Narromine, and it had great long shafts. And I said, "Doug? Why have you got such long shafts?" He said, "This thing kicks up."

37:00 When it kicked up, I could nearly read the maker's name on the shoes, as they appeared in front of me. We'd a lot of fun in Narromine. But he being a standard bearer when I was a driver in the Light Horse, we were in the one camp and we'd a lot of fun. He was later to be drowned in a flood about 1950, swimming a horse across a creek. Tragic. What did I do there? At Narromine I flew Wirraways. Then I was sent to

37:30 to an OTU in Mildura to learn to fly Spits, this was despite the fact I'd been an acting CFI in a RAF Spit group in Egypt. There I met up with Bobby Gibbs, and the others that I knew in the desert. Again, we got in a little bit of trouble. Bobby had a Morris Minor and one day we carried it, stuck it into the mess. We'd a hell of a job to get it in. And of course he got in it

38:00 and went and drove it straight out, and took all the window and everything with him, the door, the lot. I was in the gun. S they gated me for three weeks. They said, "Now what you've got to do, you have to make bricks for some squash courts." They gave me about nine WAAAFs as assistants. All I had them doing was bringing me beer. We made bricks for the squash courts.

38:30 The trouble was, you would get sick of the routine you know. We all got up to…You see if Bobby had only been careful, it wouldn't have happened. We did have a job, we'd to tip the car like that to get it in through the door. Quite an engineering job when you stuck it in there. Now if he'd been sensible, but he was silly and he went straight through and took everything with him.

39:00 My record at Mildura wasn't what you call 100%, Then I was posted to what's known as 'The Hardening Course' in Adelaide. Again…I mean, nothing was harder than what I'd gone through in the desert. There were times when I had landed at a Spit 'drome in the desert. And I had to carry some food.

39:30 And I remember one time, I didn't carry any food because, stupidly, I remembered my mother would say,

“Don’t forget to clean your teeth.” So I took some bloody water to clean my teeth, and a tooth brush, and I forgot the food. But you see, she was a tough life in the desert at that time. Anyhow, I went to this Hardening Course in Adelaide, and it was staffed by the blokes from the 9th Divvy. So we didn’t take long to…We didn’t turn up at half the parades. The next minute they said,

40:00 “You're posted to Darwin.” They said,” You're going by train because you’ve not achieved the standard you should.” But it wasn’t…I knew the AOL [Air Officer], got in an aircraft and I was flown to Darwin. I arrived in Darwin and I was told immediately that I was to be a flight commander on 457 Squad. So despite all my bad antics

40:30 they still paid me the compliment to a flight commander. I joined 457 Squadron…

Tape 3

00:00 Well, the Empire Air Scheme moulded fellows from every walk of life into probably the finest group of reputable…But the permanent RAAF were very jealous of us, I always thought. (BREAK)

00:34 Flight 457, now we were waiting, we were in Darwin with Spit 8s, that’s when I thought about putting the sharks teeth on the aircraft. I had seen it in the desert on 112 Squadron and I talked to the boys and the idea was…I mean, blokes put all sorts of girls names and things on their aircraft, so we decided on sharks teeth

01:00 and we called it, 'The Grey Nurse' Squadron. In Darwin, we just did routine training. Again, we’d Doc Fenton, the Flying Doctor, near us, he used to put on parties. I think he had every brand of beer in Australia. We would send Spits on exercises over Broome.

01:30 Take all the cannon boxes out and fill the wing up with oysters and fly those back. So we were living quite a good life. Bobby Gibbs was lucky to escape when he had a motor failure on takeoff in a Spitfire and he got badly burnt. And the Red Cross girl from the hospital where he went,

02:00 they became engaged and they decided to get married in Darwin. And I was commissioned to organise the drink, which I did. I think I mixed up about four or five buckets full of cocktail and all…The wedding was in a cottage on Darwin aerodrome, and all the VIPs [very important persons], the chief matrons,

02:30 and so on, were there. And I always remember one senior matron said, “Well, I think we should go now because this is going to be the honeymoon cottage.” And I said, “I don’t know what a honeymoon is,” because when you come from the bush, these things you never hear about, because we’d all had a few drinks. I always remember the drink must have been working because I saw the old padre drop his steak in the sand and he just picked her up and brushed the sand off, and kept eating. So I said, “Well, the booze is working.”

03:00 So we duty did the right thing and finished all the cocktail up and then went home. And then I gave the speech…At Bobby’s 50th wedding anniversary, I gave the speech, too, down here at the Yacht Squadron. At Darwin…

03:30 we then flew the Squadron to Morotai, and that meant we took off and went to Molokai, Molokai we went to Noemfoor. I met Mick Grace, he was the CO of 1 Squadron, he had been a senior boy at Cranbrook. He was the squadron leader of a Kittyhawk Squadron. And then I went to Morotai, Morotai’s in the Halmaheras.

04:00 While we were at Morotai…

04:30 We were at Moratai, and there was a call from the Americans. They had captured a lot of Japanese fighters in the Philippines. Four Spitfires, they had brought four fighter aircraft from every Airforce in the world, to meet at the Philippines and fly against the captured Japanese aircraft. So I was taken to

05:00 Reserve to Clive Caldwell. The four Spits took off from the Halmaheras and went to Clark Field in the Philippines. There we…for something to do, we got our airmen… We found a Zero, and we got the ground crews to….We pulled the belly out of a Betty, a little light bomber, and put that in the thing and fixed the Zero up, and we were flying it.

05:30 We flew the Zero against the Spitfire, and the biggest thing there was we flew… because we were the Spitfire pilots we were called on to do all sorts of flying against all the other Americans, the Mustangs, the Lightnings, the Corsairs. And we spent more time, I think, more or less doing what we call the Prince of Wales Feathers. There was four of us,

06:00 we beat up the air strip. The leader would go ahead and do barrel rolls and the two others would do the Prince of Wales Feathers and the bloke in the box would do a barrel roll, too. Once I was the box, and that meant there were three aircraft, and I was lower down. And I knew I was going to be close to the ground, because the leader, you’ve got to follow your leader, and unbeknown to me I took the light off the tower, the control tower.

06:30 How I ever…It was a full blown prop doing about three thousand revs, and I'm doing about two fifty knots, and it went straight through the…It didn't hit the prop. I landed and the bloke came across from the tower and he said, "You took the top off the tower." I said, "I couldn't have." And there was the big score mark under the belly of the Spit, where the metal pipe had scratched. I knew I was low because I looked in the mirror

07:00 and I saw the dust rise on the strip. So I probably pulled up only about six feet above the ground. That was hairy, because it was up to the leader not to get me as low as that.

Ted, what do you mean by the Prince of Wales Feathers?

The Prince of Wales Feathers. There's four aircraft, there's a vicker-three and one in the box, so the leader goes up, and he goes that way, and the two wing men go out and do barrel rolls that way.

07:30 So you know the Prince of Wales Feathers is the feather up there and there's the two…that's term of it. And then the other, the…

08:00 We did a Prince of Wales Feathers, now that was just called that manoeuvre because of the configuration, because of one going up and the other two going that way. Then it was decided we'd to go back to Morotai for the Borneo invasion.

08:30 And I was going to fly the Zero from Khartoum to Zamboanga, that is on the island of Mindanao. And Clive Caldwell had been called back for this court martial, so I was flying his aircraft CRC [Spitfire]. An American colonel was going to fly in my Spit while I flew the Zero, so I took off from Clark Field to do an air test. I had an overload of fuel on. When you have got a lot of fuel tanks you have to

09:00 go up to about five thousand feet, and you turn one tank on and turn the other one off, so you don't get an air lock. Unfortunately, I only got to about fifteen hundred, carelessly did the right thing and got an air lock, that's always the danger. And the motor cut out. And I only had about four or five seconds to turn off all the electrical circuits.

09:30 I couldn't even jettison my overload fuel. I had an overload tank underneath me with about ninety gallons of hundred octane, and eight seven in front of me, and stuff on the wings…How it never blew up, I don't know. And I landed the Spit, and luckily it broke up and I was able to get out. They put me in hospital, I mean I only had a bit of a hit on the head. I was put into this American hospital. And of course the Americans treated us…

10:00 Being Spitfire pilots, we were just one echelon above everyone else, sort of thing. I was in hospital for about a week and then they sent me down to Zamboanga, to the Marines down there, to have a bit a rest. Wonderful, wonderful. I mean the Americans were fantastic to us. Then I went from there and joined up…I took over my flight at Morotai for the invasion of Labuan, and then Borneo.

10:30 We took off from Morotai, and one of the problems was, we'd escorts…We'd Beaufighters or Mosquitos to do our navigation. They went into cloud and we lost them. When we came out, the CO and I suddenly realised we'd twelve Spitfires… We knew we were over Mindanao but no aerodrome,

11:00 And the danger was, of course, we could lose a whole squadron because we'd lost our escort. We'd an idea….There was often sort of emergency strips, and we were flying down the coast of Mindanao, and we saw this American strip. We landed there, and got all the batteries out of every vehicle to start the Spits the next morning, Got them all started and took off for Labuan.

11:30 When we got to Labuan, we discovered the Japs…There were still Jap snipers on the strip and the strip was full of bomb holes. So the CO and I went in, and we got all the boys down except one. And we tried to talk him down, we got down and he was going too fast on the strip and we said, "Take off again." He gunned the aircraft and he went straight into one of these enormous heaps of mud,

12:00 where the bombs and stuff had gone. And I can still hear the Spit suddenly go from full roar to a stop dead noise. And he got out of it. So we only lost one aircraft. The unfortunate part about the Japs were, thy were still there and we were in a Chinese plantation,

12:30 a rubber plantation. And what the army had told us had happened, they said, "Well, you'll have your mosquito net, they'll cut the net and then use a bayonet while you're struggling. So you used to sleep with a gun under your pillow. This Chinaman had a few WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, and suddenly about three o'clock in the morning, you would hear this slight rustling on the leaves,

13:00 these bloody WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. We fixed the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s. We all had a feed of chicken, I can tell you, because it was terrifying, you would always imagine in the dark….I remember I used to have my head down and I'd have my hand on my gun, and I used to get a cramp almost, because you knew you only had a second if anyone was going to drive something into you. But otherwise our contribution…

13:30 I think we shot down one aircraft, we did dive bombing. We captured a lot of Japanese bomb, which were better than ours. So I got the airmen to modify the bomb racks to take the Japanese bombs. This is a good example of how different the feeling was. A wing commander came up from Air Board, and at first he went made at me

14:00 because I only had one rank up. But don't forget I had sores all over my body from the sweat flying in Borneo. So I was on a bit of a short fuse, but I took that. And then he got stuck into me, why didn't I get permission to change the bomb racks? Now the bomb racks, we were getting the bombs for nothing, and they were much better when we were dive bombing. I mean dive bombing in a Spit, the Spit was never made for dive bombing, we'd to devise our own method and everything.

14:30 It was at that stage, I knew then, I said, "I've got to get out of this Airforce. I can't take it any more." I mean, the war was over and I had done a tour. So I said to the boss, "Look I want to go, I've had had it." I couldn't take this second boast of this wing commander, by not seeing that by modifying the bomb racks, I hadn't committed any great crime, but I had broken the regulations that all this

15:00 had to go through the board of review of skilled engineers. And so I was posted south. And I was able to talk myself onto various aircraft and arrived back in Sydney. The next minute I was posted down to Wagga, to supervise people leaving the Forces.

15:30 And I said, "No, no, I'm getting out." And they said, "But don't forget back in Cairo in 1943, you and Neville Duke signed an agreement to join the RAF as permanent officers." I said, "Look, I'm not that material." Luckily, I knew a couple of senior officers, and I said, "Well, I'm going out, I'm going to walk out. I mean, I would not be permanent material."

16:00 I just couldn't…I would never be able to follow the regulatory thing of the permanent services. And they agreed to let me go, and I think I was discharged in… I was married in uniform in September '45, and I was discharged in February '46. I had six years in uniform. That was enough.

When had you actually returned to Australia?

16:30 I returned to Australia in '44.

Sorry, after your tours in Borneo…

No after Borneo. Well from Borneo I got back to Australia…in July, August, I was married in September.

The war was still on?

Oh, yeah. I married in September,

17:00 but from the day we fixed the wedding date, VP [Victory in the Pacific] Day occurred. Because we'd a job to get…you know, everyone went crazy. We'd the reception at the Australia Hotel, that was in September, but VP day had come. And then I was eventually discharged, I got married in uniform on the 14th of February 1946.

17:30 **Where did you move to?**

Then, it was a case of deciding I wanted to go back to the land. And I went and saw my friend Bill Hind in Gunnedah, and he agreed to sell me a bit of…he had two big properties, a portion of one of the properties. And I had enough money to start.

18:00 My grandfather left me some money, and so on. So then I went and got on to some virgin soil, and I remember going in to Tamworth, and we bought some old RAAF huts and I cut them up into sections. That was the homestead. And started to build a homestead, which I did. Then the first baby came along, Jennifer, my eldest daughter.

18:30 So we commenced to farm, and I bought cows and calves. I did that in '46. We didn't leave Gunnedah until 1979.

19:00 We'd a very good life there. We would have made a lot more money if I had gone with some of the other chaps that wanted me to do other things, but I'll never regret going back to the land. Never.

Irenie took to living on the land?

Oh yeah, well she'd come from the land, you see. She grew up in Merriwa, a big grazing family. We'd two daughters, we built a little school up there.

19:30 We were able to send them to Ascot. The land was good…I mean, we didn't make a lot of money. We spent…we enjoyed ourselves.

20:00 1964, I was asked to inspect a part of Guadalcanal, in the Solomon Islands, for developing a rice and cattle project, because it was black soil plains. Guadalcanal is what they call.…There's the Weather Coast, which is on the

20:30 south side of the Guadalcanal, a very high mountain range, a four hundred inch rainfall. When you get over the range, on the black soil plains there, there was only an eighty inch rainfall. So I flew up to Guadalcanal, and saw the opportunities. I came back and recruited some young Australians, and we started to operate in Guadalcanal. I still had the property at Gunnedah.

21:00 The company owned the Mandana Hotel. We took cattle up there. It was quite a pioneering job. There

was no cattle ships, we'd to make a cattle…a special place for them. We'd no way of unloading them. We'd to borrow every truck in Guadalcanal to get them on. But we did all those things. That project,

21:30 in 1984, was producing sixteen thousand tons of long grain rice, all the beef, all the eggs, all the pigs, everything, for Guadalcanal. It's now all back to the jungle. The government bought it, and in the first year the production dropped to five thousand tons. The chap I took up there is still up there.

22:00 He's lost everything in this recent rioting and so on. And all that is back to the jungle. We pioneered farming in the Tropics. The Americans thought it was an amazing display of ingenuity. But we didn't get any money out of it, we lost money, because we reached a stage that we got too big.

22:30 And then we'd to get American advisers, and obviously we'd to give them more equity. I a director of it, and luckily they made me chairman of directors, and I didn't want to be…There was no way I wanted to handle that job. So I was lucky to get another chap in that was a brilliant professional. Between us, we kept it going and when the time came we said, "Look, let's get out. There is no way we can get in to fight the Americans legally."

23:00 And they ran it, and then it was sold to the Solomon Island government and then they destroyed it. Because, when the British…You see it was a British colony protectorate. I mean it had a governor, a British governor. It was run…We used to go in a red sea rig to go down to Government House. It was quite colonial. I gave up smoking when I was up there, because some of the nights

23:30 up at the Government House, drinking old French Brandy and then trying to work the next day, I couldn't handle the booze and cigarettes, so I never smoked again. That was it. Guadalcanal….The next thing there was…I had been developing some grain drying for this company in Sydney,

24:00 and I was called on to go to Fiji and put some rice drying equipment into the old sugar mills in Masouri. When I was in Fiji….Then I learnt there was some Australian leases in the New Hebrides, old leases. We ended up….Then it was decided that we form a company to go in and develop the New Hebrides.

24:30 We developed a very big pig farm up there, and built an abattoir. And we established cattle. We did a lot of pioneering with the cattle industry. Do you want a fully story on that one?

What I would like to ask now is if you continued flying after the war?

No, no.

25:00 I did fly in the sense…In those days they knew I was an old pilot and the blokes on the DC3s would get me up in the cockpit and I would fly it. One time I was up there, I was in the second dickie seat, and the captain was having breakfast, and we were coming up to Port Moresby. He said, "Just line her up on the strip there."

25:30 "Hey," I said, "Woh!" He's eating his breakfast and I could feel the sweat going down my back, I had been flying Spitfires, I had about 800 hours flying Spitfires, I had been a test pilot and everything, but landing this bloody thing, full of passengers. I got him to take it, I said, "No way. I'm not getting paid for this. You get onto this job." That's they only time I flew…I flew the other day with David Lowy down at Temora in a Tiger Moth. He was in the back seat, though.

26:00 Sixty years after I flew one in South Africa.

Was it like hopping back onto a bicycle?

The Tiger Moth's like driving a horse and cart compared to what I had been flying. But no, I never….I couldn't afford to. I just didn't have the funds to keep an aircraft.

Did you miss it?

No, because I had been too lucky.

26:30 I should have been…There was too many times when I got shot up or something, that I survived. Had I had the money, yes, I would have been happy, because I could have had an aircraft in prime condition, but I didn't have the money. So I never regretted… I'd had my section of that.

27:00 I got away with it and I thought leave it like that. I had many experiences in the air, training and test flying and various things…There's a limit that'll catch you one day if you push the barriers too far.

Was there anything about your Service time that you missed?

I missed the tremendous comradeship. The friends that I made

27:30 in those circumstances were unbelievable. Debben Minchin and I still joke and laugh about many of the funny things…And I mean, we did some terrible things at times, but I mean you could get away with it. I remember, Debben Minchin's sister was the Atlantic Petrol girl. There was an ad for Atlantic Petrol with a woman with her hair flying, in those early days, and she was married to a fellow

28:00 called Ralph Doyle. And when we were waiting to go overseas in Sydney, we were very short of money,

and he said always come up, we'd always have a meal. So we went up and had a meal, and they had to go out. So we drank all the scotch out of the decanter and filled it up with cold tea. We were going the next day…And I hate to think if he had some VIPs, he was a pretty big high flyer.

28:30 "Here, have a bit of Black Label," and it's cold tea. I mean those which…You know we never thought about anything. People would say, "What a terrible thing to do," but you know, we were going overseas.

Were those habits you had to lose or did they just fall off…

Yes, I mean…

29:00 As you get older, a lot of these things…I've seen many instances, we've had funny escapades in the bush. There was a case when one of my friends at the Picnic Races, he went down a couple of days earlier and got really on a bender and we were staying in this motel, and he said, his wife wasn't there, he said, "I want a woman."

29:30 So we pulled the 'Women's' notice off the lavatory and stuck it on his door, and shoved him in there. In the morning he said, "God," he said, "I thought this was a brothel. There was a 'Women's' notice on my door." Those were the sort of things you got up to, you know what I mean? Yeah, I suppose…But as you age,

30:00 you don't get up to those pranks so much. But again, in the bush there were times when we'd fun and games, and it would be the same as the Services. You could get away with a lot of more in the Services, because we'd a set of wings, and rank. In those days, a set of wings opened many doors.

Did you struggle at all to fit back into civilian life?

30:30 No, no. I'd had enough. I had exposed my neck so many times, no. I didn't miss the flying. I would have missed it if I had enough money to keep flying, but I didn't have that money. And I think instances when you got away with…I mean, motor failures on take off and hairy things…

31:00 You know, I had nightmares for awhile after the crash in the Philippines, because I could imagine what it would be like when all the fire started. And then I would get terrible hallucinations with malaria. And when I do that, I have terrible dreams. I'm on fire, doing about five hundred knots, heading straight for a brick wall. I wake up screaming, the wife says, but otherwise that's all…

31:30 **Did you continue to suffer from malaria after the war?**

Yeah, oh yeah. Even though they gave me the full treatment. If I get a chill…I haven't had a reasonable attack for about three or four years. I might have a forty eight hour session. Hallucinations are terrible, I sweat like a….and I get over it.

32:00 You're supposed not to do that, but that's what happened with me sometimes. But no, I haven't had it for awhile now.

I presume you were on medication for during Service, did you continue it?

Yes. But what happened was, I got malaria in the Solomon's, I got bad malaria in the Solomon's, and that is what kick started it again. They said it should have been cured with Atebrin,

32:30 and all the later stuff, but I got it badly in the Solomon's. I didn't get it in the New Hebrides, but the Solomon's was a bad spot for it. It's a recurrence now that, as I said, not had it for four or five, it's not too bad.

Did you join the RSL [Returned and Services League] or any Associations on your return?

I didn't join the RSL for quite awhile.

33:00 The trouble is with the RSL is, all it wanted to do was drink booze…And I couldn't see any. I hadn't changed but I couldn't see any….I didn't want to get in there every Friday night around a keg of beer when I was in the bush. I had done all that during the Service years.

33:30 So…I wasn't enthusiastic. I did join the RSL, but I'm not a member now, but I started something else. I started the Spitfire Fund, and that sort of occupies me fully. I was involved with…This was about five or six years ago, they were involved with

34:00 raising money for another block of cement. And I said, "Why don't we tip the money into a fund for the next generation? What's the use of another block of cement now?" It was for a wing, anyhow, for blokes that never left Darwin. The only injuries were when they were pissed and they fell off bar stools in Darwin. So I said, "What's a waste of…Anyhow, to cut a long story short,

34:30 I persisted, and the University of New South Wales and the Australian Defence Force Academy thought it was a good idea. To cut a long story short, the funds were invested in the University of New South Wales, and we've got a quarter of a million dollars which earns, the year before last earned $25,000. We give an award every year to someone

35:00 who comes up with an idea for the defence of Australia. The woman that won it this year, Dr Francis

Miley, is now overseas, she's studying the waste of money in the Department of Defence. And she's really put a cat amongst the pigeons. And the Australian Defence Force Academy and the University, they really helped me. The joke is, I have to sit in on the selection committee with the rector of

35:30 the Australian Defence Force Academy and the vice-chancellor of the University. And I said, "Well, I have no degrees. I'm the pick and shovel man." But they accept me. They're very good to me, extremely good to me, but I do work hard for that project. And it's getting a lot of publicity. My argument is that we don't get any assistance from the government,

36:00 because it's a living memorial. If it was for a block of cement or something, we would get a quarter of a million dollars. I was just waiting to talk to the Minister for Veteran Affairs this morning, she's been a big help to me. We have to rely on…Like Rolls Royce gave us $10,000, but the Spitfire Memorial Defence fellowship will be going when many of the static memorials are just housing estates.

36:30 It's in memory of the men who fought at the Battle of Britain, the Battle of Malta, the Battle of Australia. I flew with a lot of them and they were the finest men I have ever been associated with. So it's memorial to them, but it's a living memorial.

Did you keep in touch with many of your former flying mates?

Yeah, Neville Duke, I talked to him in England. I have been over there to see him.

37:00 Oh yeah, but I'm not a good….Debben Minchin, yes. That's Nick Minchin, the minister's father. He and I have been close…And Bobby Gibbs, of course, Bobby Gibbs just lives down here. I have that hard core of ones who…But I don't chase up the others.

37:30 I always remember, when we first put some crops in at Gunnedah, and we'd to do some aerial crop dusting. So he came in a Tiger Moth and we didn't have an air strip, so I told him to land on the road. After he had done the scrip, he said, "You're the bloke that called me, 'The most useless bloke that ever got into an aircraft.'" I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "I went through that OTU and you were there and you told me I was wasting my time."

38:00 He said, "How's about you taking that plane up now?" I said, "No dice. I'm not going up there." But I'd forgotten him, you know what I mean. And you get Americans, people ringing you up. On Wednesday, I've got to go and sign a lot of prints. I can't remember, but blokes say, "But you were Number 2 on that day that we lost X." And I'll got and do it for him, but…

38:30 I want to keep with the ones that I've had so much fun with. You see, the Spitfire people now, we have our lunch at the American Club with the wives, with the women, now it's a different story. This idea where we'll always get around the bloody barrel and talk about the war, I can't get a kick out of that. Been there done that. You've got to lift your sights for the next one. That's my view.

39:00 **Do you march on ANAZAC Days?**

Yeah, oh yeah. I march with the Spitfires on Anzac Day.

You still do?

Yeah, oh yeah. I mean, while I can I do.

And when you can't?

The time will come when I probably can't,

39:30 but then I will just watch them then, or watch whatever happens.

Would you like some of your children or grandchildren…

Yes, my grandson will march this year, and my granddaughter, she wants my ribbons, she will march with him. That's how it will go.

Do you ever wear your father's medals when you march?

40:00 No, oh no. They're in there. I don't do that. I think it's different…Otherwise you're dripping with the medals. I respect what he did, and I could go back another generation, too, and wear Mitchell's medals. But no, they're in the cabinet.

Tape 4

00:32 **I would like to take you back to the beginning of your story, as you've told it today. You've mentioned that your father served with the Royal Flying Corps in the First World War. Do you recall him telling you of any experiences he had?**

No, I remember he talked about, he fought at the Somme. There was never much…

01:00 And we always as kids, we went to Anzac Day. And I can remember him having fun with all his old compatriots, but there was never…He never discussed it like I have with my kids, and my grandkids who are interested. No, we didn't.

01:30 And don't forget in those days, life in London was…I mean they still went to shoots, and it was a totally different exercise to what it's today. But no, to answer your question, no…I know he fought at the Somme and he was in the British cavalry, but I wouldn't know much more else except that he crashed when he was an observer, learning to fly.

Was he injured in the crash?

02:00 I don't think so. But by the time he got back, the war had finished. All that…There was definitely no details ever told to us kids, that would define what it was like at the Somme. I can remember that there was terrible gas and all that sort of stuff, but there wasn't a lot of detail.

02:30 **As a child did you learn much about the First World War?**

Yes, I did. I was a generation that was accustomed, that if there was a war overseas that the Australians would be part of…I always remember when I joined up the Airforce,

03:00 I thought, 'This'll be over before I even get there.' That was the feeling we'd. Little did we know what was in store for us. I can remember when I was catching the train from Gunnedah down to learn to train, and the Battle of Britain was at its heights, and I said, "My God, it'll all be finished and we won't even get there."

That is an interesting perception given that

03:30 **your father served in the First World War, and that was a similar attitude I believe then…that they all expected it to be all over by Christmas, in its first year. And yet the following generation were aware that it had certainly extended for some time. And yet when the Second World War started….perhaps your generation…**

Well, we reckoned it would be over. Don't forget we were told the Japanese tanks were made of cardboard…

04:00 There was a perception…And we didn't realise the tremendous…I mean, when I got to England I realised how tenuous it was. I was in Harden when Singapore fell, and I'm away over there, and I thought, 'My God, this is getting serious.' The whole atmosphere's changed.

04:30 I mean, I don't think that…I think it's terribly important that the Australians, that we went to Iraq, only because I think we have to have big brothers like America or Britain. If America hadn't come into the war we wouldn't be sitting here right now. The Americans came in…I mean, I know a lot about Guadalcanal because I saw it when I was up there. I know the tenuous situation. Then lost the two battleships at Singapore.

05:00 We'd gone. and it's easy after the event. I mean all this anti-American sentiment, I don't think the Labour Party, and I don't want to get political, I don't think they realise how important it's to have a big friend. We just don't have the strength and the armaments. If the Indonesians came in, nothing we could do without a big partner. I don't say they will, but ethnic problems are quite extraordinary.

05:30 So that's what I have learnt about it, you have got to have a big brother. For us, we would never be of the calibre to provide, there is no doubt. I think Australian Airmen and Australian ground forces are probably looked on by the other countries as the finest in the world, there's no question about it. The British thought that about the AIF at Alamein and you saw what the Americans thought about that division of men we sent into Iraq.

06:00 So Australians are like they are in sport, they've got the same tenacity. The aces, the men that I flew with, Timmy Goldsmith shot down fourteen at Malta, as a sergeant pilot living in a sergeants mess. The blokes that went into the Empire Scheme, they came from every walk of life. There was a bloke, he was a

06:30 Seventh Day Adventist teacher, and he joined up with us, and he was hopeless. He was not like Debben and I, and we got the old sergeant a bit full the night before we passed out, and we said, "Don't forget to mark him down as a born leader of men," because we would be the last bloke. Anyhow, when we got to Durban, while we were looking at the girls and thinking about music and so on,

07:00 he's taking a picture of the bank. Anyhow, he got to Cairo and they put him on to patrolling the pipeline. I can remember the tears were in his eyes, he wanted to be a fighter pilot. And the next time I saw him, he was stepping out of an aircraft in the Pacific. He was a wing commander with a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross]. And I remember, I said to Neville,

07:30 I said, "You know Debben and I were right, when we said he was a born leader of men." What he'd done, he's talked himself onto Ops, he was a deadly fighter pilot. He only died the other day. We'd the Australian surf champion with us, he was hopeless. And then you have the bloke who was a school teacher, a fantastic fighter pilot. I can Keith Chisholm.

08:00 Keith Chisholm was learning dentistry, shot down eight as a fighter pilot, spent three years in the underground, escaped three times, got a Military Cross from the government. The last time he escaped…two Australians escaped, and they had the two guards…They were guarding them on the Vistula, the river, the Australian took off and the guard went to chase him, and Keith's guard turned his head to do and Keith hit him on the head and threw him in the river.

08:30 That night Keith sat in the Opera House of the Gestapo [German Secret Police]. I mean that was an Australian, he died recently. Those are records you don't hear about. I've got them all documented, because it illustrates the tremendous depth that all generations of Australians…I don't give a hang, it's never changed. There will be just as many. If there was another war tomorrow,

09:00 The young people would be better equipped than us, better educated.

Growing up then in between the wars, what did that Military legacy from the First World War mean to you? What did Anzac Day signify?

It was an important part of our youth

09:30 when we were growing up, because the days that we went, we knew that our fathers' enjoyed it and we listened to the stories. I don't think we were aware of the importance of it, even though at this stage…I mean, you don't start to realise that until you get into it yourself,

10:00 and then the whole perspective…You realise the tremendous thing. I mean, the Boer War, the deeds of the Australians there were famous. Look at the Light Horsemen at Beersheba, and all these things start to gel up together. And now of course Anzac Day to me is a tremendous…I've never seen so many people of coloured races at Anzac Day.

10:30 So it's an important event to unite the nation.

What about Empire Day?

Empire Day comes and goes, it has not got the importance of Anzac Day. You've got to face it, Empire Day's a holiday. Nothing compares with

11:00 the Anzac Day tradition, because it established…I suppose you could say it established nationhood. I suppose it unites all classes of people. And I think as such it's important that it's maintained.

11:30 I mean Empire Day…The next generation wouldn't know what we are talking about. They're gone.

You were born in England, what did the Empire mean to you?

The Empire was very important when I was growing up. I remember I was up in Bluff Downs when the King abdicated,

12:00 Edward the….The Prince of Wales resigned as King. I think he married that Simpson woman. Well, they sent a bloke from the station to tell us about it because there was no wireless or anything. So that shows how strong, that shows the strength of the Empire to us in those days.

12:30 Now, I'm still conscious. I'm a monarchist, I suppose, but I also realise unless they get with it, the generations will change it, which is quite understandable. But from my generation, the history of my family, they go back to 1640. They were fighting…,

13:00 The history…They've always been fighting then. We accepted it as part of…When this war started my father went back in the Services in the training thing, and the three boys were in the Services. We never hesitated, and I reckon if there was a war tomorrow, you would be shocked, they couldn't take everyone. You always hear about all the bad ones, but you don't hear about the goodies.

13:30 The next generation is extremely capable.

What Services did your brother enter into to?

He was in the British cavalry and then he went to the Royal Flying Corps. My brother was in the AIF. He joined up from the Law School,

14:00 and there is a chair in the Law School in memory of him. There is a eulogy that was written by Sir Kenneth Jacobs, from the High Court. Ian was extremely popular in the Services. He was posthumously decorated, too. He used to, when he was only a…

14:30 He was the lowest rank in the army, and sometimes on parade these lieutenants, who had just left school and so on, and Ian would quote and stand forth and say, "Well, that is not correct." And quote was some ancient law. We're on King's regulations going back about four or five hundred years. And of course, he would make a fool of them, the troops were laughing. They used to tell me about these stories.

15:00 But he would just question…And say, "Well sir, this is not correct because of Section 42 of the so and the Crimes Act," and so forth. The little bloke, the lieutenant had no chance of answering that he was incorrect. They wanted him to be an officer, but he wouldn't take it on. He was a trooper when he was…

whatever the lowest rank is, when he was in the desert and he was the same in the Pacific.

15:30 He took over the gun at Finschhafen, and did a tremendous job and he was posthumously rewarded, and mentioned in despatches. They are rare. They don't give posthumous awards. And he was hit by a sniper. He is buried in Lae Cemetery. The other brother was in the Airforce,

16:00 but there is seven years difference. He was killed in an accident about six years ago, a car accident. We were never close because of the seven years in that early time is like a lifetime. I'm in the bush, he was an accountant, and so we never got…We were never as close as the brother that was killed, Ian.

16:30 We were very close.

Were you middle child? The youngest?

I was the oldest. Ian was twenty months younger and Richard was seven years younger. I was the eldest. But I mean, times have changed. I don't think there is any change, though,

17:00 in the ability of the young Australians and their determination to defend this country.

That's what I'm wondering about, in your case. You mentioned that during the Depression your father's businesses had struggled, and you yourself didn't feel suited to the banking environment. What did prompt you to,

17:30 **in the first instance, join the Light Horse?**

The war started when I was at…Guli, and I didn't make any sort of make any immediate move, but I knew I would be making a move. If you're working in the bush,

18:00 you may be a little bit behind in your thinking, because you don't get papers every day and so on. It didn't take me long, I knew I wanted to do something. See, and I went into camp in January 1940. So as soon as I did that I immediately joined the Light Horse. I joined it where we lived at Bowral. I got into a Bowral troop.

18:30 I had played with the Militia before the war. I had, when I was in the bank, talked about joining, there was a CMF [Citizens' Military Force] out at North Head and so on. But I didn't go forward with it. I would have if I had stayed in Sydney, I would have joined the chocolate soldiers, the CMF, whatever they are. But it was automatic. I knew once it started,

19:00 and I would join the Light Horse, then I was in a different category. And I only decided when I realised that the horses would be hopeless. But you didn't realise that when you first joined up.

Did you see the Light Horse as an avenue into active Service?

Oh yeah. We were going overseas with them. But we didn't know, you see. It wasn't until.…I can remember the incidence,

19:30 trying to get through this gate. Someone got the hook off and the chain off to open the gate, and there's a Tiger Moth flying above us, we were sitting ducks. I said, "Well, I don't think the cavalry is going to be going away." And it didn't. I don't know whether the cavalry was used in Algeria.

20:00 That was very rough country.

You were presumably enjoying your work on the station with horses…

Oh yeah, I loved the challenge of the horses. All of my life, I mean I've played polo, all my life, I've ridden horses. I've done everything you can do on a horse, in those days, you can do a lot more now. I've bulldozed, you know, go from a horse to pull a bullock down and…

20:30 I had some terrible busters, terrible busters, but I haven't broke anything.

I'm just trying to imagine what it was that took you from…or wanted you to leave that life for a Military life. Was there any expectation from your family?

No, none at all. What happens, when the war started, until you sudden realise that it's serious,

21:00 that it's not just a skirmish. Don't forget, it was operating in France and it was pretty cool…And until it was obvious, and this is before Japan came into the war, that it was time to look at…And once we joined up, we couldn't get there fast enough. As I said I was terrified that we would just get there and then it would be all over.

21:30 **What did your father think when you did join up?**

There was never any question, never any worries, in except that mother, I don't think, but she was in the Red Cross. There was never any criticism or anything to say don't or anything.

22:00 It was just taken as the normal duty as an Australian citizen to defend the Empire. That will change now, because I don't think there's any need. The chance is now that if Australia is in any way

threatened, I think there will be a tremendous surge of young people. I don't think there's any question.

22:30 I think you would be shocked. This idea that says they wouldn't go. You would be surprised. And that's what we need then to defend this country. We certainly went to Iraq. Now I see that the value of that in many ways. Not only will it be commercially good, because there's no doubt Howard would have made deals. That country could be,

23:00 whether they find the weapons or not, it was oppressed…They've done something that is irrespect of the other. I think that it's by cultivating that association with America, it's terribly important for our future, America and Britain. Because if the balloon went up and they don't want to come out here, you can kiss this country goodbye. Unless we use atom bombs or gas.

23:30 In today's world…I mean in twenty years they can fire a rocket from the other side of the world and it could land right here in the middle of Sydney. I don't say it's going to be as bad as that, but the necessity to have a big brother is very important.

But at that time the big brother was Britain.

24:00 **Were you rushing off to defend the mother country?**

Yes, the big brother was Britain. And it didn't enter my to say, "Well, this time we…" Like our ancestors to the Boer War, the last war, never a question, never ever one section of a question. Now, the disaster is something like Vietnam. Those blokes were terribly badly treated,

24:30 because they went along, and they had the same spirit, but there was not the same aim. You weren't fighting for freedom. You were fighting for freedom for someone else. We were fighting for freedom. We were, at one stage, fighting for survival. And that's totally different to what they did in Vietnam.

25:00 The other thing is there is no greater training ground than an active duty. I mean, you can't play war. And I think that's where the powers that be are using their heads, too. All those Australians and Airmen and Naval personnel, have been blooded in the real thing. And that's where you learn the proper way of doing it, you can't play it. You can experiment and all those things, that's where it all comes out.

25:30 And the Australians are very ingenious, they've developed ways of doing things, which in many cases have been most important in armaments and defence.

In terms of your blooding, did the Light Horse experience prepare you or train you for what lay ahead for you?

Well, no…We did manoeuvres,

26:00 all that. But at this stage it hadn't been realised. The experience overseas, we were way behind. A good example that just showed you we'd neglectful over the years…It's on there's a war and the first thing we do was marshalled all the Light Horse.

26:30 If there was a war tomorrow, you'd be marshalling all the scientific guys who can bend beams, you know what I'm talking about? That's how it's gone. And you've still got fighting men, but I don't think you will ever want fighter pilots in five years, there won't be any. There will just be a robot sitting in the plane, and there will be someone a kilometre underground just pushing knobs.

27:00 **What skills did you learn in the Light Horse?**

You're supposed to pull the sword out this way. I used to kick the scabbard forward with one hand and pull it from the back, because it looked more flash, to answer your question. I'd have to say very little. We did all sorts of manoeuvres and things,

27:30 But we were more used for ceremonial stuff, in those early days. We used to do parades through Parramatta, we rode in the Sydney show. The plumes were very colourful, a ninety round bandoleer full of paper, spurs. So I can't put my finger on it, because it was no different to riding…

28:00 When you run a head of cattle….The main thing is look after your horse, only this time there were regulations thrown in with it. But to say we learnt any skills…The manoeuvres in the Light Horse were no different to manoeuvres on the ground. But no, there would be nothing else.

28:30 Nothing that would apply to some…Not like the Airforce…You got used to… making sure all the servicing is done and so on.

What about what you mentioned earlier about reflexes that you had developed as a rider?

I always remember riding a horse, a bad horse, and there was a tree like that, and we're riding,

29:00 and I'm out here and he dived straight because he knew he could knock me off. And I had just time to put my feet out and I went back over his tail and landed on my feet. It was split second. A horse, you fly on your tail, and when you are riding a bad horse, he's very….You can detect that something's coming up, you know what I mean?

29:30 To say reflexes are fast. I think they were sharpened in those days. With a bad horse you could…I'm not going to say you couldn't fall, I mean I've fallen off terrible falls, but the times I could get out and nearly land on my feet. I remember that case, I went straight over the back, there was no use trying to duck under, he was going under just enough for me off all right.

30:00 But he was a bad horse, you see. They're pretty cunning. They're not like today where you have the Horse Whisperer and all his techniques. Our methods were totally different. We were riding brumbies, too. But I mean I think you treat a horse…I think the activity on a horse teaches you to locate when there's a problem coming.

30:30 And I think flying an aircraft, you fly on the seat of your pants. In other words, that dictates to your brain your turning and so on. For me, that's how it works, and you've got to have fast reflexes, because you've only got a split second sometimes to do anything.

Did you ever fly in a bad plane?

Oh yeah.

31:00 Geez, I've flown a Russian plane, I could see the rivets almost popping almost, in India. I picked up a Paul de Fiat in the desert. I'd been out in the desert for about six or eight months. And I just took an airman there and we cleaned her up, and I flew it. We wanted a drogue tower when we were training in Egypt, and that was crazy. Taking off in an old bloody clapped out thing like that.

31:30 But you never thought of that. So I have flown bad aircraft, in that sense. We made a Savoia, we captured an Italian Savoia, that was a three engine aircraft, at Tripoli. We wanted to use it carry beer up from Cairo up to the Squadron, see, and we threw all the armaments out of it and so on.

32:00 And I said to the other bloke, an Englishman, I said, "Have you ever flown twins?" And he said, "I think a couple of times." So he and I, we never had. We took it off. As soon as we got airborne, the whole thing was a disaster because we'd altered the centre of gravity. And my guess by God, we got it back on the ground. And that was the end of the idea. Talk about a bad aircraft, fancy putting my neck out having never flown a twin.

32:30 And he was the same, and we take off in a three Italian plane. But you did silly things like that. You never thought of the risk.

Were you short on confidence, even in the days before the war?

No. I think a challenge is…

33:00 to have a go. Maybe you shouldn't take all the challenges you take on, because I think I learnt them in the hard trade as a Spitfire pilot. I think a challenge is sort of something to be solved.

33:30 Now I get more frightened, now, when I take off in an aircraft. I ride the take off, and I'm trying to work out what he is going to do when the motor cuts. Has he got enough room to go around again? What's in front of us? I don't panic, but I know in a jet, the more power you put into a jet the better it is. But turbo props, I watch. I took off and flew to Byron the other day,

34:00 and I rode the take off, and I also ride the landing. Because they're the two most dangerous processes. Once you get up in the air, you're safe. So there's two periods, when he takes off there's a critical time… And having flown all your life you realise that sometimes, and having had two motor failures in the air… We were over Broome, Bobby Gibson and I,

34:30 we got into a Cessna, there was five of us in the aircraft, we got to eight thousand feet and there was a cough in the motor, and it coughed again. I was sitting in the seat with the pilot. And I suddenly thought, 'Well, there's no future down there, we can't land there. And we immediately made him follow the road and we got back to Broome. And he knew he was flying two Spitfire pilots,

35:00 and I think that made him nervous. He only had about four or five hundred hours. But I mean, there is no future, when you run out of noise and you've only got one motor….So, I'm glad I haven't pushed it too hard.

Your descriptions of the Light Horse and their attractions for you, paint a glamorous picture.

Oh, yeah.

35:30 I mean, when you're introduced to take the brigadier's car to North Sydney and take his wife shopping, in 1940, I mean a Light Horse uniform was as spectacular as any uniform you could wear, of course you get swollen headed. As I said, I used to put wet towels over my plumes so they would fluff up and down when you walked.

36:00 And the Light Horse is a very attractive uniform. I think the government should always have a troop of Light Horse, for ceremonial, like the police horses, because it's a legend with Australian fighting people, Beersheba, what they did in the Boer War. Breaker Morant, It's a sort of natural…And our whalers are such wonderful horses.

36:30 But it's gone, as far as I'm concerned. I knew, in that very instance, that was the end….There was no chance of Light Horse being a viable thing in this war.

When you were in the Light Horse, it was 1939 I believe?

I joined in 1939.

Did you have any sense of the looming conflict in Europe?

37:00 Yes, we did…I didn't want to be in the Infantry, and the Light Horse offered what I'm…I'm mad on horses, so that was a pull to say, "Oh, that'll be good. We'll go to war with a horse." You didn't think of the logistics of what it all meant.

37:30 As far as you were concerned, we'd be posted to overseas or somewhere with our cavalry, and we'd be doing charges like they did at Beersheba. we didn't know. Don't forget when the war started, apart from a few Spits and the Hurricanes, they had nothing else.

Do you recall the day or hearing when the war started?

Yes, I was out playing tennis.

38:00 We used to go to a neighbour's place, playing tennis, when I was at Guli, and I think it was Menzies announced the war that night. I remember him saying, "We are now at war." And it sort of…It went in one ear and out the other, more or less. I can't say I immediately said, "We must go and join up."

38:30 Because it hadn't….You didn't envisage anything at the time. I can't remember how long it was, but then, of course, when I lost my job, that probably brought it on quicker too. But it sort of…

39:00 It didn't sink in for awhile. And then the reports started to come back of the problems, and then it started to sink in, "We've got to do something." But when it first started, it was just like a gentlemen's war over France. But that all changed. Dunkirk, and all that sort of…

39:30 It brought you to realisation, that OK, now is the time. Whatever you were going to do, you better think about doing it.

Why, if you can tell me?

I just felt that having joined the Light Horse, which we thought was the thing, the next thing obviously….It didn't take long for me to realise that I'm wasting my time and then we joined the Airforce.

40:00 We still didn't know what sort of….Billy Hyde and I went and made two flying suits out of possum skins, you know what I mean? We didn't know, we got the legacy of the First [World] War. The stories came back that they were flying old twin engine biplanes, Gloucester Gladiators, CR-42s, the Italians.

40:30 I mean the war was, the early stages….As soon as it started to escalate, we realised the tremendous importance. And that then grew in as you realised you've got to get going. But the initial stages, it was very slow thinking because…I can't actually remember saying, "Well, I must do this."

41:00 I said, "It's about time I did so and so."

Tape 5

00:35 **Ted, just to go back when you are learning to fly a plane. Can you tell me about the first time you flew solo?**

I can tell you about the first time I flew. I had an Australian instructor, he was in the RAF, a fellow called Panda Watson. He said to me, "I'm going to take you up in the Tiger Moth and I want you to turn around and watch the tail,"

01:00 while he did the aerobatics. Well, I don't think I have ever been sick in my life. I was sick in the air and I was sick on the ground. I thought, 'My God, I'll never be a pilot.' Little did I know by doing that the whole metabolism was disorientated. I was never sick again, ever, in the air. I have never forgotten that, to answer your question. I can remember going solo,

01:30 I think I had about four or five hours. You listened, and once you did the first landing the whole thing flooded through you. I'm not going to say it was a piece of cake. My natural ability, luckily again, came back to horses, timing and jumping and all that sort of stuff. I didn't have any problems.

02:00 I had more problems on the learning side, studying. Debben and I used to have to sit beside the brain box, that was the fellow who was the Adventist teacher. So Debben and I would there and he helped us through most of the exams. That was my biggest problem, because I had only ever done the intermediate. Solo was not a problem and after that, I took off in so many aircraft

02:30 that I'd never flown before. Like in the desert, I flew that thing with three engines. You reached a maturity that you could juggle it somehow.

Do you recall the feeling of flying solo?

Well first of all, it was an achievement, when you're learning to fly. I mean a lot of blokes got scrubbed, they couldn't go solo.

03:00 So that's your first barrier, you went solo, you're over that one. Your aim was to be a fighter pilot, otherwise you could be put down, made an air gunner or an observer or something. They could change whatever they were going to do quite easily.

So you consciously set out to be a fighter pilot?

Yes. I was determined, I wanted to be a fighter pilot.

03:30 I had no urge to be a bomber pilot. And that's why I really concentrated then. I mean, it's the luck of the draw, that's what I called my book. They wanted fighter pilots in those early stages and then they wanted bomber pilots. I wouldn't have survived as a bomber pilot. I mean those early buggers were just massacred. I would have, but the chance of survival in those early days, as a bomber…

04:00 It was pretty skinny on a fighter pilot, but nothing like it was later on a bomber.

What did you perceive as the difference between…

Well, I wanted to be a fighter pilot, I suppose, because it was a glamorous contest. It was a little bit of bravado, I don't know what it would be, but I wanted to be a fighter pilot, I was quite happy to

04:30 imagine myself pitted against someone else in the air. It never worried me. I mean, I wasn't one of the aces, but then I never broke any aircraft either. The only aircraft I damaged were ones that failed in the air. I never broke an aircraft in all my flying career. I flew in some really terrible conditions, aerodromes and…

05:00 But to me, I wanted to be a fighter pilot.

How did you and your mate see bomber pilots?

We'd a tremendous respect for them. If you'd of had a computer and fed the raids in, it would have told you that after thirty raids you should be dead. Thirty raids…That was a tour, they took you off flying, because that's what it was.

05:30 And then you went back and you had another tour. So the risk went up. Fighter pilots had a fairly heavy…They had a pretty heave loss in the early parts of the war. But after Alamein, we'd tremendous reserves, we'd backup squadrons and even though the war was getting bigger,

06:00 the reserves were bigger. And the quality of our flying and learning was starting to outstrip the enemy. When we first started, we were all new chums, sitting ducks against these aces. It was an ace that shot me down, I've since learned, a German ace. What he did, he shot all my controls away. I had just been in a fight and the next thing, the Spitfire had the control

06:30 rolled into cloud and that saved me, because when I came out of the cloud there was no one around. But I had to fly it flat out to stop it being out of control. I had to put it down on a bomber strip, and I was very lucky to get away with it. I had to land it about two hundred and fifty mile an hour, and it went up like that and didn't go over. Very lucky.

07:00 But I was lucky that I rolled into cloud or he would have shot me down. Because having crippled the aircraft, except that I could fly it flat out, but he'd crippled my manoeuvring. If I'd have gone straight and level I would have been a sitting duck. But the cloud saved me.

I have to say that sounds very scary.

07:30 **What were your thoughts on the Empire Training Scheme?**

I think the Empire Training Scheme was a fantastic scheme. Probably the greatest scheme every involved…It drew together all types, colours, creeds. As I said, we'd the champion surfer, he was hopeless. And on the other side we'd a religious teacher who was a sworn killer, a magnificent pilot.

08:00 The Empire Air Scheme trained people, whereas previously in the permanent Airforce it took three years, we did it all in three months. And that's shown by the tremendous records of the airmen, the pilots, the observers, the air gunners, that were produced from Australia. There were Australians, South Africans, Canadians,

08:30 Jamaicans and Americans. All creeds.

How did you find your instructors?

Very good, very good. I had a good instructor at Guineafowl, another goon one at Thorn Hill. I had a

good one in Tony Gaze, an Australian in the RAF at Harden.

09:00 The instructors were very good. I hope the pupils that I trained thought the same of me as an instructor. But no problems, no problems there.

Do you think there was respect for your instructors?

09:30 Well, yes. You see what happens, once you've gone solo, you start to build up your confidence, and then you go to the next stage which is to go for your wings. Until you've got your wings, you've got nothing. So you're pretty under pressure to make sure you make no mistakes. Now once you get your wings, you are through the first barrier and then you went to OTU.

10:00 Again, it was a risk. You had to fly Spitfires solo. There was no instructor in a Spitfire. They took you round in an old Magister for a while, and then you went solo on a Spit. Once you got the Spit down, you learnt it didn't have any vices. It was the most perfect aircraft to fly ever. I think I got six hundred hours in them, and I have never had…I've only had the one motor failure.

10:30 And that was because of the air lock. I've had the motors shot up, I've operated in the deserts and jungles, the Pacific…A most amazing aircraft.

After your training you joined the 450 Squadron. Can you tell me about the term 'crewing up?'

11:00 We didn't have a crew. You see, we were single, we were fighter pilots, so we didn't have to crew up. We just had ground crews who we got to know. We were individuals and we were put in flights.

11:30 You had a flight commander and then you talked to the senior ones, again, to learn from them, and they were very good. But there was no crew. Your ground crew was your closest relationship to a crew and they were very important. There was nothing in the air. No crewing in the air.

How were you allocated your plane?

12:00 Well, when you joined the squadron, you got the worst plane, which is automatic. Now the danger of that was, the exhaust would dictate where you were, the black smoke, so that would bring in the 109. But then they didn't leave you, you were protected by the other fellows in the Squadron. They didn't abandon you or anything. But in the event of a big dog fight, it's all over in seconds,

12:30 you're on your own, everyone can see you. You had to earn your spurs in other words. The first twenty five hours of operations was where you made it or you got shot down, probably. That was is in the early days. We were lucky that we were only doing minimum strafing, so even though we'd Ack-Ack…I've heard Ack-Ack explode near me, which is too close.

13:00 We didn't have the same problems as, say, the Typhoons, and the big strafing aircraft when they went in, and broke through in 1944 on D Day. We did a lot of strafing in the desert, but not as much as the Kittyhawks. We would do strafing if we got into a dog fight and ended up close to the ground and we found a German column, we would strafe them.

13:30 **You've flown mostly Spitfires, but you have also flown quite a bit of Kittyhawks. Perhaps you could describe the Kittyhawk plane?**

The Kittyhawks, it's a wonderful gun platform, but nothing like…Not in the same category as the Spitfire to fly. It's a good gun platform. The Spitfire didn't have many vices. It had a job to spin it,

14:00 it fell away gently, whereas the Kittyhawk, it was a totally different conception. One was a gun platform one was a fighter aircraft. The Kittyhawk were used as fighters, but they weren't anything like as manoeuvrable as the Spitfire. They had an inline motor. But then again it carried two five hundred pound bombs and it had great point five machine guns for strafing.

14:30 **Because you've flown mainly Spitfires, I would really like you to give me…Imagine the Spitfire is right in this room, what would we see? Describe the plane?**

15:00 Well, the beauty of the Spitfire, they were small cockpits which suited me. You had G pedals which suited me. G pedals meant that you pushed your knees up, and if you tighten the neck on your scarf to stop the blood draining from your brain…And therefore it suited me because I could pull say 6 G, I've forgotten, a lot of G, and that's important in aerial combat.

15:30 But you can't pull G and not black out. Now they've got suits to wear. So you've got a tight scarf and you pull your neck down on that, and you put your legs up high and that stops your blood draining from your brain, your eyes, you go purple when you're on G, you can black right out. And if you are fighting for your life, you pull as much G as you can. You pull G to get inside the other guy. The Spitfire was a magnificent aircraft.

16:00 It didn't do a high speed stall, some aircraft did. The aircraft was factual, it was easy to gun button on the thing. The instruments weren't hard to follow, a minimum instruments….A tremendous surge of power. You had a tit, you could break the wire on that, you would burn the motor out, but it would give you tremendous performance for about three or four minutes to get away.

16:30 It was a magnificent motor, the Merlin motor. It was a thoroughbred. It was like getting out of a beautiful Mercedes to a Ford Laser or something. Talking about some of the other aircraft. It was a very sophisticated, brilliantly designed aerodynamic aircraft.

17:00 But, it wasn't as good as the Typhoon and or the other aircraft that could carry heavy bomb loads, but of course as an aerial fighter it was as good as any.

What do you need in a plane when you're in the middle of a dog fight?

The first thing you do is you've got make sure that there's no- one locked on your tail.

17:30 And you look for anything that you can get a shot at, to protect your leader. It all happens very quickly. It's not a sort of thing that goes on for about five minutes. The fight occurs and everyone is everywhere, everyone's firing guns, and then suddenly there ain't a bloke around. It's sort of…They jump you, they come down through you and they're doing about three hundred and fifty,

18:00 and you either turn and go back into them, so you're going in opposite directions… It's hard to describe a dog fight. If you're fighting slow moving bombers, of course, you can keep running at them and so on and so forth. But dog fights didn't last long. They seemed to last long, but they didn't actually last long…Because you're under a lot of pressure. You're watching the mirror for someone behind you, you're watching this way and that way

18:30 and underneath you….And you're flying…So your wits are really tested to the limit.

What kind of ammunition or artillery did you have?

You had twenty millimetre cannons and we'd point five…They went from three oh three to point five machine guns. I think there was two machine guns. I can't remember

19:00 whether it was two or three in each wing, and a cannon on each wing. Terrific fire power, and that all converged, it was all set up, the guns were trained to converge at about two fifty metres, they would fire across, you see, so there was an area that big where it was going like that where it was maximum concentration, when you hit an aircraft.

19:30 **Where are the guns located?**

In the wing. They're in the wing and the two gun ports are in the wing, and the cannons sit out past the wing. There is little ports, machine guns are in the wing itself and the ports are covered for takeoff, because it makes a whistling noise, and as soon as you fire your guns the patches are blown off, of course, in the front of the wing.

20:00 You hear a noise and a bit of smoke coming back on your wings. The cannons have quite a feeling because the cannons are twenty mill. And there's a recoil action from the guns, you see.

A recoil action?

The recoil action of the guns do affect…You could feel the aircraft just…

20:30 It's doing about two fifty, the recoil hardly registers. But you can imagine, it's firing and recoil is pulling back. The machine gun was not much problem, but the cannon was twenty mill. I'm not saying it slowed you up or anything, but you could feel the vibration.

21:00 **And if the machine gun fire was designed to cross in front of you, and you're flying into it…**

If I'm chasing an aircraft, he is probably turning away, I have got to deflection shoot, I've got to time it so he's flying into the maximum concentration. And the good pilots could…Immediately the ring sight,

21:30 you had a ring sight, but the good pilots could virtually pick the middle of the thing and fire his guns quickly. And certainly there were many times with Duke, I was about to shoot and didn't, he's shot it and I have flown through the debris…Bits of flaming aircraft all around you because he was a top shot, he got down twenty seven of them. I think I must have seen him shoot down twelve.

22:00 **You mentioned earlier that you needed quite a lot of co-ordination in the plane?**

You had to judge distances, you had to be able to pull deflection. If I'm trying to get away from someone, I'm turning so fast that they can't pull the bead on me,

22:30 so that when they fire I fly into it. With the Spitfire, that's why you had to take a lot of G, because the more G you pulled, you had to get a bloke to pull more G to pull up on you. But it was happening so quickly. They would come, "sssst," and they're, or they'd come down and they're gone, or they'd come down and go through. And you made a decision whether you were going to chase them or…

23:00 It depends on whether you're escorting. If you're escorting you had to stay with the people you were escorting, and some would break off and fight. It was a well disciplined thing, we'd set ways we handled it. We didn't talk too much on the RT [Radio Telephone] because as soon as we talked the Germans could pinpoint where we were.

You just raised an interesting point there.

23:30 **I’m wondering what types of formations you would fly in when you set out?**

We flew in a box of four. Leader, one, two and…Or a box of four, one and his number two, three and his number two. There’s four of you, okay? The two number twos are to protect the tail of the two leaders. When you went into action,

24:00 you broke away and the number two came with you. This bloke would probably have to go into another lot there and you would try and reassemble. And it depended on how far you were travelling, because at the speed, you might be going off in opposite directions at two fifty miles an hour each, and it didn’t take long to get a fair way away. Your number two was the important fellow, because he had to watch your tail. It was his job. You did too, but he had to protect you from….

24:30 He’d warn you, and say, “There is 109s at three o'clock,” or enemy aircraft, or whatever we called them, I’ve forgotten. So having located them, you then decided what was going to happen. Were they coming after you or were you going to turn around and have a go at them or would we leave them? It all depends on what responsibility you had. If you were escorting bombers, you couldn’t leave them. But you wanted to know where the enemy were. So the number two kept that informed,

25:00 and then you picked them up. So you're watching, too…And so’s the other two watching one another, you're cross-looking. That’s the important part about it, don’t be jumped by someone.

You partially answered my next question, which was, who’s watching the number two?

The number two’s got to watch, overall, everything.

25:30 His job is to protect you, but he’s also looking this way, and he’s generally protecting and turning the aircraft, and he has got to keep good eyesight, and listening to the radio, and the radio is saying, “There’s fourteen bandits in your area,” and immediately you go looking, “Where the hell are they?” You’ve then go to…

26:00 You might see a little glint in the sun and you know that’s them.

The language is quite interesting too, bandits…

We called them bandits, yeah. “There’s fourteen bandits,” and we know what you're talking about. And they might say back, “And they’ve seen you.” So they’ve interpreted the…They're picking up the German…We might not talk.

26:30 We might not say a word, because we didn’t want the Germans to pick up anything from us, I know, picking up the information didn’t infer where you were.

But if the number one and number two are relying on telling each other what’s around, and you're not speaking…

Well what had happened is…We wouldn’t talk, unless…We’d only talk when we spotted something.

27:00 If we’d agreed there’s got to be complete radio silence, we would have a method of communication. “Fly against him and do that,” I’ve forgotten what it was… This is more important on the Kittyhawks. It didn’t matter so much on the Spits, but on the Kittyhawks, you never spoke. Because when we started, we got an American squadron that wanted to learn from us,

27:30 and they were all blokes with thousands of hours. First off you’d think you were at the movies, you know. They were talking about, “Joe’s got this,” and, “Bill’s got that.” So we told the CO, “We're buggered, we're not going to fly with them any more.” Because we’d the 109s coming from near and far. With the Spitfire, not so bad. And if it was radio silence…If not, we would still make the comment…We would hear the message, we didn’t have to answer them.

28:00 Control would say, “There is fourteen bandits north east of you.” We would just listen to that, so we’d look north east of us for fourteen bandits, we didn’t say anything back, or, “We’ve seen them,” or something. There was no talk until the scrap started, and then we would warn one another quickly. Once there was a…

28:30 We were at Alamein on Kittyhawks, and we’d a scrap and we were racing home, and there was a voice on the thing, “Red 60!” It was screaming, “For Christ sake, come back and help me, I’m being attacked!” And then there was stony silence. It came up a couple of times, and then I heard a gravel voice, say, “Have you had it yet?” An Australian, he got home all right. It made me laugh because this poor bastard was fighting for his life and then this voice, this Australian,

29:00 “Oh, gee, Red 2? Are you still alive? Have you had it yet?” That was the sort of quirky humour that you developed. If someone was shot down, we would all have a beer in memory of them. And then, “What sort of a hat’s he got?” “What’s his bed like?” We’d pick up…His personal stuff went back to his family,

29:30 and we’d argue who was to split up the decent bed, or if he had a special water cooler or something, we’d argue who was going to get that. But we’d a beer for him, though. So we weren’t…We didn’t get callous, but life was expendable in the sense that, unless we kept a sub value sense of humour…

30:00 I always remember a little bloke, he was married, and he was saving all his money, and I said, “Forget it. Just go and enjoy yourself.” This was on 450 Squadron, and we’d a South Australian there, his name was Jenkins, gravely voice. And I heard this little bloke’s in the mess there, and he’s nervously he’s going to pick up a beer,

30:30 and I heard this gravely voice say, “You take your great hot sexual hand off my beer.” He drawn back as though he’d touched a black snake. I have never forgotten that. He was killed, I warned him. You had to have a relaxed…You weren’t thinking you are immortal,

31:00 but you had to have a relaxed atmosphere. We were sent out, because 92…Churchill was sending us messages of what a tremendous job we were doing, we were sent out all these wonderful cookies for Christmas, eggs, tomatoes, everything. We even got photos of it. We got full that night and had a fight with the eggs and tomatoes, we never ate them.

31:30 There you go, see? What do you reckon? All the bloody tent was spattered with eggs and tomatoes, because we got loaded and drank all the Christmas beer and grog, and we said, “What are we going to do now?” Then someone threw an egg. The next person threw a bloody tomato. So all the eggs and tomatoes went down the side of the tent. Well, that’s how crazy it was, you see. But then that unleashed…We got more fun out of pelting those eggs and tomatoes and direct hits with that, than if we sat down and ate them.

32:00 And at times our tucker was pretty rough. I’d lived with pack horses in North Queensland, so I knew what rough tucker was. It wasn’t much bloody better in the desert, at times. But the cooks we’d were fantastic. What they could do with bully beef and stuff, but we were on the move all the time.

32:30 Those pictures there, there’s pictures there of what it looked like, just three or four garries, cars and trucks.

Just going back to the dog fighting. Did you have like a code name for yourself?

Well, you were Red 1. Say the Red Section,

33:00 Red 1, 2, 3 and 4. The two leaders were Red 1 and Red 3, 2 and 4 were the two numbers 2s. So we’d say, “Red, Blue and Black.” So we wanted to say…”Blue Section will you climb to ten thousand feet and watch for so and so?” That’s how we talked about moving our stuff around in the air when we’d to.

33:30 **I can imagine that the talk would get fairly intense.**

Well, the chief of the Airforce, Teddy, used to visit us and complained about the language of the Australians. Don’t forget, we’d women doing some of the thing, and you would think you were in a shearers camp. The language was blue. We knew what the Australians were like.

34:00 There was no niceties. But it just came out naturally. The Chief of the Air Force, Air Marshal Teddy was complaining. He said, “For God sake boys, try and cool it a bit.” In the air you could tell the Australians. You know what a bunch of Australian men are like together.

You have already mentioned the word 'bandit' for the enemy.

34:30 **Were there other ways you would talk about the enemy?**

No, we only used them as bandits. We might describe them as 109s or 190s or something, but bandits was the term that was always passed to us from control. “The bandits have taken off at so and so.” That would alert us that they had taken off at Castel Benito or something. So we would be immediately alerted to…

35:00 The controller was extremely good getting messages to us. Which played a vital role in being alert.

Where would the controller be?

He would be travelling with us. There would be a headquarters' controller. He’d be up in the desert with us.

On the ground base?

On the ground base, yes.

35:30 I don’t say I ever saw, but then you only went back a bit and you came to the next group control, you know what I mean? I got into trouble because, I was leading a whole wing of Spitfires and the day before we’d lost our Wing Commander Winch Green. It was only written up in the press the other day. He was an Englishman. He used to wear jodhpurs, beautifully cut jodhpurs.

36:00 I suddenly looked down and I saw three Savoia Red Cross planes, Italians, and I was close enough to see the faces in the window, the look of terror, you know. And I told, “No one to shoot, no one shoot.” So we went past them. When I landed, I was called up to group headquarters, and I was dressed down by the group captain for not shooting them down. I said, “Look, I sleep at night.”

36:30 I said, “We’d lost our wing commander…” Now we know we used to strafe ambulances and they would

blow up, because the Germans used to carry petrol armaments in ambulances, but the driver could get out. But in an aircraft, I could have shot those three down…He said, “You’ve got a DFC,” an immediate DFC. I did some terrible things. I saw blokes shot in a shoot, and we shot them in the dinghies, but there is no way

37:00 that I could take the risk of shooting those aircraft down. I had plenty of blokes' at power and everything, when our own wing commander could have been aboard one of them. He wasn’t, he’d been killed, we didn’t know at the time, though. But the British didn’t like it. So I didn’t worry about that. I would have worried had I shot them down. I still worry about the pilots I’ve killed, the enemy pilots I’ve killed.

37:30 I just wonder, you know…But that would have stuck in my mind really badly. You didn’t have to do that. I would have shot at….I’ve strafed ambulances, plenty of times, because I knew they would be carrying bombs of petrol, because that’s how the Germans got to move the stuff in the desert, so did we. So there’s no code. Not in survival there isn’t.

38:00 **Was that also something about because they were close you could see them?**

When I saw the Savoias, when I came down and pulled away, I was close to them and I could see their faces, and I could see the fear in their eyes. They could have been Italians or Germans, I don’t know. You don’t know, but the look of fear frightened…

38:30 There’s no way, having lost the wing commander the day before, that I could shoot those down, that would be…But the British were pretty sour about it. They couldn’t understand. They said, “You could have got yourself three victories.” I don’t want victories. I don’t want a victory that takes that type of action. I have no qualms in any other activity,

39:00 but not to shoot a Red Cross plane. I was very friendly with the Australian Red Cross pilots, and they said sometimes the 109s had given them the miss. So I was fully aware of it. And the risk was that the wing co could have been on that plane, but I sleep at night.

When you say you have done some terrible things, can you talk about some of that?

39:30 When they shot my brother, I went and got some explosive bullets, which is illegal, and I used to go out in the evening, and I would find a Japanese island and I would strafe them, at risk to myself, when they were all sitting down for a meal…But they were explosive bullets.

40:00 So I would have got my share. But you know I was absolutely….I had a complete hate for them having destroyed my brother. It didn’t take me long after the war, that I got a contract from Mitsui to put a grain growing equipment into Indonesian Mitsui thing in Indonesia. But at that stage…

40:30 I went to great risk to make sure that I thought I’d balanced the budget. I can’t remember where I got the explosive bullets, but they said, “It’s illegal.” I said, “Stuff that, I don’t care. There’s no bloody illegal game in my game.” You could mark bullets to do all sorts of things. I didn’t have the time. Explosive was the best…

41:00 And the Geneva Convention doesn’t allow that. But then they shot us in the shoots and they shot us in the dinghies and we did the same.

Tape 6

00:34 **Ted, you were just about to tell me that one time in the islands you got really badly shot up.**

Oh yes, I took a number two with me, I knew there was a gun emplacement on an island about three hundred ks away, so I went down there and I found the gun, a Japanese gun.

01:00 And I did a run in and strafed it, and got a few Nips, I could see them, then I saw them run away from the gun. And they left the gun firing straight in the air, and I made the fatal mistake of going over the gun. It blew a whole like that in my wing, it just missed the pipelines and fuel lines and so on. Little did I know at the time, any pilot caught then was beheaded automatically, they didn’t waste time.

01:30 I knew a chap that was beheaded. I remember my number two, I said “For Christ sake don’t panic. I’ve got to get home.” And I remember looking down at the water and I saw these great schools of sharks, and I thought, 'My God, I’ve got to…' Now the aircraft flew perfectly. I had this big hole in the wing that you could nearly put your head through. So we got back home. But you know, I was at fault.

02:00 I did the first run and I should have gone out, right out of sight and come back right at the deck level and done the next run. Instead I did a nice easy lazy turn. It was a complete waste of time, because the Japs were cut off down there, they were south, they’d all been cut off. We could have starved them out. But as we’d nothing to do, so we’d would go down and strafe these odd strips and so on. There was an odd aircraft flying around, Japanese aircraft.

02:30 But how it ever missed the cockpit, a few inches either way, the main fuel line, the controls. So now you know why when I finished flying, I pulled the curtain down for ever. That was a real…how it ever…But there it is, my number wasn't up.

03:00 **Given that story and also that the 450 Squadron, and even the 92 Squadron, had such high casualties….**

They did, but the high casualties were at the beginning of the war. At the beginning of the desert there was high casualties, and then the casualties went up again when we got into Italy. Now, the casualties in the Pacific, at the time we got there…

03:30 We only lost…I can't think. I think we lost a pilot through a motor failure over the jungle, but I think we got him back. But there were no casualties from Japanese aircraft, we were chasing them. I was doing night flying in a Spit 8, which is crazy. Never designed for it. Blind Freddie could see me coming the bloody great ports of flames coming out both sides.

04:00 The horizon was gone, you were blinded….That was more hazardous than the bloody Nip. Had we gone to Okinawa, the Americans wanted to take us to Okinawa, it would have been a different story, because it would have been going back to the desert warfare. In that period of time…from when we broke through at Alamein…Oh, we lost blokes,

04:30 we lost a few, but not many. There were heavy losses, initially. Fighter aircraft were decimated…but they held the front line virtually. Once the war turned,

05:00 it eased up except, say, on D Day when they started strafing and all that sort of stuff. That's when the danger comes in, because you're exposed to different…you've got gun fire to handle as well, ground fire. The biggest hazard in the Pacific was the flying weather. The distance we'd to travel over water, with one motor.

05:30 **Just going back to the Middle East. Did you have a lucky charm?**

No. I had no lucky charms. That was just…Each day came and went. I kept sane.

06:00 We used to be sent out…The RAF had a special house in Cairo called Rhodesia House. Remember an actor called Leslie Howard? His brother ran it. We would be taken out there, no girls allowed or anything, but we could eat and drink our heads off for a week. We used to do that. I can remember one incident there,

06:30 we all got a bit full one night and they said across the main road there's another club or something. So we said, "We'll lay down a barrage of empty bottles and we will shift them out of there." We were planning it all, like a war. So we did this, and there was a ruddy New Zealand bloke underneath and they came over and arrested all those blokes. We thought it was a hell of a joke.

07:00 We did a mighty job, because we'd these bottles of water. We'd to get them up high enough to get them over the road and they landed on this club across the road in Cairo. But thank goodness there was a New Zealand club underneath us and they came and arrested all them. But Rhodesia House was that sort of atmosphere. Neville and I would go to Cairo,

07:30 we'd tons of money. Your money was building up, and we would take a suite at the Shepherds or the Continental Savoy, we would eat and drink and have fun. Those were the sort of periods that relieved the pressure. We usually went straight back to office, no problem.

08:00 **Did you have a special flying jacket or cap?**

No, because I just wore the forage cap. I had no charms, no lucky charms, no rabbits feet. I had to rely on what was happening, I'm not saying you shouldn't have had, but I didn't have anything.

08:30 I wasn't married, so I didn't have to have a picture of my wife or anything. No nothing.

The way you just described a dog fight, it sounds like you need to rely very strongly on your instincts as much as your instruments?

Absolutely. Number one, the minute you start to

09:00 pull the aircraft into rolls all the instruments tumble, they're are all out anyhow. All you have got to do….Your horizon you can see with your eyes, you don't have to rely on any instruments. You know if you go over with the sun on your right, you know you have got to have it on your left coming home, sort of thing. In the desert I'm talking about, the desert. So the only instruments you had to worry about was your speed indicator,

09:30 your petrol gauge and your pressure gauge, to do with the motor. You had a fine and coarse pitch, which regulated the revs, and you had to watch the petrol gauge and that is all. You didn't have many instruments, but when you went to night flying it was quite a different thing. Because you had to take off on your instruments. When you got up on a dark night in the Pacific, you couldn't see the horizon,

10:00 and especially with those two exhausts, purple flames coming out both sides. I mean they were never built for night flying, but we were chasing a Japanese bomber. Crazy, crazy, dangerous. Probably the most dangerous flying I ever did on a Spit 8. Bloody great long nose, pull it up, no horizon, watch the instruments, get up look for the nip and try and pick your horizon again,

10:30 We gave it away, too dangerous. We got him anyhow, in daytime.

Were there any blind spots on the Spitfire?

Well, there were, underneath. You couldn't do…

11:00 The more imperfect flying you did, the better you were. When you were flying absolutely perfect and level and a hundred percent, you are a perfect gun target. While you were skidding around a bit, you weren't. You're watching under that bloke's tail and he's watching under yours…There's are four sets of eyes scanning the skies and the radios, so it was pretty hard to sneak on a section.

11:30 It was pretty hard to get on a section without someone spotting it. The chance of getting jumped is very small. The biggest danger was that the Hun [German] would get up in the sun,

12:00 and you couldn't see him in the sun. You can't look into the sun. So he would get the sun right behind you, that was the danger. You always knew as soon as the sun was behind you, you immediately started to make sure that you had a better…So you might pick him up, you see. But that is where a lot of his victories would come, completely blinded by looking into the sun, you can't look into the sun.

12:30 He used that and so did we. You could jump, they couldn't see you.

You were really relying on very clear visual…

You were relying….and the controllers, if they said, "Bandits are close."

13:00 And they'd said, "You've been seen," we would know they were in the area and then we've got to find them.

The controllers are on the ground, quite a long way from where you are, would they have radar…

They have radar, they are looking on a screen. We'd IFF, Identify [Identification] Friend or Foe, which we turned on. But the Germans, they'd know when they took off.

13:30 They took off at Castel Benito, the controllers would see them…not see them, track them taking off, and let's say they are heading towards Malta, they wouldn't worry about them. They'd say, "Hang on, there's fourteens coming down the coast, they are at Derna," or somewhere. Then we would know, there's Derna up there, you know what I mean? So there was a good communication on that basis, quite a good communication.

14:00 As long as you kept your wits about you…You really had to concentrate. It was no good going to sleep, you had to keep watching everything, all the time, watching, swaying. Make sure now and again….Relying on these other two blokes, too, but if they went to sleep you are on your own, type of type of thing. So you had to do a lot yourself.

14:30 The others were good, the two leaders especially because they are checking. But the number twos, who were knew to the Squadron, wouldn't understand. Some of them just flew with their heads in the office all the time. But you had to be consistently scanning, your eyesight had to be spot on. You might only see a glint in the sun, just a slightest glint,

15:00 then you would know there is a 109 up there, or enemy aircraft. The sun is probably behind him, and you just see a glint, and that immediately alerts you. Once you can see what's coming, you've got a chance to take evasive action or attack him. It's the one that jumps you. I never saw the bloke that shot me down, because I had been in a dog fight and I was so relieved at not having to get out, and the first thing I knew was when the cannon shells started to hit the aircraft.

15:30 I probably missed him, he probably came out of cloud and saw me…I just checked and it was all clear and I was just concentrating on getting home, and suddenly the bloody thing hit me as though someone was belting the aircraft with a hammer. The next thing it just flipped on its back and went into cloud.

And, as you say, you were on your own…

Well, I was on my own,

16:00 because we'd finished, we'd lost one another, and the CO went crook because I hadn't had many hours in operations then. But it was just a fact of life that in the scrap we got separated. Whether he chased me or I did, I can't remember. The problem was that having got split up, the next thing is survival, go for home.

16:30 I was heading back for home, and then I discovered by flying flat out, the aircraft started to roll, and the more I flew, I'd lost the controls. I was able to get enough control to get it back to fly straight and level.

I went for the biggest aerodrome I could find in the desert, it was a bomber 'drome. I put it down on the sand. I mean I had to land at a fair rate of knots. The sand all flew up, I was blinded,

17:00 and I felt the back coming up and the danger was to go over and back and catch on fire, you see. I just got up to the perpendicular and then it stopped and dropped down again. Then I breathed a sigh of relief. Coming in…you go as though you're low flying low to the ground and you get lower and lower and lower, and you can't drop the speed off. I just pulled the tail up a little bit so that the prop doesn't hit the ground,

17:30 try and get the tail onto the ground first, and then I cut the motor. Well, then the prop hits and bends back, being a metal prop. The speed, I was completely blinded, the sand. luckily…there was about that much soft sand, and that clogged into the radiators and slowed the Spit up, but in the slowing up process it started to rise up. Instead of getting right over, it got to about there

18:00 and then the speed dropped down and it fell back again, and I scrambled out, very relieved. I got a ride back to the squadron, because the aircraft was a write off. It would have been, because I had lost the controls and it landed at a hell of a rate. The CO said, "Why didn't you come back to the fighter strip?" But I was way over enemy territory when he hit me, and I was keen to get back into home,

18:30 I didn't want to be taken a prisoner of war, I didn't want to bail out. These all run through your mind, and you haven't got half an hour to make a decision. If you're going to pull the plug…have to have enough height to do it, too.

How did you know which bomber strip you were over?

Well, I knew where they were at Alamein. I don't know which one it was. I knew once I started getting in amongst…the first one I found,

19:00 I was on to, couldn't miss it, great big long strips. Alamein was only forty ks wide, fifty ks wide, that's from the coast to the Qatar depression, that's where the British stopped the army. Because you had the Med this side, and on that side you had the Qatar depression. You couldn't get a vehicle across the Qatar Depression, it was just soup, you'd disappear.

19:30 So no one could go round you, No-one could come around you, you see. Alamein was the ideal stoppage before you went to Egypt. It was not far out of Egypt… Cairo, I mean, Cairo, in Egypt, it was not far from Cairo. So you've got bomb strips and fighter strips all the way back from between Alamein and Cairo. Now the bomber strips were further back than the fighter strips.

20:00 But this one, I might have been a bit bushed, but this one was a big strip, and that's all I know. It was good enough for me to put the aircraft on. It was marked out as a strip and I thought, 'Well, bang, let's give it a go.' I was relieved to get out of that aircraft, too, because you don't know what other damage you might have done. I'm only going on what I could see, but there have been a fuel line about to blow up or a pipe to go or something,

20:30 He hit bits of it too.

The Merlin?

The Merlin motor, the Rolls Royce Merlin, but there were bits missing, but no vital ones, not a vital bit. A bit of shrap…

Did you have a radar on the Spitfire?

No, no, no…You've got IFF…Yes, we did have radar.

21:00 Identification Friend and Foe. That sends out a beam, and that identifies you with the controllers and the ground crew. The Germans didn't have that, so we do have a radar, yeah, in that sense. We've got cameras in the wings, if you shoot down an aircraft it takes a picture. That's the only way you can claim victories, too.

21:30 **I was wondering about that…**

Yes, a little camera just right alongside the fuselage, a little camera hole. And when you fire your guns it takes pictures. You see the combat pictures on TV today, that's taken from the aircraft that you're firing from. Otherwise there's no confirmation. You've got to have confirmation of your victory.

22:00 Your number two, or someone, has to say that you shot it down. I had a bloke that, he flew, he was a Canadian sergeant pilot, and he claimed five victories, and I was very suspicious. We couldn't see any evidence, I don't know…The liaison officer

22:30 that write up the combat. Anyhow, I had a visit from an American and he said to me, "You know, have you got a Spit?" I quoted the number, he said, "Often I see it in the air, and you could see he's firing his gun, you can see the blue smoke coming off, with nothing in front of him." So this bloke was building up a good score fictitiously. He would have won a Distinguished Flying Cross, but we picked him.

23:00 And of course, no cameras. The camera was always jammed or some story. You had to prove that you shot the aircraft down. You had to give the location, before they would give you a victory or a probable

or a damage, or whatever it is.

And how important to you as a person to have claimed…

23:30 Well, it was important to… I mean, there was a lot of very good pilots that never got a chance to shoot much down. Because I was flying with all these other blokes getting plenty of victories, I also wanted my share. And I just couldn't get them. I mean I had opportunities, but they just dried up,

24:00 or Duke or someone…And there's a lot of luck in it, too. If I could have got into a Stuka party or something, but I'm not going to decry from the blokes…As I say, I wasn't in the same category as the aces. Then again, I must have some qualities because they kept giving me flights. But that doesn't say… I mean, there were a lot of blokes who never got any decorations who should have got them, too.

24:30 **On that note, what qualities do you think you need to make a good fighter pilot?**

I think you had to have very stable judgement, I think you had to realise that the prize is your neck. So when you go out there in a contest that's what the prize is. And thirdly, I think when you get out

25:00 of the aircraft and you go to bed, you go to sleep. You have no worries. I can't remember now, but I always slept at night. Now whether that was from bravado, I don't know. I got such an inspiration from that bloke who used to wet his pants. I thought, 'Well, I can't afford to wet my pants.' I felt like doing it.

25:30 That's what it's about. I don't think…I mean the good example is there's the Australian surf champion, who was hopeless on our course, and there's the bloke who was a school teacher, bald headed, the last no-fancy moustache,

26:00 he looked like Robert Donard or something, and he was a killer. So there is no make up. The makeup is the fact that the co-ordination, and the decree of stabilising your brain to forget about it and get on with life, will all make up to what it is to be a fighter pilot. And you must have skills. You must have very good flying skills.

26:30 And that doesn't say you have got to be an ace pilot, but you've got to have very quick reflexes, that's the most important.

What about the notion of being, as you say, a killer?

The people were with that extra…Like Clive Caldwell was a pretty rough pilot.

27:00 But he was a magnificent fighter pilot. Being a very good pilot doesn't say you are a good fighter pilot.

Is what you are getting at the notion of going in for the kill, like to go in for the final…

What do you mean? In a sort?

27:30 **I'm just trying to imagine, if you are in a dog fight, what makes a really good fighter pilot?**

A good fighter pilot is made up, that he is very stable in his judgement, he's got very quick reflexes and very quick to assess the situation,

28:00 and work out the best way to attack this aircraft. If it's an aircraft that can out dive you, you think of ways of getting it. If it's an aircraft that can out manoeuvre you…. All that has to be done, you haven't got a computer to do it, it's all done quickly. And that puts you at an advantage to have a gun platform that you can be…When you do get into position…I mean, I remember when I shot down the Macchi, it was perfect. He was just turning a little bit

28:30 and I turned inside and I saw the cannon shells just explode along the side of the aircraft. I think I killed him before he ever hit the ground. So that was perfect, you know what I mean. Other times, as I said with Neville Duke, I would be just about to push the button and he would be over here, just a bit behind me, and he would push the button and then I'm flying through bits of aircraft.

29:00 Lucky not to hit some of that. He was an ace, he shot down twenty seven. He did three tours, I did two tours. But we didn't have much of a chance in the Pacific….to shoot down aircraft, because there weren't enough around to shoot down, to fight.

And what about danger from own fire?

29:30 Which ones?

Your own flyers. Did you come across any instances where you were running into fire from your own side?

Yes. One of the troubles was when we were flying Spit 9s,

30:00 we used to have to come….There was Spitfires, Kittyhawks, American and so on, and we used to go down through them to land because we were out of fuel. And once I was coming down and I looked in the mirror and I saw an American bloke firing at one of our blokes. And if I'd have got round I would have shot him down.

30:30 I just saw the smoke coming off his wings. Now the Americans were a little bit trigger happy, and I suppose he had not seen a Spit 9 before, probably just joined the squadron, thought it was one…coming in to shoot him down, but very few. Ground people…I mean, I've been fired on by the navy and all that sort of stuff. The navy always did that. They always fired on you automatically,

31:00 the British navy. We always stayed a fair way away from them, too. If we were escorting them….We got well out of bloody range, I can tell you. Their attitude was probably inexperienced gunners protecting the ship and it's very hard, sometimes, you couldn't identify whether it was a Spit or a 109 or Macchi.

31:30 And no radar, if it has not been picked up by the radar. The biggest danger was, for us, was bombing and strafing the German lines, and the German lines were only about fifty metres apart from the British. And it's not a straight line, it goes in and like that. And of course, that's is where the casualties come where they strafe their own troops. That happens. It's happened in every war. How bad it is? I don't know.

32:00 It's always written up as a big deal, so I know.

What about markings on the exterior of the Spitfire?

Yes, we had the roundel.

Sorry, the…

The roundel. It's a round thing like that, and I think it's red, white and blue,

32:30 you know what I mean? Whereas the German had the iron cross. The Ities had…I can't think of the emblem, but it wasn't hard to pick. The roundel was our…thing, whereas as the Nips had a big roundel, a big red one. We had ours with the red, white and blue. The aircraft had like QF, or AB, and a number on it.

33:00 **Was that on each wing?**

No, on the fuselage. The roundels were on top and bottom wing, and on the fuselage….No, they were at the bottom side of the wing, on the bottom side of the wing,

33:30 you can see it in that picture there, and on the fuselage. But not on the top side. I'm pretty that's it. But that was your identification.

In terms of other colourings and markings on the planes?

They were camouflaged, whether it was tropical or desert.

34:00 We had desert camouflage or the tropical camouflage. There was no other special deal, you were either tropical or desert.

I know that you marked one of your planes with the sharks teeth…

34:30 All the planes in the Squadron were sharks' teeth. Once we designed them, we all went over to the sharks' teeth. It was the Grey Nurse Squadron, and they all had the sharks' teeth. I just designed the first one, which was like that big, and then we got them going properly, like they could spray on with a template that big.

Was that in the Middle East?

35:00 No, I did that when I was in Darwin. There were squadrons in the Middle East that had them, that's what gave me the idea. We were just lying about before we took off, with not much to do, and I thought why don't we try a shark's teeth, and I got them to paint one on, and the teeth was only that big. It looked a bit pissy, but it was written up in the press.

35:30 And then the armourers made a template, which you could use with a spray gun. We got the big sharks' teeth then.

Where did you first see those markings?

I saw them at 112 Squadron in the Western Desert. That is the first time I saw it.

36:00 I think the Americans had them, too. It was fairly usual…There were squadrons with it, but we were the only Australian squadron out in the Pacific with it. The sharks' teeth, we thought they looked terrifying. It was something to do, better than blokes painting girls figures, names

36:30 and all sorts of funny looking emblems on their aircraft.

You flew in three different squadrons, so I would imagine you were changing planes quite a bit?

I had 452, 450…No, I flew in four squadrons. 452, Australian Squadron, then I went

37:00 to the desert and I flew in 450, and then the 92 Squadron in the Western Desert and 457 in the Pacific.

Three Australian squadrons and one RAF squadron. I hadn't flown in Australia until I came back in 1944.

Did you ever get attached to one particular plane?

37:30 Yes, you became….As a flight commander, you always had one of the best planes. Once, when I was sitting in a tent in Darwin, I decided to take one of the planes up to about….to see how high I could get it. I got it to about thirty six thousand feet. And I must have had a rush of blood to the head, and then I decided to just turn the nose down and let it go.

38:00 I got up to what's know as Mac 1, the speed of sound, I lost control, because the speed of the aircraft had blown….pushed the head and I lost control. It took me about twenty thousand feet to pull out. I've never had such a scary ride in my life. The controls…I had to use all my strength to control the aircraft….I started like that…And it took me,

38:30 because I couldn't pull much G at that speed, and I pulled up at about four or five thousand feet. I pulled the paint off the wings. It's a wonder I didn't pull the bloody wings off it. I never flew that aircraft again. I gave it to someone else. It was a stupid thing to do. I had no G suit, and I was on oxygen, and the thing was flying along like that at about thirty six thousand, thirty seven thousand feet,

39:00 because the air is so thin. So when I turned it down, and I let the motor run, it absolutely….I saw the needle go round past four fifty. And then at height, there's a figure that you multiply it by, because of the thin air, because your aircraft's speed pedo head is governed on sea level. And that's is when I hit Mac 1. That's the speed of sound.

39:30 But I nearly lost it…That was bloody stupid, but that's what happens in life, you see. I remember Neville Duke and I were sitting, when we were instructing, it was always important to impress the pupils. So we worked out a scheme. We were going to do a roll on take off that…We would have killed ourselves. Then we decided, in the Spitfire you could select wheels up.

40:00 You see the wheels were up like that. So we decided we would select wheels up, hold the aircraft, left wing one, and one wheel would come up, and then lift the other wing and the other wheel would come up. Now you had about that much distance to stop the prop hitting the ground. The margin was…He did it, I didn't do it. I chickened because it was too dangerous. But it looked fantastic and that really impressed them. You know, you had to impress the pupils.

40:30 But you had to hold the aircraft… See when you selected wheels up, you had to hold the aircraft down so that the pressure of the aircraft wouldn't let the wheels come up. The just lift one wing, up she comes, the other wing, up she comes. And you had to be sure that you hadn't put the aircraft…The prop would hit the ground and that the aircraft might go down with the wheels…There was a bit of thinking in it. But it looked very spectacular. I backed off.

41:00 You do make some decisions that are sensible. We had another incident that was pretty scary. We were just waiting to take off. The worst danger in teaching people was the final parade. So you take all the pupils up with you, and they want to be nice and close to you, want to show how good they can really fly.

41:30 Their wings are running up and down there, and the other bloke is running up and down there, so you know, you're boxed in. Each bloke's, "I'm going to show this bastard I'm a pretty good pilot."

Tape 7

00:32 Anyhow, we were waiting, see, and what had happened at this AD [Aircraft Depot], they were training some Turkish pilots on Kittyhawks, that had been training with the Germans. Don't forget, Turkey was neutral, so we trained neutral pilots. I trained the prince from Yugoslavia. Anyhow, what had happened, the Kittyhawks were landing,

01:00 and we were sitting on the side of the strip with our motors running waiting to take off, and a Kittyhawk landed and he was a bit slow on getting off the strip. And they'd sent a Kittyhawk off to take off. And as he went over the top of the bloke, the wheels were coming up, but they weren't quite up, and they hit him in the back of the head and killed him,

01:30 He was in a Spit, that's right, he was in a Spit. And he fell forward on the controls with the Spit still running. And the Spit started to circle around us, sitting in our Spits with the motor running. So I jumped out of my Spit and chased it on foot. Because the danger was, here was a bloke dead in the cockpit, and his hand had gone forward a bit on the throttle as he was killed.

02:00 And eventually, he was turning slowly, and I cut across and jumped up and pulled the motor off. But the terrifying thing is we had all these pupils, they were all lined up ready with their motors running. I had to go back and get back into my aircraft, and I thought, 'God, I hope these blokes…' It was unsettling enough for me. But it was just one of those terrible tragedies. The Kittyhawk wing comes…

02:30 whereas the Spitfires wheels go up like that, the Spitfire comes back and curls over and then tucks in. And as it was curling over it just hit on the back of the neck and killed him.

Was he a…

He was a Turk. Not one of my students, but he was a Turk. It was frightening to happen in front of all the pupils that you're about to do a fly past with.

03:00 **Can you tell us about the fly past?**

What had happened we, we used to take up five or six at a time, and we would take up and fly in formation around there and then we would do a nice pass over the strip for the group captain to see. It was the passing out parade in the air. They are all trying to impress you,

03:30 that they can fly right up against you. Well, if you look at this wing tip and it's ducking in and out, and this one is ducking in and out, and you've got to keep flying nice and steady so they don't…I'm not saying they were trying to, but there was always a little….I probably did the same when I was passing out. Because I mean, if you get a high rating…I mean, we rated them. I would rate a bloke and say, "I don't think he's suitable as a fighter pilot." That was my responsibility.

04:00 But I always quizzed him first. Why did he join up? What was his…Trying to get inside his motivation, because I didn't think it was right that you could send a bloke off as a fighter pilot who wasn't suitable. I'd seen too many blokes killed that weren't suitable.

So you're saying that they might have deliberately been flying a little close…

Well, that's an impressive thing to show their flying ability. I don't say they were over doing it but there was an element of competition.

04:30 They were demonstrating they were pretty smart cookies, and they were pretty good types. too. But then they went off to join squadrons.

How did you take this as their instructor?

I had a bit of fun with it, too.

05:00 I used to do barrel rolls, show them how to do a barrel roll. You do a barrel roll to the right and the tail does everything, and then I would say do another to the right and then I would do one to the left, and his tail is fighting against the aircraft going to the left, and I'm sitting in the backseat…this is a Harvard. And his tail is shifting and shifting, and it's going the wrong way because…

05:30 It was silly, but I used to do that. The other thing I used to do is, there was a pilot relief tube in a Spit, in the front seat, and a couple of times I would use it, if there is a bloke number two and he screamed, he'd say, "Christ, you've got glycol." You know, that showed me that he was alert.

06:00 **What does that mean?**

Well, see the pilot relief tube allows me to spend a penny in the air, and the tube just goes out underneath the aircraft, So the bloke is flying number two to me, and he's suddenly getting sprayed. And he said, "Red Leader! Red Leader, the glycol." Because we had glycol in the radiators, that showed me he was on the ball. That was my idea of working it out. Not all aircraft had pilot relief tubes.

06:30 **Had you flown on ones that didn't?**

Yes. I don't know why this one did but there must have been some that came out that did. For long range…Sometimes we'd be in a Spit for three hours. I think three hours, some of the longer flights I did in the Pacific, because you are flying at low revs, it's a long time you know.

07:00 You're dehydrating, too, especially in the Pacific. The Spit 8 was for low flying. I didn't mind being an instructor, it was so much good fun. We were flying aircraft and Duke and I were having a ball. That car that I'd left at the strip in going to Malta.

07:30 I volunteered to fly seaplanes, in the D'Entrecasteaux Islands, because I thought it would be wonderful to be flying around there and land, and beautiful olive skinned girls come out and feed you and so on and all this stuff. And I went down and saw the Spits taking off with the floats and I said, "No way. I'll pull out of that one." While I was there I saw my car, the Fiat,

08:00 and I said to the bloke, "That's the car I took off the Itie up in Tripoli." "Yes," he said "We took it on the strip." He said, "You can have it back too, it's hot." The cops, the Red Caps had got on to it, the Military Police. I said, "That'll be right." So I took it back and put it on the strip at Abu Sueir, and I designed my own number plate.

08:30 I took an Australian number, an Egyptian number and a Palestine number and a British number. I put them all together on one number plate, got the Turks to do it. When I used to pull up at a checkpoint, they would write it all down and I'd say, "This is a special vehicle, I'm going to HQ [Headquarters]." "Oh, yes sir." I would salute and I'd go through. What happened, I gave the…Debben Minchin was…

09:00 What was he doing? He was flying, he was test flying bombers, so I gave him the car when I left, when I came back to Australia. And he gave it to his Palestine girlfriend and she pranged it. Anyhow, the Red Caps called on Debben, they said, “Flight Lieutenant Ted Sly had a car that he took it off the Ities,”

09:30 Debben said, “Oh, I don’t know.” He said, “He was unlucky, he got killed you know. he went back to the Pacific and he got shot down on his second op.” They said “Terribly, terribly sorry.” That was the end of it. Debben was a quick thinker. We got all sorts of stuff. We had an auto Union Horsch, everything back at Abu Sueir. And it was only towards the end of '44,

10:00 that Red Caps were catching up on all the loot that had come out of the desert, and there was a load of it. We all had bloody cars and rifles and stuff that we’d picked up on the way. We had an auto Union Horsch, magnificent car, a big German thing like a Mercedes. Someone had pinched it from the Germans.

What did you plan to do with all this loot?

10:30 Oh, we just used it for our own benefit. You see, we didn’t have vehicles. You couldn’t get a vehicle. It was about eighty ks to Cairo, you couldn’t get a vehicle on strength….There were staff cars, but we weren’t high enough in rank. There might be one staff car for the big cheese, but we had no trouble having our own cars, and although we did run it on the government fuel, they’d just turn a blind eye to that.

11:00 And we had this auto Union Horsch, it would do about…Christ, I was terrified on some of the trips we had back from Cairo at night. But I mean that was on strength. I’ve got a picture in my book, a beautiful car. And we had plenty of airmen to maintain it. It might have been highly illegal, but in those days there were a lot of things that were illegal.

11:30 **It sounds like there’s plenty to touch on there, but I just want to backtrack to some things you said before. And one is when you talked about flying planes, especially in the Pacific, that didn’t have a pilot relief tube. How would you relieve yourself?**

You relieved yourself before you took off, and you dehydrated and there was no…

12:00 There could have been relief tubes in the other aircraft, I don’t know, but I always remember that had one on that training flight. There could have been, I don’t know whether, I must check, whether every craft had it. But you didn’t…You dehydrated enough, you know what I mean? It’s not like in the cold climate. And even though ….Flying Spit, we’d be flying at probably ten thousand feet,

12:30 well, it was cool, but I never had any urge to relieve myself, ever. And as I said, we did have long trips. You were fully occupied. You had to keep your wits about you, you had to watch your revs, your fuel… You had to keep pretty smart on any long trips, especially if you're over water.

13:00 There was not much future if you go down there. But not like on a bomber. They’d have all that stuff, but we didn’t…We just didn’t have a long enough…In operations, a lot of our sorties only lasted thirty, forty minutes.

What about when you are assembling, preparing for a sortie...Nervous tension might be building up?

13:30 Oh we,, you relieved yourself before you got in the air. Nervous tension…You haven’t got time to think about anything else, you know? First of all, you’ve got to get off and then you join up with your mates, and then you’ve got to keep your wits about you from there on. Operating in the Pacific, a different story, because we didn’t have many enemy aircraft. But when you are in the desert,

14:00 they could have been lurking, they could have been….If your ‘drome was close to the German ‘dromes, they’d know we were taking off and they’d be there to get us before we got properly airborne. You had to be pretty quick, I don’t say there were many incidents like that but some of them were like that. Those sorties only lasted thirty, forty, forty five minutes, because you're in the tangle,

14:30 and you're doing all the flying, and once you do all that you really use fuel, because you're pushing the motor. You go out at, say, two thousand revs, and then you go up to three thousand….I think that’s the figure, I can’t remember, but as soon as you push that Merlin up she soaks up the juice. You don’t have any long range tanks either, minimum amount of fuel because of the danger of getting hit.

15:00 **Would you have a particular procedure that you followed before leaving on a sortie?**

Well, you were in the ops room and we’d discuss…Let’s say we're going to take off to do a patrol or… This is not a scramble, if you're a scramble, then you're on standby. The top level was that you sat in the aircraft,

15:30 and they fired a Vary pistol and you took straight off. As soon as you got airborne they would say, “There’s bandits coming in from three o'clock,” see, that’s why they scrambled you. If you're taking off on the next level of scramble, you're sitting in the ops tent, the pistol goes off, you race to your aircraft and go off. Or the other thing is if we’ve got to meet some bombers for escort, or something, and we are going to take

16:00 off at X. So we'd go out at X and take off. So there was about three levels of awareness take off time.

If you had a few minutes or even longer before you knew you were taking off, what would you do to keep your mind clear? Or perhaps…

It didn't worry you. If there was no…

16:30 You were going to do the job, OK, if there was a lull or something you would just go and sit down and have a bit of a camp. You don't get wound up. You got wound up when you were on standby, because you've got your two fingers ready to push the buttons to start the motor, and you're watching the tent for the coloured light. So you're really on a pressure…After about half an hour, you're flat out.

17:00 I mean, you've got a job to keep concentrating. It means that the speed you're getting off means whether you're going to get shot down. You've got to go straight off, quick time, bang, and stay down low until you can suddenly pull up and survey what's going on.

Were there cases where you had to sit there for half an hour?

Yes, that was when we were…

17:30 when the strip came under cannon fire from the Germans. I only did that for one afternoon. It was too dangerous. They decided to pull all the squadrons back to a 'drome out of range. It was silly, because here we had all the Spits and there was shells dropping amongst the aircraft. I had shrapnel come down the side,

18:00 well I mean that's bloody stupid. They withdrew all the aircraft, the squadrons went back a notch, until they could get the guns, get the Germans that were up in the mountains.

I know you said that sometimes a flying mission would only last…a number of minutes, but sitting in your cockpit for half an hour primed to start your engine,

18:30 **I imagine that must be draining. What happens to your nerves, your concentration?**

Yeah, but your concentration…The fact that they suddenly decide you should go, you're full stream, you're as quick as…Your life depends on it, to get off. That wasn't a problem. The problem was that if you sat for too long you started to relax,

19:00 so we used to change the blokes over.

That ability to be able to flick on the adrenaline, say to get up to full speed, was that something that came with your training?

Yes, I think it did. I think you learnt to be positive when it was necessary, super positive, and to really pull back when you weren't. You had to relax, there was no question about that. I mean, if you didn't relax, you got…

19:30 I'd seen blokes, they were all killed because they never relaxed. They couldn't fly enough. And then they got onto drugs…Because you could get a drug that would keep you awake. We carried a drug, we carried an escape drug.

An escape drug?

Well, that means if we got shot down, and our morale's low, we would take this pill and that would build your morale up.

20:00 Build it up too much. I know blokes that walked through the German lines throwing sand down the breeches of the guns. It really gave you a burst.

Do you know what this was?

I can't remember now, but it was a well known one. It was in your escape kit. You carried an escape kit strapped to your leg. That had a map in it, a knife, and a…

20:30 We carried a goolie chit. A goolie chit was when we were in where the Sinusees were. Goolie chit. The story was that if you were shot down, they would give you to the women, they would castrate you with broken glass, then they buried you in the sand with only your neck above and then run camels over you. I mean, this is the story.

21:00 So you carried this goolie chit. I have had mine framed. And it gives all the instructions and so on and so forth, and at the end, the last word the British put in is, 'Good Luck.' All the goolie chit did, it said, "OK, you've got this airman, return him to the nearest air base and you get £50,000,

21:30 give him a drink of water," and so on and so forth. Now all the story about what the women did to you may be all….But that was the story, so we carried goolie chits, we called them.

Where was this story supposedly…

That was the story I got…I would say it was cooked up, pre-war, when the British were dealing with old

aircraft in Iraq and Iran. But the Sunisee were

22:00 all the way in the desert, the Sunisee tribes. We came up against it…We used to go out and shoot deer, there was an odd deer, for a bit of fresh meat. And we were going to see if we could buy a couple of sheep from a Sunisee. So I took a couple of blokes out in the desert, and we weren't getting anywhere. And I thought, 'What we might do, we've got a pretty fast jeep,

22:30 we'll knock a couple of sheep off and take off, and they've only got camels, they'll never catch us.' Just as I was going out of the chief's tent, he gave me a battered bit of paper and it said, 'Under no circumstances touch this bloke's sheep or his women. He is one of our best undercover agents in the desert.' I'm glad he gave me that sheet of paper. The Sunisees were obviously

23:00 both sides, you know, but they were nomadic tribes. And we did get a few sheep from them, but they were like jack rabbits. I butchered them and they were very, very tough eating. And a few goats. When you're living on hard rations all the time, a bit of fresh meat was fabulous.

23:30 **On what occasions were you living on such hard rations?**

All the way in the desert. I mean we only had….I can't say I complained about the food, I mean, I had lived in North Queensland on pack horses, and we only had corned beef, we made dampers out of crème of tartar, spuds and onions, golden syrup. The fare in the desert was…

24:00 They gave us the best, we couldn't complain. Now and again we'd get a burst of good food. But I can't remember, I really can't. But bully beef was made up into all sorts of fancy dishes by the cooks. Burdekin Duck we called it, and all sorts of things. You've got to remember, under the conditions it was pretty good food.

Did the conditions in the desert campaigns

24:30 **as a whole come as a bit of a shock?**

The thing was that the desert campaign was typical British, was extremely efficiently run. When I was attached to the Americans…I was attached to the American Air Intelligence, they had an ice cream factory, they had…The Americans moved and…The Americans have tremendous fighting skills,

25:00 but nothing would touch the British, in my book. I think it was illustrated the other day in Iraq. You never heard much about the British, what they did. They took over that town and they ran it pretty smoothly. British are very, very…They've been doing it for centuries. I think the Australian soldier is the best shock trooper in the world,

25:30 but I don't think there's any match for the British in a long campaign. They know it, they've been through it so many times.

Just on the note of British organisation. I would just like to touch on your training in the Empire Training School in Rhodesia. What were your impressions of this new country and of the training there?

In Rhodesia? Well, it was just touch and go whether I went back to settle there.

26:00 Magnificent country, and I could see so many opportunities for farming. I toyed with the idea…Thank God I didn't, but I was quite keen to go back there. Beautiful country. Rhodesia was a really top country. The Club at Salisbury, they had a polo field, I played a bit of polo, they had everything.

26:30 And they lived very well. It has been ruined now, the same as many other countries that have gone to this….Now I'm not going to buy into whether it was colonial or not, but it was a mighty country, Southern Rhodesia. But I'm glad I didn't…But it did cross my mind.

You talked of the reception that you got from the British warrant officer in the pith helmet when you were there.

27:00 **What were your subsequent impressions of the British?**

Debben and I sort of took them as a joke, old fuddy duddies, but when I started to work with the British squadrons, and I realised their value….And when I became a flight commander, I would have been lost without them. I had blokes on charges and so on,

27:30 I could talk to them. Those warrant officers were the salt of the earth. But for us young Australians, the discipline they would punch into us…We didn't want to learn. They didn't understand us. We used to get full on a Friday night, it was pay night, and all sorts of silly things. But they absolute the salt of the earth. They'd spent twenty five years in the RAF,

28:00 Palestine and Mesopotamia and all those places. They were absolutely fantastic. But you don't know that, until you suddenly have responsibilities put onto you. Then you realise that you have got to have them to carry the duty through. They knew everything, they were really good, those WOs. The backbone of the Airforce in my book.

28:30 **You just touched on some differences between yourself, as Australians, raw pilots, and the**

British, who were training you. Can you tell me of the differences between your experiences in RAAF squadrons and RAF squadrons?

The thing was that the RAF squadron that I was with was a top squadron.

29:00 It had been a squadron through every scrap since the First [World] War. It was streamlined. Now the Australian squadrons were very good. But you had the Australian squadron there with the Empire Air Scheme, okay, maybe one permanent officer that was a cadet. It was therefore oriented to Empire Air Scheme type of training.

29:30 There were blokes from every walk of life, learning to fly. When you went to, in the beginning of the war, to the all Australian squadron, the sentiments….They were top fighter pilots, the early ones, but there was a sentiment of sort of older chaps that flew Ansons patrolling the Tasman or something, and they got CBEs [Commander of the British Empire] and DSOs and so on. Because the RAAF hierarchy was way behind

30:00 the thinking of the Empire Air [Training] Scheme. That's my view. And that was so much so that when all the fighter pilots in the Pacific signed a document, Mick Grace, Doug Vanderfield, they were all leaders in industry, thought that we were wasting our time. The Japs were cut off, we were just spending money. The Americans wanted us to go into Okinawa and Yokohama and up there, but the air board wouldn't let us go. And the reason they didn't let us go was

30:30 they lost 10 CVs, 14 OBEs [Order of the British Empire], 15 MBEs [Members of the Order of the British Empire]. People say I shouldn't say those things, but it's a basic fact. The Americans wanted us because they knew we were an efficient fighting machine, and we were Empire Air Scheme. But under no circumstances….The cadets were also brilliant, the early ones were top fighter pilots, but it was when you came down to the…

31:00 We called them stumble bums, and that's the ground people. There was some good leaders, but there was some hopeless leaders. But they'd been in the Airforce for twenty years, and their thinking wasn't the same as ours. The British, wherever I went with the British, they were streamlined, but they had been at it a lot longer than us.

31:30 **As a part of that training scheme you came into contact with pilots from countries around the Commonwealth. What impressions did you have of these different nationalities?**

There were all…I mean, we were all the same. There was brilliant sergeants, there were just as many pluses as there were minuses. I couldn't say one was better than the other.

32:00 The Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians, Jamaicans, South Africans, Rhodesians…You name them, they came from every walk of life and they were all….I would say if you put them altogether you would have a job…The odd ace would show up, the rest were all the same.

Did you have any preference for flying with Australian or…

No,

32:30 You flew with…They were all the same. You had no worries, Canadians…it didn't matter who it was. You were all in the same band of quality. There was no one that I would ever say, "I won't fly with him." If I was to say that it would be because he was a galah and talked on the radio,

33:00 or something, and could run the risk of getting us into trouble. The discipline in the air was very good, that was taught to us by the RAF. You look at some of the pictures there, you couldn't believe it, compared to what you see…Us sitting in old clapped out old chairs waiting for a take off, in the desert. Sometimes we were lying out under the wings of our Spits.

33:30 Nothing around, because we are up there…So that all took organisation, but they didn't move with a couple of ice cream factories. The Yanks looked after themselves, I can tell you, but that was their way of doing it.

Did you ever witness any LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] in other pilots?

34:00 Well, yes and no. I had no instance of it. I was one of the people that felt sorry for that bloke, because I didn't know that I might be LMF, too. It's all right to talk about it. I heard about it, how they had drummed them out of the Service and all that, but I can't say I ever come across it.

34:30 And I wouldn't be critical, because I think that the makeup has failed you, and you take him off and give him some other duties. There's plenty of other work he can do, maybe an instructor. Because you didn't have any room for any LMF, because they relied on you. Once you became a leader, you had to be.

35:00 Their lives were responsible on your activities. But I don't blame someone becoming LMF, because if you stop long enough to think about it…which you never did. I never saw any instance of it, but I have heard about it.

Were there any times when you questioned your own judgement?

35:30 I never questioned mine, I think the time I didn't shoot down the Red Cross plane, that was my

judgement. They questioned it, but I have no qualms about it. I suppose there is times when I should have

36:00 gone a bit to the right, and I would have shot him down and…I would have got in ahead of Neville, but I was quite happy to survive. I had enough close shaves, so don't push the button too hard.

What was your relationship like with the ground crew?

Fantastic, oh gee, once you got on the squadron, they were your life blood, the ground crews. You looked after them.

36:30 They were terrific blokes, those Englishmen. Australian ground crews were probably….What happened when they formed the Australian squadrons, they sent the ground crews to England to learn from the RAF. It was a time of the war when they were short of so much stuff and the crews were innovative and making guns work.

37:00 When the Australian squadrons wanted to get them back, they couldn't. The RAF commanders made all sorts of excuses, sent them away on holidays and so on, and said, "He's away for awhile." That just shows you the reputation of the Australian ground crews. They fitted up that Zero…When we were attached to American Air Intelligence, they fitted up the Zero. The Yanks were working on their aircraft, we had ours flying before they even got theirs off the ground. The Serves in the Airforce were tops. They are today, too.

37:30 **Relating to flying under G forces, can you explain Gs?**

The G. It's gravity. Let's say, I weigh eleven stone. Well, G1 is twenty two stone.

38:00 In other words when I do that, my weight is going back. If I change tack, and I'm flying on along and I change tack, the gravity, my body is forced into a gravity thing. Now G1, G2, G3, G4 are the degrees of gravity. It's your body being on the outside of the circle.

38:30 And the faster you're going and the quicker the turn, the more G you pull. Then you pull enough G for you to black out, the blood drains from your brain. That's why you have G pedals on a Spit, and you put your knees up like that, and then with a scarf… If you pulled your scarf really tight and clamp your neck down on it, then you could go onto the purple.

39:00 You're pulling your joystick, and as the purple comes up and you start to lose your sight, you have to ease off a bit, not so much G. When you talk about G….Now they have G suits. Now the G suits are the modern thing, they so control the contours of your body, that you don't lose the blood out of your brain.

39:30 **The purple you are talking about is?**

Going purple is…when the blood is draining from your brain and it's sort of drained from you and the purple is before you black out. You might only do it for an emergency for a couple of seconds, so that the bloke is shooting at you, you've pulled away from his fire. I don't know how many G you can pull, but there is a limitation, But now they've got G suits, and that has overcome that problem.

40:00 **How long could you stay in a manoeuvre where you are pulling Gs?**

Not long, because the seconds…You see, you're going at a fair speed and you pull it and you are probably out of trouble. It doesn't go on for a half minute, it doesn't go on for thirty five seconds. You're on the purple for three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine or ten seconds say,

40:30 and by that time you are out of the thing. You've got to be very careful not to do it too quickly, you'll black out. Many blokes have died because they had blacked out. But that's what the G is, the limitation, what you can apply to your body, in changing its direction in a fast manoeuvre.

Tape 8

00:35 **I would like to take you up to the point where you returned from the desert to Australia. You were sent to Darwin and made flight commander of 457. Before we talk about your duties and campaigns, I would like to talk to you about that role of leadership.**

01:00 As a flight commander you've got…approximately twelve or thirteen pilots and there is twenty four aircraft in the thing. Then you've got experienced pilots, inexperienced pilots, young pilots, and your job is to mould them as a team. It's not hard to do because they have all got the same movitation.

01:30 You soon pick out the pilot who wouldn't be suitable for that operation. I did this in the Pacific. For instance, when we were night flying, which was such a dangerous job, I had no blokes I could put on it, so I did it myself. I felt that I had to do it myself because you can't ask someone to do something that you're not game to do.

02:00 I'm not saying that I was any better in capabilities, but I knew it was hazardous. It was too hazardous, that's why we stopped doing it, it was bloody crazy. First off, we'd to take off in the dark with a Spit 8, secondly we'd to find the Betty [G4M Bomber] that was flying around in the bloody dark. Second, he'd see us first,

02:30 thirdly we had to get up close and open the guns, and the flash from the cannon would blind us anyhow. It was a crazy operation. The Americans were operating on the strip and they said, "You must get these Bettys, they're good bombers." We said, "Right oh, that's our duty." We got him in the daytime. To answer your question, you make sure that the training is right and you try and protect them.

03:00 I mean if a man was married I felt he had to be careful, he's got responsibilities … You soon learn their skills, and if you had a concert you would get blokes to do certain things, so all this was part of your job. It wasn't hard, because they were all the same, they were all dedicated fighter pilots.

03:30 You pick section leaders, and then it was just a case of…When we were in Morotai, the Americans we discovered, gave us bourbon whiskey for the number of sorties we did. We did plenty of sorties. The bourbon used to come along with

04:00 just an ordinary typed label, so I don't know what vat it came out of. And we had plenty of patrols and so on. The tragedy of the Pacific was that it was a 'no go' war. It was crazy. You had these beautiful expensive aircraft and skilled people, sitting on an island, chasing Japs that were cut off. And protecting the air. But there were only two or three Bettys flying around anyhow. It was a bit different in Balikpapan.

04:30 That was a tough thing. But on the Buna side…The danger was that we'd get shot by snipers. That was such a disappointment after the desert, which was such an intensive fighting operation. You did protect the ones…You protected the new pilots. You tried not to send them on a…

05:00 You wanted to blood them into the system. When I first started, when I joined 452, they said, "Here's some bloody cannon fighter." Well, they were right. You were cannon fighter, until you got over that barrier that you become street wise in the air, I guess is the word. And that street wise was…You learnt to be able to use every guile you had to see something,

05:30 to keep your wits about you. Some pilots just flew with their head in the office all the time. Well, they were hopeless. They were sitting ducks. That was your responsibilities as a flight commander, and it wasn't hard because they were all the same…You didn't have to…A bloke didn't want to do this or that, they were all...The trouble was when there was a job on was who to take, because they would all want to go.

06:00 **Did your role as a flight instructor pave the way towards these…**

Well, I was a flight commander at the OTU, too. I was more concerned there that I didn't put on a bloke's report, if I felt it, I would say, "This man would be better in Ferry Command." But I wasn't a good enough psychologist to pick them.

06:30 You know what I mean. And my most distressing memories of going to the morgue to identify the blokes that were killed in training. I can never forget that, when they pulled the sheet back and you'd see the bloke on the slab. That upset me more than anything, because I had never seen death before. You don't see it in the air, you don't see it on the ground. That was your main responsibility in training…

07:00 And make sure that you instilled in the safety of this….The RAF put it into me and that's what saved my life, no question.

That is something that occurred to me when you talked of the passing out parade incident where the Turkish pilot was killed.

That's right.

How many accidents did occur in training?

07:30 Not many, but it was quite extraordinary that….Another thing, we'd a problem when we took off to go from Darwin to Morowki. We gave instructions that what you did, you did not turn off the strip. As soon as you landed, you speeded up to get off the strip, because you have a lot of aircraft coming in. We had a very good instructor, I remember his name, Johnny Stern. He was an instructor that got onto ops.

08:00 A beautiful pilot, he taught me how to do aerobatics. What he did, he landed and as in training you pull up as soon as possible and you turn off at the first turn thing. A friend of mine, Billy Crystal, was landing behind him, killed Johnny, broke Billy Crystal's two legs and wrote off two Spitfires, because he didn't stick to the regulation.

08:30 Which was anti what he'd been trained for for five years, as an instructor. When we landed…When we're taking a squadron of Spits in on these strips, because you only have one strip, and you've got twenty four aircraft running short of fuel, you got down and kept going, so the other bloke could land here, and you keep hiking and get off the strip and then you come back up.

09:00 But as soon as the bloke turns off…And that is what happened with the Spit bloke in Abu Sueir, he slowed up…The bloke just gets clear, there's a controller, but there's not much fanciness, you're all on the thing. Get out of the way. And this bloke was just unlucky. If he'd gone another yard or something,

09:30 he would have missed it because the wheel just hit him on the back of the neck and broke his neck. He just slumped forward over the controls.

You spoke earlier about losses in operations and how they lessened as the war went on.

Yes, that's right. For us it did, yeah.

Was it the same with training accidents?

No, I think there was a percentage of training accidents.

10:00 Not a big percentage, but there was a percentage. Whether they lost their lives in Tiger Moths, Harvards or Spits. It's not a big percentage, but there were losses on training.

As you say it's not a big percentage but still…

There are definitely…I can't remember them,

10:30 but there were losses. Even on that gunnery course we did on Hurricanes, we lost one of our experienced blokes there. There's a lot of accidents occur. A lot of experienced blokes were killed in what we call 'shadow firing.' Shadow firing is that you fly an aircraft at about two hundred feet down sun, in the water. So the shadow is in the water.

11:00 We then do deflection shooting on that shadow. You see the splash in the water where your gun fire is going. But many blokes have been killed, they have missed the horizon. You see, in the Pacific, sometimes the water and the cloud, you lose the blue. There's no strict line of thing and they go in. That is how Bluey Truscott killed himself. There is a lot of accidents in the whole exercise,

11:30 caused by exceeding the safety measure. Now if you ask me what percentage? I wouldn't know.

What I was trying to get at was…How do you take losses in training as opposed to losses in an operation?

It's the same thing,

12:00 Okay, that's tough, hard cheddar. A bloke gets killed in training, you feel sorry, you've probably been close to him. Also, they scrub blokes before that occurs you know. If the instructor detects that a bloke's got a weakness that won't be accepted, they'll scrub him. That happens, and he might become ground crew or anything.

12:30 There is that…That element goes on all the time.

There is also the difference in what you mentioned earlier, that whereas if a colleague was killed in action in an operation, you might not see the aftermath of that, whereas if someone being killed in training from what you said before you might see the aftermath of that…

13:00 In the RAF, when they were killed in training, it was a ceremonial business. There was reversed arms, slow marches, firing over the grave…You couldn't believe it. We lost a couple of blokes at Guineafowl, and it was the full ceremonial parade in the burial. But what happened there, one spun in.

13:30 I don't know what the percentage is. If you said to me…I don't know. We lost a few blokes on training.

Instances, like you spoke of before, like when you had to identify them in the morgue, what that when you were in a leadership role?

That was when I was a flight commander of an instruction flight of an OTU.

So is that…

I was at Abu Sueir

14:00 I think I was OC [Officer in Command] of B flight, I was just like a flight commander in a squadron. And that really upset me, because then I thought of his parents and….You see, in operations it didn't occur, you never saw it. I suppose an incident…We shot a bloke down in the desert,

14:30 a young German, and I got a picture of him sitting in a Spitfire. I stuck him in a Spitfire, he was a bit burnt, and we had him in the mess…This is when we had a couple of gallons of candy wine. And we all got stuck into the candy and we had the two British guards there that were going to take him away,

15:00 and anyhow, they got a bit full. And they said, "We will take him outside and run the rubber hose over him and get a bit of information out of him." We said, "Don't you touch him." We then became…We sent words back to his parents that he was alive and so on. The fire goes out of your belly when you're back there, the same age as us, talking the same language, he could talk English, so the area of this hate disappears.

15:30 when you get down here. Now, I was approached the other day, there is one Japanese still alive that survived the raid in Sydney Harbour and he wants to come out here. And we've met German fighter aces and it's all…We then look on it that it's a challenge and we all survived and we've got common interest. I always remember that

16:00 little German fighter pilot. We were protecting him at the finish, and of course we'd ruined him for interrogation. See, they interrogate you as soon as you are a bit wafty, we'd filled him up with candy. But the old British were going to thump him up a bit, they had to get some info out of him. I always remember the big Canadian…he was a big guy.

16:30 He scared the two Poms. And he was taken back to the cage, he was burnt, but he was the same as us.

I guess that raises an interesting point, one that you touched on before, when saying that flying operations if you make a kill, it's still somewhat removed from you, your victim even the

17:00 **aftermath of your action, isn't quite as in your face, say, as an Infantry soldier in hand to hand combat.**

You don't see it. When you shoot someone and the aircraft go down, that's the end of it, isn't it, as far as you're concerned, you haven't got to worry any more. You don't have time…I have thought about it, but never…It never sticks in my mind

17:30 like identifying the dead bodies in the morgue. I can see that as clear as crystal, the bloke pulling the sheet back, the body on the slab. That sticks in my mind absolutely clearly. But shooting an aircraft down, oh well, he's gone, the bloody explosion on the ground and that's it.

Do you think you can explain why that image sticks in your own mind?

18:00 One is that I've actually seen it, the other I haven't. And I've moved onto the next scene, anyhow. Haven't got time to think about it. Bobby Gibbs shot down an Italian, and they took the little joystick out. He was an Italian count. Bobby then eventually found the family, back in Italy,

18:30 and he took a trip to Europe and returned the stick. And he completely broke down, he said, "They clapped me, as I came in." He said, "It was the end of me. I broke into tears." He couldn't take it. That is the odd relation…you know what I'm talking about? There's a sort of….But in war time, because there's no rules….I mean there are rules,

19:00 the Geneva Convention, but they are all broken, they all break them. You shouldn't say that, I suppose. And therefore….You're fighting for survival, you're fighting for freedom. I never had any question about that, freedom is priceless. But after the war, I've worked with the Japanese. I will always remember, the first time I met Mitsui people,

19:30 they had their head down and I wanted to go round and tip their head up, "Look me in the eye, you bastard." You know what I mean? But their money was good, they paid their bills better than a lot of the others. I put in a grain drying thing in Jakarta, in a combination Indonesian Mitsui Project. So I mean, the war's come and gone.

20:00 But now there's ethnic hatred, it's terribly important….I would go to war again just to protect this country. I would not hesitate, they wouldn't have me. But I would go, because I think that your heritage of this country is so priceless that is has to be protected. As I've said before, there would be so many young people to go that you wouldn't have enough people to bloody train them.

20:30 **I find it very interesting that you say that the war has come and gone, and afterwards you can look back and your attitudes might change, or time's changed, circumstances change. And yet even during the war, you've told us of an example where**

21:00 **this veil of hate towards your enemy was removed because you've seen the…**

That's right. But that was over a period of time, four or five hours. But you've got to remember that when you're fighting for your life, you haven't got time for any niceties. As I said, for a fighter pilot, the prize is your neck, your neck is on the line. Yours or his.

21:30 There is no second prize in survival. You're out there, you're fighting, you're doing a job. Now you're only a minnow in the whole field. But I was dedicated that freedom was part of my heritage, I guess, and all my ancestors had been fighting people for…. I've got the history, they've been fighters all their lives, and I suppose that is a streak that I've still carried on.

22:00 But it's not for anything else but I can walk down the street here tomorrow and tell Mr Howard to get stuffed and no bugger will shoot me. You can't do that in many countries today. So that's my motivation on that side of it.

And as you say, that's what you were fighting for. And what changed when you were sitting with this German pilot?

Here was a young bloke, the same age as me,

22:30 he had pictures in his wallet of his sister and his mother and so on. And then….you're not in the heat of combat. We're two people exactly the same. Now, he wasn't a Gestapo…He was a fighting bloke. And I suppose that's the period of time, when you're sitting down after four or five hours, that the fire goes out of our belly.

23:00 Today the German fighter aces have travelled to reunions with the British aces, and so on and so forth. Because the war has achieved what we wanted, and now, we are, as you can see, we're a part of the safety factor.

23:30 That's what the change is. Two different things, while you are in active Service and when you've finished.

Did you believe that there was a respect amongst pilots from whichever side?

Yes, there was. There was a respect of the skills…

24:00 There was a respect of the skills that you both had. But I think that there is two different aspects. There is the heat of the battle, and in our case we won,

24:30 and then there is that thing now. You know as well as I do that if we're going to survive we have to trade with Japan, with Germany…And in today's world, it's no good saying, "I wont play with Japanese," or whatever country. So having got over the war, what is the next move? Commercially we've all got to survive, haven't we? We have achieved survival in war, now we've got to achieve survival in commerce.

25:00 You can't carry stuff. There is a limitation of how far you carry it forward. I have got…It doesn't worry me now seeing a Japanese. For a while I didn't…When I saw them, I couldn't stand them. But I mean I work with them, so I can't turn round, I have got to accept that fact. We are free, and that is what we set out to do anyhow.

25:30 **Your retelling of the incident with the German pilot is touching in its humanity, and yet at the same time when you talk of being in the morgue with the pilots killed in training, that's a tragic moment. You've talked of this difference between being in action as opposed to not.**

26:00 **What does that moment in the morgue do to your feelings of motivation for action, or for continuing the fight?**

Well my immediate thing is for his parents, that he has been killed in training. You sort of….I suppose you could say, "Well, what is the difference between dying in training and dying in war?" And I suppose there is the difference that…

26:30 Well, to me, that bloke…I was responsible for him, and he did something and he got killed. So there is sort of a feeling of responsibility. If he had been killed in action and I was responsible for him, I can't help it, because someone was shooting at him. I go through my mind, is there anything that I did that could have averted that?

27:00 What happened? And I go through it in my mind, and then I feel that responsibility just jaggers it, in that sense. When the British Army captured those Italian vats of Chianti, there was a New Zealand soldier drowned in one. We all said that would probably be the best vat, the best stuff, because it was rubbish the stuff we were drinking. I often said, "What will that write back and say happened to him in action?"

27:30 You can't say he died in a vat of Chianti in Tripoli. We joke about that, how they were going to get over that casualty, when they put him in the casualty list. 'Killed in action, drinking Chianti.' That's what he was doing.

Do you know what happened?

He fell in and drowned.

Sorry, with the report of this…

I don't know what happened, no, but we joked about it. We thought how are they going to fix that up in the obituaries.

28:00 To say what happened to little Johnny. Having captured that Chianti, everyone got a dose of it. It was terrible bloody stuff, but we'd nothing else to drink.

I would like to talk about the time when you were working with American intelligence and test flying planes….

28:30 We were sent up there, it was a special unit. I had a pass signed by General MacArthur. I could go into any station and demand transport. I can remember one thing, I have never seen so much stuff, Japanese stuff. There was every steel bit size from the smallest up to about 3/8 in metric. And we'd always heard about how the Japanese steel was no good.

29:00 I took a sample of each bit and eventually took it home to the bush. I think some of the bits are still going, fifty years later. They were the hardest steel we ever had. The Americans flew food out from

America each day. We lived like fighting cocks and we spent most of our time flying against all the other aircraft. The Corsairs and

29:30 the Mustangs, and the Canadians, and the British, and the Marines and…Of course, were flying Spit 8s, and we were absolutely heroes, you know, because all we used to take on was flying against them. And we were waiting to fly the George and the Jack. And then we were flying the Spitfire against those to work out…Because they were terrified of…They were big radial motors two thousand horse power and no one had developed that before.

30:00 That's when we got to work and got a Zero going. Well then, having got all that done, we were just about to start flying against the other and then they called us back to do the invasion of Labuan, in Borneo. We were there about six weeks, I think. Oh, it was a good life up there. The Yanks wanted us to go to Okinawa but airboard wouldn't. They sent very strict instructions

30:30 that the Australian Wing is not to go to Okinawa, and that was a tragedy. The Yanks knew we were very experienced fighter pilots, but air board wouldn't do it because, as I said, air board would lose probably a couple of DSOs, some DFCs and MBEs, CBEs, all the British decorations. And that's what caused the court martial for Clive Caldwell

31:00 **Yet you still say it was a tragedy that you didn't go?**

No, no, we couldn't go, air board stopped it. We went back and did the invasion of Borneo, and that was, again, that was mild compared to Balikpapan.

31:30 We only shot down a couple of aircraft, because it was all back woods. The biggest danger we had was the snipers. And we did show the flag at Sandakan, we saw a couple of blokes come out of Sandakan…A terrible sight. That was the worst camp of all in the whole of the war. Those were the things that the Japanese did which really brought the hatred. But again, it's had to dissolve because

32:00 we want them as a trading partner now that we are out of war. We have got our freedom, so we have got to come back a notch.

This remarkable life you certainly led while test flying, can you tell me the conditions in which you were living?

We were in beautiful quarters at Clark Field.

32:30 And we had, I think, a plane came out each day with fresh food from the States. I got sick of maple syrup and flapjacks. We used to cool our beer by getting a tin of high octane fuel and putting a hole and let it evaporate, because it dripped onto the thing. We had a pass, we could travel, we could go into Manila for anything.

33:00 We were taken up with our flying, because we were doing these demonstrations all the time, everyone wanted to fly a Spit. A bloke would drive up in a brand new Jeep and say, "Look, here's a brand new Jeep, can I have a flip in your Spit?" "Well, what is the use of a brand new jeep on Clark Field? How am I going to get it back to home?" It was a haven of luxury. And unfortunately, when I wrote off Clive Caldwell's plane,

33:30 I couldn't fly the Zero back to Zamboanga, and I was out of flying for a couple of weeks, because they said I'd had a bad crash and it might affect my metabolism or whatever it is. I was so lucky to get away with my life, that was the main thing.

Was Clark a dry airfield?

Clark Field? It was just called Clark Field, it's still called Clark Field. It's the main aerodrome at Manila.

34:00 The Yanks had a very big depot there.

You talked of the octane there…

Yes but we captured….There was a lot of….the rice wine that Japs drink, Saki. I can always remember cooling a tin of beer,

34:30 because the Americans had plenty of canned beer there. We would knock a little hole in a four gallon tin, let it drip, and the evaporation of the 100 octane would cool the beer. The Americans there had everything, ice cream factories, all the luxuries in the world. It was a most interesting interlude.

35:00 **Can you recall the circumstances in which you were selected to take part in this exercise?**

All it was, was Clive Caldwell was told to pick six pilots. So he picked the ones he wanted, and we were, probably, a bit better than the others in flying ability.

All from 457 Squadron?

No, they were all from the Wing, the whole Wing. Bruce and I went from 457.

35:30 I can't remember, I can't even remember now who the others were, but they were picked form the whole Wing. I flew up as a Reserve, and then I took over Clive's plane….I was a Reserve, and then

someone must have got sick, I was flying up there, but I also had Clive's plane, CRC.

36:00 And he came back for his court martial. It was an interesting exercise.

I'm curious to his court martial, was that the result from something…

Well, what happened was that Caldwell had sold whiskey to the Yanks, which we did at Morotai, we all did, to build the airmen's quarters. Otherwise they would have lived in tents on the ground, a very wet area.

36:30 And air board wanted to get him because he wanted to take the Wing to Okinawa. So they trumped up a charge. And air board was doing just as badly, they actually got up there and they would go home with all sorts of loot. It was the most disgraceful thing that ever happened in the aviation, in the RAAF. He was pulled back from group captain to flight lieutenant. That case will eventually be opened up, I suppose,

37:00 But it was an absolute con job in our mind. Air board wanted him because he sold whiskey to the Yanks, but we also built proper quarters for our airmen. They would not have had that if we hadn't of done it. Maybe we shouldn't have done it the way we did, but that was what we did, It wasn't an offence that they could take it out on our most senior flying fighter pilot.

37:30 **I would like to pursue the impact it might have had on you a little later down the track. But first I would like to talk about the test flying. You said you flew in a variety of enemy aircraft. Do you recall what types?**

38:00 We flew Corsairs, this is when I was at Clark Field. I wasn't terribly keen on flying a lot of other aircraft because I was flying, all the time, the Spitfire. You've got to remember that the others wanted to test us out on our skills flying in the air, so we would fly against a Lightning and he would be a very good the pilot.

38:30 He would be able to feather one motor and we would have to really work to get inside him, and all this sort of stuff. They always wanted us to do our flying exhibition of the Prince of Wales Feathers. See, there was four of us and….We were the only Spit 8s there, despite the fact that there was all these other aircraft. And because they hadn't got the other George and Jack flying, we had our Zero flying, we spent most of our time…every day we'd put on a flying exhibition,

39:00 beating up the strip and so on. Every time you went in the air there would be some Yank who wanted to take us on in a Corsair or a Mustang or something, so we were always….So we really gave those old Merlins hell. We had to, to maintain our superiority.

Could you explain feathering the motor?

39:30 You take off in very course pitch, the pitch of the blade, and feathering a motor in a twin, is you stop the motor. And you it when the blade is like that, not like that, against the air stream, see what I mean? So he stopped it. So that means on a twin motor he's got this stopped and he can do a very sharp turn on that one. They would only feather it for a second, but feather it enough to do that,

40:00 to try and get inside us. With the pitches, you take off with a very fine pitch, and as soon as you get air borne, you go into the coarsest pitch, so that you are not doing the revs and the prop is carving out big chunks of air. And of course, that is not using so much fuel.

Talking about the planes that would fly against you, you mentioned a Jack and George?

There was a George and a Jack,

40:30 they had big radial motors. We didn't have any twins. We were just starting to operate. We built our own Zero, and flew against it, and that established…I could pull a bead on a Spit in a Zero, but it had no armour plate. The armour plate in the Spit's about that thick.

41:00 The main exercise was, we learnt quite a lot.…of the techniques of the other aircraft. But as I said, before the George and Jack were flying, the Yanks had a hell of a job to get them flying, we were pulled back to fly in the invasion of Borneo. See, then I had a prang, so then I was sent down to Zamboanga to stay with the Marines, and I just got back to Borneo and I had to take my flight to land in Labuan.

Tape 9

00:34 **I would like to put one question about what you talked of, at the end of our last tape, when you mentioned that you had had fitted out a Zero. What was the feeling of being in an enemy plane?**

Oh, no problem. I mean, it's interesting, because you learn.…Especially in the Zero, it was a nice little aircraft,

01:00 a beautiful little aircraft, and they were dangerous. The Zero shot a few Spits down. Very manoeuvrable in the hands of a good pilot. The British and the Americans were very worried about capturing these big aircraft, because even though Japan hadn't folded up, we were fighting in the Pacific and any great…A bit like the Germans when they had the buzz bombs going off in London at the end of the war,

01:30 it was their final fling. They were determined to make sure they could do something about it.

Would the reputation of the Japanese pilots and their Kamikaze tactics…

Well, the Kamikaze is a different cup of tea, of course. The Japs had good pilots, they had good fighter pilots. Kamikaze is just like these suicide bombers today.

02:00 There's nothing you can do about a Kamikaze, for us. You're going to hit the battleship, now he's firing everything, throwing everything except the kitchen sink at you, but you're just going straight into him. Unless they could blow you out of the sky before you hit, there is only seconds, dual loaded with petrol and bombs, and bombs and that's it. The British code is to save lives in war.

02:30 The other code doesn't worry us, the glory is to die as a Kamikaze pilot. They tell me, these blokes in Iran, the first thing you do when you get to heaven is you get seven virgins. Now they believe all that garbage, you know what I mean? All that sort of thing…It's an honour to die.

Of the standard Japanese pilot, was there a similar respect, as you described with the German pilots?

03:00 Well I didn't…The few we flew against, there were too few to form a judgement. But for the raids on Darwin, they were pretty good pilots, they shot down some of our top blokes. The Japanese skills were very good, Because the Japanese and the Germans had been training for it, they had a big nucleus of top fighter pilots. We started from scratch. We moulded fighter pilots out of every walk of life.

03:30 Irrespective of what…You just couldn't achieve the same quality on two or three hundred hours as you could if you had two or three thousand hours. But the top pilots in both people were pretty good.

Could you describe me the details of your accident while you were in the Philippines?

Yeah, what happened was, I was going to fly the Zero from

04:00 Clark Field to Zamboanga, and this American Colonel was going to fly my CRC. So I loaded the CRC up. I had the long range tank, that's about ninety seven gallons under the belly, two wing tanks…I think it had the wing tanks full…And what happens when you take off, you've always got to check when you've got an overload of all these tanks, you go up to about five thousand feet, and you make sure…

04:30 You turn the one, so you turn onto the belly tank and turn off the main tank, to make sure there's no air locks. Now I did that, but I made an absolute terrible error. I only went to about fifteen hundred feet, because it's very unusual to occur, to get an air lock. And I turned the fuel onto the belly tank and turned the main tank off,

05:00 and I got an air lock in the line and the motor stopped straight away. And I had to get over an American picture show, which meant I had to go down and pull up to get over. I didn't have time to jettison any of the fuel. I just had time to turn off all the switches. I turned off every electrical current and tightened the seat belt, and the aircraft went in, and left the cannon sticking out of the ground like two carrots.

05:30 And luckily the aircraft broke in two. I got a cut down there where I hit the cockpit. And I jumped out….How it hadn't caught fire, there was petrol everywhere. And I'd forgotten to pull the plug to the radio, and it spun me back onto the wing. And I got it out and raced….And there was Yanks firing pistols and ambulances flying round.

06:00 I mean, how it never blew up? God only knows. It was really unbelievable. I mean I should have been an inferno. And they took me and put me in an American hospital. And I was like…you'd think I'd won the war. Spit pilot, I had nurses sitting on the bed all round, it was unbelievable. They kept me there for four or five days, I was right as pie. As I said, they sent me down to stay with the Marines and they looked after me like…

06:30 They were wonderful, those American Marines. And then I went onto to Morotai and started the invasion of Borneo.

This accident, you said you had some nice treatment afterwards, but what does an incident like that do to your belief and your desire to keep flying?

I had nightmares for awhile, but you've got to get above it.

07:00 I can't think of it, you see. Life has to go on. I mean, that is only one of two or three times when I should have been killed. You haven't got time to think about it. What are you going to do? Get on with your life or are you going to go into a hollow log? I got away with it. Now if I stopped to analyse it,

07:30 then I get frightened. It's best to move on, otherwise…I have had terrible nightmares, but I'm very fortunate that I can never blame the war, or blame the war that I'd had these nightmares. I have a small

pension, and I could probably get a much bigger pension. But because I haven't, I don't think it's right that I should concoct a story that I'm half way round the bloody twist.

08:00 I go to sleep at night. My wife said I do wake up screaming, sometimes, but that' s when I relive one of them,, but not often….then I relive it, and I imagine the fire, but it's too minor. You've got to go on with the next move. I couldn't get back in the air quick enough. And that's not bravado, that's just the way I wanted to be.

08:30 Otherwise, you know, if you stop flying every time you get a scare, you'd be on the ground for a long time.

When had Caldwell's court martial happened in relation to this incident?

Clarke Caldwell? Well, they brought him south…

Was it in relation to your accident? Around what time?

09:00 No, he was sent south, being court martialled. They had a court case and got all this stuff…What triggered that was because, 1) he led the group that had written to air board….and signed by a lot of fighter pilots that we were wasting money in the Pacific, it would be better if we all went up and joined the Americans. The Japs were cut off, there is Australia, there's the Halmaheras, there's the Japs,

09:30 except for Borneo, now they couldn't go anywhere. The fact that they wanted to get at him, so the fact that he had sold alcohol to build the stuff for the men, was enough to trigger what they did. Everyone was….Unbelievable. You've got a man who is a flying ace, he's an Australian flying ace,

10:00 and you reduce him, too, in rank, group captain, wing commander, squadron leader, three ranks, they made him a flight lieutenant….And that was because he upset all the…He was a tough bloke Clive Caldwell, he didn't muck around. Clive Caldwell was a man of his own. I can remember Clive, when he lived up in Bellevue Hill, and there was a barking dog and he said…

10:30 He wouldn't muck around, he said, "I'll shoot the bastard." He had a…but he was a fantastic fighter pilot.

Did that episode upset you in a way that affected your…

No but it worried us as fighter pilots. I'll give you a story on Clive. When Clive was dying, he was in the hospital for the dying at St Vincent's, and I went to see him, and he was asleep and I said to the minders,

11:00 "No, don't wake him up." They said, "No, he's given us instructions, we must wake him up." And Clive and I were talking. And while we were talking, the bloke came in and he went to his bathroom and took a chair out, and as he went past Clive's bed, he said, "I have taken a chair out of your bathroom." When he just got out of sight, Clive said, "Did he call me a bastard?" I mean, that was Clive on his death bed.

11:30 He thought this bloke had called him a bastard. Oh, he was a fantastic man.

You've talked of luck in flying and you've described the near misses that you've had. I'm just trying to get a picture of what your attitude is. At this stage of the war, after all the experiences you've detailed,

12:00 **when that episode happens, when you have sounds to be your most serious accident and you've already talked of your service at Morotai and Borneo and talked of it as a….well, certainly not a waste of time, but maybe a misadventure, what is happening to your desire to keep fighting this fight for freedom?**

12:30 Well….you had to get above that. You had to rise above that temperature, that was the problem, because you were there until the end of the show. Then it was achieved, we did have freedom, and the fact that you had been able to escape these various incidences were part of the flying job.

13:00 And you just counted your blessings, you couldn't dwell on them too much.

Was there no sense of, perhaps it's time to give it away or take less risks?

When I knew it was the end of the war, then that's why I never flew. I mean, I've flown in the air, but I reckoned I used up all the plugs

13:30 in the period of time I'd been flying. I've been very lucky. I know I was a good pilot, I was always listed as above average in all aspects, but that doesn't say that…You can be extremely capable but you can still go down on a crazy little incident.

What has remained constant in all this time though? In terms of your personal flying experience?

14:00 Constant in which way?

In your affection for your flying or what you flew in…

You had a reliable aircraft, and anything like that didn't change your atmosphere. You just got in it and you started the motor and you listened to it, and away you went. You didn't have time to sit down and think back on all the other incidents, they were all gone.

14:30 **This is your Spitfire you are referring to?**

Yes. There is no good worrying about it, it just happened, you got away with it. There's nothing you can do, you have to move onto the next stage. That or you gave up, didn't you? Or became a LMF.

Did your affinity for the Spitfire waver?

Never, ever. Greatest aircraft that was ever designed.

15:00 Anyone can fly a Spit. How to get it off the ground and back on the ground, that was the tough stuff. Once you got it in the air, blind Freddie could fly it. It didn't have any vices.

How would you describe your personal feelings toward this aircraft?

My view is that it was the greatest designed aircraft ever put together by any country.

15:30 The Americans have wonderful fighters, the Russians have and so on. But the Spitfire had no vices. It was a perfect aerodynamic piece of flying machinery. I think that's why it became such a glamorous aircraft. It was the backbone of so much….I mean if you put an ex-war plane in the corner of every street in Sydney,

16:00 they'd all be around the Spitfire. It has built up to that glamour, whether we like it or not. The Hurricane was a great fighter, so was the Kittyhawk, so was the Tomahawk, so was the Typhoon, but none of them touch the glamour of the Spitfire. It's short of…I'm not going to say it was false, but it's an aura that is completely established.

16:30 Something which lives through so many generations.

Is the Spitfire something you missed once your flying Service was finished?

Yes, if you had….To buy a Spitfire today, it's a million dollars.

17:00 They've got fifty flying in England. They have been rebuilt, that gives you an idea. There will never be a replacement for it, that era is gone. They're jets now, they are safer, they do all the thinking for you. They've got everything.

Is the glamour of it something you miss?

The glamour was the whole life.

17:30 The glamour was part of the fact of the era. The Spitfire was established in the Battle of Britain, the Battle of Malta, and we came along and we swam with that tremendous group. Every fighter pilot was a Spitfire pilot. If a bloke flew anything, he was always a Spitfire pilot. I'm a genuine Spitfire pilot, I've got six hundred hours on them.

18:00 It's because that is the glamour part of the exercise. It established this glamorous standard, and it's lived through every generation.

Would the image of the Spitfire lift you at times if you were low?

18:30 It was a pleasure to fly it and I don't think that…I mean, I never ever, ever hesitated if I had the opportunity to fly it. You've got to remember that its main part was…It was perfect in every avenue, it was a perfect flying machine in war. And because we were then glorified,

19:00 it all was a great mixture. You were a Spit pilot, so that put you up a notch. Today as you say, I talk to blokes that never flew Spits, but they're quoted as Spitfire pilots. That doesn't worry me, I'm happy with my lot.

You mentioned earlier that you have spoken with family after war,

19:30 **of your experiences and of being a Spitfire pilot. What things have you passed on to them?**

Little bits, but that is why I have written this book. I've put it all in the book and that has all the pictures, because I carried a camera right through the war. I have some wonderful pictures of all that part of it.

20:00 Instead of having bits and pieces, I put it all together and that book is written for that purpose. The people doing the book will think it will interest a lot of other people, so I've got to sell it now to pay for it all. I don't think they said that will be a problem.

Have you ever passed on any advice to your children or grandchildren?

20:30 Yes, I have told every grandchild that's a pilot, it's no good to…I know the CO of 3 Squadron and he

says, “Join the Airforce.” But if you join the Airforce you’ve got to spend twelve years. And in fairness, I don’t think fighter aircraft, I don’t think they have got more than five years to go and then, as I said, it’ll be a robot. I think the days of what we experienced will never be repeated. They will be repeated for strafing and that sort of thing, that’s all.

21:00 But you won’t see what we saw.

Is there anything of importance relating to your own war experience that you would like to leave with those behind you?

The most important thing, I think, is that it shows…

21:30 There is an old saying, “They're not as good as in as grandfather’s day,” I don’t believe that. I think that today’s modern education and so on, that the young people are so qualified, much better qualified than I was. And I’ve always said if the balloon went up tomorrow you would be surprised how many would… join up.

What changes did you see in your own generation after the war?

22:00 Well, not a lot, except that we weren’t educated today like the young ones are. We didn’t have computers or anything. In the period of time since the war ended to now would be the greatest industrial evolution of all time, when you think about it. Digital this, digital cameras, that camera can do….I mean there’s no end to it now.

22:30 They’ve got digital phones that will pick up images. I mean it’s galloping, isn’t it? Faster than you can imagine it. I’ve got no chance of keeping up with it. The young people can.

Was Australia a changed place when you returned from the war?

No, it was just wonderful to get back.

23:00 Australians are very….They treated me with great respect. Often, when I play golf, the youngsters come and take my buggy down the hill, because I’m eighty five. No, the respect of people is amazing.

What changes did you see in yourself immediately after the war?

23:30 I think I was so lucky to be alive, and I had to go out and make a living, and rear a family and pay the bills. I think the worse trouble is that the war had taught me to take risks. I would take risks that I probably shouldn’t take. I would buy cattle and buy and sell stuff. I think that was something I learnt as a fighter pilot. But I have no hang ups.

24:00 I get an odd nightmare…I think about that morgue, I will think about that tonight now, but that is the only hang-up I get. If you can call it a hang-up.

I’m interested to know how you regarded those people who had been your enemies, immediately after the war?

24:30 I mean the war ended, and it was obvious that…It didn’t take long for me to realise that…I mean the first five years, no trouble, because there was no interchange between the Germans and the Japs. But then it wasn’t long to realise that we had to trade with these people. You couldn’t carry this war on. I mean, Germany lost the war and now we’d to spend millions

25:00 …getting them running again. What happened, it wasn’t long before we were dealing with the Japs, we were dealing with the Germans….The same thing as I said, the German fighter pilots were talking to our guys, we were talking to the others, so the breakdown was we were all human. You could see the changes. I see on the TV last night that McCartney sang in Red Square. Now he was barred from going to Russia twenty years ago,

25:30 now they welcome him with open arms. There is a changing pattern I think of the whole exercise. And the education that goes through is pulling nations more into a thing…Except now you have the ethnic problem with the terrorists. And that’s worse than war because we don’t know where they are. But to answer your question, I have no trouble. I had an incident in Germany, when Debben and I were on a trip,

26:00 and we called in at a place in Austria, and a bus load of Germans came in from the Africa Corps. We didn’t tell them that we were fighter pilots. So we talked, “Yah, war…” And all this stuff. And it was one of those nights, all beer and so on. When we got up in the morning, the Germans had paid our bill.

26:30 We didn’t tell them we were fighter pilots from the desert.

Have you ever met any former enemy pilots?

Oh, yeah, yeah. I gave a speech the other day at Rotary, and there was a bloke in the audience, he said, “You probably fired at me.” He was a German,

27:00 but he’d been out here twenty years.

I'm curious if they, like other people you've mentioned who looked up to Spitfire pilots, did the enemy pilots express an admiration for you and the Spitfire pilots?

No, not expressly. I think the Spitfire image has been built by our own people. No, but I meet...

27:30 There's plenty of people. I employed Germans after the war. I had a lot of bits and pieces I had taken off German troops, and I employed a German at Gunnedah, and he knocked them all off. So the crossover is quite normal. There's the first five years where it's static, and then the very fact that you've got to live goes ahead.

28:00 **Can you recall a proudest moment from your Service?**

When I got the Returned Soldiers badge. I mean, I suppose….There is no question that survival was, whether you like it or not, when you've done your last op, it's a weight off your shoulders.

28:30 You have pushed it to the limit and then it's gone. You can't get away from that one. We used to joke about it, "Do you want to a DFC" "No, I want that bloody Returned Soldiers badge," which we all got. And when you got that you were happy. You couldn't do any more.

Did you receive flying medals?

Yes, I got a DFC

29:00 and a Mention In Dispatches.

What did they mean?

There were a lot of blokes should have had DFCs, I think I earned mine. I got a Mention In Dispatches on 92 Squadron, well on normal squadron, I would have got a DFC there, but because so many were won by the other men, there's so many allocated to each campaign. I was amazed that I got a Mention In Dispatches, which is just below a DFC.

29:30 It probably contributed to me getting a DFC, anyhow. I had four Campaign Stars. But I think when you finish your tour, you're lucky. I'm still healthy,

30:00 I don't have hang ups, I've been cut to size. You never know. These are things beyond us, aren't they? You just count your blessings.

Is there a strongest memory, or most poignant experience, that has stayed with you?

30:30 What, after the war or during the war?

From the war?

I think it's because the family traditions have been fighting men. All the amazing history, going back to Mitchell, who worked behind the enemy lines with the Duke of Wellington, that's why he got out here. And father being in the Royal Flying Corps. I think it's established a hierarchy, that I'm a fifth generation Australian,

31:00 and we've established our little niche in the thing. I'm not saying that's going to go on like that, because I don't think there will never be anything like…In future wars, it will be done by machinery. You won't see anything like the carnage we've seen. That was illustrated in the Gulf War and the last war, we lost no one in Iraq, only we were exposed to fighting. So the change is there.

31:30 Now, having survived it, I'm just counting my blessings, but you're not going to see anything like the carnage we've seen before, ever. That's my opinion.

Is there anything from your experience during the war that you think we might have missed or anything in concluding that you'd like to add?

32:00 No. I think that…When I think of the shoot up in the mess, when I held that glass up, I think what a stupid thing to do, when the bloke is full of whiskey, when he pulls his gun up and leaves me holding just the thick part of the bottom, of the glass…When I think of doing stupid things like that…And I think that I had such a wonderful time.

32:30 When we were in London we were treated….Cairo, Alex [Alexandria]…There was a very wonderful side. OK, we were out in the desert, but we were always coming in. Then we had six months instructing, fantastic. King Farouk had his beautiful night-clubs… But to answer your question, whatever minus there is there, there was such a big plus on this side, that they equal out.

33:00 I think I was very proud when I got a DFC. And what happened was they said I was to get it from Mr Bakell, and I refused to take it. I wrote back and said, "Send it to me in an envelope with a Queen's stamp on it." They didn't, they said, "You've got to come down." So I waited until Northcott was the governor. They're childish, I know, but….those are the souped up ideas you had.

33:30 I wouldn't take it from Bakell because he was a Labor bloke that I didn't like. I thought there was nothing wrong with saying, "Let the Queen send it out with her stamp. That'll be pretty good, won't it?"

They wouldn’t accept that. So I had to come down for investiture when Sir John Northcott started. No, I don’t think there’s anything, I just count the blessings.

Well, I think we can count our blessing that we had the chance to talk to you today, So we thank you for that.

Okay.

INTERVIEW ENDS