Australians at War Film Archive

Thomas Trimble - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **When and where were you born?**

I was born on the 1st August 1920, in the suburb of Mosman [New South Wales] in a

01:00 house overlooking Balmoral Beach.

What were your parent's names?

Thomas was my father and mother was Whydah, it's the name of the bird of paradise of New Guinea.

How did she come by that name?

By her parents I guess.

01:30 **Did you have brothers and sisters?**

I have one sister and a stepbrother and sister, that's three of them.

Did you spend all of your childhood in Mosman?

Yes.

Did you go to school there?

Yes, I went to

02:00 the Mosman Public School and after I was about twelve I went to North Sydney High School for five years and I did my Leaving Certificate in 1936.

02:30 **Can you tell me, what's your earliest memory?**

03:00 I guess my earliest memory would be been taken by my father and mother, no my earliest memory would be when I was taken by my mother

03:30 to Moore Park in Sydney where my father was playing cricket for the Bank of New South Wales for whom he worked. I think that would be my earliest memory.

Can you describe the day, can you describe what the outing was like?

No, not

04:00 really. I can remember going across in the ferry from the [Taronga Park] Zoo wharf and then being on Moore Park and watching my father play, and that's all that I can recall of that. That would be my earliest I think.

04:30 **Was yours a happy childhood?**

Yes, I would say yes. I can't think that it wasn't. My mother died when I was about five and for a while then

05:00 my sister and I lived with my grandmother and then for a while we had a housekeeper, which I didn't get on with. It was reasonably happy, it depends on how far you want me to go on in childhood.

Did you know what

05:30 **your mother died of?**

No, I don't think I was ever told.

Was it sudden, had she been ill?

I can't really remember, this was so long ago. I can't even remember much about my mother.

06:00 It must have been relatively sudden I would think because my sister who was eighteen months younger than I would only have been three and a half when she died, so my mother couldn't have been ill for very long if that's what you're asking?

06:30 **So quite a bit adjustment for you and your sister to have to move live with your grandmother?**

I think it was, but you know kids can adjust because I think at that age you can adjust to anything. You're adjusting all the time as you're growing and you're growing at quite

07:00 a rate.

Did you father remarry?

Yes, my father married again which was unfortunate.

Why was that?

He was an ex-service [man] and had spent four years in World War I

07:30 and ex-service people are a bit strange, he'd been in the army and he had some pretty rough friends I think and he married a girl quite a bit younger than he and she had been born and bred in the country and to come to the city was quite a big change in

08:00 her life. Being married was a big change and I don't think they were quite compatible and my sister didn't get on with her for a reason I don't know. Eventually they separated,

08:30 I mean my father and his wife separated and then they were divorced and that was after the other two children were born. For a while then we lived just as a family of a father, myself and my sister and then very many years later

09:00 my father married for a third time. I think that was fairly happy because he had known the woman virtually since he'd started to work after World War I.

You said that some of the World War I fellows were a bit strange?

09:30 I didn't say that they were strange, I said they were typical ex-serviceman who had a ex-service life. They drank together and they thought much the same as each other and

10:00 they lived a man's life.

I'm not sure what you mean by that, could you?

You'd have to be a man to understand it I guess.

Well perhaps you'll have to be a man to explain it?

I wouldn't know, I don't know how I would explain it. When I say they lived a man's life they could make

10:30 decisions and they didn't have to worry about pleasing anybody. They can argue among themselves and they could enjoy themselves. It's a bit hard then to have to worry about a wife and to have to worry about children and I think that was one of the problems.

11:00 **It sounds as though it might be quite hard for a serviceman to come out of that male environment and start living a family life, is that more or less what?**

I think it was, but don't know how it affected my father with his first wife but

11:30 I think it affected him with his second wife, because she was so different. My mother had brothers who had been in the army with my father, in fact this no doubt was how they came together.

12:00 When my father came back from World War I, he disembarked in Melbourne and he stayed with one of his wartime companions whose family owned a hotel in Williamstown.

12:30 There he met my mother who was assisting in the hotel and of course she was only a young girl, and he'd come back into civilization you might say, and they just hitted it off quite well. In fact

13:00 he got on well with the whole family, that's all there was, they were just happy.

Did you keep in contact with your mother's brothers?

Not really, because I was in Sydney and they were all here in Melbourne.

13:30 I did met some of them many many years later, certainly I didn't keep in touch with them.

Did your father talk to you about World War I at all?

Not really.

Growing up as a child what did you know about World War I?

14:00 I suppose very little. I met some of my father's friends. Every Anzac Day I was taken into town to watch the parade, mainly because my father worked in the Bank of New South Wales

14:30 and that building, you may know it, looks straight down Martin Place, looks straight over the Cenotaph. On Anzac Day, Dad use to be given a window in the back and we could look down and watch the parade.

Did your father not march?

He use to march with his unit

15:00 past the Cenotaph, the parade would move into George Street and Dad would drop out and come back into the bank and watch the rest of it.

What was your impression of the Anzacs and of the Anzac parade, what did you feel about those soldiers, what did you make of it all?

15:30 I don't think that I had any particular feelings one way or the other, I accepted it

16:00 and it was something that I was told about and it was something that was important in many people's lives, or that was what I knew.

16:30 I don't know that there was much else.

Did it seem to be important in your father's life?

It was important in Dad's life. As I say because some of my mothers brothers, or one of them

17:00 remained in the navy and he was quartermaster on a boat called the Tingira. Which had been remained from being the Sobraon [boys' training ship] and this ship was where the young

17:30 lads who joined the navy did their earliest training. That's all that I can recall of that.

As a youngster growing up in Mosman what would you do for fun?

Sailing, swimming.

18:00 Since we overlooked Balmoral Beach it was no trouble for us to go down for a swim, it was only a five minute walk down to the beach. In the winter a friend and I use to go for long tramps along the shore line.

18:30 In the summer if we could we would go sailing, there were lots of small craft that needed a crew and we were always available and so I did a lot of sailing. When the weather was bad and the seas were big coming through

19:00 Sydney Heads, I and my friend use to go to various points on Middle Head just to watch the Manly Ferry and boats going in and out of Sydney Harbour. We use to do a lot of kite flying because where

19:30 we lived was fairly closed to the top of the road leading out to Middle Head and it was a great place in which to fly kites. We did a lot of things like that.

Did you enjoy school?

20:00 Yes I enjoyed school because we had very good teachers at Mosman Public School where I went until I was twelve, very good teachers. When I went to North Sydney High School we had

20:30 I would say the pick of the teachers because North Sydney High School was the equivalent on the north shore of Sydney High School on the south shore and it received I think in my second year there a headmaster who was probably the pick of headmasters.

21:00 A very clever man, very keen on sports and he really wanted to develop all of the pupils. When I say he was keen on sports, he was so good that when Don Bradman's team came back from England one year, he managed to get them to come to North Sydney Oval and play against the school team.

21:30 He being a cricketer was one of the members of the school team. A marvellous man and he also introduced the German language to the school so that I was lucky enough to be able to study Latin, French and German right through my high school years.

22:00 I liked school and I enjoyed it.

You went through school until Leaving Certificate, which is what about Form Four?

No I was sixteen and it was a five year course at high school.

Was it the Matric [matriculation], no?

We didn't call it Matric up in Sydney. Matric was for those

22:30 who failed their Leaving Certificate and it was a lesser examination to enable these people who failed the leaving to get into the university. To us a Matriculation was a second class examination.

So you passed your Leaving, so you completed high school?

Yes.

After school, what next?

23:00 1936 was getting towards the end of the Depression in Australia, long before you were born. Next door to us was a very wealthy Jew, a little fellow with a great big tall wife

23:30 but very bright. In fact he was a legal man, and he was so bright that he was disbarred from the New South Wales Courts, the New South Wales legal system. As a result of that he was given the job of Chief Clerk in the most prestigious law firm

24:00 in Sydney and because of him and his contacts with business he recommended me to the Queensland Insurance Company, which had been formed by Burns Philp [shipping company], you may remember that. Jimmy Burns use to come over to the office now and again. So I

24:30 got a job they're as a very junior clerk I suppose you'd call him, the most junior of all and therefore a real dogsbody. I stayed there progressing through various departments until I became the motor vehicle insurance clerk in the Accidents Department.

25:00 In those days there weren't very many vehicles in Sydney and each month I would only have to look after about four or five hundred renewals, that was the number of insurances that we had. They were good years because I was improving all the time. When I say improving my prospects were improving.

Were there any girlfriends around too?

25:30 No, I didn't have time for them because pre World War II the working week was six and a half days. We use to work until midday on Saturday. Saturday afternoon I'd go sailing and Sunday I'd go sailing also.

26:00 I had a friend as I said and with him I use to do a lot of walking and he worked in a business concerned with these buying and selling of yachts. This was in Mosman Bay and we had left our home near Balmoral and living in a

26:30 flat which overlooked Mosman Bay. I use to spend a lot of time sailing and also I had applied through an advertisement to sail with a yacht with one of the yacht clubs and I'd been taken on. The fellow who owned the yacht

27:00 was the engineer for Lysaghts Wiredrawing Works in Sydney and he was a very keen yachtsman and he was interested in the theory and I just sailed with him.

So no church on a Sunday?

27:30 I gave up church before I went to high school, because when my mother was alive she was very keen on going to the Anglican church at the Spit Junction in Mosman.

28:00 Also one of my uncles was an elder of the church and his son was in the choir and so I had to join the choir. Church was something that got on later in my years which interfered with my

28:30 Sunday sailing and so when my father married for a second time, I was quite happy to give up church and go my own way.

During the 30s, after you'd left school and you've started work and it was the late 30s by now, were you

29:00 **aware of the problems brewing in Europe?**

Yes, because in 1938 to occupy my evenings during the working week I joined

29:30 the army Militia [CMF, Citizens' Military Force]. Probably because some of the young lads that I knew had done that and I think I may have been partly persuaded by my father, the fact that he was an ex-serviceman and had been in the army. I joined

30:00 the local artillery unit, fairly local and my first work with them was as a gunner. In those days the guns, it was an artillery unit, the guns were

30:30 drawn by horses but we were in the process of converting from horse to trucks, the trucks were going to draw the guns. I had then the opportunity to convert to a signaller, which was another

31:00 gunner of course but at least I didn't have to worry about guns. One of the attractions of being a signaller was that if the army was properly equipped, the signallers were going to receive a motor bike, these sorts of attractions were good for a young fellow.

Did you consider joining the navy reserve, with all your experiences on the water?

No, I didn't care for the navy.

31:30 I was more interested in the air than the navy because where we had lived at Mosman we were on the direct flying route particularly for the people who used to make record attempts between England and Australia. They'd come down the coast and over Manly, which we could see from our place

32:00 and they would be met by flocks of aircraft from the New South Wales Aero Club which would come out to meet them and then escort them out and over the city and so I saw a lot of airplanes. In fact one year when I was coming home from a school,

32:30 Arthur Butler who later started Butler Airways had just flown out to England, and as we were walking home from school he flew right over us, and he was quite low. This was a big thing to just see. So I had an attraction for air and about

33:00 1939, I'd been in the Militia about one year and a half I suppose, and I saw an advertisement in probably the Sydney Morning Herald, I think that was the paper that we bought, in which the air force, the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] was interested in

33:30 taking on young fellows for a flying course and the attraction of that was that if they could complete the course they would obtain a four year commission with the RAAF or they maybe transferred to the RAF [Royal Air Force] in England.

34:00 I was becoming very dissatisfied with my life in the insurance company and I wanted to do something different and I could feel that I had more in life than just working as a clerk. I sent away for the

34:30 application papers, but being, I think I was then eighteen and before the papers could be sent in I had to have my father's approval. Dad was not too keen on this, and in fact we had great arguments. He reckoned the army was the only

35:00 place to be but in addition to that, my cousin, who the young fellow as I said was in the church choir, was working at the time for what was called the College of Civil Aviation and this was a unit, which trained

35:30 people as aircraft mechanics and that sort of thing. It was run by Sir Keith Smith, he was one of the two Smith brothers who were the first to fly from England to Australia and he used to say to me, "Don't be a pilot,

36:00 be on the ground staff", and of course my father took note of that because he knew more than I. Anyway, I eventually managed to get Dad to sign the papers and I sent them away and this would have been in August 1939. The closing date for the application

36:30 was 2nd September 1939 and on the 3rd September 1939, Mr Menzies [the Australian Prime Minister Robert Menzies] said that Australia is at war with Germany on the side of England. That worried me you see and I thought that this was no good I would have withdrawn my application but then I thought what if people knew about this, it would be a rather cowardly thing to do.

37:00 I didn't know anything about it in the hope that I would not be the sort of person that the RAAF was looking for. First of all my background wasn't adequate in my opinion, I was not too sure that my academic ability was sufficient for them

37:30 and so I didn't worry. Then in October our army unit went into camp for a fortnight or three weeks.

This is still the Militia unit?

Yes, I'm still in the Militia as a signaller. We went into camp up at West Maitland, near Newcastle. Halfway through

38:00 I received a summons to come down to Sydney to be interviewed by some RAAF people, which I did and I did the interview. I was very unhappy, I thought "Geez, I've got no hope with the sorts of questions that they asked". The interviewing people where two very young fellows in just ordinary civilian clothes, they didn't look

38:30 like they came from the air force, and they asked me different questions.

What sort of questions?

I can't recall now. One of the questions was about the theory of sailing, because I did mention that I did a lot of sailing. I went back to camp, happy in the thought that I had no way of being accepted. As it happened the RAAF

39:00 was trying to expand obviously in the first three months of the war. Back at work in the Queensland Insurance Company my sister turned up one day, early in December 1939, with a big smile on her face and a great thick envelope. This was an acceptance by the RAAF

39:30 for me to start a flying training course.

Tape 2

00:30 I went around the hangars there to see where we could have a flight, a little ten minute flight or whatever it was and there was an airplane, it wasn't a Tiger Moth or anything like that. It was a beautiful high winged plane with a cabin. I went into the hangar and I said, "Can we have a flight in that?"

01:00 and he was quite young, about seventeen or eighteen. The fellow said, "We're just changing a wheel, because we had a flat tyre", and he said, "When that's fixed we will let you have a flight". We waited around and looked inside some of the other hangars and came back.

01:30 This airplane had been pulled out onto the tarmac and my sister and I got in and the pilot got in and he had a wooden leg, and that didn't matter. We went up and we had a beautiful flight around the harbour, it was rather a bumpy day and it was late in the afternoon and I don't think my sister liked it too much but

02:00 anyway it was wonderful, and I guess that really developed a liking or a desire to go flying, but I felt a little bit.

I'm curious Tom, in 1939 were you aware that war as imminent?

War broke out as I said on 3rd September 1939.

Yes, but when you applied for this RAAF training scheme?

02:30 I don't think really.

When you applied for that you really didn't kind of think you'd might end up in combat?

No I don't think so. It wasn't a case of patriotism, because when I went to apply I was after the money,

03:00 if I was going to be taught to fly and then live as an air force officer for four years and then perhaps go into an airline was a good thing. While I was working at the Queensland Insurance Company, at lunchtime one day I walked into, there was a little

03:30 square just up from Circular Quay, it's where the anchor of the Sirius, that's a flagship from the First Fleet I think, and still is. There is a hotel fronting the square and that is where people like

04:00 [aviator Sir Charles] Kingsford-Smith and those early flyers use to meet and sometimes air force people would come. One day I saw an air force officer walking into that hotel and he had his uniform on with gold braids, as it was in those days. He looked magnificent, I mean air force blue,

04:30 well you may not even know about it. The old air force blue was a unique colour; I've still got my uniform in fact. A colour something like that but a little darker in fact, a unique colour. I thought, "That fellow looks all right".

So the uniform

05:00 **was attractive?**

Well, yes the uniform was attractive but that wasn't the reason why I wanted to join the air force.

Well, in short, what was the reason?

The reason was that it meant that I could possibly get a much better job than I was in. Four years in the air force sounded quite good to me, but that would have given me training as a pilot

05:30 which would have made it fairly simple for me to get a job as a pilot in the airlines, and obviously they were expanding all the time.

You had had that long standing interest in flying, hadn't you?

Well, yes I had it for quite a few years. I'm only nineteen or eighteen.

06:00 **You say that you didn't join the air force out of patriotic motives?**

No.

Why then had you joined the Militia?

It was something to do. We met one night

06:30 a week, we did a little bit of training in the drill hall. We knew that we would have an annual camp, in which our training would be extended. Occasionally we would have a Sunday in which we signallers would be sat on an open-tray truck

07:00 and we would be driven around the suburbs and we would have to be able to map read and tell where we were in this exercise. Lots of young fellows were joining the Militia in those days because it was something for them to do, it didn't cost you anything, and we weren't paid anyway.

07:30 I think we were paid when we went to camp, it may have been a couple of shillings a day or something like that. It was just the thing to do for the young fellows. I mean others of then joined what was called the "Navy League". They were the two, the Navy League and the army Militia

08:00 was just the thing to do I suppose.

Where were you when war was declared?

I was in Mosman, Sydney.

Were you at home listening to the radio, were you out on the town?

I can't remember, I've got no idea.

I'm just jumping ahead a little but. When you got your acceptance into this RAAF

08:30 **training, what was your reaction then?**

I suppose I was elated, I probably felt a little bit of

09:00 tribulation, I can't think much else. You see, when I was accepted and I received all the papers, Dad had to sign them I was going to get out of doing what I had been doing, I wasn't going to be a clerk and I didn't have to study accountancy or anything like that in my mind.

09:30 I was going to have to leave Sydney and go to Brisbane, it was just that things were going to happen, I will put it that way. I couldn't predict what those happenings might be, but my life was opening up a little bit.

It was an exciting time?

I think it was, and I was going to be with

10:00 new people.

When did this training commence, when did you report?

I commenced training on the 8th January 1940, at an air force establishment, which had just been formed,

10:30 which was being formed actually at Archerfield Aerodrome and it was called Number Two Elementary Flying Training School. It was so new, if I can use that expression, that the instructors were civilians who had been impressed by the

11:00 air force and given a very short instructors training course. The CO [Commanding Officer] of the unit was only a Flight Lieutenant, but he was a permanent air force man. We had Tiger Moth airplanes, which were just about the first ones off the assembly line in Australia, when Australia started to build Tiger Moths

11:30 in bulk. We had no uniforms but we were given a pair of overalls. We had civilian shoes and civilian socks, and civilian hats but gradually things got better and we got,

12:00 I shouldn't say "you know", I'm sorry. We got shorts, and short sleeved shirts, socks and proper shoes.

Were you a little bit taken aback when you were presented to be joined and they couldn't even give you a uniform?

No, because this was what I wanted so fair enough, that was what I got.

What else did they kit you out with?

12:30 That was all. We lived in barracks, which were fitted with just a bare wooden floor, a wire stretcher for a bed, the mattress was coarse material filled with straw.

13:00 We had a small cupboard in which we could put our personal things, which were much, just what we had arrived in and shaving kit and things like that. We were taught how to make a bed, blankets no sheets, and how it had to be setup everyday. We were

13:30 taught, I will use an expression that you won't like, "We were taught how to be gentlemen", by that I mean we had to conform with a particular pattern that the RAAF wanted. It was up at about six, and you had time then for showering and shaving

14:00 and ablutions, breakfast and make up your bed and whatever was in your chest of drawers and sweep the hut out, polish your shoes and things like that. While we were having breakfast, the CO of the unit would come around and if things weren't exactly as

14:30 we had been told to have them, the bed would have been torn apart, your stuff would be scattered all over the floor, and this upset a lot of the chaps. What we were being taught was to conform, this was the big thing. To conform with a service life, we were in the service now, and

15:00 it was good. It was hard work, because we would fly in the mornings, in the afternoons it was too rough to fly and then we would have lectures. Some days it was so hot that we would go into a lecture wearing your underpants and a towel, we wouldn't even

15:30 find it necessary to bring in our writing materials, and we would be given the lecture and we would just have to remember it. We were given lectures and all sorts of things, airmanship, I can't remember them now.

The rules about being gentlemen were relaxed a little bit when it came to lectures?

Yes.

When you say that you went out flying in the mornings,

16:00 **I mean were you going out with a trained pilot?**

We went dual for about the first ten hours, at the end of about ten hours we soloed. That was a wonderful experience, unless you've ever had to go through this you wouldn't know what a feeling it is to be by yourself,

16:30 you're the only one in control of the airplane and you can't mess it up or otherwise you will kill yourself, or you will wreck the airplane. I remember my first solo, the instructor got out and took the stick out of the backseat, no he took the stick out of the front seat because pupils flew from the backseat, because if they were going to get sick the instructor wasn't going to

17:00 get it. He took the stick out of the front, no he didn't take the stick out, that right. It was tied back with his harness, that's right. I took off and I remember as I was climbing up, what a marvellous feeling it was, there I was and I suppose it happened

17:30 to everybody else, there I was in control, I must not mess it up because I've still got to land it. It was great. So we did about forty hours flying in two months at Archerfield, and then I came down to Point Cook.

What were you flying

18:00 **up there in Archerfield?**

Tiger Moths.

Just Tigers?

Yes just Tigers.

Did you like those planes?

Well, it was the only one that I'd ever flown. To me a Tiger Moth was quite something, with one hundred horse powered engine, they were new, and they were nice airplanes being new. Later in my air force life I came to believe that the Tiger Moth

18:30 was the worst airplane that I ever had to fly. It was an airplane that was designed in England, specifically for English farmers, terrible airplane, terrible airplane.

In what way, Tom, heavy?

Too light.

Too light?

Wing loading too low,

19:00 terrible airplane. A silly airplane. It would have been like driving a go-go mobile or something, compared with all the other vehicles on the road, terrible airplane, that's my opinion. Lots of fellows swear by them, and spent thousands of pounds buying them.

Nevertheless, your first

19:30 **flying was wonderful experiences?**

It was wonderful my first, it was wonderful, until I went to Point Cook.

And then what happened?

Point Cook is the oldest service aerodrome in the world. This bloody government is trying to sell it, money hungry characters that they are. But it's the

20:00 oldest air force establishment in the world, not just in Australia but in the world. It's been a continuous air force establishment since it was formed. Point Cook was a permanent air force station, and it was staffed by permanent people. Now, these are the elite of the air force.

20:30 The instructors that taught thing us about airplanes were the elderly, senior, non-commissioned officers and they knew their jobs backwards and instructors were senior air force, when I say senior I mean fellows that had been in the air force for more than four years. They knew

21:00 the air force and they knew how to instruct them and they knew the aircraft and they were beautiful fliers. Point Cook had a warrant officer WOD, Warrant Officer Disciplinary called "Champion". Now Champion was a fellow, not very tall,

21:30 fairly thin, he had a neck, which never moved from being stiff. They use to say he use to walk around with a broomstick up his backside, which kept him that way. He had been the WO instructor for every cadet course that had past through for donkey years. All the officers

22:00 were dead scared of him. When some years later he had left the air force he went around to every unit and he was entertained by all the officers. A marvellous man but they were all dead scared of him, scared. When our course arrived we didn't have him, but we had a corporal

22:30 who he training. We were instructed in discipline. We then had better quarters, each cadet had a room, with a bed and a wardrobe and other things, but we had to polished the floors

23:00 and the same discipline applied. We had a set Cadet Mess where we were taught how to dine, in other words made sure that we ate correctly and we used the correct knives and forks and things like that. The training was to fit us for later life.

23:30 I was very grateful for all of this I think, and also I met there more people than had been on the course at Archerfield because some of the fellows on my course had been trained at Essendon and we

24:00 then came together at Point Cook. So for this intermediate training, we were at Point Cook, which was called Number One Flying Training School, Number One FTS. Half of the course because of their names were allotted to the

24:30 training squadron which had Westland Wapiti, you probably done know what that airplane looks like, I'll show you later on. The other half, the lucky ones were trained on Hawker Demons

Which half were you in?

My name starts with a T, so I happen to be in the second part, which fortunately flew Demons.

25:00 **The Demon, can you tell me exactly what it looks like?**

Can I move?

You can, but I don't want to you show me a picture, I want you to tell me what it looks like?

It's a bi-plane with about six hundred horse power, much faster than a Tiger Moth. It had fixed machine guns and it was a two seater airplane, but the gunner's seat

25:30 in the back had been taken up by the instructor and it was a beautiful airplane. There we did air to ground gunnery. We did dive bombing because Point Cook being on the waters edge they could put a buoy out on the water and we could just take off and

26:00 drop bombs.

Tell me what dive bombing is, what do you actually do in the aircraft?

You dive towards a target, you let a bomb go and you pull away. Dive bombing as opposed to level bombing. Level bombing, you are flying straight like this, and you drop a bomb, and from your gun sight you've calculated where that bomb will hit.

26:30 Dive bombing you direct your airplane towards the target and let the bomb go, and of course the bomb is going to hit the target, you hope. We did a bit of night flying, is was an extension of the elementary training at Archerfield with a much more powerful airplane. In fact they'd been Australia's frontline

27:00 airplanes until the outbreak of the war when Australia commenced to build a Wirraway. These Demons that we had at Point Cook were being relegated to training and they were the first course, the first

training course on Demons that Point Cook

27:30 had. Prior to that they only had the Wapiti but the Wapiti was going out of service.

It's a peculiar name?

No, no it's not, one of the South African deer is called the wapiti deer, didn't you know that? Well see, you're learning.

It's called a Wapiti?

A Wapiti Deer.

No, no the plane?

The plane was just called the Western Wapiti .

28:00 The RAF called all its airplanes by a particular name, like the Demon, the Spitfire, that's how they were called in the RAF. Australia used to buy its airplanes from England. The Americans on the other hand called their airplanes by a number, P-51, and the P-80

28:30 and all the other things. The P stands for "pursuit", bombers were like B-29s and B-52s, so they had a B for "bomber". The observation airplanes had an O in front of their number. The trainers had a T, but that was just the difference.

29:00 **Is it very very different flying different aircraft?**

Each airplane has got its own characteristics. There only differences to a degree, they all rolled, and they all pitch,

29:30 that's all you have, yes, pitch and roll, I mean they turn.

What was your high point of your training at Point Cook, what was the best part?

The cross country flying I suppose. We had to do a cross country flight from

30:00 Point Cook up to Benalla, which was the first time we landed at an aerodrome outside Point Cook. Point Cook I should tell you was nearly a grass aerodrome, Benalla was merely a dirt area. The flight to Benalla meant that we had to use a map for the first

30:30 time in our lives in our flying career, but it was easy to get there because you could follow the railway line, from Melbourne up to Benalla, and the aerodrome is right beside the railway line. We landed at the aerodrome, and we would have to check out with an instructor who was there before we go back. I remember just after I had landed, the wind had changed

31:00 and another fellow had come in down wind and finished up on his back. I walked up to the instructor, whom I had to see and I hadn't removed my helmet and he said, "You're not an Aero Club pilot, when you get out of that cockpit you take off your helmet", so

31:30 thereafter I always left my helmet on the stick. We were learning all the time. Our training was being extended and that was good.

Were there any casualties in training?

No,

32:00 I don't think we had any, some fellows didn't make it quite obviously. We had then thrown off the course, off both courses in fact. I think the casualties came shortly afterwards when the fellows

32:30 went to other units. No, I don't think we had any casualties. There were casualties, but later in my career that I remember.

There were no crashes, there were no accidents?

Yes there was this fellow who finished up on his back.

But he was ok?

Yes, he was ok, but the airplane had to be rebuilt of course.

33:00 I remember a bloke at Archerfield who had wiped off an undercarriage, and that airplane was a tangled mess when he got it down.

What was the hardest part of your training?

Landing, landing always, that's the hardest part.

33:30 **Why is that so difficult?**

I don’t know why it’s difficult, it just is difficult, it’s a judgment. Some fellows can judge well, some can’t.

What is it that you need to judge?

34:00 You need to judge your touchdown I guess. Each airplanes is that little bit different, some of them have stiffer undercarriages, I don’t know, it’s so hard to say. I think landing

34:30 is probably the most difficult part. Because you’re trying to bring something back to touch the ground. It’s easier enough to leave the ground, all you do is run fast enough and pull the stick back if you’d like to put it that way. Landing, you’re coming from a high speed down to nothing and if you don’t

35:00 make it, how can I put it, if you don’t touch smoothly you’ll bounce. When you start bouncing you haven’t got too much control of anything. I don’t know, I can’t explain it any more easier than that.

That make sense. After Point Cook, where to next?

35:30 When I finished at Point Cook I had about one hundred hours flying, that would have been about what all of us had. I received my commission as a pilot officer, which meant that we had to have the dimensions

36:00 taken of our physique and these were sent away to the clothing factory in Melbourne and uniforms were built for us, and we got a uniform. Then we were kitted out, and we received postings to different units.

36:30 Some went to bomber units, some went to what I might call floating units there usually just general purpose units, some went to units where they were trained as instructors. I was lucky enough to be posted

37:00 to 21 Squadron which then was a squadron based at Laverton and it was what was called a Simpson Air Force Squadron, 21, 22 didn’t exist, 23 or 24, 22 was

37:30 at Richmond in Sydney, 24 I think was in Brisbane or it may have been 23, 23 was in Perth. Later 23, or later 23 was numbered 25 so that I went first of all of

38:00 Laverton to 21 Squadron. After I’d been there about a fortnight, I was posted onto 25 Squadron outside Perth then for about …

Tape 3

00:30 **Your first posting was 25 Squadron?**

Yes.

Where was that located?

That was at Pearce [Aerodrome], Western Australia near Perth.

What were your tasks when you arrived there?

To learn to fly the Wirraway and

01:00 to learn just about everything that a Wirraway would do. We had gunnery, we had dive bombing, we had level bombing to the extent that we didn’t drop bombs but we flew

01:30 on a bombing course with an observer in the back who was acting as a bomb aimer. Our target was what was called a camera obscura, which was on the tarmac of the aerodrome.

02:00 The camera obscura on the tarmac was the target, we would fly over the target, the observer in the back would say when he was going to drop the bomb and then after so many seconds the image of the airplane would be at a certain position on the table of the camera obscura, and

02:30 that’s how they could see where the bomb would land, effectively that was it, just effective level bombing with the. We did camera gunner attacks on target aircraft. On a few occasion while I was there we put two hundred and fifty

03:00 pound anti submarine bombs on the Wirraways and we flew down to Albany and the purpose was that we would provide and anti submarine activity if convoys were sailing around the point of Western Australia were likely to be attacked. So

03:30 we were just on standby just in case we were called up. Also when the convoys came into Perth, some of the ships would have to remain out in Gages Roads outside Fremantle and we would do patrols, carrying bombs out past Rottnest Island, and just provide a cover.

04:00 **I was wondering if you could take us on the tour of the Wirraway?**

The Wirraway is just a low wing airplane, it did carry a pilot

04:30 in the rear seat, a person called an observer who was required to carry out a number of tasks. One was a rear gunner, two he was a bomber aimer because the bottom of the cockpit of the Wirraway could be opened up

05:00 and the bomb sight could be placed in it and it could be used for level bombing purposes. He was also the wireless operator, he could also fly the airplane if necessary because there was an extra control column in the side of the cockpit. Which could be put in and he could take over and

05:30 fly the airplane for a while. Really, the true observer in the old RAAF was a fairly adept sort of a character. The pilot of course had control of the two machine guns, on top of the fuselage flying through the air scooter and he had control of the bomb switches and

06:00 so the bombs that were carried under the wings could be jettisoned by him. It was a general purpose airplane as built for the RAAF. It was an airplane, which combines the uses of two American airplanes, which were bought to Australia

06:30 to be test flown and to be examined. It was an Australian design and it had a single engine of about five and a half hundred horse power.

A single engine?

Yes, a single engine. The RAAF later used it as a trainer.

How did it compare

07:00 **with the other aircraft you'd flown?**

It was all right, it was about the same speed as a Demon but it was a better airplane than a Demon. It could do much much more than a Demon, and it was more modern plane compared to the Demon who was a bi-plane.

How many other personnel were in the aircraft with you?

Only one,

07:30 just the pilot and the observer.

So you didn't have a navigator as well?

No, the observer could do the navigating if you needed to, were as the pilot did the navigating. The Wirraway was essentially a short range airplane, its maximum flight time would be about

08:00 two and a half hours I think, as opposed to airplanes that could stay up for about twelve hours or more.

I had in my mind a Beaufort bomber so I just comparing the number of personnel on that, that's why I was surprised to hear that there was only two on the Wirraway?

The Beaufort was a bigger airplane, with twin engines,

08:30 a heavy bloody thing. I did fly it.

Did you?

Yes. I had to learn to fly a Beaufort before I was allowed to fly a Beaufighter and so I was given a rapid course of about

09:00 two hours dual on one.

Where did you do that training?

This was later.

We will wait for that then. How long were you at Pearce for?

I was posted there in May 1940 and

09:30 in October 1940 I was posted to 3 Squadron, so what's that, six months, about five and a half to six months.

How did you feel as a pilot, did you feel that you were pretty skilled, that your training equipped you for the job?

No, I was just improving all the time.

10:00 Since I was learning all the time, I was training all the time I hadn't reached to stage where I thought

that I was skilled, I'll put it that way. I image that my flight commander or squadron commander didn't think much of me at all anyway.

Why do you say that?

They were quite practice

10:30 people, here I was newly graduated out of Point Cook and I was just what they called a "spod pilot", someone learning effectively. I will put it this way. All pilots after they solo,

11:00 think that they are good. As they get a few more hours they think that they are better, and a few more hours they start taking risks and kill themselves. You've got to avoid that as a pilot. In particularly some of the fellows who graduated from Point Cook with me, I say so much I mean a few,

11:30 very soon after killed themselves because they thought they were good. There was a saying in the air force "There are no bold pilots, there are old pilots, but you don't find old and bold pilots". I think that

12:00 sums it up pretty well.

Did you make many friends on your training course at Point Cook?

I don't know about friends, acquaintances certainly. I don't know what you mean by friends really.

I mean

12:30 **people with whom you have maintained contact with over the years or people with whom you flew with even?**

Not from training. I am still in contact with pilots out of 3 Squadron, these are fellows I knew

13:00 from fifty years ago, and in fact only a couple of weeks ago one of them came over from Perth and I hadn't seen him since 1941 and yet after we introduced ourselves, and we had to do that because this fellow had a beard like Father Christmas But as soon as he started to speak

13:30 it was as though we had only been talking yesterday. Another fellow I know lives up here in Box Hill, we talk about once every couple of weeks, I don't know whether you'd call that friendship, but acquaintance,

14:00 I suppose that is friendship in a way.

I would say that it was?

I made these friends.

When did you know that you were being posted overseas?

25 Squadron had some of the earliest Wirraways

14:30 and the Wirraway production was just getting into the swing of things and so Pearce was allotted five new Wirraways numbered around the hundred. So we took five of the old ones, which were in their twenties, in numbers of twenty, we

15:00 flew them across to Fisherman's Bend, and Fisherman's Bend had an aerodrome in those days because it was the aerodrome for the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation which was making the Wirraway. We took five over and we took five back. I damaged my new one, badly.

15:30 **How?**

At Kalgoorlie, I taxied the starboard wing over one of the posts on the boundary fence which is just a country posts about this high with barbwire strung between them, because Kalgoorlie was just a dirt aerodrome. The other four airplanes carried onto

16:00 Perth. The next day after repairing my wing a little bit with the aid of the local flying doctor who was based at Kalgoorlie. I taxied into the tarmac and all the ground crew of the 25 Squadron were out there looking and I thought, "Geez, I'm in for it here".

16:30 A flight commander, or one of the flight commanders jumped up onto the wing as I turned the engine off and said, "You know, you're lucky", and I said, "Why?", and he said, "Black Jack", who was the CO of the squadron and with whom I'd been over with to the East, he said "Black Jack has got you on a court martial charge, but last night a signal came in pressing you to the Middle East.

17:00 So you're not going to be court martialled but you've got a day to get a clearance from here, you will then be flown over to Adelaide, you'll then have to catch the train up to Sydney and then you be on the next convoy". So they had to kick someone off the DC2,

17:30 so to put me on it to fly to the East. In those days we had a DC2 flying between Perth and Adelaide, and it's a DC2 and it's a pretty old aerodrome.

I've been on a DC3 but not a DC2?

The DC2 only carried about twenty people all together I think.

18:00 I then went to Bankstown, which was the embarkation depot and I got my clearance and my overseas kit and my bed and things like that, collapsible bed and wash basin and tin trunk and all the other stuff. I got all my injection shots, inoculations.

Which ones did you have to have then, can you remember?

18:30 I'd have to look at my paybook; I can't remember it's all the ones that we normally get. It was a very hot day and they said, "Now don't overdo it", or the doctor said this when he gave me the injections, he said, "Don't overdo it, because you'll probably suffer". But the convoy was going to

19:00 sail the next day or something, it may have been two days so I raced around the embarkation depot and I was just walking into the Mess for lunch and that was the last that I remember, until I woke up in the hospital. Apparently I had passed out with the effect of this and the running around.

19:30 I was a bit lucky because it turned out that one of the ships of the convoy was having engine trouble so she was delayed a couple of days and so I managed to make it.

I have just one question, if you damage your aircraft are you liable to be court martialled, is that?

It's up to the CO.

20:00 It was a new airplane, brand spanking new and I had probably done the wrong thing, there were five of us like I said and it was the squadron commander who was leading the five of us. He taxied out when we were about to take off to return to Pearce and Kalgoorlie, he taxied

20:30 out and plonked himself and the other three airplanes had taken up their positions and Kalgoorlie being a dirt aerodrome there was a lot of dust being blown back from the air skirts and I went and taxied around the back of them. I could've taxied around the front which meant that I

21:00 would put my dust over his airplane and I wasn't game to do that, so I taxied around to here. But what I didn't know was he parked himself right on the corner, or a corner of the boundary and the corner was hidden in the dust of the other airplanes and I was taxing through that dust and just caught my wing. Well, it wasn't his fault and it wasn't my fault I suppose.

21:30 **What were your senior officers like?**

Good, I mean they had been in the air force long enough, they knew the system. The senior blokes were good, they'd been well trained and I had the greatest of respect for them and I think that most

22:00 of the fellows that I knew did.

You'd been in the Militia hadn't you, before you joined the air force, did you see any differences in the army discipline compared to the air force?

Yes, the Militia were part time people, yes there was quite a difference. The Militia was just

22:30 finding itself in those days, and this was long before they ever got into action. The Militia was part time training, it was not much different from just being a normal civilian anyway. The service was different because

23:00 I was on the third last cadet course, since the being of the RAAF in 1921 up to the beginning of the Empire Air Training Scheme, there were thirty cadet courses,

23:30 numbers one to thirty. I was on twenty eight and after that it was the Empire Air Training Scheme, what they have now I don't know.

You'd be a pretty rare prop-up then wouldn't you?

Yes. The last three cadet courses after war broken out,

24:00 were merely intermediate between the air force which was training pilots for short service commissions and the Empire Air Training Scheme. When we graduated we became Citizen Air Force.

Right.

They were Citizen Air Force

24:30 Squadrons. All the twenties, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25 were Citizen Air Force Squadrons. They were squadrons which had pilots who were more or less weekend pilots to a large extent, more or less weekend. That was the purpose of the squadron,

25:00 they obviously had people in them with short service commissions but basically they were what we

called CAF Squadrons.

So the war changed then with the Empire Air Training Scheme?

They came in. The chaps that graduated had Air Force numbers, the

25:30 Empire Air Training Scheme different numbers, they had the four hundred thousand the five hundred thousand and the six hundred thousand numbers, representing different states. My number in the air force was 652 and that's right from Dicky Williams who was one and I think Wayne Course finished at

26:00 about seven hundred and thirty or something. Later, I was given a prefix of 260 which meant New South Wales and 240, 250, 260 and 270, we were sort of intermediate people.

Ok, back to being posted to the Middle East then, what was your reaction to this, can you remember

26:30 **how you felt?**

I thought I was pretty wonderful. I was told that, not that I was being posted to the Middle East but I was told that I was being posted to 3 Squadron. We all knew that 3 Squadron was an elite squadron.

27:00 Before World War II Australia had 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. 9 was the flying boats on the cruisers. They sent a lot of the crews and pilots to England just before the outbreak of the war, and get flying

27:30 boats I think, and they called them, and because war broke out they left them in England and called them 10 Squadron, have you heard of 10 Squadrons?

No I haven't.

They were the famous Sunderland Squadron in England, a famous squadron and that was 10. I'd been posted to 3, now three was an elite squadron and I'd been posted to that, and that was something.

28:00 **This is, as you've explained it's an Australian squadron?**

Yes.

Ok.

It's a permanent RAAF squadron. It was a World War I squadron too.

Did you know where it had gone at this point?

Yes, I knew it was in

28:30 Egypt or the Middle East. The Middle East is its old stamping ground, that was were it was in World War I and that was where it was going in World War II. I was happy, and then when I got out of hospital at Bradfield Park,

29:00 I joined the others who were going to 3 Squadron. We met in Ushers Hotel in Sydney and there I met the other five pilots who had been posted and then we went down to the ship that was taking us, which was the Aquitania.

29:30 **Did your parents know that you were going?**

Yes, my father knew. There was only my father and my sister. Having told my father he was going to tell my grandmother, that was his mother. I suppose he would have told the rest of the family like his brothers.

30:00 But no one else was suppose to know.

Had you had time to have a girlfriend yet?

No. I don't know what you'd call a girlfriend. I knew girls in Perth.

I suppose women with whom you associated with socially, went out?

30:30 Pearce was well away from Perth, when I say well away I don't know how far away it was, about thirty mile or something. A working week was five days, or it may have been six days.

31:00 Sometimes we would, it must have been five days. Sometimes if we received permission we would go into Perth and stay at one of the clubs and maybe have a look at the shops or go up the Scarborough, which was a long way up out of town

31:30 in those days. A long a dirt road in fact, and there was a hotel there and we could book a room and have our meals there and we'd go swimming, we'd take our togs with us. We'd go down to the beach and have a swim and come back in the afternoon for a meal there.

32:00 That was fairly rare because generally we'd be on duty for the Sunday, we'd have either a job as orderly

officer or assistant or something like that, and also we'd be on standby. We didn't have much time to go into town and have any civilian contacts.

32:30 Also we didn't need to, because there was so much on the station, so many of the senior officers had their wives there, they lived on the station. This was what a permanent air force station was like. Senior officers had living quarters there and had their wives. We had plenty to do on the station, there was no reason really to go into town, or to be offered. For that reason,

33:00 I can't think of anyone having any close attachment with girls in town, no I can't remember.

I was just wondering whether you leaving anyone behind when you went off to war?

Not really, what was the point of it, you're just as likely to be killed as anybody else. We didn't believe in

33:30 being married. It was drilled into us that it was silly to be married early into your air force career, and it was silly too. A fellow who went away with me was married, and he was killed on his first flight and his wife was a hostess with

34:00 AWA [Australiawide Airlines].

34:30 In fact she was the hostess on the flight that I was on from Pearce to Adelaide on my way away. That was an interesting flight if I can digress for a moment?

Sure.

35:00 It use to take all day to fly from Perth to Adelaide. We'd take off at about eight o'clock in the morning and stop at Kalgoorlie and we'd have a cup of tea before Kalgoorlie and at about lunch time a meal would be served, beautiful meals in those days. Then in the afternoon you'd have

35:30 afternoon tea. After lunch, when we were getting quite close to Adelaide, out to the right of us on the Great Australian Bight, it was black as anything, and out to the left of us you could see clouds of dust rolling in from the inland and we were flying between the two. Then eventually they came together and the airplane started to buck a bit

36:00 and the light came on to fasten your seatbelts, and I was in the rear seat, which was a single seat normally for the hostess I think, I was in that seat. Right up in the front was a women stretched out and she was the wife of one of the air force officers from Pearce going east for some sort

36:30 of medical treatment. So the hostess went up to the front and was trying to strap her down a bit and the plane was starting to buck. Then it would buck a bit more and just in front of me sitting over there was an Indian gentlemen with a normal fedora on his head and as it bucked a bit, out came that and he put on a peaked cap, and a bit more bucking and then all

37:00 of a sudden all of the baggage in the racks above our heads came out onto the floor and so he changed it to a fez, not feeling too good myself. Then all of a sudden the airplane just went onto its side and went down and down and down, and I thought, "Geez,

37:30 this is the end", and it finished up with a colossal bang, and it straightened itself up and the hostess had been right up there and took off. From about that height she came flying down feet first along the passage way and hit the galley beside me and galley burst open in a cloud of barley sugar and she was sitting there smiling at me.

38:00 All of a sudden we buck together and "weee, crash" against the pilots' cockpit. God, we were in a mess, you'd never seen such a mess, the passageway was laden with all this rubbish. We got to Adelaide, we landed and it was raining and we were standing on the tarmac,

38:30 and everything was being unloaded from the airplane and the pilot was there, and he was the senior pilot for the airline, and he said he'd never flown in conditions as bad as that. While we were waiting the other DC2 came down from Alice Springs, and it took three attempts to get down, it was a terrible flight.

Tape 4

00:30 I was on the Aquitania; I went over with six replacements. The first replacements was the 3 Squadron. The chap in charge of us was a senior member and he was the squadron leader, there were

01:00 a couple of blokes from the Brisbane Squadron, the Wirraway Squadron, there were two of us from the 25 Squadron.

01:30 One of the chaps from the Brisbane Squadron was a fellow called Johnny Jackson. He's given his name to the aerodrome at Port Moresby, he was the first CO of 75 Squadron that was the first Kittyhawk Squadron

02:00 in New Guinea and he was killed after about six months. Johnny was a very experienced pilot, he was a stock and station agent in Queensland in private life and he had imported an airplane from America called the Beechcraft.

02:30 A very fast airplane, a very fast by plane, and he used it for his work in Queensland. He was called "Claypan" because he'd written a testimonial for Beechcraft, saying, "I've landed my Beechcraft on very windy claypans", so in the air force they called him Claypan. Where as most pilots when they went to 3 were in their very early

03:00 twenties, Johnny was over thirty. He was always called "Old John", he was old, Johnny was old. He had a marvellous upbringing, his parents had been wealthy. In his youth he'd travelled to England and maybe to other places in what was then called

03:30 the "The Young Australia League" - before World War II the Young Australia League use to select a number of young fellows each year and send them to England, as an education. Have you ever heard of it?

Yes.

Well Johnny had been on one of those courses. When we were on the Aquitania, because there were only nine

04:00 of us air force officers, and about half a dozen navy fellows all going to the Middle East. We were put in a very small dining area of the Aquitania. The Aquitania had dining areas right down the port side and there were

04:30 three large dining areas which were taken up by the army and this little one with this great big circular table, where the air force people and the navy people use to sit. Johnny with all his experience and the fact that he was a wealthy person, got the head waiter and we use to have wine every night and Johnny use to select it and they were marvellous.

05:00 **So you were a very exclusive group?**

Quite elite. I know we got into trouble with the army fellow who was in charge of the ship, Brigadier, and of course Brigs are not young. I remember we use to be up in

05:30 the officers' lounge having a drink before dinner. One day the Admiral who was in charge of the convoy for one night, every night in fact, he use to come through the lounge in which the army officers and the air force officers were and he was an old character, God he was old, skinny with a goatee beard,

06:00 and he must have been dragged out of retirement. He use to be in white, this was his evening wear, a white shirt, white pants and the pants use to be rolled up to about here and white socks and white shoes, you'd never seen anything like it. He use to come through the lounge and everyone would stand, the old Brigadier would say "Good evening, sir", and the admiral would say, "And how are you tonight, my boy?" You can imagine

06:30 how we use to smirk at that. It was a good trip.

Did you have many stops along the way?

One. The convoy consisted of three ships, we had the Queen Mary and the Aquitania out of Sydney and we pickup the Mauretania out Melbourne

07:00 and we stopped at Perth for a day to refuel and then we went straight to Bombay [now Mumbai, India].

How long did you spend in Bombay?

I had to wait in Bombay until we could get a ship that was joining a convoy with twelve others, so we were there for about a week or so.

What did you do there, did you have time to

07:30 **visit?**

We looked, we didn't do much, I can't remember what we did very much. I remember we were staying in the Taj Mahal Hotel. I can remember Johnny Jackson had his corns removed

08:00 by an Indian. Have you ever seen the treatment?

No.

The Indian would wash his feet, Johnny had corns badly, rub his corns with some oil, then he had a little black tube about that long and about as thick as my thumb, black rubber opened at each end and put it on his corn and then he'd stuck like mad and then squeeze this rubber

08:30 flat and eventually he'd draw the corn, I can remember that, that's one of the things that I can

remember.

Was this your first trip outside Australia, isn't it?

Yes, it was.

What were your impressions of the Indian people?

I don't know, they were just Indian. They were different to what I'd see them.

09:00 No that's all.

Bombay then from Bombay, where was your next stop?

Bombay to Egypt, we went up the Canal we got off at El Kantara and then we caught a train from Kantara on the other side of the canal

09:30 to Alexandria and we went into a hotel while the squadron leader, Duncan Campbell who was in charge of us, or he was the senior member of the group. Tried to discover what our next move was, you see

10:00 all we knew was that we had to get to Egypt, but we didn't know where the squadron was. Eventually he met up with the signals officer who had come to Alexandria to try and find us. The signals officer was a bloke called Pete Jeffrey. Pete Jeffrey was my CO for years later but at this time he was only the signals officer of the squadron because

10:30 the 3 Squadron had been sent to Egypt as a sort of support for the Australian Army. It was what was called an "army cooperation squadron".

Were there many of those?

Yes, there was a few. 3 did not go away as a fighter squadron, it went away as an army

11:00 cooperation squadron. The purpose, it had a lot of signallers it had observers. Pete found us and he took us down to the west of Alexandria to Ikingi Mariut which was just near Lake Mariout on the outskirts of Alexandria. There we met

11:30 the rear echelon of the squadron, who was someone out in the blue. Pete interviewed us and he said, "I want the most senior ones up in the squadron", at that stage the squadron had only lost one man. He said, "I want the senior blokes up in the squadron, the ones with the most flying hours".

12:00 "Trimble and another bloke called Campbell who are the most junior and had the least number of flying hours - I'll send them down to Ismaliya to the RAAF station where they can learn to fly, and it's a shocking airplane, something called the 'Westland Lysander'". There's a Lysander

12:30 up there, that one, it's like a modern hovering plane. It was designed especially for army cooperation, it could fly like a helicopter almost and it would land like that and take off like that.

Was it armed?

Yes, it had a couple of guns in the undercarriage bearings and it had a gun in the back seat.

13:00 The squadron had a few of them but also the squadron had a greater number of what was called "Gloucester Gladiators", they were a bi-plane fighter, a four gun fighter. Which some of the RAF squadrons in the Middle East were equipped with.

13:30 A beautiful airplane to fly. This other fellow and I went to Ismaliya, and we did a bit of training on Lysanders but then because there weren't too many Lysanders at Ismaliya

14:00 and many field people trying to fly them. To make up our hours we had to fly other airplanes, planes a bit like a Demon but they weren't Demons. That was good. I met fellows from the RAF, I met South Africans, from the South African Air Force, and from the Rhodesian Air Force and

14:30 all together it was nice, because in the evenings we could go up to the theatre or we could go into Ismaliya and have a meal at the French club. Ismaliya was the headquarters for the canal pilots and so many of them were French, you didn't know that perhaps, but anyway they were. Then I went back to the squadron, I went back to

15:00 Ikingi Mariut after we'd done our stint.

How many more hours had you got up by then?

I don't know, about twenty or thirty possibly. I had a couple of hundred hours altogether, because I'd probably done about one hundred odd at Pearce.

15:30 I remember we arrived at Ikingi Mariut and Jeffrey had flown down to pick us up and he'd flown down in the Gladiator and he said to Jimmy Campbell and I, he said, "There is a Lysander here, take it up to the squadron", and he said "who's got the most hours?", and we both had about the same

16:00 so he said to Jimmy, “You fly it, and Trimble you sit in the back”. I remember Jimmy said, “Where’s the squadron, how do we get there?”, and Pete said “It’s over in that direction, out in the blue”, he said “you’ll see it”. Off we went and flew over this sandy waste with the sea on one side, and you couldn’t

16:30 get lost because there was a main road that ran right up to Tobruk, and a water pipeline as well. Anyway, we found the squadron. Just short of Tobruk [Libya] at a place called …

17:00 **It will come to you.**

It’s short of Tobruk, a roadhouse built by the Italians. When they built the main road across the north of Africa they put these roadhouses in different places, just really a building beside the road and it was in the form of a square, and an opening there and rooms

17:30 all around here and things like that. That was where the officers stayed, and on the other side of the road the troops would clear a patch of ground and remove big rocks and camel thorn and the airplanes were down there. The first

18:00 night I was there, I slept in one of the rooms and woke up in the morning and everything was hazy, hazy and the room was hazy. It had a window opening not a window, it turned out there was a dust storm blowing and you couldn’t see the airplanes down there. The place was

18:30 filled with dust. I remember I got in a wagon, like a station wagon and it carried about eight or ten of us I think down to what we called the aerodrome. Then we got lost and we couldn’t get back for a while.

Was this because of the storm?

19:00 Yes. When it finished I still wasn’t allowed to go on operations, again because we didn’t have a lot of airplanes. We probably had about sixteen pilots, but we didn’t have sixteen airplanes, and I’d been junior

19:30 and less experienced than so many of the senior blokes wasn’t taking the ops.

So what did you do?

Eventually, they let me fly a Gladiator, I hadn’t flown one you see, I didn’t know how to fly a Gladiator. I flew a Gladiator and that was quite an experience

20:00 and the thing was filled with sand, with an open cockpit thing and so what the blokes would do was take them off and fly them upside down and let all the sand blow out. I was sort of not awake to this because they didn’t tell me, and it was like a dust storm trying to take off in it. Eventually, having had a couple of flights and getting experience in the Gladiator, I was allowed to go on a patrol with them.

20:30 I did a silly thing, the crew started the airplane engine and I hopped into the cockpit and then as I’d always done with airplanes in Australia I tested the magneto switches. The magneto has two switches, you’d turn one off and see how many revs would drop off the tachometer, and

21:00 then you’d check the other one. You were allowed a drop of maybe two hundred revs on each switch. I turned one switch off and the engine stopped. The sergeant got me out of the cockpit and he looked at me and said, “If you ever touch those switches again, you’ve had it”,

21:30 and then he kicked me off, I thought this was a bit of a dig. He knew far more than I.

So you never did it again?

Oh no. My next patrol we flew in those days in a broad “vic” [flight formation], like birds.

22:00 Again I was put beside the leader on the left and of course I’d never flown formation, well I’d flown formation but not an operational formation. In ops you’re looking out all the time, but as far as I was concerned I could only look at the bloke I was formatting on and we took off and we were flying around and I was holding station pretty well and then the next thing we landed.

22:30 I thought, “Geez, I didn’t even see that aerodrome”, and we landed at a place called El Adem, which was the aerodrome just south of Tobruk. El Adem comes into the story a lot later. Luckily we didn’t have the Gladiators for more than a couple of weeks more.

How far would you go,

23:00 **how far did you travel on this patrol?**

We may have gone out about eighty to one hundred miles, it wouldn’t have been much more than that. The Gladiator we would only cruised them around one hundred and forty miles an hour I think and the patrols wouldn’t have lasted more than two hours.

23:30 You couldn’t patrol more than that, because the Gladiator would not have carried more fuel than for about two and a half hours. If you got into a fight you’d immediately put your power up and your fuel consumption would go up to blazers, and you just wouldn’t make it back, or make it back to your own

24:00 lines anyway, because the squadron would be well behind the front line, obviously.

Had you been aware of much action in the area?

No, there wasn't very much, because this was in the days when the British Army was only up against the Italian Army. The Italians were going back pretty quickly,

24:30 you had to chase them to catch them and this sort of business. We had these Gladiators for a while and then we were going to get Hurricanes and I was sent back for a Hurricane on about the second or third batch that went back for Hurricanes.

25:00 **Went back, where too?**

We went back to, the RSU [Runway Supervisory Unit] were repairing a Salvage Unit not at Ismaliya but next door to it,

25:30 I will give you the name later.

That's fine.

Within a couple of miles of Ismaliya. I went back with a group of about three others I think and although the first couple of Hurricanes had gone up to the squadron and had been picked up by

26:00 the more senior and experienced pilots and were then flown straight from the RSU straight up to the squadron, which was what we'd expect, they were all gunner pilots. When headquarters had discovered they had done that they said, "You're not allowed to do that, you've got to convert to the Hurricane, you take it to Ismaliya to convert. Get the training

26:30 squadron at Ismaliya to convert them to Hurricanes and then you can take your own". I was in that group that had to have some training on the Hurricanes at Ismaliya. We pick up the Hurricanes at

27:00 the RSU place and took them over to Ismaliya and went into the CO of the training squadron and said, "We've come down from 3 Squadron to train", and he said, "You're not in the bloody event", sorry, "you're not in the event", he said "I've only got a couple of Hurricanes and a whole lot of fellows trying to get off of them", and we said,

27:30 "We have brought our Hurricanes with us". He said, "If you fellows go, don't waste my time". So we took them back and I remember I took mine, I had to have a wheel change and various things done to it.

28:00 They didn't have the parts at Ismaliya so there was an aerodrome further down the canal with spare parts for the Hurricanes, so they gave me one of the bi-planes and I took the feather with me went down and pick up something and got back. On the way back to the squadron we stopped at a landing ground up towards

28:30 the Mersa Matruh I think it was, up towards the boundary of Libya and we landed there for lunch, because it was that time of the day. They had no water, but they had plenty of spirits so we topped up on spirits

29:00 and I remember I had to land again at Tobruk after Mersa Matruh for refuelling. I remember I must've misjudged my height because the airplane, I must have been a fair bit off the ground because all of a sudden the airplane fell right on its tail with an awful thump,

29:30 and I thought, I'd broken it, but anyway I hadn't. In due course we got up to Benghazi which was where the squadron was. We were at Benghazi for quite a while, we weren't on Benghazi aerodrome we were on Benina Aerodrome. Which was the Italian Air Force Base for that part of Libya,

30:00 a beautiful station, laid out streets, tennis courts, a zoo in fact, even a small zoo. A great big control tower, nearly as big as the one at Tel Aviv and we were there for a couple of months.

What were you doing there, I mean the Italians had been pushed back

30:30 **at this point?**

We were the only air force in that part of Libya, there was a bit of a flight of airplanes back at Tobruk. We had a couple of RAF pilots allotted to us, to round out our numbers and because

31:00 the rest of the RAF had been sent to Greece, this was about the time the Germans were coming into Greece. So we were the only squadron in Egypt, or Athens as I say this other RAF one. Except for some of the

31:30 aerial reconnaissance people who had Lysanders and they also had a couple of Hurricanes and they did all of the aerial reconnaissance right out to Libya.

So, you're there supporting the troops are you?

The troops had gone further down to Agedebia [Ajedabya?] down the bottom of the Gulf of Sirte

32:00 and there they stopped because the army had run out of vehicles. In that desert each campaign would only go for about one thousand miles. At the end of one thousand miles their trucks had had it their tanks had had it and they couldn't go any further. This was why tanks use to be carried on transporters and when they were going to go into battle they'd take them off the transporters

32:30 and they'd probably lose them all anyway. The distance a tank can travel under those desert conditions is nothing. The desert, they all talked about it as the desert, have you ever been in the middle of Australia?

Yes.

Around Woomera?

Not around Woomera, but up around Uluru?

33:00 Have you ever been to Birdsville?

No, not that far, to King's Canyon.

The country around there is sort of hard ground with a lot of growth on it, about this high, there, there, there and that was what the desert was like that the desert that I'm talking about.

33:30 Of course over there around Benghazi it's beautiful, it's lush, and that's where the Romans were in their days. In fact all of the north of Egypt with the greenery of the Mediterranean you wouldn't think so now it's so barren. It's beautiful.

34:00 We were there for a while and then Rommel [German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, commander of the Afrika Korps] came in.

Did you have any engagement with the enemy at that stage?

Yes, our job really was the defence of Benghazi, so occasionally we'd get some of the German reconnaissance airplanes.

34:30 **No Italians?**

No, we had the opportunity to get some Italian bombers; this is another thing I've got to say. I was in C Flight, B Flight was the lucky flight. B Flight used to get nearly all the flights, but I didn't, it was just the way things went.

35:00 B Flight managed to knock down some airplanes. C Flight not very many, occasionally but not very often. Sometimes we didn't have much interception work, usually what we tried to intercept were German reconnaissance airplanes but it was just too high,

35:30 the Hurricanes couldn't go that high. These were the early Hurricanes, the Battle of Britain ones. We got airplanes that had been in the Battle of Britain that had flown for about one hundred hours. They'd been sent out to Africa and they'd flown right across Africa and up the Nile and the RAF used. The Hurricane that was allotted to me had something like one hundred and twenty hours out of it.

36:00 We reckoned that if they flew for one hundred and eighty hours they had it. The service airplanes are not designed to last a long time in war because you might get a brand new one and lose it on its first flight. You don't want to waste your money or your effort. Then Rommel came in and we

36:30 kept going back as hard as we could.

Kept going back as hard as we could, can you explain that a little bit better?

Coming back into Egypt.

You were coming back, right.

We were moving everyday from landing ground to landing ground. You'd start off in the morning at one landing ground, the troops would get you airborne and you'd finish

37:00 your patrol further back and you'd might get another patrol in and you might go a bit further back. We were running out of parts for the airplanes, and we were losing them, we were losing the odd pilot.

But you hadn't had really bad casualties at this stage?

Yes, pretty bad.

37:30 Your squadron only got sixteen to twenty pilots and you've only got to lose a couple and that's bad. We are only talking about small numbers.

Yes, you're right it's bad for any pilot to be lost?

To lose four, that's quite a bit. What you're trying to do is send out eight to ten at a time

38:00 and you can't get that number out of each flight.

What affect does that have on you when you lose a pilot?

Nothing really, you're just wondering if he's dead or whether he'll walk back, I don't think it has any effect, no not really.

So you keep going back then, you keep retreating?

38:30 Yes, we kept retreating and eventually we were running out of serviceable airplanes and I was given one that had no air compressor. The Hurricane had an air compressor, now the air compressor operated the guns.

Tape 5

00:30 **Tom, I'd like you to tell me about the first encounter you had with enemy aircraft? Any one, when you were over Libya?**

01:00 I don't think I had an encounter, not sort of one on one, certainly.

01:30 **The pilots that you lost when you were in North Africa, how were they lost?**

They were shot down, shot down.

Were you ever in a formation and other pilots in that formation were shot down?

Much later, much later when we got Tomahawks I was. On Hurricanes

02:00 I don't think I can remember any cases.

All of those patrols you did around Tobruk you never encountered any enemy aircraft?

I told you I was so junior I was not lucky enough to get to many jobs. Later, after we

02:30 came out of the desert and went into Palestine and got Tomahawks then I had a couple of encounters but at about that time the CO made me the swinger for our flight, but sometimes we would have two swingers.

03:00 He laid down the law that swingers were not allowed to take part in the fighting they were there to act purely as lookouts.

So where did the swinger fly in the formation?

Before I tell you I will explain that the swinger or the weaver was a bloke like the American scouts they had in there

03:30 when they were going westward. The history of weavers, it started I think in England when they had a man that flew behind the main formation and his object was to act as the lookout, because instead of flying straight like the others did, he flew a weaving course, therefore he could look behind. Quite frequently the weaver

04:00 was the first bloke lost, because he would be attacked and the main squadron wouldn't see him. Then the weaver was put up in front of the main squadron so that he looked back and he could see right through the squadron and they could also see him and thereby protect him. I got this job of weaving, it was actually called a weaver.

04:30 The result of that was the weaver used up more fuel because he had to fly a bit faster than anybody else. He was most likely to run out of fuel first and so therefore he was allowed to land first and take off last when people were going out.

05:00 Then it was discovered that if the weaver used his ability he could fly not a straight and not a level weave but if he went like this and swung he would build up his energy, built up his kinetic energy as he swung

05:30 down and he'd lose it and he'd swing again and therefore he was using up virtually no more fuel than the squadron. It was a method of saving fuel and therefore we called them swingers.

It sounds quite difficult, was it?

No after a while it was the most comfortable thing, I could swing using a throttle setting of about

06:00 half a pound per square inch or one inch and work no more than the others, that doesn't mean anything to you. What that means is that I only had a slightly more opened throttle setting than the rest of the squadron.

Did you enjoy that role?

It was all right, except as I say, the first time that I tried to take part in the scrap the CO who

06:30 had been leading the squadron ticked me off and he said, “That is not your job, your job is only to act as a lookout, and even when the blokes get into a fight you still lookout”, and warn if more aircraft are coming in.

How would you warn the other planes?

Just by talking to them.

On what?

On radio. We had an RT [Radio Transmitter] system.

What would you say

07:00 **if you saw planes coming, what was the language that you would use?**

Probably, “Bandits maybe above or below”. You’d use a cock code they might be in front of the squadron or behind or above or below or anything like that. You had to be very quick because you see on radio and the ABC will happen to know this, because they had a women who

07:30 likes to talk above others. If more than one person speaks it becomes garbled, both trying to speak on the telephone at once, have you ever tried it? You can’t understand each other. Our warnings had to be a very short duration, because there are only so many words that you can say in a minute, or ten seconds which might be all

08:00 that you had. Therefore our warnings were only a few words and they were a minimum number of words you would have to use. For instance, you wouldn’t call up and say “swinger calling”, or something like that, you’d just say what you wanted to. I was made a swinger for months.

08:30 **While you were a swinger the squadron was engaged in combat?**

We swung all the time, from the moment we took off until the moment we got back. Not just through combat, oh no.

The rest of the squadron would be fighting, while you’re weaving around?

Yes, they might be or they could be.

09:00 **Was that frightening?**

Sorry?

How did you react when the squadron was under attack?

That was nothing.

Presumably you could also be shot down?

No, because I could get out of the way of anything. My job was merely to look out

09:30 to watch, I could avoid being shot down because there was no mean for me to be shot down, they were used to them. Generally, the scraps that I was in were not of that type, either we were attacking bombers which means everybody would be attacking

10:00 and they’d be unlikely to have had escorts or else we would be trying to cover ships or bombers from attacking aircraft in which event we wouldn’t want to leave the people that we were protecting. Quite often 3 Squadron when we were out on the job with bombers what was called a “close escort”. The close escort had to stick with their

10:30 people that we were protecting. There would be upper covers, the middle covers or the upper covers and they were the ones that could also do the fighting, but we had to stick with the bombers. In other words just stop enemy aircraft from getting right to the bomber.

How many crew in a Hurricane?

One.

Just yourself?

Yes.

How were you able to fly

11:00 **the plane and fire the gun at the same time?**

The trigger was on the control column. The Hurricane and the Spitfire too for that matter had a control column which was articulated so that it came up through your legs and at this point it could pivot, so

that that

11:30 little bit could pivot. It had a circular ring grip that you could hold in your hand or with two hands like that and there was a button up there and you just pressed the button with your thumb like this.

Where were the guns?

The Hurricane had four guns out in that wing and four guns out in that wing.

When you're sitting in the cockpit, and you're swinging around what can you see,

12:00 **from your cockpit what can you see?**

Everything.

Three hundred and sixty degrees?

Yes, that was the purpose of it.

Did you enjoy it?

I didn't mind it, it was all right.

It must have been spectacular views?

I suppose so in the sense that I could see

12:30 all around, I could see up and I could see down and I didn't have to worry about trying to format on anybody, in other words fly very close to anybody else. Usually one was flying in formation and formations vary in type part of the time of a pilot was occupied

13:00 was merely in keeping station, or merely in keeping stations and also depending upon on which position in the station he flew so his viewing area would be controlled. By that I mean if a fellow was flying there and the leader was flying there, this fellow would be looking out generally in that sector.

13:30 **I'm wondering, when you're flying in formations and you're over Palestine swinging around, when you see the enemy aircraft coming, what happens to you, what do you feel when you see them coming?**

Not very much I don't think. Perhaps a relief that you've seen

14:00 what you've imagined could be there ... Yes, a sense of relief that you see what's up there, you see what's about. It's when you cant see anything that you're worried that is something that you cant see, or there maybe something that is outside your range of vision. When you see what's there you're quite at ease.

What about when they start firing at you?

14:30 Fighters only fire at one another when they are within range of one another, say within about three hundred yards. You're pretty safe, I don't know whether you know much about

15:00 ballistics. The effect of gravity is that anything in the air will drop towards the earth at the rate of two feet per second per second.

Nevertheless many pilots were shot down?

Yes, unluckily or because their attacker was very close.

What would be going through your mind

15:30 **when you saw another plane shot down?**

You'd be wondering which part of the formation he had been lost from.

What would that tell you?

I don't think that it would have told me anything.

Would you know who it was?

Generally, I think so because the fellows who'd flown together for a fair bit of time would

16:00 know two things. The first thing that they'd generally know would be which airplane it was and who was flying it because each airplane would normally would have a letter, it might be A, B, C, D. In addition to that before you took off you'd know who was going to fly where

16:30 and in what part of the formation and so you'd tend to know that. Each pilot had a peculiar way of flying, I don't know how I can put this. After we got to know one another pretty well, just by looking at an airplane you could almost tell who was

17:00 flying it. You may not understand that, fellows who'd have flown together would know what I'm talking about.

It's a signature style?

It's hard to describe that, you might think that it's impossible, and I can't describe it.

Just like the different ways that a person walks, that you can tell a person's walk, is it something like that?

Yes,

17:30 if you've flown together often enough I mean.

You'd been flying with these people for a long time, when you saw one of them shot down what would be going through your mind?

I don't know, if a fellow was shot down. I suppose the only thought was, "I'm glad it wasn't I".

18:00 **When you'd get back to base after flying an operation do you wait on the airstrip until everyone came back, or would you get off as soon as possible?**

No, you'd just taxied to wherever you were going to leave the airplane. Then just get out and wait for the truck to come and pick you up.

18:30 You'd obviously talk to your crew first and point out anything that you wanted attended to, it might be dirty plugs.

Would you wait and see who'd come back?

Only when you got back to the ops room where you would all discuss what a patrol would be like. That's all.

That's when you'd count

19:00 **up who's not here or who didn't come back?**

I don't know about whether you'd count it up, you'd know because as you came back to your aerodrome, if you come back in a formation you'd know who was missing and if you came back individually you'd just wonder who was back.

How did it affect the morale of the squadron when pilots were lost?

19:30 I wouldn't know, I don't think that it affected us very much.

What would you do if someone didn't come back, would you..?

You'd tend to ask if anyone had seen what had happened.

20:00 It's very hard to explain. I didn't really see, I don't know if I was on many patrols where we lost very many pilots. I saw

20:30 fellows shot down but I don't think I can say more than that.

What did you see when you say that you saw a fellow shot down, can you describe what you saw?

21:00 I'd probably describe it better by mentioning the fight we had one day near Tobruk but this was later when we had Tomahawks. When 3 and 1 and 2 Squadron had gone out as a wing

21:30 and we'd been attacked by 109s [German Messerschmitt Bf 109 fighter planes] several times on the way out to the area that we were suppose to patrol. I'd seen one or two 109s shot down and then as we got close to Tobruk we were attacked by

22:00 maybe about twenty-odd 109s and because we were following 112 Squadron we weren't leading the wing that day. We unfortunately went into a turn with 112 Squadron and we thought that they were just going to turn but instead of that they continued to turn and went into

22:30 what is sometimes called a "defensive circle", and naturally we were part of the wing and we went in with them. We got stuck there and we stayed in it for sixty three minutes. In that sixty three minutes I saw one fellow just a bit

23:00 up from here he was hit by a 109 and he got out into his parachute, and I saw his parachute and by the time I had gone around the circle I wasn't looking for him. Another chap who was just up in front of me and slightly lower, at about my height was rammed

23:30 by a 109. The tactics of the 109s was to sit above us and then dive through us in pairs and they'd shoot on their way down. We were going around in circles. The bloke that was hit by the 109 and as he was hit

half of one wing was sheared off and the 109

24:00 just disintegrated into a shower of sparks, like a cone that was gradually expanding and so in that time I saw this one fellow shot down here and the one up there.

What time of day was it?

It was quite late in the afternoon,

24:30 it was quite late. They were the only two.

What's the point of going into a defensive circle?

It's not a defensive circle at all, it's not an offensive tactic it was something I think that started in

25:00 World War I and it was a tactic that we had often talked about and said that we would never get into one, we would never get into one. It was just that we followed this other squadron on that particular day. Much to our cost, because I think our squadron lost four pilots that day in that particular episode.

25:30 I only saw two of them shot down, yes we lost four. Silly tactic, brainless, brainless, but you'll often hear people talk about it.

What was it suppose to do?

I think it came

26:00 from World War I when so many aircraft had a pilot and a rear gunner and the idea was if you got into a defensive circle the bloke behind you could protect you because he was flying right behind you and got between you and him and also his own gunners could be shooting.

26:30 It was something that came out of World War I it was a brainless thing, it was brainless.

So at your debriefing after that patrol were you able to voice those criticisms?

Oh no, we didn't bother, we knew it was wrong and we should never do it, and we blamed our tactic for our losses. We realised we'd done the wrong thing and as I said to you we were following,

27:00 we were the following squadron in that operation.

What was the visibility like, late afternoon?

Late afternoon it was sunny but there was cloud, but we tended to be out of the cloud.

Were you firing?

Was I firing? Yes, a lot, yes as the 109s came down

27:30 we used a lot of ammunition, I don't know whether I hit anything, I used a lot of ammunition.

Could you see the bullets leaving the plane?

No.

In that light?

No, we didn't have, I think in those days we only had ball and armour piercing incendiary. The incendiary would have been seen, but it's hard to

28:00 see in the daylight. But we wouldn't have seen the sort of ammunition that we had. We wouldn't really be looking for it, you're looking more at the target and what's likely to be the target, or whether you're likely to be the target, it's hard to describe a bit of a fight like that.

28:30 **Yes, I appreciate that, yes we'd hoped that you'd try because it is fascinating to us to hear what it was like?**

That was quite an astonishing day because we formed this defensive circle and because it looked as though we

29:00 weren't going to get out of it, we had to conserve our fuel. This was essential because the 109s that were attacking us and we were just a little bit south and east of Tobruk. Coming from an aerodrome probably El Adem close to Tobruk, so that they would go down and refuel

29:30 and come up again because we weren't moving, we weren't going anywhere, so we were sitting ducks for them. What we did was to develop a three-ringed concentric circle, by that I mean we had a very wide circle at the top and down a little bit further was a less wide circle

30:00 and the bottom with a smaller circle again. The fellows at the bottom weren't using much fuel and they could swarm around. The other here were using a bit more fuel because they were flying faster and the fellows up here were really belting around because they wanted to avoid the things that were coming

down. That meant that we progressed,

30:30 and you'd be up in the top circle for a while and you'd move down and then you'd move down further but the fight lasted for sixty three minutes and sixty three minutes was the longest fight that I'd served in. Most fights only lasted about one or two minutes, by the time that you'd have lost everybody, you'd all disperse.

31:00 **Sounds exhausting?**

No, after a while what I did was wind my trim, my rudder trim on, so that my rudder pedals were neutral and I didn't have to use a force one way or the other to keep in the turn because the Tomahawk was very fierce on the rudder. That took some of the weight off my foot, I was cunning in those days I guess.

31:30 Some of the blokes had been knocked about by the 109s, you know they were being hit. One fellow that I remembered had a mass of his wing shot right off, can I show you a model and point this out to you?

If you could describe it in words that would be much better for us?

32:00 The flap section of his port wing completely, so that he had a big gap in his wing like that. He was down near the bottom circle and after about sixty three minutes I was getting a bit tired of this and the sun was setting and I called up, and we hadn't been using the intercom and I called up and said, "Let's get out of this

32:30 bloody circle", and a fellow called Bobby Gibbs he signed that and he was later CO of the squadron said, "All right, you lead". As soon as I had reached that part of the circle where I was facing east which was where we had to go to get back to base. I broke out

33:00 and as I looked back I looked in the rear vision mirror or looked back and no one was following me, I thought that I wasn't going to be by myself and I went to turn back but as I did the others started to stream out and I was just about on the deck and the others were really getting down towards the deck and it was starting to get dark and we had to go quite a way to get back to our own aerodrome.

33:30 We'd lost most of 112 Squadron at this stage, how he'd got out of the circle I don't know. The others were following me and we were putting our power on to increase our speed to get back before it was dark and I remember this fellow who had lost this great big piece of wing went past me like a rocket. How he did it I don't know, he was going like the clappers.

34:00 We'd gone quite a distance, we got just about back I think just over the border to Egypt and Libya and all of a sudden a fairy light was fired from the ground and I looked down and I could just make out that there were

34:30 a couple of Hurricanes there. So like a flash I did a circuit and came into land. This fellow that had lost so much of his wing was already landed, he'd gone straight in and the rest of us went down and it turned out that that was a very forward landing ground that was being used by the

35:00 reconnaissance squadron they had Hurricanes still and they'd apparently seen right out into the distance, they'd seen us coming home and realised that we had to land in the dark, or before it got dark. Someone had used his brains and fired a fairy light and it led us in. That day, only one of our squadron got back to base

35:30 from that fight and the next morning we struggled in with about another seven I think. That was just that one occasion.

It sounds very dramatic. Who were your particular mates in your squadron?

I suppose all of them,

36:00 all of the pilots.

Who had you lost that day?

Not all the pilots because as I said we were really two flights, I flew in C and half the pilots flew in B.

Who were your mates then, did you have any particular friends that you were particularly friendly with?

The ones that slept in my tent, there were two

36:30 or three and we all slept in the one tent, I knew them pretty well, I knew others. You don't form a mateship because you know the fellow maybe gone the next day. There were acquaintances and they earned your trust,

37:00 whom you respect.

So that pilots that didn't come back would you hold a service for them, I guess you wouldn't have known if they had survived or not would you?

Usually one of the people on the job would know what might've happened

37:30 to a fellow who was missing. Whether he had gone straight in and he was dead he might have crash landed in which event there was a chance of being picked up either by the enemy or as it happened very frequently by one of the long range desert group patrols,

38:00 if I can progress to this extent. Before World War II there was a fellow who was an amateur with the desert and desert conditions and he did a lot of travel in Egypt. I suppose the British War Office must've always thought that there was likely to be war in the Middle East then and no doubt there always will be.

38:30 So north of the Sahara Desert and about two hundred miles in from the Mediterranean coast Britain built a series of caches of food, ammunition

39:00 and petrol and they divided up the land into strips.

Tape 6

00:30 When we came out of the desert and left the Hurricanes and first of all we were on Lydda aerodrome. It was the first time that we had to fly airplanes of runways, Lydda had concrete runways and

01:00 the other thing was that we had Tomahawks and this was an airplane that was bought for use by the French and so they had French fitting and things like this.

So were they left hand drive?

No, there's no such thing as a left hand drive in an airplane.

I'm just having you on.

01:30 Also they had funny reflector sights that the Americans put on and it consisted of a telephone pole with three bars because the Yanks never expected to fly against anything that required reflection shooting, and these were for ground staffing purposes. Anyway all of these things had to be changed. They had 2.5 machine guns, the Beeches that which came back towards the cockpit with cocking handles

02:00 in the top of the instrument panel and if you had a round that had jammed or something it would clear the barrel. They also had two machine guns in the port wing and two in the starboard wing. You could clear these guns if they had a blockage by means of a cable and a handle. There were four of these things

02:30 and they fitted between your feet and if the gun jammed you could clear it by pulling the handle. The handle was connected to a wire which went out to the gun, I should say. Or if the gun ran away and sometimes the guns would runaway and it would just continue to fire when you took your hand off the button you could pull one of these handles and pull the firing mechanism back.

03:00 **Who were your enemies in Syria?**

The French.

So it was the French Air Force?

The French Air Force, not the Vichy French, nor the Free French, but the French, there's a fundamental difference. This was because we were so lucky in Syria because France, or these Frenchman

03:30 were only protecting Syria so therefore the very clever Brits kept our aircraft and aerodromes were in Palestine, and the French weren't going across that boarder. The Brits are bloody cunning. I hope you're not Brits?

04:00 We had quite some fun as I say the B Flight seemed to be lucky and they seemed to have most of the flights and got most of the credits for most of the victories. C Flight one day shot down six French bombers that were bombing a British force up in or out near Palmyra [Syria]

04:30 you might called it Tamyra but we called it Palmyra in those days. I remember later, a couple of weeks later talking to one of the crews who was in hospital in Aleppo [Syria].

Aleppo was Syria?

That's the north, that's like in the north

05:00 isn't it?

I think so, yes.

Yes, Aleppo. He was one of the crews of one of the last bombers of the six that we shot down and he was the one that told me about the fact that the French were only protecting Syria. He was a Frenchman as opposed to a Free Frenchman or a Vichy Frenchman.

05:30 I always despised myself that day because again I was swinging and I was the only swinger that day and a flight of us, not a full twelve, a lesser number had gone out

06:00 to Palmyra escorting a squadron of Bremen bombers going to bomb a particular force of Frenchman who were out near this place. We'd been delayed because of the bombers

06:30 and we used up a lot of fuel in taking them out to Palmyra when they left we waited around for a while because we had an intelligence support that there was a bombing raid by the French on this bridge, and this British force that was out there. Then the chap who was

07:00 leading the flight reckoned that we'd been out long enough and we started to come home, in other words back to Damascus to refuel and I'd been swinging and had a lot of trouble because we were so slow going out and I had to maintain a much higher speed that was needed to just stay to protect our flight.

07:30 When the flight had turned to come home I had been flying in the opposed direction and I'd got behind them, looking back although I was still weaving behind them trying to catch up I saw two French bombers come in and bomb

08:00 and I thought to myself our bombers had done their job, and that was what they were suppose to do, they were suppose to protect them, it doesn't matter if these French bombers do their job, and so I swung a bit and did another swing, another swing and I thought, we cant

08:30 go back to the squadron that I saw all these bombers coming in, so I called the flight leader and said, "There's bombers back there", and we turned. Just as we were turning I saw the next two bombers came in well of course the blokes got stuck into them and we flew back and attacked them and again as I say as a swinger I'm not allowed to take part in the fighting, then I saw two more

09:00 come in and by that time I think the flight must've used most of its ammunition and so the flight leader said, "All right, you can attack now", and another chap and I attacked and attacked and attacked. The last bomber, the sixth he fought like the clappers and I don't know what he did to his engine but he must've over boosted it so much and we were flat out and the other chap would come in and shoot

09:30 and I'd come in and shoot and we were doing this all the time the pair of us. Until we forced him right down and the crew tumbled out, because he had skidded along on the dirt. I kicked myself I thought I didn't have to say that I saw those aircraft, because we were on our way back to

10:00 Damascus to refuel and we'd done our job, we'd protected the bombers and yet we'd destroyed all of these Frenchman and it had been a real carnage because I remember as the sixth one went down on the ground the other fellows from the flight had caught up with, Peter and I, Peter was the other bloke

10:30 who was shooting below. They started to come in and we going to start shooting at the fellows on the ground, the crew that had fallen out and I remember the flight leader called up and he said, "Don't you touch them, I'll shoot the first man that goes for them" and he really meant it. Our bloodlust was really up that day. We came back to Damascus and refuelled

11:00 and then the airplanes took off individually to go back to our base at Rosh Pinna which was just up above the sea of Galilee in Palestine and very close to what use to be called Lake Hula, which is no longer a lake and they closed it all in and they planted crops. I couldn't get

11:30 off from Damascus because one of my brakes had seized and I couldn't let it go so I was waiting for the wheel to cool. While I was waiting one of the other chaps took off to go back to Rosh Pinna and his engine cut out just after he'd taken off and he turned back to try to land on the runway at

12:00 Damascus, stalled and led in and killed himself. I remember I went down to look at him, within about a minute or too, I and another chap ran down and I remember I was most astonished because it was so hot in Palestine then and we were flying in shorts and short sleeved shirt

12:30 and his legs were twisted like a cork screw, and of course he was dead. That left a funny taste in my mouth.

Sounds quite gruesome?

Not really, because the other bloke said, "You go back to the squadron and tell them what's happened", and this fellow went to Damascus where they had him buried.

13:00 Flying down over the Golan Heights when I got my airplane and I was able to taxi and could take off. I was flying down over the Golan Heights it was so bumpy that the airplane would lose height, I'd got through a series of bumps and the airplane would just lose height. I had to use quite a bit of

13:30 power to get over there, it was just another one of those things that had happened.

You said that you despised yourself for having?

I need not have said that those French airplanes that were there, they were dropping their bombs and I couldn't stop that from happening. We

14:00 didn't really have enough fuel left I reckon to have a good stoush. They weren't bomber which was very very fast and I knew we really would have to use a lot of power to catch them, but it happened.

It sounds as though you would rather wished that you hadn't?

No, not so much a wish, I really thought that it was unnecessary that I do that.

14:30 On another occasion towards the last days in Syria when we heard that there was likely that an armistice [would be] called we were sent up on a job in the because we had been told that the French had some light tanks that had been seen in the

15:00 valley that runs down between the two sets of hills and so we went out and looked for them but couldn't find them. We were on our way home and down into Palestine again and at the end of this valley

15:30 there was a very slight drop, a slight drop maybe twenty feet and then the ground tended to slope away. The sun was shining into this edge of the valley and there were those four tanks which had not been seen by our blokes and they flew over the top of them

16:00 like that. I can see them there and the fellows all had their shirts on and they were all sunning themselves and I thought, "Oh well, the armistice is going to be tomorrow or the next day", I didn't tell them until after I got back.

So you decided to let them be?

Yes, you do silly things like that.

Did you feel as thought those Frenchmen in the bombers, they needn't have died really?

16:30 No, I didn't think that at all, I didn't give them a thought.

Then why did you despise yourself?

I despised myself because I thought that it was unnecessary to do what I had done. We couldn't have stopped them bombing, they'd done their bombing,

17:00 they'd done what they had set out to do and that was all that there was to it. I had despised myself because if I hadn't have reported them, I hadn't done my duty, I thought of

17:30 it that way, but on the same token I thought that it was unnecessary to have done my duty, it was just a feeling that one has.

I think that's quite understandable? Tom I'm curious how you came to be visiting this French chap in the hospital in Aleppo - had you sought him out or was that a coincidence?

18:00 I was given ten days leave while I was in Syria and this fellow Johnny Jackson, the elderly pilot the very wealthy bloke and his young brother who had also come to the squadron invited me to go with them

18:30 during our leave on a trip up into Syria. Johnny had contacts with friends from Queensland who were in the army and who had obtained for us a car, the army had no doubt ratted it from somebody. So we got a little Renault.

19:00 We went up to Damascus and up through Syria and right up to Aleppo. Somehow or other while we were in Aleppo we were told that this Frenchman was in the hospital, I don't really remember how this happened, but it was because of that that we went and saw him.

19:30 I don't know how it happened I just know that it happened because even now I can see in my mind I can see the fellow lying in bed and the captain of the French aircraft talking to him. These are just memories that one has.

What did you say to him?

20:00 I wouldn't remember, but it was the captain of that aircraft that told us that they were French and that in fact they were only trying to protect France's possession which was Syria and that was the reason that they hadn't attacked us. They knew where our base was in Palestine, but they never had come down to

20:30 attack us. These things happen in wars. That's the only way that I knew about him, because I couldn't speak to him in French and it had been years since I left school. I wouldn't be any good in speaking French, not conversational French anyway.

21:00 **What sorts of fun did you get up to while you were at the base in Palestine, could you go into Tel Aviv?**

Yes, we'd go into Tel Aviv and go to cabarets there and I went into a place and I learned to smoke from a hookah [pipe].

21:30 Don't mistake me, you know those things when all those tubes come out and you all sit around and have a puff. We use to go in and swim at the beach.

What were you smoking in the hookah?

I don't know, I just knew that I smoked it but I didn't like it much. We use to swim on the beach, and of course there you could undress on the beach

22:00 and get into your togs. We went down to Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. Most of the time I suppose I was kept back at Lydda because we

22:30 didn't have too much time off.

Did they have any notable brothels in Tel Aviv, what were the fancy places?

No.

What were the cabarets that you went too?

Just a cabaret.

In theatres or in bars in cafes?

23:00 I can't remember theatres, I can remember bars. Some of the ground crew were very lucky they could be given days off, they might have a week off or something and they'd go and live in a commune, one of the Jewish communes.

23:30 You must remember in those days that was 1941 the Jews were just starting to get into Palestine in any number. At one stage we landed in a paddock near Haifa

24:00 and it had been sown, it had been wheat I think. It was close to a Jewish settlement and since we got there in the morning and the patrol was not to be until after lunch

24:30 we were picked up by a truck from one of the Jewish communes and we were taken in for lunch. Gee, they were living hard, they were living hard. Just ordinary wooden tables and we were entertained before lunch by the very old men of the commune, certain young girls and women

25:00 served the meal which was again pretty rough, and the utensils were pretty rough. Other young girls were responsible for looking after the children, and all the other young people and those of not so young in age were out working. Everybody worked, not a single soul was doing nothing.

25:30 They were the most courageous people I thought, they were trying to make something of the land that they had gone to. Even up at Lake Hula, the people there were hard workers but also they were using the lake for fishing because I remember down a bit

26:00 from us there was a British Cavalry Unit that was being converted to mechanisation. Some of us one day went down because every morning they exercised their horses and I was talked into going down and I said, "Yes, I've

26:30 ridden before", so I was roped in, and these chargers they were magnificent beasts. I got on one and all he wanted to do, and he knew I wasn't a horseman all he wanted to do was to walk sideways, have you ever tried to ride a horse sideways? How I stayed on I don't know. Anyway we went up very slowly because each chap was leading

27:00 a couple and we went up to this kibbutz up at Lake Hula and we stopped there for a rest and then we started to come home. When the horse knows that he's going home, he goes like the clappers and mine just took off, he took off and I remember Pete Turnbull who was the chap who had shot down this last bomber he

27:30 was a country man and he'd been the junior buck jumping champion up in northern New South Wales before he joined the air force. He said, "Are you all right?", and I said, "I think so", anyway he could see that I wasn't and he raced his horse down and caught up with mine just before it reached a small creek and he was going to jump. I was so stiff after that the next day

28:00 we were going to move from Rosh Pinna up to Rayak in the Rayak Valley, that was the name that I was trying to think of and they wouldn't let me fly with them, I had to fly by myself, because my legs were so stiff I couldn't move.

You were glad that you weren't in the cavalry?

Yes.

28:30 I had a swim in the Jordan River there, that's where I swam in the Jordan River, no clothes on, because

there was just a couple of us and going down stream like this in case we ran into somebody. Yes, I enjoyed my time up there.

Any other notable fights over Syria?

29:00 Yes, there were a couple of occasions and we did a lot of strafing up there. I can tell you one humorous occasion and one not so humorous. We use to staff the road between Damascus and Rayak Valley

29:30 and there was a railway line that ran there and also there was a river that runs and I've forgot the name of it. The road is in a valley, not a valley so much but there were hills that came up very close to the road and it was a very windy road.

30:00 Very hard to staff vehicles on a road like that and you'd go in and pull up and twist around. One day we were staffing one of these roads and we saw some vehicles that had just about got into the Rayak Valley where it was open and the road was fairly straight and there were about four or five cars and an ambulance.

30:30 A fellow, that I can talk about later, started to shoot at the ambulance and I thought that was a bit in for a dig. I was shooting at a car and it stopped and a an Arab got out and he was dressed in Arab pants with the great bit sack to catch Mohammad when he arrives,

31:00 these were white and his jacket was dark and he had a fez on and he hopped out of his car and it was going to be strafed and he could see what we were doing and he ran out over the field. One of the blokes, who was a little bit ahead of me fired some rounds

31:30 close to him and these was a little white dog that came out of the car with him and of course this white dog ran like hell and past the bloke. I went down and put a few more bullets in, into the ground not into the bloke. I can remember he took off and he passed that dog as though it was standing still.

32:00 That's a terrible thing isn't it, it was funny at the time. The other thing was that one morning about five of us took off and we were going to try and catch the French Air Force that was on an aerodrome called Homs.

32:30 We took off very early after sun rise and our intention was that we would have the sun behind us and we'd be able to go straight down into this aerodrome and we would be hard to see, with the sun behind you you can't look straight into the sun. We did that, and again this day I was swinger again and I was the swinger for the flight this time

33:00 and all the time and I swung out when the others went in and strafed the aircraft on the ground and you could see the crews working on them, they were working on the aircraft. They were spread out so as to cover the aerodrome

33:30 and obviously I was going to strafe too but I didn't find a target because it was out of my, I was too far to one side. So I did a complete turn again and I came in again what I could see was drums of petrol, forty four drums of petrol so I shot at those and away the fellows went

34:00 right at ground level, so that they couldn't be shot at or anything and I'm starting to swing and I'm well behind them and I looked back and there was a massive column of black smoke towering up from this place and I read later in various sources that what had happened

34:30 was that the fuel had ignited from being strafed and it had spread and in fact this aerodrome was such that the aerodrome was there, there was a railway line here and we came in that way. The fuel dump had ignited and next

35:00 to that was an ammunition train and next to that was a train filled with troops obviously just waking up for breakfast. The ammo train had blown up and it would have killed about a thousand odd troops. You know, it was a very successful morning, a good operation that one. That one was not so funny of course.

35:30 **Did you feel a little surprised, how did you feel when you read those reports?**

It was years later, it was just interesting to me.

Were you taken aback, you had no idea that there were that many casualties from that operation?

No, our object had been to strafe the aircraft, we didn't know that there would have been anything else there.

36:00 I may have known it earlier I may have got it from the Frenchman when I did the trip with the two Jackson brothers with the little Fiat, or in the Renault or whatever we had, I can't remember.

From Palestine you were then moved back up into Libya weren't you?

To the desert?

Yes, when was that?

36:30 We went back to the desert in late August after the Syrian business.

Where were you posted there?

Still the 3 Squadron.

No, where was your base I mean?

We came back and we were based at a city Sidi Haneish.

Because Tobruk was still under siege at this point?

The Germans had come right up to

37:00 the border of Egypt.

How close was the city Sidi Haneish to the border?

A couple of hundred miles.

How long in flying time?

Maybe a couple of hundred miles was too many, I wouldn't have thought that

37:30 more than half an hour to three quarters of an hour, I will have to look at a map to be more precise.

You were well within an hour of flying range of the frontier?

Yes.

Of the war?

Yes.

During this time, the second half of 1941, there was a change of government in Australia?

Oh, was there?

I was just going to say,

38:00 **were you aware of that at the time, Menzies resigned?**

Menzies went out didn't he?

Yes.

I suppose we were aware of it. I remember Menzies came up and visited us when we were at Benina and Benghazi and that would have been six months before, yes that's right.

How was it when Menzies came to visit?

38:30 How was it?

Yes.

I don't know.

Were you pleased that he'd come to visit you?

I don't know.

Or displeased, or you couldn't care less?

I don't know what my thoughts were that far back.

Were you getting news from home, were you getting letters?

Yes, my sister would write to me, and sometimes my

39:00 Grandmother and I'd get newspapers sent. My father wrote religiously every week, even if it was only just one page. I think he recalled his own time in the army and he probably reckoned that it was

39:30 a great help to keep that contact up.

Would you agree with him on that?

I appreciated what he did, surely. Because mail day was a big thing, everybody - the troops the officers the whole lot - you could almost see the jealously on

40:00 people's faces when the mail arrived and there wasn't nothing for them. Jealously was probably the wrong word to use, it was sort of, I can't quite describe it.

Longing, envy?

You've got to see it, it's hard to put it into words I find.

Tape 7

00:30 **We finished the Syrian campaign and you go back to North Africa, now are you still doing the same sort of work as in Syria?**

No, you see

01:00 generally you'd come into North Africa and Rommel was quite successful and he reached Tobruk and couldn't take it and so he proceeded to the border of Egypt. Which was about as far as he was prepared to stretch his supply line,

01:30 do you remember a thousand miles is a long way for a particular advance. He reached the border of Sollum and he couldn't take Tobruk because the Australians were holding out and then people who replaced them and Tobruk was being

02:00 replenished with ammunition and what not by the Royal Navy which was towing barges into Tobruk every night and taking them out by night. It about reached Sollum, which was the border if you like going into Tobruk by nightfall,

02:30 they towed in and then the ones that were emptied would be brought out and then would about reach Sollum again at dawn. We did a lot of escort of cover of these barges from the city of Sidi Haneish and for that purpose we developed the formation again which was called the

03:00 "weaving pairs formation", which was a little bit copied from the Germans in that the aircraft were in pairs but at different heights like this, and everyone was weaving, except the leader - he flew straight, someone had to know where they were going. We had the swingers one down there and one up there and we did a lot of this work. Sometimes the 109s

03:30 would come out but if we stayed out over the things that we were suppose to protect they would attack us, sometimes they did but generally they didn't. Sometimes there would be naval ships that we had to protect but you couldn't fly over them because the navy would shoot at anything that came over it. Because a ship took longer to produce

04:00 and it was more expensive than any airplane ever built. The navy or the "farmers" as we called them, were always suspicious, anyway that's nothing. Sometimes we'd do a patrol just a defensive patrol out past Tobruk and sometimes we'd escort bombers out on the bombing raid near Tobruk.

04:30 Gradually the British forces built up in strength, in the number of tanks they had and in about November I think, or a little earlier the

05:00 British mounted an operation called "Operation Crusader", I may have the date wrong but anyway towards the end of 1941. Their forces were stronger by this stage and also they had obtained

05:30 some special incendiary tank ammunition which meant their tanks were much more effective or could be more effective. 3 Squadron had a few of the longer servicing members sent home and we were getting new pilots from Australia.

You'd been had been there for a while by this stage, hadn't you?

06:00 I was getting towards my year. We weren't keeping them for more than a year. Eventually the British were able to push Rommel back and relieve Tobruk

06:30 and that meant that the 3 Squadron went to that aerodrome which I called El Adem, the one south of Tobruk which is I think now is the main Tobruk aerodrome, it's probably an airport in fact, and so we were operating from there. At the beginning of December

07:00 we were relieved for a week, to train up some new pilots and to get our aircrafts tanked up and I remember one night I was sitting out in the desert next to another chap on our

07:30 two-holed toilet, it was cold and the wind was blowing and we were out in the open and it was black as pitch. He said to me, "The doc has decided that six of us had to go home, we are going to be allowed to fly for another fortnight",

08:00 or another week, I've forgotten the time, "and if we're not relieved he is going to ground us", and he said, "If you're lucky enough not to be killed or shot down", he said, "I think you're going to be number six". I thought, "This is great, I've got a chance of going home". We went back into the desert,

08:30 or went back to El Adem and we reached a stage where we were getting short of pilots and so we were

taken off normal patrol operations and we were getting a lot of them because another force had been built up.

09:00 The air force was pretty strong and we were told there were two hundred fighters available for this particular advance, that's not bad, two hundred was good for the Middle East. We reached a stage where as I say we were a bit short of pilots and aircraft

09:30 so instead of having to patrol on a particular day, and if the date if you want it I can give it to you. Our squadron was put on the defensive of Tobruk area in other words we just had to sit on the ground and be prepared to go off as necessary. I was on the first shift from dawn to

10:00 midday and I came off the shift and went down to the Mess for lunch or something and I think it was Bobby Gibbs who came down to see me and he said, "We were rather short of pilots and we have got to do a patrol this afternoon, will you come out with us?",

10:30 I was C Flight but see Bobby was B Flight. I said, "All right". We took off about ten of us I think Nicky Bar says in his book, have you heard of Nicky Bar, I've got his book there anyway. I was reading it to refresh my mind and I was only doing it yesterday.

11:00 The job we had was to fly out as far as an aerodrome called El Martuba which is quite close to the Gulf of Bomba and it's getting up into Cyrenaica [Libya]

11:30 and I should point out that the weather had been wet.

That would have been rare wouldn't it?

No, you get tremendous rain there, the Germans were using the Martuba as their main aerodrome and they were flooded, I've got a book here by a chap called Hans Joachim Marseille and he later shot me down

12:00 and he was a famous German pilot [credited with 158 kills] and he had six victories before breakfast one day in the Middle East. The weather was moving westward so that it just about reached to Gulf of Bomba moving west. We were told that we were going out as less than squadron strength and

12:30 we'd do just one sweep over that area and we'd come home because we were going as less than a squadron. On the way out I could see streams of bombers coming back, streams of bombers escorted by fighters and every now and again you'd see 109s attacking them, but we were coming and we stayed well to one side. They wouldn't attack us

13:00 because we were just fighters and we weren't going to do any damage. We came in over the Gulf of Bomba and there we ran into wispy cloud, it was sort of darkish, the cloud wasn't darkish but because of all the cloud that was about. It was beautiful I don't know whether you've ever seen wispy cloud

13:30 but it's a bit of cloud and a bit of wisp there and it's glorious. We came over this El Martuba and we were told that there would be no fighters, the German air force would have gone right back to Benghazi. I had never seen so many aircraft on the ground in all my life. Have you ever looked down on top of an ants nest, not these little black ants but the big ones, we that's what it looked

14:00 like and I thought, "God, we lost a couple of blokes from the flight just getting in there", getting in that far because of the cloud and various other reasons. By this time I'd been leading the left hand section which normally four but it was down to one and we were down to myself at this stage.

14:30 Flying around a bit, eventually I nearly collided with a Tomahawk and a 109, I don't know which one was following which but I followed both of them anyway, and then eventually I saw another Tomahawk being chased by a 109 up there and I thought, "I've got to knock that 109 down", so I flew up towards him, and I

15:00 looked back and down there was another 109, really pulling down hard, it's a beautiful sight. Because of the atmospheric conditions and the fact that he was probably flying at maximum lift coefficient, you don't know what I'm talking about. Two beautiful silver streams coming of his wing tips, have you ever seen this?

I've seen vapour streams.

15:30 These are vortex streams from his wing tips, silver, beautiful and they'd go back about three or four aircraft lengths and then disappear. I won't give you a lesson on aerodynamics but anyway I looked at him and he fired and he had one of the new 109s, which had a canon firing through the centre of the airscrew spinner and I saw the beautiful rounds

16:00 going out like that, but back here you see. I told you that gravity is working at thirty three feet per second per second, and everything that you fire takes a path like that and I saw this beautiful stream and it was way underneath me and it wasn't going to hit me I thought, "He won't hit me", and I was aiming at these blokes and then he put another burst out and it still was a fair bit away from me but as it got

16:30 closer I could see that it was going to hit. I turned my head away and still trying to shoot at this bloke up here and all of a sudden I felt “thump, thump”, two close rounds had hit me.

So you knew that you’d been hit then?

Yes, my feet were knocked off the pedals and I will tell you more about it. I felt one round hit just under the tail plane

17:00 and it hit me and it caused me to slightly bunt and then the fourth round hit now I’ve got a model of an airplane there to show you. I had the canopy half way back and I didn’t have my goggles on because it was hard to see in the conditions. The canopy is half way back because I’d been flying partly in rain and I

17:30 wanted to be able to see out to the sides. The fourth round just hit the front bow and it put a little dent in it like that, and I will tell you why I know all this later. That round was a twenty millimetre that exploded on my head it was only about that far away from it and the hole there is gradually closed up, but various things happened all at once.

18:00 My head was filled with fragments, these two rounds burst the fuel lines of the engine and ignited the fuel which came up through the cockpit, so the cockpit is burning and my windscreen

18:30 was blown out, blown away from the top bow and fortunately it curled forward like this because it was held at the bottom. The other plate of glass in the front of the Tomahawk was separate from the windscreen, it was behind it because it was an afterthought from the Americans when they sold them to England.

19:00 By curling out by that, have you ever seen a ship’s bridge? Where they have something to keep the air going like that? I immediately knew that I’d have to get out because the airplane was burning so I went to undo my strap and pulled the pin out and at that instant I became unconscious,

19:30 just before I became unconscious, I thought, “Oh, thank goodness, I’ll be dead before I hit, I won’t feel it”, this was what I’d thought. I’m lying there and burning, and my face was just burning, cooking.

And you could feel this?

Only that much because I’ve got helmet down to there and a oxygen mask here with the microphone so my eyes and everything was cooking up here

20:00 and the flames were burning my gloves and I always wore leather gloves, so all that was happening was the gloves were shrinking a bit. Then all of a sudden I woke up, sorry, as this happened the stick had come back and the airplane had flicked and I was spinning, when I came to I became scared. I thought, “Geez, I’m not going

20:30 to be dead, I’m going to feel all of this”, and so I got out of the spin.

You’re still burning and you’re doing all this?

The flame was starting to die down because all that happened was that the fuel lines were cut and the explosion of the

21:00 explosive rounds had ignited the petrol but once that was finished the flame had gone out. I get the thing out of the spin, but my eyes, this eye was closed completely and this eye was closed but I managed to squeeze it open and I saw the Gulf of Bomba was out on my left so therefore I was heading south which was better than flying into the sea.

21:30 Then I realised I was going straight down, having come out of the spin I was still going down. I was only a couple thousand feet when I was hit so if I pulled it out, if I pulled the aircraft out of the dive I might not fly into the ground. I pulled it out of the dive and I still hadn’t hit the ground and my

22:00 eye had closed up, so I’m blind now but I can feel things and so I pulled the airplane up until it just started to reach it’s stalling speed, because you can feel all these things and then I put the nose down a little bit until it built up speed and then like that and eventually I felt the air scoop hit the ground and I just flattened it out and skidded to a stop. I tried to get out,

22:30 I hadn’t disconnected anything, I just had to get out of the cockpit and I tried to get out, but of course the hood was only half open so I was struck there and I had to get back and open the hood and disconnect the oxygen and the intercom lead and I got out with the parachute on

23:00 and stood beside the airplane and tried to open this eye a little bit with my glove and look around, and I couldn’t see anything and it was getting pretty close to dark. I couldn’t hear, I was deafened from this explosion, which had just happened up here I couldn’t hear.

23:30 My next reaction was to take my helmet off, and of course when I took my helmet off immediately there was a mass of blood flowing everywhere and I thought, “God, now I’ll bleed to death, I’ve got to the ground and now I’m going to bleed to death”. I always flew with a yellow silk scarf and I took it off and wound it around my head, you might think that’s a funny thing to do but my reason

24:00 was if the blood just piles up inside at the top of it, it would self-congeal and would stop me from bleeding. These were thoughts and I'd found a twist at this stage. Then I thought, "I cant see anybody coming for me, I might as well as see if I can walk home".

24:30 This would have been a long walk of course. I had in mind that the army, this was an advance by the army, so the army was still going to come up towards where I was and if I could walk towards where they were coming from we might meet up and I'd be right. I opened the hatch in

25:00 the rear of the fuselage where there was a container was I suppose had rations in it and should have had a tin of bully beef and a block of chocolate and a pack or two of dog biscuits.

25:30 That doesn't sound very appetising. The bully beef was the highest quality of beef that you could have, it had been canned in Argentina in World War I, believe it or not and it was beautiful, because I'd had it before at another stage. The chocolate was a block, about

26:00 three or four inches square and about half an inch thick, and you needed a hammer to break a little chip off it, but it was the sweetest chocolate that I've ever tasted in my life. The dog biscuits are the most nutritious, have you ever had them? Nutritious, they're marvellous, the only trouble is

26:30 you need a hammer to break a piece off. I put these into my battle dress, I didn't have the meat the troops had pinched that or someone had pinched it but I did have the dog biscuits and the chocolate. I thought, "No one's come out to pick me up so I might as well as see which way to walk". By now it

27:00 was dark and I tried to squint up at the stars through one eye, I didn't recognise the stars and I didn't know what to do and I didn't know which way to walk. The pain of this burning was so severe that I could only walk into wind and the wind was coming from the east so that meant if I walked in that direction I was right.

27:30 So after a couple of hours, things were just getting too much for me and fortunately I wasn't wearing flying boots, the fur lined ones, I was wearing desert boots. Because we'd been told that the fur lined flying boots would get sweat in them and you couldn't walk far because they'd just break up, so we'd thrown them aside and we didn't fly in them.

28:00 It was getting cold, I could feel the cold because I'd taken my gloves off and poked them into my pocket and I thought, "I've got to stop, I've got no water", and that was another things that was missing from the pack. "I've got no water and I'm thirsty

28:30 and I'm tired, I've got to stop". So I walked until I ran into a rather big thicket and at that stage I thought I'll open one of the maps that I was carrying and I'll put it into one of the smallish bushes

29:00 and it might catch some dew. Then because I'm so cold, I'll pull the parachute and I'll sleep in the silk. Well that was all right accept I wasn't getting any water, and I couldn't stop I just had to keep moving to keep a little bit of

29:30 a draft. I started to walk and at dawn I was in a fairly open area and again all I could see was out of one eye and I'm still deaf, but been careful to look around all the time. All of a sudden over on the rise

30:00 I saw a German scout car, and it had stopped and it was stationary. It must have been that the people on it must have been looking at me. I hadn't said that what I was doing, was carrying my parachute over my shoulder, and it's pulled open and a bundle of white stuff and I stopped

30:30 and I then took about two minutes to shrink from standing to about that, because the camel thorn bushes are about that high you see. I think that the Germans must've thought that I was an Arab, at that distance in a brown battle dress and this white thing over my shoulder and my head was so dark and if they had glasses on me

31:00 they may have thought that I was an Arab, just one of them just wondering around. Eventually they moved off, so I kept moving in that direction. It must have been about midday and I came over a rise and there was a small stream and I thought ,"I'll get some liquid here",

31:30 so I went down and I stood in the stream and the water was only about that deep, but it was mainly puddles. I saw then, because I could smell, I saw then that it was a bit foamy and it had a funny look and not much of a nice smell.

32:00 It was about this time that on the other bank an Arab had appeared with a rifle pointing at me and remembering the opening the opening words of my gooly chip, do you know what that is? I'll tell you in a moment. I said something

32:30 which in Arabic was an English flying officer, and it goes on, "If you look after me and get me back to my people you will get one hundred golden sovereigns". That's what I could read, and there was also the same thing in Arabic, in Arabic print that's what I mean. So he indicated to me that I was to climb the bank to were he was

33:00 and he took, and I still had my revolver and webbing belt on and he indicated that he wanted that and I

gave it to him, because I knew that I couldn't do anything else. He opened the revolver, which was wrapped in an oily rag to keep the sand out, and he saw that it was English, I'll tell you why that's

33:30 important. He indicated that he'd look after me in one way or another. I discovered that just over the top of this bank was a big patch of ground about one hundred yards square which was cleared of camel thorn, there were piles of camel thorn around the boundary and

34:00 he and two other people were planting a crop. This was going to be a crop, because the rains had past through there and the ground was a bit soft. I could see that he wanted the one hundred golden sovereigns and he was going to look after me. So he took me over to the edge of the field and pulled away some of the camel thorn bush, a big bush of camel thorn and it was about this high

34:30 and pushed me under there and he got a blanket which he threw over me, and then threw the camel thorn over me and I stayed there until late in the afternoon.

You must have been in terrible pain?

Yes, I was in pain, I suppose I was in pain, but I realised he was my only hope of salvation.

35:00 Anyway, late in the afternoon he pulled me out of the camel thorn bush and took me up to a rise, which was a rocky rise a sort of round crop of rock and they had a dish in it. The other two Arabs were there and they were cooking. What they had was I had my

35:30 my arms around and they were going to serve you and they had a bowl about that size which they got from somewhere because in those days we rarely had wooden bowls, we only had field dishes but this was a wooden bowl and they cooked up a mass of macaroni or something like that. They probably got this from

36:00 looted Italian stores. They had this and I'm sitting over here and the three of them were sitting there and they started to eat and then they beckoned me over and they divided this mess, this bowl of macaroni into four and they indicated that one fourth was for me.

36:30 In those days I didn't realise that the Arabs used their right hand to eat, you knew this, fortunately, I use my right hand. Then night came on and I suppose it must have been about

37:00 nine, ten or eleven and the night was as black as anything. This fellow who had picked me up then took me down to the flat where they had been preparing to plant their crop and there was a baby camel. I could sense all this because I could feel things.

37:30 That's why the water was so polluted, they had this camel. He indicated that I was to get on the camel behind him, the camel's kneeling and he hops onto it and he indicated that I was to get on behind and hold him because you've seen the shape of a camel, you've got his neck there and then you'd come up to a hump and it slides down to his tail, and I was to sit on this sliding bit

38:00 and holding him like that. That camel was a bit bright, it was prepared to carry one, but not prepared to carry two. He couldn't get it to stand on its feet. So eventually he indicated that I was to hand on with my hands like that around the hump and my legs were spread out over the backside. That way he took me through the Germans lines that night.

38:30 Now and again he stop and he'd walk away and he'd indicate to the camel to keep walking and now and again I could hear noises and eventually the chap would come together again with the camel and I must have been asleep half of the time, and I didn't quite know what was happening.

39:00 A couple of hours before dawn perhaps the camel gave a grunt and fell to its belly and I just fell off. I'm lying on the ground and my body had seized from the navel down. I'm lying on the ground with my legs up in the air, because I had no feel from here down and I'd just

39:30 seized up from a result of sitting on this camel.

Tape 8

00:30 A couple of fellows carried me into a tent, it was a tent that belonged to this chief Arab I've been talking about and his wife. He and his wife spread a carpet on the desert floor

01:00 and he had some other carpets and he indicated to me to lie down there on it, and gradually I was getting a bit of blood back into my legs, and I could straighten them out a bit. Then his wife laid down a little bit away from and he got in between his wife and me

01:30 and his rifle, I don't know whether he had the rifle between himself and me or between himself and his wife, then they pulled up this other carpet and at that stage I discovered that those carpets had the biggest fleas in them that I'd ever seen.

02:00 They must've been about that big and they started to bite and that just sent me out. In the morning when I woke up and they started to feed me, and I cant even remember what I ate. The Arab pointed out that the Germans had moved through their camp during the night,

02:30 and he pointed and said, "That corner", and you'd see it and you were outside the tent and you could see the tank tracks, on the corner of his tent, and we were this far away from it, I didn't wake up for that, but he knew it. I stayed a couple of days there, I'd have to look at my diary to get these things right. Eventually,

03:00 I think it was the same day, he took me up to the rim of this depression in which the camp was it was quite a big camp I can assure you, I don't know how many tents but it was what I would call a big camp. He indicated that he was going to show me the Germans, and he managed to talk to me somehow, but I can't quite remember how. He said "I'll show them to you",

03:30 and he put a big Arab burnoose onto me and took me up to the edge of the depression and again I've still only got one eye slightly open. He said, "Over there", and I couldn't see a thing, I mean with one eye.

You had had no treatment for your eyes by now?

I had none of the vision

04:00 that these desert dwellers had, and so I came back. When I came back I saw a bloke in English battle dress. I looked at him and thought, "Geez, I don't know what this is', and it turned out that he had been a driver of one of the long range desert group trucks that had

04:30 been unfortunately waylaid when they had gone up to attack some part of the Germans up in that area. He'd been picked up by the Arabs, he'd escaped and he come south to where the Arabs were and they'd taken him in. He was going to be paid for by the British when he got back. So they had this bloke

05:00 I wouldn't have been surprised they hadn't had a German as well and they would've got some money from the Germans too. The pair of us were there and the next day the Arab let me walk around the camp a bit, and I was starting to feel a little bit better, but I didn't have the burning pains still around here, I've still got this scarf on looking like death warmed up.

05:30 As I walked around the camp, I came to a tent which had an awning out the front of it, typically Arab, they had a tent and then they have an awning for outside seating. There was a carpet on the ground and sitting on this carpet was a young women

06:00 whose age I wouldn't know, but she was certainly into her middle teens. Barefooted and she smiled at me, didn't laugh she just smiled.

06:30 God, I can see it now. Not a smile of pity, a sheer smile of sheer friendship. One of the most beautiful women I've ever met, and ever seen in my life. So I sat down and watched her and I was told by again this fellow who had picked me up

07:00 that the tribe was moving west hoping that the army would keep going west because she was betrothed to a fellow from another tribe who were in the west, and when they got there she was to be married. Whether he trusted me or not, I don't know, eventually a very old Arab

07:30 found his way into where we were and he sat down and I think he was just acting as a chaperone, god that women was beautiful. With in a couple of days the army got far enough west and I

08:00 was put on a donkey, and the whole tribe came out and here we were joining up with the army, they were going to hand me over to the army. An armoured car came up and I hopped off and I said, "I want to get back to my squadron", and the bloke looked at me, and I think he was going to shoot me over that and he asked me another couple of questions

08:30 and he said, "Right-o, hang on", and I'm on the side of this armoured car hanging onto the aerial. The aerial was spring-loaded and this great big aerial and it was swinging like this at the truck and it was bouncing and swaying like this. A bit later he handed me over to the contingent of doctors and there were about twelve doctors, in this bit of the army

09:00 which was the 7th Indian Division, all Indian troops, wonderful but they were white doctors. They wanted to attend to me, I said, "Oh no, no see you", I was going to eat with them at night,

09:30 and you wouldn't believe this, but the army was going to settle down for the night and the doctors stopped on a bit of a rise and I watched the troops coming forward and then all of a sudden a group of ambulances, and there must have been, I wouldn't know how many, if I say six I could be wrong, it could

10:00 be ten, they came up together. They were surrounded by a square of these Indians, great bearded characters in trucks. I was standing on the rise with one of the doctors and said, "Why are you protecting all those ambulances?", and he said

10:30 "Where do you think we keep the explosive tank ammunition?" As it got dark, the doctor's servants set

up a table, out in the open and set up a table with a white table cloth and chairs came out, beautiful padded chairs, polished

11:00 glasses on the table and the places were set with silver. We dined, we could have been in the grandest hotel. When these doctors wanted to relieve themselves they would whistle up one of the Indian servants and he'd have a little folding seat and a shovel and then go out into the desert and dig

11:30 a hole and he'd plonk himself down, I'll tell you they were living like kings. The next morning the doctors indicated to me that there would be a truck going back to where I wanted to go, back towards Tobruk and they said, "We've got to have an early breakfast, you have breakfast later". I was waiting in the Mess tent, and it was a big tent that was set up, a beautiful tent, and it was a Mess tent for all the officers

12:00 to eat in. An old character came out of another tent and came inside and he had a few tabs and things on and it didn't mean much to me, all I wanted to do was to get back to the squadron. I sat down and had breakfast with him and he asked me who I was and what I was, and I was sore now and sorry

12:30 and a bit bloody naïve and I started to tick the army off. Me telling the General what I thought was going on, I can laugh now when I think about it, but it was bloody childish. Then later after breakfast they put me into a truck it was going back with an equipment officer back towards Tobruk where I wanted to go

13:00 that was where I thought I had to go. This was a brand new Ford truck, not a pickup truck but three-toner or something, brand spanking new. We did four tyres in about three miles, the Yanks were palming off onto the Brits the most rubbishy stuff and of course they were making a fortune out of it, not really because I think the

13:30 jeeps during the war use to cost about ten dollars or something, or ten pounds it may have been. Eventually we got back to the squadron and got to El Adem Aerodrome and there was some of the squadron, the doctor and a few other people

14:00 and they asked me what had been happening, and I said I'd been shot down and had had all these experiences and so the doc said, "Let's have a look at you", and I've still got this bandage and thing on and I had a little medical pack

14:30 the Arabs had given back my webbing with the revolver and the little medical pack. Immediately the doctor opened it and said, "Have you been taking any morphine?", because we had two little morphine pills if you couldn't stand the pain and you could give yourself a needle, but that was all that he was interested in and he said, "Have you taken any of that morphine?", and I gave it to him and he said, "That's good".

15:00 I remember I got out of my uniform and I used another uniform and sort of washed myself a little bit and then he got a basin, a metal basin they were in those days and he started to wash me, and I've got my head of this basin and I could hear 'dink, dink, dink', there was all these bits of metal

15:30 coming out of the congealed blood. Then he washed me and then put Tanafax on my burns. Tanafax was the recognised method for treating burns, it's a greasy substance and it dries hard, and it's the worst thing that can happen. It causes the flesh underneath it to

16:00 rot and you know to just put pressure on this great big scab over my eyes. It used to send me mad almost. Then he said, "We've got to get you right, because Wolfy is going to be married", he was going to marry Lucille in the cathedral in Alexandria. Wolfy was

16:30 Wolf Arthur, you've probably never heard of Wolf, he was a very famous fighter pilot in 3 Squadron and by New Guinea and he died just a couple of years ago up in Darwin.

17:00 Lucille was a Greek Armenian, beautiful, a beautiful lass, she was only about eighteen or nineteen when Wolf married her. Wolfy was only about a year older than I. The doc was to be his best man and they had wanted me to be at the wedding because

17:30 as the doc pointed out that it was suppose to be my last flight, and I should not have been on it, but it was the last day and I'd only gone because they were short of pilots. Wolfy, after I'd been missing had been doing patrols on his own looking for me and to see what might've happened. They managed to get me down to Alexandria and

18:00 we were staying in the Cecil Hotel, on top of the Ottoman Bank anyway, do you know it?

No.

It was owned by an old, a very old French woman who had been a prostitute all her life, and she made enough money and she'd brought these two or three levels.

So, you'd got to the wedding though?

18:30 They held it up, until the doc had managed to get me into the church and I became Wolfy's best man.

What about your injuries, I'm intrigued, when were your injuries properly treated?

The doctor's looked after me, he'd come back to Alex when I went back there.

19:00 I was gradually getting better and after it was discovered that this Tanafax was doing me harm, they broke the scab, I don't have to tell you this, but it caused a massive pus and everything came out and then I was starting to get better, to heal from all of that.

You must have been very healthy?

19:30 You couldn't be anything else out there. Then I stayed on the houseboat on Gezira Island for a couple of weeks before we could get a ship back home. The doc said to me, "What I can do is say that you returned to the squadron uninjured and

20:00 you can come home with me and Wolf and a couple of other blokes", and one of them was the CO of the squadron who had been my flight commander. "Or, I can say that you are injured and indicate what your injuries are and you can go home on the hospital ship". I'd been living with these blokes for twelve months, I said, "No, I would like to go home with you".

20:30 Well, it was the worst thing that I've done, because according to Veterans' Affairs this never happened to me, even though at one stage I had a series of x-rays and there are still bits of shrapnel in my head, and the doctors reckon that there is nothing wrong with me. Well, how little they know of course, I'm around the twist.

That's

21:00 **extraordinary, isn't it?**

Look I'm holding you up.

No, no not at all.

Are you prepared to go on for a little bit longer?

Yes, certainly because we want to get you home and up to your next posting?

At this stage.

How were you greeted when you got back to your squadron, some of this harrowing experience for about a week hadn't you all up?

I was away for ten days,

21:30 or eight or something like that. Wolfy was married on the 23rd December or the 25th December, It may have been the 23rd, yes I was

22:00 away for about eight or nine days.

So they went home with you?

I came home with the doc.

Had your family known anything about this, they wouldn't have, would they?

Yes, a telegram was sent that I was missing, and another telegram when I got back. The services were good that way, they were very good.

When you got home then, well obviously

22:30 **you came home by ship, you were able to recuperate a bit?**

Yes, I probably had a little bit of leave. Australia then had just been invaded through New Guinea, not Australia but New Guinea had been invaded.

23:00 They were trying to form their first squadrons, the fighters, to operate out of Moresby and also my CO who I originally I called the signaller had come home, he'd been sent home a little bit ahead of when I came. To reorganise the defences of Singapore, because

23:30 Air Chief Marshall [Arthur] Tedder [AOC Mediterranean] reckoned that his knowledge and experience of warfare in the desert was unique, and so because of Tedder he was sent to Singapore. But Singapore fell, so he came back to Australia and he formed the 75 Squadron the first one into New Guinea, and the 76 Squadron the second one and only formed them then handed them over to their

24:00 commanding officers. He then formed the number 2 OTU, which was the fighter operation training unit at Port Pirie, we then managed to persuade the air force to give us five Kittyhawks which we picked up and flew from a paddock between the Ford factory and the International Harvester factory down at Geelong.

24:30 I don't know whether you've ever seen it, but it's a tiny little spot. These airplanes had been assembled

but had never been test flown, and to add it to which we had only flown a Kittyhawk once in the Middle East, so we were a bit new. We took them to Port Pirie and a couple of weeks later we went to Mildura which was built

25:00 as an OTU, just being built. It was pretty rough and no hot water and the mess had a floor in the dining room but elsewhere the floor hadn't been built. We use to sit on the floor beams at night talking and drinking by the light of kerosene lamps,

25:30 and particularly talking because at that stage we just received some people from England.

At what point did you move up to Darwin?

I didn't go to Darwin for another couple of years because I was an instructor at Mildura for a while and then I

26:00 had a job with the headquarters in Melbourne and then I went around various units comparing what they did and what they did was use to the people in the OTU and then I was sent to Jackson in Mississippi, as a

26:30 representative with the Dutch Flying Training School. From there I was posted to Darwin, and then I came back from Darwin and I went to Mildura again and I was at Mildura until the end of the war.

How long were you up in Darwin?

About a year.

So you had a very long war?

It was all right.

27:00 **Where were you then when war ended?**

Mildura.

What was your reaction, to the news that war was over?

It was a relief but then I was left to wonder what I would do, whether I would try to remain in the air force or if I got out, what sort of work I'd do.

27:30 But I was fortunate that before the war I'd spent two years sailing with a bloke, I think I told you this, who was the engineer of Lysaghts Wiredrawing Works in Sydney. During the war he had an uncle who I think was a rubber planter in Malaya,

28:00 and he left him a bit of money which he'd spent buying steel plates, about this by that and about an eighth of an inch thick or perhaps it may have been a little bit more. He had designed for himself a steel yacht, but much bigger than the one that he'd been sailing.

28:30 Because he worked at Lysaghts, he was able to obtain some very good welders from there who helped him built this new yacht. He then was interested in the air league and so that he could sail his yacht,

29:00 he used it to train young kids in the air league about sailing, he was a cunning fellow.

You didn't remain a pilot did you?

Oh no, I left the air force. There was an article in one of the local papers about the Spitfire squadrons and our squadron and my name was mentioned.

29:30 Having seen that, he wrote me a letter and he said that he had this yacht and things like that. When I left the air force I use to sail with him on the yacht, just he and I. Occasionally he use to take out the daughter of a family who lived nearby. This family they were strict,

30:00 they didn't believe in drinking and smoking and all of this, but the girl liked to dress up. She was only young about my age, so she use to come over to Merv's place and Merv would take her sailing with me.

At what point did you marry?

30:30 Long after that, after I'd left the university, long after that. When I was sailing, Merv used to say, "What are you going to do now that you are out of the air force?", and I said, "I don't know", and I said, "Can you give me any recommendations?", and Merv had gone to Sydney University and I think he was

31:00 a civil engineer, he may have been a mechanical engineer. He said, "Why don't you go to university and study something, study aeronautical engineering". I said, "All right", so I applied to do engineering through the CRTS, the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. The Commonwealth after the war

31:30 was putting so many people through university. I applied and they said, "We can't investigate you properly, go to the university and start sitting in on engineering lectures", I did this for about a fortnight. Then I came out and I said, "Look, it's a bit hard, my mind is just not

32:00 conditioned to study, yet", and they said "Look, if you want you can put it off for a year", and I said, "That's good, I'll do some private study and I pay for some lessons from various people", which I did. Then I went back to the university after a year's break. I didn't past the first year, I failed in a couple of subjects which they let me take

32:30 again while I did some of the subjects for the second year. It took me an extra year to get through uni. Then I decided to study aero engineering which they reckoned was about the hardest course there was and in fact the first year, I think there had been about thirty graduates and the year I went though

33:00 the numbers had dropped off and I think we had about six or eight.

But you got through?

Yes, well I think they were a bit generous with ex-service people. Yes, I got though. Mind you I thought that engineering was hard because I had to

33:30 attend five days a week, in my early years and I had to attend two nights a week and we worked until nine o'clock, and that was mainly in engineering drawing, and I worked every Saturday morning. Because I had to do more technical things because my name was a T,

34:00 back at the end of the list again. My name started with a T, I did blacksmithing and boiler making. That seems funny for an aero student but I learnt a lot that way because we had teachers who'd been a foreman at the BHP steelworks works at Newcastle. These fellows were not just people who taught us technical things, they taught us a lot about other things. For instance, I remember

34:30 one of them said to us when we were doing blacksmithing, he said, "If you fellows graduate, be a giver, be givers don't just be takers, be useful for your country".

You had been, during your period with the RAAF anyway?

Yes, but that didn't mean a thing to them because they didn't know that, but I thought

35:00 that they were very good teachers. I enjoyed the work and in fact the professor of our engineering was a chap who'd been specially brought out from England when they formed the aeronautical research laboratories here.

That's where you went to work, wasn't it?

Yes, I went there later. He'd been especially brought out from England to form the aero department at Sydney University.

35:30 He had been working at Farmborough at England at the Royal Aircraft establishment. He had been on the committee which had investigated Whittle, the man who built the jet engines and when he was listening to Whittle he told us and he was quite prepared to do this,

36:00 he said "I told Whittle, he was a bloody idiot", but he was a keen sailor, and oh geez you had to sail with him otherwise you didn't pass your exams.

Tape 9

00:30 **I'd just like to ask you a few general questions about your war experiences, what affect do you think that your war experiences had on the rest of your life?**

01:00 I don't know.

Did you ever dream about the war?

No, the only dream that I ever had that I recall was about a month before I was shot down and I dreamt that I was on fire.

01:30 Then I woke up and I thought, "Well, that's just a dream I'm not going to die by being burnt", but that goes back into 1941. The affect of the war on my life, I suppose it's been I'm relatively convinced that I can be happy without being

02:00 very wealthy and I'm not really interested in making a lot of money but that doesn't mean anything, really. I'm happy that I've known people and that I like people, almost loved them I suppose you might say.

02:30 **Do you think that it was a just war?**

No war is just. There is only two things that causes a country to go to war, and I suppose you've been told this many times and many people would say the same thing. Wars are only fought over

03:00 commerce, trade or territory, I think that's

03:30 all. When you think back over war.

Religion, I suppose.

Religion that was the other thing that, I meant to say religion because there are so many different religions in the world. You've only got to think how perhaps the Anglicans react to Muslims, how

04:00 the Jews react, I've known Jews. In fact when I was at ARL there were two of them and they were magnificent people, generous but again they have different beliefs to us, those two tops ones are of no use to you but it's the ones down there that might.

04:30 When I went to ARL I had to work for a bloke called Fred David, Fred David was a Jew, he was an Austrian, a brilliant man he'd done aero engineering in Warsaw or somewhere,

05:00 Freddy was an aerodynamicist too. Another Jew I worked for there at odd times was a structural man and it was through him that I did so much work at Woomera, my next door neighbour was a Jew and he was the one that got me my initial jobs. The Jews that I spoke to in Palestine

05:30 were curious and they didn't try to do you in, and don't let me insult you, within our own area, are either of you Roman Catholics?

I'm not.

Well if you are, I'll will say this anyway, I have found that Roman Catholics tend

06:00 to be a bit wary of Anglicans and I say that for this reason, when I went to ARL I replaced a bloke and he was an ex-air force bloke but he joined quite late in World War II. He had been running the low speed wind tunnel but he was going to move into the high speed tunnel and I was to take his place in the low speed tunnel.

06:30 He was a Roman Catholic and he had a great friend who was in the mechanical engineering division who was a Roman Catholic also, that friend got the job as ARL representative, or department of supply rep with the air force,

07:00 aircraft supply. He left and this bloke from the tunnel took his place. I did apply for the same position but I didn't get it,

07:30 not for a position but I didn't get it. This bloke that had been working in the high speed tunnel under Arthur Bennett. Replaced Arthur in the air force now that was three of them with the same religion who were in that line and to me I'm Anglican

08:00 and I told you I went to this Anglican church but since being married I haven't been inside a church. This is one of the things that worried me.

Just getting back to the war, are your memories of the war, are they the strongest memories that you have?

Some of the ARL stuff is.

08:30 Another thing I was going to say about this was when I was at Mildura we had a lot a different sections with an adjutant in each one. Pete Jeffery who had been my CO in the Middle East and was from Mildura use to have to write a report on each officer every three months for promotional purposes. The adjutants of the different

09:00 sections had to write a report on their own staff, not commissioned officers but their own workers, for promotion. The boss discovered, that's Pete Jeffery, he discovered after a while that the fellows who didn't have the same ability in his opinion nor the background, but some of the people from his

09:30 squadron had, fellows who'd come home were being specially recommended over and above these fellows that the boss knew that were very good. He went into this and discovered that all those adjutants were Roman Catholics and all the people that they recommended were Roman Catholics so he had all the adjutants moved out just like that. At the end of the

10:00 war, all units were told to have a sort of a thanksgiving service, and we all lined up in parade and there was going to be a few words for thanksgiving by the priest, but not for the Roman Catholics, they had to fall out. I was amazed they fell out but they didn't want

10:30 to. That's what I mean about religion, it's unfortunate and I think religion is one of the things that can break up society so easily. I merely say that I think it will happen, or that it does happen that way,

11:00 not that I despise people for it, that's how they think fare enough they are entitled to think. They've got brains between their ears then that's the way they think, well fair enough.

Do you think you received adequate acknowledgement for your contribution to the war?

Yes, well

11:30 what acknowledgement do I need, yes of course. There is nothing special about me, no I think I've been well served by it. I belong to Veterans' Affairs and I've got a gold pass now and I've got free

12:00 medical attention, I have no complaints I think I'm much better off than a lot of people, I have no complaints.

Is there anything else then that you would like to say about your war experiences that we haven't covered?

No, not really.

Do you consider yourself brave?

No.

12:30 **Or what about others that you served with?**

Bravery is a hard thing to describe. This friend of mine who I was saying that married the lass in Egypt. Now Wolfy I think in one of the first fights that the squadron had was

13:00 shot down out of his Gladiator. He had to leave the airplane, he tried to get out but he failed to disconnect his oxygen tube. The oxygen tube in those days was a rubber tube of about that diameter but it was a very thick tube and he broke it. The top wing folded back on him and he broke the tube

13:30 and he pushed his way out through the fabric of the wing and got out by parachute. People later tried to break that tube, and they couldn't, he must've used some superhuman strength that you just get, it just happens. Fear is something that occurs at a particular

14:00 time, it maybe due to something that you've heard or something that happens, or something that you might think happened. As you asked me before were you afraid before when you saw enemy aircraft, and I said only when you couldn't see them, when you're in a

14:30 fight you weren't scared, you were just intent on bringing about a particular happening. You weren't scared, or at least I wasn't and I can't think of anybody else who was, or who mentioned it anyway. It's just part of the human build I guess.

On that note, we'd like to thank you very much

15:00 **for spending all this time talking about your war experiences, we'd like to thank you very very much.**