Australians at War Film Archive

David Nesbitt - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:31 **Good morning David, lets start today's interview by asking where and when you were born?**

I was born in Grenfell in New South Wales on the 15th of January 1922.

Can you tell me where Grenfell is?

01:00 It's in the Riverina.

Was it a large centre?

No it's a small country town. It was situated in the wheatbelt, and some sheep.

And did you stay in Grenfell for long?

No I don't remember being there it was just where I was born.

Where did you do most of your growing up?

01:30 In Sydney. And Newcastle, but in the reverse order. I grew up in Newcastle until the age of twelve and then the family moved to Sydney, so I have been in Sydney then since I was thirteen.

You started your schooling then in Newcastle?

Yes.

What was your father doing at the time?

02:00 Yes, was a Presbyterian minister at St Andrews Presbyterian Church.

And what was the minister doing in Grenfell?

He was the country minister in the district.

And your mother?

My mother, she was a trained nurse when he met her and they married, and I

02:30 was the result of that union.

Did she continue nursing?

No.

Did you have any siblings?

No, I am an only son and an only child.

What do you remember of the depression?

Well we were living in Newcastle at the time and my memories are very graphic.

03:00 I can remember dole queues stretching down the Main Street, Hunter Street in Newcastle, every Monday morning for about two miles. They used an old engine shed, railway engine shed, where the actual office was. And you passed through that to get your dole.

03:30 And that is a graphic image in my mind of the depression. Everybody, children I mean, mostly wore bare feet. To have a pair of shoes people would actually stare at you, you know as you walked past.

What impact did the depression have on your family?

04:00 Well my father he was the Presbyterian minister and he was involved with parts of the direct work

connected with the church. He was involved in a lot of welfare and youth programs, trying to get work for boys that had just left school, and other people that were out of work. He was connected

04:30 with a lot of food distribution, stuff like that. I remember we had people coming to the door asking for money. You know fellows that were on the road. Tramps as they were called in those days, they were really good fellows out of work.

05:00 You know transiting Australia looking for a job. We didn't have any money, but my families policy was that nobody was ever turned away and my mother used to offer them a meal. So they always got something to eat. The times were so desperate that it was down to that.

05:30 **And did you always have something to eat?**

Yes.

What deprivations did you feel at the time?

Well I didn't feel any because I was conscious of what was taking place. But I didn't feel any because I was young and I had playmates in the street and in the district. And we didn't live far from the beach.

06:00 So my needs were taken care of, you know I had a loving family. And I had a warm bed at night. So my needs were minimal for those times any rate, and I didn't personally feel any deprivation. But I was conscious of what was going on around me.

06:30 **Were the few years you had spent very young in Grenfell, had they left a mark of the country on you?**

No because we left Grenfell when I was probably about three, so I don't have any conscious memory of Grenfell.

Grown up as a city kid?

Yes.

07:00 **How was the move from Newcastle to Sydney?**

Well I was sent down from Newcastle to Sydney to Knox Grammar School, which is a big Presbyterian school as a boarder and the family followed me a year later. So that's how my transition from Newcastle to Sydney took place.

07:30 **What was that one year on your own like?**

Oh well I was a boarder at Knox Grammar School so I was in a school of about three hundred and fifty fellows at that stage. So I had plenty of similar company.

And how long did you remain at school?

I stayed there until I matriculated.

08:00 And the family moved to Sydney after I had been there a year and I became what they called a day boy. The family moved to Lindfield and I used to travel by the train each day to school with a lot of other fellows and return home by train.

Had you missed your family while

08:30 **away for that one year?**

Oh yes, I was initially very homesick. And I found the discipline pretty hard, very strict. But it stood me in good stead later on.

At the time you finished schooling,

09:00 **how close was the war to breaking out?**

About a year. Eighteen months.

What plans or dreams did you have for your life when you had finished school?

09:30 Well my dreams were when I left school were how often I could surf. But I realised that I would be required to do other things, further studies to get anywhere,

10:00 but I wasn't quite sure what I wanted to do. So I got a job with an insurance company. Which was a fire and accident, workers compensation. And that's what I did up until the time I enlisted. I was doing the insurance student examinations

10:30 and I was in the early stages of that when the war broke out. And that took me up until the time I enlisted.

Had any family members or relatives been involved in the First World War?

Yes. My one of my

11:00 fathers brother, my father, and my mothers three brothers. So in the generation preceding me there were five men on both sides of the family involved in the First World War.

What tales or impressions had you received of their experiences?

11:30 Well initially they didn't talk very much about it. So it was difficult to pick up any detail, I understood later you know, why they didn't discuss it generally. They talked about it amongst themselves, and anything that I heard was usually where I

12:00 overheard a conversation where they were talking amongst themselves. But I realised that even though I was a small boy and a boy growing up that whilst there was a sense of adventure there it was pretty horrific. And I remember hearing, when I was living in Newcastle, a lady saying

12:30 the steelworks used to roll steel at night, and if it extruded the hot steel that gave the noise like thunder. Boom boom boom boom boom. And she said that it reminded her husband of the shelling in France, and he got the shakes as a result of that. It brought back his memories.

13:00 And it was one of the memories that stayed with me from what I had heard from the First World War. But other than that I'd seen photo's and so forth and so on, and I realised what trenches looked like and steel helmets. And one of my uncles was in the Light Horse in Palestine and he had some photos of that so I was able to

13:30 pick up on what it looked like any rate.

Well I see, to a young boy seeing those images must have provoked your own mental images. What did you think of war as a young boy?

Well I realised that it was pretty horrific

14:00 but it didn't play a dominant part in my thought process because I was more interested in the surf and football and cricket and trying to do my homework. So I guess I was involved to a large extent in my own life, but I was still conscious of what had happened.

14:30 **How significant was Anzac Day to you growing up?**

Well it played a part in my life because of the involvement of my father and his brother and my mothers brothers. And I was a cub in Newcastle, which was my first experience of Anzac Day and we used to march

15:00 in the Anzac Day march or parade in the kind of Boy Scout movement. So I was aware of what took place and what was happening. And we marched up the main street of Newcastle which was Hunter Street. And up to a place called Kings Park, where they held a memorial service, and it was well attended, you know it was a big day in Newcastle.

15:30 So those are my early memoires of Anzac Day.

How well did you appreciate what it meant to the diggers marching?

Say again.

How much did you appreciate what it meant to for instance your family members?

I could see that it meant a lot and it was very important to them.

16:00 Having the involvement of five male family members in the First World War and they always observed it, and my family did. There was always a memorial service in my father's church before the Anzac Day march, so the involvement was

16:30 fairly comprehensive. Even at an early age.

And you said your father had been involved?

Yes.

What was his part?

He was a late enlistment in the army. My fathers brother he had joined up earlier and

17:00 so had my mothers brothers.

And had he gone overseas to serve?

My father? No. He was late enlistment, he was fairly young compared to my uncles.

In that period leading up to

17:30 **the Second World War, you were working at the insurance company, what ideas were you getting of the approaching conflict?**

Well I was conscious of what was happening at school, which took me up amongst other fairly close to the outbreak of the war.

18:00 We had an Englishman on the staff and he used to hold, during one of our history classes he would devote about one period a week to mainly current affairs. And we were well briefed by him on what was happening.

18:30 The advent of the Nazis in Germany and the policies of appeasement that were being followed. The occupation of the Rhineland, and what else? The

19:00 German occupation of Austria and the betrayal of Czechoslovakia by the British and the French. So I was well conscious and the fellows in my class were as a result of this kind of modern history period that we had once a week. Wand we had other history periods during the week.

19:30 So I was fairly well briefed if, you could say on what was happening and what might happen.

It certainly sounds like it. Can you say that you had a grasp on what might happen?

Yes. And I got that mainly

20:00 from school. And it carried me on through the year I was working too, with the insurance company before I joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force].

In that sense then how much of a surprise was the outbreak of war for you?

It wasn't completely surprising because of my

20:30 being well acquainted and well briefed at school which initiated an interest in current affairs, and history, and what may or may not happen. And I think I was very fortunate having had a teacher or an English master who had come from the UK [United Kingdom] fairly recently and educated us and informed us

21:00 of world affairs.

Not as many were as fortunate as you and the outbreak of war apparently came as a shock to a lot of people and apparently stirred up a lot of emotion at the time. Even being as well briefed as you were, what emotions did the outbreak of war stir in you?

21:30 Well I was pretty young at the time, and I was involved in studying and surfing and going to dances, I don't think that it aroused any deep seeded emotions in me at that time.

22:00 **You mentioned that your English master was an Englishman?**

Yes.

How strong were the ties to Briton for you?

Very, we were brought up in, my generation anyway was brought up with the concept of the old British Empire. The British Empire was shown on old school maps, and

22:30 life insurance company annual calendars all the British Empire was shown in red. So I was very conscious of it. And we were close to England or the UK. And the monarchy or the King all played a considerable

23:00 part in our lives in those days.

What part then did Britons ensuing struggle in those early days of the war mean for you?

Well it meant a lot because we were conscious

23:30 of the fall of France. The evacuation and miracle evacuation of troops from Dunkirk. And that was followed by the Battle of Britain which was a close won thing. You know things were hanging by a thread,

24:00 I was conscious of those things, that it was a life and death struggle. And so were the fellows around me, well my immediate group any rate, I can't speak for the rest of Australia but that was my personal experience.

What thoughts were prompting you to consider enlistment?

24:30 Well I'd been in the cadet corps at school, so I had that experience. Enlistment in the cadet corps was voluntary, but it took place from second year onwards. First year you could only do what was called

25:00 physical training. But in second year you were allowed to join the cadet crops if you wished on a

voluntary basis. And so I had several years of that. And while I was working I joined the militia and went into the 7th Field Brigade.

25:30 Which was an artillery, what's now called army reserve.

After your father having served with the army in the First World War, how much of a compulsion did you feel to follow in those footsteps and served in the armed forces, or the army?

26:00 He was already in the RAAF as a chaplain or a padre. And he was what was called part time, but he still was a minister at the Presbyterian Church at Lindfield. But the RAAF initial training school was at Bradfield which was the next suburb and they had a number of what they called part time padres,

26:30 so he was back in uniform. So I was conscious of that. And Bradfield Park which was the initial training school or one of them in Australia, was near us, and the fellows from that initial training school used to catch the train into the city when they were on leave. So there was a constant flow of blue air force uniforms,

27:00 so I was circulating in that environment.

Having had experience in the militia yourself, why not follow that path and join the army? Or even the navy?

Well my father was in the RAAF and I wanted to learn to fly. And I knew

27:30 a lot of fellows that had enlisted, and in the RAAF it was purely on a voluntary basis, so there was that motivation. And I wanted to join. So I was in camp at Ingleburn with the army and there was a recruiting drive for the RAAF. So I got some leave,

28:00 and we were in camp at Ingleburn and I came down to Sydney and enlisted. In the RAAF, as aircrew.

What pressures perhaps were there, once in the militia to remain in the army?

Well in my personal experience there weren't any,

28:30 we were allowed. I didn't have any trouble, in transferring or enlisting. What that involved was that I was discharged from the militia, and placed on the RAAF reserve. You weren't called up immediately because there was a backlog

29:00 in the training program. But we had to attend what was called twenty-one lessons. And that entailed going to any number of public schools, state, education department schools, where there was a serious of twenty-one lessons.

29:30 Which took twenty-one weeks, roughly. And that involved mathematics to matriculation standard, with a bit of trigonometry. Also we were required to learn Morse code, this is on the reserve. And there were classes conducted by

30:00 some ladies who had worked for the PMG [Postmaster General] as it was called in those days and were familiar with Morse code and they taught us. So that when you were called up you had the background in mathematics and Morse code. And the quicker you could get up to twenty-one words a minute the better.

30:30 Because you had to, when you went in there was a whole serious of examinations. So that was the kind of transfer situation from the militia into the Royal Australian Air Force Reserve. Now when the time came you were called up. They could draw on the reserve,

31:00 there was a course starting each month. And you got a call up notice. And I went into the number two initial training school in Bradfield Park in Sydney.

Can I ask when that was, when were you called up?

The 11th of October 1941.

31:30 **And you had actually begun your application to join the RAAF sometime earlier in that year?**

Yes. In February 41.

32:00 **Before we start getting down the track of your earliest period in the air force, what was it that motivated you to want to join?**

The air force?

Yes or the services? Why did you want to be a part of the services, involved in this war?

Well I had the consciousness of what I'd been made

32:30 aware of at school. I was aware of that having had an enlightened English master who briefed us on

world affairs. So I had that background. And then I could see that we were in trouble, as a nation I mean, I don't mean personal trouble I mean national trouble. Coupled with a yearning

33:00 desire to learn to fly. And I had heard and been aware of what was happening to many fellows who had preceded me in enlisting in aircrew in the Royal Australian Air Force. Who were already in England and the Middle East, and I wanted to be like them. So it was those combination of factors.

33:30 **Where had the desire to fly originated?**

I had, my father took me up to an air display at the aerodrome in Newcastle, and there were three air force planes up there which gave a flying display, and a number of civilian

34:00 owned aircraft, and they gave flying displays. And we were allowed to go up and touch the aircraft, and look inside them and see the instruments and the control column. So that's where I got my first initiation into things flying and I guess that's where the concept was born. Little did I dream that one day I would get the opportunity.

34:30 **And I would also like to ask what trouble you envisaged the nation was in or was going to be in?**

Well I had this kind of well grounding at school and I knew that we were starting from well behind.

35:00 We had given so much away in appeasement to Germany. What was the question again?

It just caught my attention when you said we meaning the country were in trouble. I was just wondering what you meant by that?

Well that the trouble, that we had started from behind. I mean Germany was so far ahead in rearmament and

35:30 they were occupying Europe. And then that was rapidly followed up by the betrayal at Pearl Harbour, the fall of the Philippines and Singapore. The entrapment of the 8th Division in Singapore, when the whole lot were made POW's [prisoners of war]. The thing kept escalating.

36:00 But I was already called up when that had happened. When Pearl Harbour happened. But that's what I meant by we were in trouble. So I think I was very fortunate that I had had this early grounding, well I think I was fortunate anyway.

36:30 **When you were finally called up in October 41?**

41.

Although it had been some time since you initial application, how did you decision to enlist affect your family?

37:00 Well I wasn't stopped but I think there was a certain amount of apprehension on behalf of my mother and my father. Not only was I an only son but I was an only child so, I think that was a perfectly natural reaction for people who are placed in that emotional situation. Nevertheless they signed the papers,

37:30 and agreed.

Being the only child was their reaction something you had considered?

Yes.

And still?

And still it was ok with them but they had

38:00 what I just mentioned.

I take it that the induction course that you talked of earlier, in this interim period between application and being called up. You would be required to pass these to progress and be called up?

Yes. One of the requirements,

38:30 when you got on the reserve you then had to do these twenty-one lessons. You went, I went to Rosehill Public School where they were conducted on Tuesday and Thursday nights. And they were staffed by volunteer teachers from the Department of Education and the private school system. And those men and women gave their time voluntarily.

39:00 So it was like going back to school. And then you had to complete the set of questions, like a little exam and hand them in at the end of each week. And you weren't called up until you completed the twenty-one lessons.

39:30 Now the twenty-one lessons, it was ok if you missed a week, you didn't have to do them in twenty-one

weeks, because you could have the flu or something like that you missed a week. But you had to do the twenty-one lessons, and the time frame was up to you, within reason. I mean provision was made for if you got sick or had the flu or got the measles or whatever.

How did it feel, being back at school?

40:00 Well it was ok, it interfered with my football training, I had to give that up because we used to train on Tuesdays and Thursday nights. But there was a lot of fellows that I knew, because it was in the district. I was playing Rugby Union after I left school, and there were fellows from my club who joined up at about the same time, in the RAAF, and I knew them. So there

40:30 a kind of fraternity and companionship. That was my personal experience any rate so it was ok.

And you mentioned that you were considered anointed by the reserve at this point, until the time that you officially pulled up?

Yes. You had a badge which you wore in your lapel, which was a kind of eagles wings and a

41:00 (UNCLEAR) was round like that. With eagles wings and that was your RAAF reserve badge.

Worn proudly?

Yes.

Ok I note that our first tape is coming to an end so we will pause there.

Tape 2

00:31 **David before you take up your story proper again there is a point I'd like to ask you about, you mentioned that when you came down from Newcastle, in your first year boarding at Knox that you found the regimen and the discipline something new to get used to. And yet you have also said that you were involved in cubs, and then you joined the militia where certainly discipline plays a**

01:00 **large part. How did you find that discipline or disciplined life?**

Well I found that whilst I found the discipline at Knox hard going initially, the strict, it certainly wore well when I went into the air force and into the initial training school.

01:30 Some guys found the discipline hard going in the initial training school. I didn't have any difficulty with it because it wasn't as hard as what I had had at school. So I was fortunate then, I didn't think so at the time when I was at school, and I was thirteen when I was first introduced to it but it served me well later on.

02:00 **Well I'd like to talk about your time at Bradfield Park now, that was the initial training school, how were you introduced to that environment?**

Well the first two months comprised mathematics

02:30 Morse code, initial training in armaments, that's machine-guns, and cannons and so forth and so on. Close order drill, that's marching and handling a rifle, which I had already gone through at school and in the militia so I didn't have any problems with that. And Morse code in which we had to pass exams based on twenty-one words per minute.

03:00 And PT as they called it in those days, physical training. And group marches. So that was the initial introduction. Then after two months you sat for examinations in those subjects and then you went before a board or a selection committee and were categorised, or mustered as the air force calls it,

03:30 into pilots, navigators wireless operators and air gunners.

Upon entering Bradfield Park were you considered part of the RAAF proper at that stage?

Yes, we were in. In for the duration and twelve months after.

How much of that two moths training you just talked of seemed pertinent to air force service?

04:00 Oh I think it was essential because later on the maths and the trigonometry formed the basis for air navigation. And the Morse code for communications either by wireless or Aldis lamp, which was visual. So that was essential.

04:30 And the initial training in armaments was essential for what you had to become familiar with later on.

In what way do you say that?

Well I mean the aircrafts were armed. The Hurricanes, which I was on later, had eight machine-guns

and the American P47 Thunderbolts had four fifty millimetre [actually 0.5 inch] machine-guns.

05:00 And then another mark of Hurricane had four twenty millimetre cannons. Two on each wing, so you had to know what they were all about, how they operated, how to use them. So that initial training led up to the appreciation and the use of those armaments later on.

You also said that you had received training in using hand weapons, the rifle?

05:30 The rifle, that's right yes.

Which you had had some experience beforehand. What weapons did you become familiar with?

In the air force?

During that initial training period. Was there more than just rifle training?

303 rifle, and Lewis and Vickers machine-guns.

06:00 They were the actual armaments in the initial training school. Then, after the two months when we were categorised or mustered, the wireless operator air gunners and air gunners they left the initial training school and went into wireless operator air gunner training schools, they branched off.

06:30 And the pilots and the navigators stayed on for a month in the initial training school. And we got involved in air navigation. And still doing Morse code and armaments as well. But it was the initial two months in mathematics to matriculation standard, or what's known

07:00 in 2003 as the Higher School Certificate in New South Wales. That was the kind of foundation for air navigation, which involved kind of elementary trigonometry and plots on charts which were later taken into the air. And the navigators had to plot, get fixes, astro fixes on the stars and so on.

07:30 So that was all related back to trigonometry, which goes back to mathematics.

How necessary was it that pilots, or people not doing navigating on a plane should know this information?

Well we all required a basic knowledge of air navigation because when you are on your own you had to know where you were, or supposed to know where you were.

08:00 And we needed this basic training in that aspect of air navigation. Whereas the fellows that became navigators and went into Bomber Command later on, they actually had a little table inside the bomber aircraft and they could do plots with rulers and pencils and take astro fixes on the stars and so on.

08:30 But when you're a pilot and you're flying you can't do that. So you had to rely on basically on map reading. You had to be able, but that comes much later in the training. We had an air map and you've got a system of roads, and railways, and towns and you've got to be able to see the conjunction of them on the map. That's it down there,

09:00 and you can get an idea of where you are and where you've got to go. By being able to identify Sydney, for example, and knowing what the course is to Melbourne for instance. That's a simplification, its more involved that that.

What preference if any did you have for the particular musterings?

09:30 Well I had major preference for pilot, you were asked what you wanted but it didn't mean you got it. Because your selection by the characterisation committee or selection committee was based on examination results and what they thought you looked like, and you know a whole serious of reports from various instructors. They had a whole file on you and that's how the selection was made.

10:00 **How spot on with singling people out in to the different mustering were these selectors?**

I really don't know. I couldn't answer that one. But by and large the system worked excellently, and there were undoubtable fellows that were made navigators and wireless operators that could have made excellent pilots.

10:30 You know had they been put to the test, so that's not to exclude them, but that's how the system worked. And the selection committee was made up of air force officers who were pilots from the First World War. Officers in the educational section in

11:00 the RAAF who were qualified school teachers in various faculties. And they assessed you in the light of all of the reports, so that's how the system worked.

What did you think they looked for in a potential pilot?

Well they

11:30 looked at the examination reports. They looked at your character reports from various instructors. We

all had a drill sergeant, we were divided up into flights, there was about twenty-five fellows in a flight. And we had a drill sergeant and he was in charge of us all of the time, almost lived with us. And on his assessment

12:00 on what kind of people or what kind of fellow you they thought you were, that all went in to this selection committee.

How fair did you think that process was at the time?

Well I think it was as fair as it could have been, considering

12:30 the emergency that was applying in those days and the losses that were being occurred on the various fronts or theatres of war. Undoubtedly like a lot of things in life there were anomalies. But I think it was as fair as they could make it in view of the emergency. And they weren't operating in peacetime

13:00 you know where there was a certain amount of leisure to make these decisions. They had to make them, I mean the Jap's were knocking at the gates of Darwin for instance. So I think that it was fair.

How much provision was given to the trainees to dispute a selection or to

13:30 **appeal against their placement?**

None that I know of. In the air force you did as you were told and that was it.

How did that sit with you?

Well I didn't have any choice and neither did anyone else. And I could only speak for myself and the fellows that were immediately around me. But

14:00 they all accepted it, those were the rules of the game and you played by them. And aircrew was on a voluntary basis and fellows were so keen to get through and qualify that they were prepared for any amount of discipline in my observations. And rules that applied. And you didn't have any choice any rate so you did as you were told.

14:30 **You mentioned earlier the drill sergeant who was in your presence a fair amount of the time, I'm wondering what the housing arrangements were like while you were in this training?**

We were in wooden huts,

15:00 with wooden floors, bare boards, not heating no cooling. The toilet arrangements were in what they called ablution blocks which were removed a considerable distance from the huts we lived in. Communal showers, no petitioning between showers, the showers just came out of the wall

15:30 and you know there were eight of them in a row. And the same with the toilets, they had eight toilets or ten toilets or whatever, no petitioning. So those were the living arrangements. And the mess was in a bigger wooden hut, long trestle tables in which you queued up. Got your eating irons as they were called, that's a knife spoon and fork. Plate

16:00 and you went along and they dished out the food. Slid your plate along, the food was good. Initially, Bradford, I think they did very well with the mass catering that they had to do.

16:30 **How did this communal living, sleeping, eating suit you?**

Well nothing beats a private bedroom in your own home, but just speaking for myself it was ok by me because I had already been subjected to that when I was at school, and when I'd been in the militias. And in cub camps if you want to go right back. Ss

17:00 I had had exposure to this in previous experiences. And the company was basically was good, and friendships formed. Bonding started to take place, so I personally didn't have any trouble with it but I can't speak for everybody.

17:30 **What opportunities were there for friendships or bonding to occur?**

Well in my experience there was every opportunity. And some of the friendships and bonding that took places at various times in my air force experience have stayed with me right up into my old age.

18:00 And it was one of the things I missed most when it was all over. Great companionship.

Well you mentioned that this initial period lasted two months, I take it that at the end of that time you were selected to remain for that extra month?

Yes, yes.

18:30 **And what took place during that time?**

Well as I mentioned to you earlier the subject was mainly navigation, a continuation of Morse code, armaments, that still continued. Physical training, rifle drill that still continued. And then at the end of the third month,

19:00 we were then posted to, in the air force you are posted. You know you are not sent to or asked to go to, you are posted. We were posted to an elementary flying training school and I went to mascot, or was sent.

How did you receive your posting?

Oh I thought it was great, I'd been posted to Mascot whereas a lot of the other elementary flying schools were

19:30 way out on the western plains of New South Wales. So I considered it excellent.

And at the end of that three months, how exactly did you learn of your posting?

Oh it was read out on a parade, a list of names of who is going where.

20:00 **As you said there were different areas you might have been posted to, what differences were there in say being posted to Mascot, or being posted to one of the country areas?**

Well there was no difference in the training because everything followed a general syllabus. And that applied right through what was known during the war as the Empire Air Training Scheme.

20:30 Canadians were going through the same training program, the same thing was happening to them, or New Zealanders or Englishmen in the UK. So the training syllabus was exactly the same. But being posted to Mascot meant that I was in Sydney and I was close to home

21:00 and we were given leave every weekend so I could get home or see my girlfriend whereas if you were in a country EFTS [Elementary Flight Training School], the training program was the same but you didn't have access to your family. I was just lucky that I was sent to Mascot, posted to Mascot.

And there was a girlfriend at the time?

Yes.

21:30 **How long had she been with you?**

Oh about two years I guess, eighteen months. But she joined the WRANS [Women's Royal Australian Naval Service] so she wasn't around as easily as previously.

22:00 **How did you look on each other's enlistments?**

Well we accepted it. She knew that I was going to be called up and I knew that she was going to be called up so that was sit.

As you said that you were a part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, from when were you aware that you were involved in that scheme?

22:30 Oh from early in the war it was in the newspaper. It was common public knowledge. It was a great scheme that was formulated, I think the concept was born just before the war broke out. The idea being that the

23:00 UK would be crowded with air space for instance, and by some far seeing low ranking RAF [Royal Air Force] officers in prairies of Canada and on the western plains of Australia, New South Wales I should say,

23:30 and other states. And facilities in Rhodesia, where it also took place, and South Africa and New Zealand, it was well removed from the area of hostilities so you could run training programs uninterrupted. And this was common public knowledge, I think it was in the newspapers. So I was well aware of

24:00 the EATS [Empire Air Training Scheme] as it was called by the time I went in.

What was you awareness then of the purpose of the scheme and in what capacity you would be used once you had completed it?

Well from what I understood before I went in, it was known publicly that

24:30 the British Empire as it was, was well behind Germany in their rearmament program and their training programs and there was a big kind of catch up to be made. And if we were going to win the war that we were in, it would have been implemented on the vast program the subsequently was.

25:00 And some fairly heavy losses were anticipated. And so that was the reason for it s creation by some far seeing high ranking RAF officers.

25:30 **Being posted to mascot for the elementary flying training school?**

EFTS they were called for short.

Was it here that you were given your first opportunity to fly?

Yes. The aircraft were Tiger Moths which looked a bit like World War I

26:00 by planes. And my first ever trip into the air which was an initiation, you know just to get the feel, my instructor, the fellow that took my up was John Kingsford Smith, who was a nephew of Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, the great pioneer Australian aviator. And he was subsequently to become my flight commander at Mascot.

26:30 So that was a historic notable encounter.

Indeed I am wondering how much pressure you felt to perform?

There was pressure of course, but there was largely keenness, amongst us all. You know there

27:00 was an enthusiastic willingness to learn. To fly and do it successfully. And we were all volunteers, and we were there on a voluntary basis and there is a tremendous spirit amongst volunteers. And so whilst there was pressure there was also a keenness and a willingness, you know it was a pleasure.

27:30 I can only speak for myself and the fellows immediately around me, but that was the atmosphere and the attitude.

I was wondering how much keenness you would have felt, given that you had been in training, after calling up, for three months before this posting. It's a long time to wait before you can actually

28:00 **get into a plane. I'm assuming there was a lot of anticipation to actually start flying?**

Yes there was.

Was there a period once you got to Mascot where there was more training to undergo before that happened?

No it was immediate. And we flew in the morning under instruction, and had ground subjects in the afternoon.

28:30 **What comprised ground subjects?**

Well we were back with navigation again. And there was another subject called theory of flight. And there was Morse code again and armaments again. And so physical training, PT, exercises.

29:00 **How did you progress with all the theoretical side of your training?**

I found theory of flight and Morse code and armaments ok, I struggled with mathematics to some extent, but I managed to get through. But it wasn't easy.

29:30 Because my bent, if I could say I had a bent education, it was towards the classics, rather than mathematics. But I coped. So that was the basis of the training program at the elementary flying schools, and it involved

30:00 straight and level flying and aerobatics, and cross country exercises. For instance, on your own and map reading, we flew from Mascot to Camden, Camden to Richmond and Richmond back to Mascot. That was my first ever cross

30:30 country on your own and you had to map read.

How many hours before you flew solo?

Seven. Seven was about the average that fellows went solo, some a bit before, not many. And a few a little later.

31:00 **Can you describe to me, I am presuming again that your first flight at Mascot in a Tiger Moth was your first time in a plane?**

Yes.

Can you describe your very first flight?

Yes it was in an open cockpit wearing a leather helmet and goggles. And it was absolutely, for me, it was exhilarating. It was an introduction to a new world as far as I was concerned.

31:30 I loved it. We were up, you know there were in between the clouds, it wasn't complete coverage but there were breaks. It was beautiful, it was exhilarating, it was thrilling. And I had a good instructor that I got on well with. So there

32:00 was a certain amount of bonding, I mean he had a lot of pupils, but that was ok. So I was very happy. But that was my memories of my first ever flight, opened up a new world. And there is a sense flying in an open cockpit aircraft that you don't get in anything else.

32:30 **What is that sensation?**

Well you don't get it in a modern 747 for instance, you might as well be sitting in a movie theatre seat in my opion. But in an open cockpit you've got the wind in your face, you've got the roar of the Rolls Royce Kestrel engine, you are in control

33:00 of this thing, it is up to you. You can turn it either way, or make it go up and down or stuff like that. And you're open to a new world of beauty and clouds and that's in the air. And this enormous vista on the ground that opens up to you.

33:30 It's a big thrill, all positive emotions for me. I loved it.

Did you encounter any airsickness?

No.

Where were you in the plane in relation to your instructor?

Well in a Tiger Moth there

34:00 are two cockpits in line, you know one in front of the other. And they're completely open to the environment. They are not in cabins, you have an air shield just in front of you keeps the wind at bay to some extent. And the pupil sits behind the instructor. And in a Tiger Moth he speaks to you through a tube, that's not electronic, you know, it a rubber mouth piece.

34:30 And you've got earphones and you kind of yell into it. Whereas in later aircraft it's electronically assisted.

How difficult is it to make yourself heard over the wind and the engine?

Well its not hard and its not easy but you've got to yell because there is the roar of the engine,

35:00 there is the sound of the wind through the struts, there is the wind blowing in your face. So there is a degree of difficulty, but it is certainly not impossible, well I had to listen carefully anyway.

What safety provisions were there inside your cockpit space?

35:30 All the Tiger Moths were equipped with what was known as Sutton harness, S U T T O N. I think Sutton was the name of the Englishman who invented it. But they were a serious of four straps which were secured to the aircraft proper. And they came over your shoulders, left and right shoulders, and criss crossed about the bottom of your ribcage, and then they met two other straps that came up from the floor

36:00 thought your inner thighs that connected to a central lock. Which was about the top of your abdomen, and they were secured with a pin that went through it, and they had a quick release that you could undo it with when you got out or you had to bail out.

Would you wear a parachute?

36:30 Yes. All the aircraft, we were all issued with parachutes. And they fitted into the bucket type seat, and they were designed so they took the parachute. Fitted into quite snugly. And you actually buckled on your parachute before you climbed into the aircraft. And then you sat down into this bucket seat and then you did up this Sutton harness

37:00 which secured you to the aircraft, so you didn't fall out.

What preparation had yo been given to use you parachute?

Well we were told, we were told how to use it. There is a quick release handle. We were also taken into what was called the parachute shed

37:30 where WAAAF's [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] were repacking parachutes. And they were hung from a hook in the ceiling, and then they were taken down and carefully refolded on long polished tables. And put back into the pack. And these girls had done special courses in parachute packing and care. And we were shown where the release was, and how to count ten when you bailed out

38:00 and then pull your ripcord and hope that it opens.

Was there any reserve shoot or a second pull cord?

No not with the ones that we were issued with in those days. Just the one ripcord.

What was your impression of the Tiger Moth?

38:30 I thought it was magnificent. I loved it from the start, and as I mentioned earlier there is a great sensation from flying that I seem to get, and I can't speak for everyone. But a lot of fellows I know, it's a real sense of flying that you can only get in an open cockpit aircraft with the wind blowing in your face you know. And you're subjected to all of the elements.

39:00 Which you don’t get in modern aircraft where you are in an enclosed canopy cabin.

Being in an exposed cockpit would you suffer from cold when you were flying?

Yes if it was in the winter. I subsequently flew a Tiger Moth in England in the January. And there was snow on

39:30 the ground and you absolutely freeze to death. You’ve got these freezing conditions directly on your face, and then on the floor there are cables or wires that are connected to the rudder panels that go out through a slot in the side of the aircraft, and down

40:00 an external cable to the tail plane which controls turning left or right and up and down. And there is a big slot in the side of the aircraft at foot level, and in winter your feet just about freeze off. Even though you have flying boots on, but that was an experience I didn’t have until I got to England, when I was doing my elementary

40:30 training at mascot it was in February, March and April which is in Sydney a kind of summer. So it was very pleasant. And we did some night flying, but only with an instructor. And that was an experience, looking down on Sydney even though it was supposed to be. I had never seen the city at night

41:00 and even though it was supposed to be blacked out, the Jap’s were in the war by this time, you could still get a general configuration. And there’s a flare path lighting up the runway.

It all sounds like a magnificent experience, we’ll talk more on that after we change another tape.

Tape 3

00:04 **David I would just like to take up your story, you were describing with quite a lot of passion flying the Tiger Moth, do you recall your first solo flight?**

Yes it took place at

01:00 Bankstown, Bankstown aerodrome was the satellite to Mascot. And Bankstown was used because Mascot was crowded enough. So half of the course was split, one half flew at mascot and the other half flew at Bankstown. And then the next day they would reverse the process, and the fellows that were at Mascot

01:30 would go to Bankstown and the Bankstown fellows would come to Mascot. And we were taken as a rule by truck from mascot where we lived on the aerodrome to Bankstown, or some of the fellows that flew over with their instructors, the aircraft were transferred from Mascot to Bankstown, they flew, and they went straight into their lessons, and when they finished

02:00 they landed, and the fellows that had gone over by truck they got in and went up with the instructor and went solo as the case may be. So that’s how the system worked. Both aerodromes were used. Lived on Mascot but flew out of Mascot and Bankstown.

Can you tell me what

02:30 **the feeling was like when you first flew solo?**

Yes. Well there was a high degree of nervousness, you had been up, the usual process was you had been up with your instructor and he landed and he said well you’re ok to go solo now and he got out of the aircraft. Out in the middle of the aerodrome, patted you on the shoulder and said you’ll be right,

03:00 don’t forget everything I have told you. And it was up to you from there on. You had to taxi down to the boundary of the aerodrome, and swing the aircraft around, check it, run it up, test the magnetos and then take off with all of this apprehension and nervousness. And my thoughts, and with a lot of my immediate mates was I wonder if I’ll

03:30 be able to get the bloody thing down again. You know will I be stuck up here forever? But I got airborne and went around and wondered whether I was going to get it down properly, which I did. And you only had to do one circuit and you taxied in. You know and he patted you on the back and said well done. And for me

04:00 and I’m sure I speak for a lot of other fellows, it was a tremendous sense of accomplishment. And as I’ve spoken of earlier, this introduction to this new world I found, one of the things I found with flying, particularly in these early stages was, I get it only in the surf now,

04:30 in older age, is a complete release from all of the cares of this earthly world. And I’m not being spiritual or religious. But up there all of your worries leave you and you’ve just got this wonderful sense of freedom and another world. Comes back to you the moment you land and get out and someone says to you the bank manger has been on the phone and wants you to ring him back.

05:00 So that was my emotions as I can remember them best in my first ever solo. And then that leaves you with a desire to try it again. And then you're into it.

I imagine

05:30 **that in a sense you could be quite hooked really, like in terms of an interest and a passion. When did you next get an opportunity to go up again by yourself?**

The next day. Everything was on a daily basis until that aspect of the training process was completed. You flew every day weather permitting,

06:00 some days the weather closed in and it was impossible to fly. But it was every day. And in those days, like the rest of Australia we all worked on Saturday mornings, and being at Mascot I was lucky, we were given leave from twelve midday until twelve midnight, had to be

06:30 back in camp or on the aerodrome by twelve midnight on Sunday night. So we had that day and a half, but the rest of Australia was doing that, commercially.

And how long did you stay at Mascot?

Three and a half months. That's what the

07:00 training program, the time it took. And that varied slightly like there were contingencies to deal with. Like we might get a week of bad weather and the program fell behind. Whereas people out west or on the western plains might have had an uninterrupted three and half months or so they would be slightly ahead of us.

07:30 But by and large it complied with the program that was laid down, training program.

You mentioned earlier that maths probably wasn't one of your strong subjects, how did you or what did you do to get your maths up to speed?

Well on the reserve that I spoke of earlier and we did these twenty-one lessons

08:00 at state schools which were tutored by volunteers from the Department of Education and the private school system. They coached you and that was the purpose of, they gave you a lesson on a blackboard and then you were given a set of exercises to do while you were in class. From memory I think it was about two hours we went, from seven and finished at about nine. And during that time, sometimes we had two instructors,

08:30 don't forget they were volunteer school teachers. You know they're circulating and you could ask them. You know they would sit down and run you through. So the tuition was excellent. And that's how one was brought up to speed. The same applied with Morse code and so on. Staffed by volunteers.

09:00 **And then applying that theory to actually flying, when you were flying a plane do you need to rely immediately on your maths?**

No but you need that basic training for air navigation. And particularly fellows that went onto multi-engine aircraft. Bomber aircraft later on in the war, when they're over Germany you know, you have got to

09:30 know where you are.

At the end of your three month period, or three and a half month period at mascot, where were you posted then?

What happened that the Jap's [Japanese] had come into the war, and while we were at Mascot the Americans arrived, the first of the

10:00 Americans. And immediately and coinciding with their arrival all kinds of things started to happen. Darwin was being bombed by the Jap's. We had to load, as aircrew trainees, some transport aircraft that were taking urgently needed supplies up to Darwin. The unions had refused to load.

10:30 Some friends of mine went down, as aircrew, and unloaded some American munitions ships that the wharfies had refused to unload while Darwin was being bombed. So those were the kind dramatic and dramatic things that were happening also in addition to the flying program whilst I was at Mascot.

11:00 Also coincidental with all of these dramatic things happening the American air force started to arrive, and they started to use Mascot and Bankstown, so we began to have these high powered American aircraft that we had never ever seen in our lives before, interceding in our circuit. And you've got

11:30 Tiger Moths and American Kitty Hawks. And Areo Cobras which was the current American air force fighter plane at that point in time, landing at the same time that we were. And it set up for some bad accidents. And the Americans wanted Mascot and they wanted Bankstown

12:00 to base their aircraft. They had the equipment. So Mascot had to be evacuated as far as we were

concerned as a training school, and the aircraft were then evacuated, half to Tumut in south eastern New South Wales

12:30 and the other half to Benalla in Victoria. So there were approximately from memory, eighteen Tiger Moths that had to be evacuated, plus all the ground crew. And they didn't have enough instructors to fly out eighteen, no I think it was more like twenty,

13:00 ten went to Tumut and ten went to Benalla. We didn't have enough instructors so they chose some pupils, pupil pilots. And I was one of them, and that was a magnificent experience. I was chosen for the Benalla expedition. And we were

13:30 John Kingsford Smith who I mentioned earlier, the nephew of Sir Charles. And to give you an idea of the state of Australia, there weren't any air navigation maps available for that trip. So John Kingsford Smith led us on a Shell road map to Benalla and we went from Mascot to Goulbourn.

14:00 We landed, we landed at Goulbourn airport, and at Goulbourn airport you come in over the fence which is a split rail fence. Ever seen a split rail fence? Well I won't describe it, it will take too long. But its and old pioneering type fence in Australia. And the airfield at Goulbourn was paspalum about three feet high,

14:30 with three or four or five cows grazing. Not huts, no nothing. And there was a civilian truck there, was a contractor, with a couple of forty-four gallon drums of petrol. And refuelled out of those with a hand pump. And then we took off and we went in lose fit formation like that you see? With John Kingsford Smith out the front. Fortunately it was a fine day, beautiful day.

15:00 And we flew from Goulbourn to Wagga. I remember you fly over the Great Dividing Range, and this is a nineteen year old boy you know? And we flew directly over Burrinjuck Dam. And it was magnificent. Anyhow we landed at Wagga and refuelled again and then took off and flew to Benalla. And that was easy we followed what they called the

15:30 iron compass, which is the railway line runs straight as a die from Wagga to Benalla, all you've got to do is follow it. So that's how we left Mascot.

That's a very amazing journey to make in an open cockpit.

Yeah and at nineteen. And some of my friends, you know, we

16:00 were boys that had barely been out of our district. You know products of the depression. You know, so it was a wonderful experience. Even now you don't get to fly over Burrinjuck Dam in an open cockpit Tiger Moth.

How far up does a Tiger Moth fly?

16:30 Well it depends on the exercise. Most of our training program took place between eight and ten thousand feet, I'm not sure what that converts to in metric. And sometimes a little higher. But most of it was about that height. And that depended on good weather of course. You can't get up to ten thousand feet if you've got a ninety percent coverage of

17:00 cumulonimbus cloud you know. Its dependant on the appropriate weather.

And during that trip where you were using landmarks more than maps to guide you, I'm wondering if at any time you went off course?

17:30 Well we didn't go off course, and I wouldn't have known whether we were off course because we were entirely dependant on John Kingsford Smith. And he also was, what was known in Australia in those times as a bush pilot. You know they'd flown, almost pioneering days in outback Australia. And another one

18:00 of our flight commanders, there was A flight and B flight, he was an Australian and they were in the reserve air force before the war, and were called up, and he had been flying in New Guinea. So they were bush pilots and they were used to flying by the seat of their pants. So John Kingsford Smith did just as well with a Shell road map. Which was completely inaccurate

18:30 in terms of modern air maps. But he remembered a lot of the landmarks from his bush pilot days. So there is your answer to did I know if I was off course. I didn't worry because I knew that we were being led by an able experienced bush pilot, it was his responsibility.

19:00 So I just enjoyed it.

And how did you get back to Sydney?

Well we were given leave, and I came back and I think I had about five days leave. And I went home, stayed with my folks.

And how long did the trip actually take?

To Benalla? It was done in a day, I would have

19:30 to look my log book up to get the exact times, but I think about nine hours. That encompassed time on the ground at Goulbourn aerodrome and Wagga [Wagga Wagga]. I think we were given a cup of tea and a sandwich at Wagga if I remember.

20:00 **And what did you do with your five days leave?**

Well I spent as much time as I could with my family. I was very fond of my mother and father and I knew from what I had witnessed with other fellows, in the army, navy and air force, you know that you never knew

20:30 how long or when ever again those kind of things would happen. So I spent as much time as I could with them. Because I wanted to. And my girlfriend, although she was in the WRAN, she was still based in Sydney, subsequently she went to Canberra and Queensland but that's another story.

21:00 So that's how I spent those five days, then I had to report to a place called 1 ED. That's 1 Embarkation Depot in Melbourne, which I did and spent two days there and we were posted to a place called Uranquinty, in the Riverina, which is out of Wagga. Which is a service flying training school, which is the next stage in the training program.

21:30 Now when we arrived there the training program had come to a grinding stop, the Jap's were still bombing Darwin, I think Singapore had fallen. It was anticipated that Australia would fall back to the Brisbane, that's where we abandon Australia down to some line just north of

22:00 Brisbane. So that was the state of emergency, and we found at Uranquinty all of the instructors were taken off training and were doing an advanced kind of what they call an OTU, an Operational Training Unit. In other words they were forming into wartime squadrons. With these training aircraft, which were barely operational.

22:30 So there was no flying training, it came to a grinding halt, but there were plenty of lectures, and group marches and physical training. Rifle drill and stuff like that. But we arrived on the Friday, on Friday morning.

23:00 And everyone worked on Saturday morning as I said earlier, and we were given some leave. But there was nowhere to go, you know we could go into Wagga, which was all right. Won't comment on that.

23:30 And we resumed our normal ground subject courses on the Monday morning, and I was with my mates from Mascot. Half had been sent to a training school in South Australia, and half to Uranquinty. Thirteen of us from Mascot actually, and we were in this hut. And you're supposed to sweep your hut out, you know you are responsible for its cleanliness. Or else. And we didn't have time to sweep it out,

24:00 we had to be on parade see? Had breakfast and have a shower and all of that stuff and get on parade, and what used to happen in most training schools, there used to be the CO's or the adjutant's inspection. During the day they used to come through, come through here you see? Look they haven't swept the floor, who left these curtains open, you know that sort of thing. You were responsible for the hygiene in your hut

24:30 and we hadn't swept our out. So we're on first lecture of the day. In ground school see? Sitting in a classroom situation with the instructor up the front who was an air force officer who had previously been a Department of Education school teacher you know. The pointer and the blackboard. And the station warrant officer marched in, and he is the air force equivalent of the regimental sergeant major. And he went up to the instructor

25:00 and the instructor nodded and he read out a list of thirteen names. Which was all the fellows from Mascot who had been posted to Uranquinty, the other half had gone to South Australia. The adjutant wants to see you. So we were marched, marched up to this adjutant's office and this warrant officer wouldn't tell us what he wanted to see us about. But we thought this is it, dirty hut,

25:30 we're in trouble, they might even scrub us from the program. Because you only had to put one foot wrong and they wanted to get rid of you. They had a couple of courses banked up and the Japs had come into the war, and all these things. So we marched in, the thirteen of us, and lined up in front of his desk you know. One to thirteen, and he had one of these high pitched

26:00 soprano voices, nasal. And he said I'll never forget. You're the luckiest thirteen fellows on this station. All air force establishments weren't called bases in those days, you were on a station, you know like as a railway station. And I thought God, that's a funny thing to say when we're going to go up on a charge.

26:30 That's what you were called, you know like being charged in court. He said, you've been posted to Canada, and I couldn't believe it. And what had happened there was a big Yankee troop ship as a transport in Melbourne, we didn't know this. But as it transpired later she had brought an American Division to Melbourne. And they had been on their way to the Philippines, this American army division,

27:00 and the Jap's had taken the Philippines so it had been diverted to Australia. And one half, there were two Divisions actually, one went to Brisbane which is another story for another day and another time. And one Division was sent to Melbourne, and this big Yankee troop transport, this is what we found out

subsequently, was getting ready to go back to the US [United States] and she was empty. So we were posted to Canada.

27:30 And he said, you know if you don't want to go there are plenty of fellows who will take your place and we had one fellow who had just got engaged to a girl, and he didn't want to go. They were going to get married or something silly like that you know, and because I'm nineteen I'm thinking how stupid, there's millions of girls.

28:00 So he said to the adjutant that he wouldn't. So we had a fellow called Billy Littlejohn who had been left out. He was one, and he heard and he raced up to the adjutant's office and this bloke said can I go? And he let him. And he was killed up in our blitz, I'll tell you about that later. Our new training program in Canada, anyhow that's where we up until now. So we've been posted

28:30 to Canada and he said King's Regulations, as they called them in those days, there was no Queen. That's everything was governed by King's Regulations in air force law, you were entitled to ten days pre-embarkation leave. But he said there is not time for that, so he said if you're willing to take seven you fellows, this is addressing us collectively, you can go. I'd have taken two.

29:00 And he said well you better hurry, when you leave an air force station you have to get your release. You have to go to the MO [Medical Officer] in the medical section and he signs that it is ok for you to go. And then you go to the armaments section and they release you that you haven't got any arms in your charge, you know. There's about eight people have to sign it. Like I have to sign my release

29:30 for you people for the footage. And then we had to get all of this done, and get the four o'clock train to Sydney. So I am home again and that was my final leave. That's where we're up to now.

30:00 Went down to Melbourne.

It sounds like you only had time to put your bag down in Uranquinty.

Three days.

And how many boys all together were posted to Canada?

In this draft thirteen. Thirteen. We were from Mascot, and we stuck together, we didn't have any say but

30:30 the air force stuck us together, fortunately for us, so now we are in Melbourne. Back in 1ED. 1 Embarkation Depot, which was the Melbourne Showground. It's the equivalent of the Sydney Showground, they had commandeered it. And you know the enormous pavilions they have in showgrounds? They had forty-nine beds in one pavilion,

31:00 and it was a kind of transit, you know people being transferred from Sydney to Perth, or Melbourne to Darwin, or Narrandera where there was an air force training school to wherever, so that's what it was used for. So we arrived to 1ED which was the old Melbourne Showground, and there is approximately about

31:30 two hundred and fifteen other aircrew fellows already there, waiting for what we didn't know what, but it turned out to be this American troop transport. But we were told we had to be there for seven days waiting for the ship. She had to be cleared and re-provisioned and refuelled and all of that stuff, but we didn't know. They don't tell you anything,

32:00 you pick up a lot of stuff from the grapevine. But you don't know it until it's happening. So we had seven days in Melbourne, which was great. We were given leave, and we didn't have to do anything. No lectures, no drill. It was full of WAAAFs. Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force. We were given leave every night. We used to go into town.

32:30 We went to the Old Australia Hotel and they had, like the equivalent in Sydney, had a place called the Silver Grill, where you could get a steak and oysters, and there was a bar and there were dances. You know so it was great. So that's where we are up to.

Yes well you've partly answered my next question I was going to ask you

33:00 **when you received that announcement that you were the luckiest men because you were going to be posted to Canada,**

Yeah that was the statement from the adjutant, he was thinking what I was thinking. Go on.

Why were you so excited if you weren't told anything about it?

Oh I knew we were going to Canada, he said that. And I had heard

33:30 through the grapevine and through my fathers close association with the air force. He often used to go down with the drafts they called them in the air force. A draft is going to Canada, a draft is two hundred people, or a draft is going to South Africa or a draft is going to England. That's what a draft means. And my father used to go down and farewell

34:00 them, you know actually get on a ship and all that kind of stuff. So I was aware, and I had heard of

letters coming back from fellows who were in Canada, it was an exciting new country you know. They were well treated, so it was a great anticipation and looking forward to it. That's why I was excited. But I knew I was going to Canada and that's about all we knew.

34:30 How and, well we knew it had to be on a ship.

When did you find out the purpose of your trip to Canada?

Well we knew it was for further training. Because Australia was a part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, and the Canadians had, that why President Roosevelt

35:00 called it the aerodrome of democracy. They had enormous facilities available. I mean we had good ones, but the Canadians had even more. And they also had the advantage of, they were right next to the Americans who were in the war by this time. And American supplies, aircraft engine spares you know. No blackouts. With

35:30 a country so big, and you know twenty miles inland and you can't see a thing from the sea. What was your question?

Well before I go on to hear about Canada I might just go back to Uranquinty if I may, you mentioned that you were only there for three days. I wanted to know if you got the opportunity to fly a Wirraway while you were there?

No because as I mentioned

36:00 earlier the whole training program had come to a grinding halt, and the available aircraft that were there were being used by the instructors to form up kind of combat, or as the RAF call it an operational squadron. You know they might be sent up to Darwin or Cape York, or wherever was considered strategically appropriate for that time. Things were pretty desperate. I

36:30 can remember, what I forgot to tell you after I had finished flying training at Mascot, my people had been given the use of a flat in Manly right on the beach for nothing. Because half the residents of Manly had fled to the Blue Mountains because they thought the Jap's were coming. And to get into the surf, the army had put barbed

37:00 wire the length and breadth of the beach, and to get into the surf you actually had to get the troops, they had barbed wire gates. They kind of swung open, and you could go through them to get into the surf. Mind you, you had to make sure you didn't get a good shoot or you'd wind up under the barbed wire. So what I'm saying is, what was the question?

37:30 Anyhow.

I asked, well you told us when you were posted to Mascot you flew Tiger Moths and got quite a few hours up in a Tiger Moth.

Yeah, sixty, that was the requirement of the program.

When did you get an opportunity to fly another type of plane?

Not until I got to Canada.

38:00 Because Uranquinty was stopped because of what I said, the emergencies. So we are now in Melbourne.

Well can you tell me about the ship that you were going to sail on?

Well we didn't know until, we were put on a train, there is a railway station right beside the Melbourne Showground. Known as 1ED in those days, 1 Embarkation Depot.

38:30 And it took us down to Port Melbourne, and the railway line which was used for freight or good trains as they called them in those days, actually ran onto the wharf or the pier. And the train actually went right on, which was normally used for freight and cargo. And we climbed down and walked through a big shed and onto this massive American troop transport. With the stars and stripes

39:00 just fluttering from the mast. And it was a ship called the [USS] Argentina which had been commandeered by the American government, and she had been used on the South American luxury trade. Prior to World War II or the Americans coming into the war, and was hastily converted, as we were to discover, to carry troops. Except

39:30 on A deck which they didn't have time to convert. And the Americans had put their officers there, and their troops had all been put in the, they had collapsible bunks you know, that came out of the wall. Chung, chung chung. And you climbed over like a ladder to get up to the top one. But they had left A deck complete almost,

40:00 they had put some bunks in. And we went back to New York as it turned out in that accommodation. We had the ship to ourselves. And they had, it still had the peacetime menu in the dining room. I've got it. And we were waited on by waiters. I

40:30 think that was her last trip like that you know. She had been hurriedly converted.

Are you talking about the QE II [Queen Elizabeth II] now?

No I haven't even mentioned it. I'm talking about the Argentina. We are still in the wharf at Melbourne, and she was the one that was used on the South American luxury trade. And I don't think the Americans had had time

41:00 to completely convert her into a troop transport. So that the accommodation situation to our complete surprise. And we sailed from Melbourne the next morning, early in the morning and went down around the bottom of New Zealand. And the reason for that was there was Jap [Japanese] submarines off Sydney and Brisbane. And we did a kind of,

41:30 if you look at the map a big loop underneath New Zealand and underneath Bounty Island and ran along the fortieth latitude, the screaming forties as it is called. Or the shrieking fifties, degrees of latitude, we were in the southern ocean and you have these enormous swells that are generated in those latitudes

42:00 where there's almost unlimited ocean all around the globe.

Tape 4

00:30 **David you have just described to us a fantastic picture of your journey on the Argentina, as a young boy of nineteen, can you describe to me what you saw when you got to the Panama Canal?**

Yes it's a on the Pacific Ocean side we entered through a series of lochs.

01:00 And you first enter at tidal level of the Pacific and the gates close behind you. And that's like a bath where the doors close, all referred to as lochs. And then that's flooded from up higher until the loch or the bath

01:30 fills up to the level of the next loch. Then the gates open at the other end and let you into this loch, and then close behind you. And that loch in turn is flooded, and then you go up another. It is like a series of water steps. And then when, there is a long distance to cover, there is what the Americans call mules. M U L E S. And they look like, ever seen a Melbourne tram? You'd be

02:00 too young to remember a tram in Sydney. They're like Melbourne trams only a bit smaller. And they run on railway lines or tram lines right next to these lochs. And they tow the ship through the confined areas, it doesn't drive itself on its own propellers. That's how the ship is controlled, so that was an enormous experience for us nineteen

02:30 year old boys, or a bit older. Until you eventually get to the, I think it is called the Gatun Lake. G A T U N. Which is a lake high up in the kind of, what do they call it there? In the Panama Isthmus, Central American mountain range. And the ship can actually traverse, its like going across Sydney Harbour, it's a gigantic lake. And we anchored for

03:00 the night in that and then resumed the journey down on the other side and came out, I think its Colon on the Caribbean or Atlantic side. And go down a series of locks where the reverse situation applies. They release the water and the ship drops, close the gate behind. Go into that one and they release the water in that. One lot is

03:30 of water is releasing into the Caribbean and the other is draining back into the Pacific. And it is all fed by the Gatun Lake, which has tropical monsoonal rain, you know they don't have any trouble filling the lake. So that was an experience, and the whole thing was guarded by the US Army. And we spent a day in the harbour at Colon

04:00 and set out across the Caribbean. And we were only at sea about four hours and we saw this semi-submerged machine-gunned lifeboat. And at that period in time the German U boats were conducting an attritional campaign off the east coast of the US and down around Florida and into the Caribbean.

04:30 **Approximately what time of year is this?**

May. Early June. The northern hemisphere summer. So on about the third day out from Panama early in the morning, I was asleep and the ship came to a grinding halt, it was shuddering, you know, like that.

05:00 Nobody told us anything of course, went up on deck and a raft had been sighted with one only survivor on it. And contrary to the US navy's instructions, because this ship was under control of the US navy, it's a court martial offence, the captain stopped the ship. And the Caribbean was like the Mediterranean as I was later to discover, it's

05:30 as flat as that. Beautiful blue, but no swell and here's this fellow in this life raft. So they put a lifeboat over the side with the first officer in charge and they rode out to it and picked him up and brought him back, it all took time you know and we're sitting there. And we got underway again, and I went down to

breakfast. Breakfasts are staggered see? You go at

06:00 seven, and he goes at seven thirty, and I go at eight. With our time, and on the stern of this ship there was a four-inch cannon that had been installed by the Americans, most big ships had them by this time in the war. And it opened fire, do you know we heard it open up.

06:30 And it turned out that we were being attacked, we found this out subsequently, by two German submarines as we were going through what's known as the Yucatan Channel. That's Y U C A T A N. Yucatan is a peninsula in Central America that juts out into the Caribbean and Cuba comes up, the north-western tip of Cuba, and you have to pass through the Yucatan Channel which is a hundred miles wide.

07:00 And that's where they lay in wait because it is a bottleneck, you get the shipping flow. So we were under attack by these two German U boats. And I actually saw the periscope of one cut, you know how a big ship leaves a wake, you know, it cut through the wake. And it performs what they call a Prince of Wales feathers.

07:30 The periscope comes up like that, and as it moves forward it throws a little plume of water forward, and two out to the side, like an ordinary bow. Like the Prince of Wales feathers and that's where it gets its name. So we were lucky to get out of that alive, they must have missed us, they were obviously patrolling this Yucatan Channel cross wise and they must have been at the extremities of their patrol as

08:00 we came down the centre and picked this fellow up. And he was taken off, we pulled in to Key West, which is the southern tip off Florida, which was a US navy base. And they took him off and we didn't see him again. He may have been a bait, we never found out. Could have been, could have been genuine. And from there we went up the east coast of the US and disembarked in New York

08:30 and that was the end of the sea trip.

That must have taken several weeks?

Three weeks. Three weeks and a couple of days if I remember correctly.

And what did you do when you got to New York?

Well

09:00 first of all we went into New York Harbour early in the morning. And you can imagine country boys from Australia, you know the jaw dropped. Anyhow there was a troop train to take us up to Canada, but they gave us, they let us have about five hours leave on the condition that

09:30 we came back and you know reported back to where the ship was. Because it's alongside a railway line. So we were able to have a look around for five hours. And then we got on this troop train and it took us up to Canada, to Montreal. And we travelled all night, oh part of Saturday afternoon and then all night.

10:00 From New York to Montreal, or Monreal as the French Canadians call it, they don't sound the T.

And where was your eventual camp or base?

Well we were taken to what the Canadian call a manning depot, that Canadian for embarkation depot that the Australians called it, that I mentioned the one in Melbourne, there was also one in Sydney. And

10:30 we awaited a posting, there were about two hundred and thirty of us. And after we had been there a week, roughly two hundred of the fellows got postings to various air force establishments across Canada. Out on the prairies in western Canada, and some in eastern Canada, and there were thirty of us

11:00 left that didn't get a posting because there were no vacancies. And we were there for about another eight or nine days and a mate of mine from Mascot, who had been with me all through the training program, and he and I were in the Avalon Surf Club before the war. We got five days leave and went up into the Laurentian Mountains, north of Montreal, which is where the Canadians play skiing

11:30 in the winter. And it was lovely, you know lakes, and we hitchhiked up into the mountains, and we had six days leave. And the whole thing cost us ten cents, which was the tram fare to the terminus, which we got off, walked over to the footpath or the sidewalk as the Canadians called it.

12:00 Put our fingers up and never looked back, straight away two lifts, three lifts from various people. And what we were looking for was a little lodge on the side of a lake, you know with canes and things. And the first lot of people stopped and said we're going to stay in that hotel up there, and you know, it was a million dollars a day. So we kept going and got another lift and they dropped us.

12:30 And the third lift, a fellow came along in a car and he picked us up and we got talking and he said what are you doing here? And we told him what we were looking for and he didn't say a word and he branched off this main road, we were in the mountain country, down this kind of gravel road and it wound down and I'm not saying anything. And suddenly we break out of the forest onto this lake and there is a lodge you know.

13:00 Not a five storey hotel, but a timber two storeys. And he was the owner, the proprietor of this lodge, and it had canoes and swimming, and he put us up for five or six days. And when the time came to pay he wouldn't take any money, and it turned out that he had been a Belgian in the First World War and he had immigrated to Canada after the First World War.

13:30 And in France where the Belgian trenches ended the Australians started you see? The Australian sector. And he was in the Belgian army in the First World War, and he was on duty right where the Australian sector started, and we were in Australian uniforms with Australia on our shoulder flashes. And hence ten cents for the,

14:00 and so it was wonderful, he even arranged, we got a lift back into Montreal. And then from there we got a posting to a training school. So that's the trip from Australia to Canada?

And what was your friend's name?

With me? Tony Wheeler. And he is still alive.

14:30 **Would he be in your mind possibly your best mate?**

Was, I've got other best mates since, because we have grown apart. I mean economic and commercial necessities, we have digressed,

15:00 but I am still in touch with him. Yeah.

You've mentioned that you were posted overseas with thirteen other boys from Mascot, how did you manage to stay in touch with each other while you were in Canada?

Well what happened,

15:30 one of the strange things that did happen in the air force, we were given the opportunity of sticking together, well that's how it worked out. When we were left behind in Montreal and we went up into the mountains and the others were posted, what the Canadians did, they said you can stick together with your friends, but

16:00 we need twenty fellows to go to Winnipeg. And you know thirty to go out to Edmonton. And that's what happened. And we had one fellow who said we're not going to volunteer for anything so just sit pat. And he was older than us so we sat pat. And the thirteen of us were left with these others, and they went off and we got this leave.

16:30 So that's how we managed to stick together. So the thirteen of us went to this same training school in southern Ontario. So that's how we stuck together.

And what was the name of the place that you went to in Ontario?

It was called, to give you the Canadian terminology it was called 14 SFTS. That's Service Flying [actually Secondary Flight] Training School. That's the next

17:00 stage. They were called service flying training schools in Australia too. And it was at a place called Aylmer, A Y L M E R. Which was in southern Ontario, eighty miles from the US border. So here we are in southern Ontario, and that was the start of another training program on

17:30 aircraft called Harvards. As in the university. And that was, that was a four month training program, took us from July to October.

And this is now 1942?

Yes.

18:00 **What type of plane is the Harvard?**

It's a training aircraft, it's a low wing monoplane. And it was used extensively in Canada for single engine pilot training. The Wirrraway that was used in Australia is a cousin of the Harvard. Both

18:30 originated from the North American Aviation Corporation. And it was used extensively by the US air force, although they didn't call it the Harvard, that was a Canadian nomenclature. The Americans called in NA 33 they had different terminology. But it was the same aircraft. But it was used, it was used also in Rhodesia and South Africa.

19:00 **And how did you find it to fly?**

I had some initial difficulty with it. Because it was a much more powerful aircraft, and in all of that description I have given you, that took three and a half months,

19:30 or four moths lay off from flying. You know its not like riding a horse for four months or you playing tennis you hadn't played for four months, you know what I mean? So I had some initial difficulty with it. It was very powerful and for me a bit awesome initially. Although later, much later when we had one on our squadron as a transport aircraft

20:00 to get back to leave areas it was like a toy. So everything is relative. But that's what it felt like initially.

We've heard from other people that there is often accidents during training. Can you tell me about any problems or accidents that you encountered?

Yes. The thirteenth

20:30 fellow that volunteered to take the place of a chap that had got engaged to a girl at Uranquinty and had been to see the adjutant and he swapped them. In our new training program in Canada he was one of the first to go up, that was just how the timetable worked. Similar to the syllabus here in Australia only at the SFTS half of

21:00 the course would fly in the morning and the other half did ground subjects. Then in the afternoon the fellows that had done ground subjects flew, and the fellows that had flew in the morning did ground subjects, so that's how it worked right through the three and a half months. So this fellow who had got onto our draft at the last minute, and was the number thirteen, he was one of the first to go up. You know, when we

21:30 arrived with an instructor on what we call a familiarisation exercise. You know he would just take you up and say look that's the name of the town and that's the river. Anyway we were in ground school and we heard this wirrrr and then boom. And the whole bloody place shook. And what had happened, he and his instructor spun in on his first ever trip.

22:00 So then we had a military funeral, oh several days later. So that was my first encounter, and it was with the thirteenth fellow from Mascot who we had all stuck together with, who had asked the adjutant if he could go in place of the fellow that got engaged. So that was king of coincidental and a shock to us all.

22:30 Because he had been with us you know, up until that time. And there was a certain amount of bonding by then as you can well imagine.

Where did the plane crash?

It went into farmland near the aerodrome.

23:00 **That's a very sad story. Can you tell me about perhaps times yourself when you felt like maybe you hadn't backed the plane into the right parking spot, or you know you mentioned you had a few difficulties with**

23:30 **the Harvard. I'm wondering if there were any other difficult times for you?**

No not really, my difficulties were I found it a bit awesome you know. I wasn't miscuing or anything like that. My movements were

24:00 tentative. You know you control the aircraft with a joystick or a flying column here. And it was so powerful, you know I was a bit overcome, awesome. That's the kind of difficulty I had. Whereas when I first got in a Tiger Moth it was like going home, I had no trouble.

24:30 But I mean that was overcome within a week any rate, but it was there. And one had to overcome it, because I mean if you didn't go solo within certain hours, same thing about seven hours, then you came up for an examination by the CFI, the chief flying instructor and he assessed you

25:00 and you could be scrubbed, or washed out as the Canadians called it. You were finished with the pilot training course and sent of to a wireless operator air gunner school or a navigator school depending. So one had to overcome those things, and you've also got to keep up with the pack in the course. You know the pace is set by the cleverest, and

25:30 that applies to ground school and flying. And you were conscious of fellows going off solo in six hours when the norm was seven and I wonder will I? So there was that standard to achieve, but anyhow I overcame it and the program progressed and we did night

26:00 flying, a lot of night flying. Initially with instructors and then solo. But it wasn't too bad in Canada because in Ontario which is in mid Canada I guess, or the Canadians call it eastern Canada, there were no blackout restrictions. They are so far in from the sea it doesn't matter, so you had lots of light down on the ground to get your bearings from and so on and that was ok.

26:30 And the accommodation similar to here in Australia only it was better, and the food was excellent. We had, I won't say we were popular, but we had the advantage that our uniforms were slightly different to the Canadians and the New Zealanders and the

27:00 British. Ours was a deeper darker blue. And we had the buttons were black bakelite. Whereas all the others, the British or the English and the New Zealanders they all had brass buttons and had to be polished. And the fact that our uniform was different, they were the same shape and we had the same ranks, everything was the same except the colour,

27:30 and it was like a magnet to the girls you know? And so if you were pimply and ugly and Australian, see the advantage you had? Anyhow that's just an aside. But we were mixed, the thing that I didn't mention,

I think there were thirty Australians and I think there were sixty fellows on the course. And the

28:00 balance were made up with Canadians. We had five Americans who had enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force before the Americans came into the war. A lot of Americans came up and crossed the border and enlisted. And they were still with us. And we had about eight English, British, you know English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh

28:30 who had been in the RAF, or who were still in the RAF and they were making up the numbers of the course. So it was a very interesting, it was the beginning of my personal experience with what were known as mixed or international squadrons. We had fellows from the English speaking world but from those countries. And

29:00 our flight commander was American, and he too had been an American who, he had had flying experience before the war and he had come up and voluntarily enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force before the Yanks [Americans] came in. What else did we have? Oh we had a magnificent canteen,

29:30 you know it was like, it was almost like 2003 Woolworth's supermarket. You know they had American standards of living, we were almost bush boys you know. When you had a cup of tea some one went out in the back yard and boiled the billy, I'm exaggerating. But the standard was very high. And all their runways were bitumen or concrete, whereas

30:00 Uranquinty was a grass field. The aircraft were put away in hangers at night, whereas my memories of Uranquinty, a lot of them were left out in the open during the day. But they had the advantage of immediate American supplies and stuff like that. So it was a great experience. And we had, we were given what the Canadians

30:30 called a forty-eight, every second weekend. Forty-eight is short speak, Canadian short speak for forty-eight hours leave. You know that's all day Saturday, all day Sunday. A forty-eight, you on a forty-eight? Where are you going? You know that's the. And we went a lot of times down to Detroit which was the nearest American city.

31:00 The Americans let us in, you know there was no trouble. And Detroit was wide open in that all the bars, all the movie theatres, all live theatre were open on Sundays. Whereas in southern Ontario it was like here in Sydney. It was a kind of Calvinistic society where everything stopped at twelve midday. This was when I was growing up. Everything stopped at twelve midday

31:30 on Saturday and life didn't begin again until half past seven on Monday morning.

You've spoken with a great deal of respect and admiration for the Canadian training school. How many Australian troops, air force troops were trained in the school?

In the total number of Australian that went through Canada under

32:00 the Empire Air Training Scheme agreement were nine thousand six hundred and six. And they were all categories, navigators, pilots, wireless operator air gunners, and straight air gunners. And that was spread over 1939 to 45. They weren't all there at once. And that was in addition to Australians training

32:30 here in Australia and being sent to Rhodesia and South Africa where there were also programs under the EATS scheme. They weren't as vast as they were in Canada.

And when did you get your wings?

I got my wings on the

33:00 23rd of October in 1942. So I started training in July, it was about four and a half months.

And you've mentioned that the training school had men from Britain New Zealand as well as

33:30 **Canada and Australia, what were the relationships like between the different nationalities?**

My personal experience was that they were excellent. We all got on well together. It was a new experience for us all to be exposed to fellows from those countries and different points of view.

34:00 At the same time we all had a common interest and a common goal, that was to complete the course and get our wings. And we were interested in the same things, you know girls and a few beers and working. You know in a sense of learning to fly, so I would say excellent.

34:30 And we were, we all shared the same hut or sleeping arrangements, you know there was no segregation. The Canadians weren't put in that hut and we were in this. In the actual sleeping arrangements, they had double bunks made of steel with wire mattresses. You know I'm on the bottom you're on the top. And I just forget, I think

35:00 there was about twenty-eight people to a hut. And they were heated because they have some terrible winters, the Canadians. And we were mixed, you know you might have two Aussies here and a Canadian and an American, and Englishmen and Scotsman and then another American who was in the Royal Canadian Air Force. So we were completely integrated and mixed. So there was

35:30 great opportunity for bonding. And for one of the things I was invited home. One of the Canadians lived on a farm out of Toronto and he was married, and he invited me home to his family's farm, his parents owned it and were running it, but his wife was living on it you know. And I went home and spent the weekend with them.

36:00 **Yes I am a little bit surprise, I would have thought the Australians would have bunked in with the Australians, how did you decide who would sleep in which hut?**

Well first of all, the course was in one hut, there were thirty of us see? And this hut took thirty. And there was, there were

36:30 the total number of fellows on the course was sixty, and there were thirty Australians and the balance were others. And each, what I forgot, they were in an eight shape like that, connected by what the air force calls ablutions, that toilets and showers and all that kind of stuff. And when we arrived they just said you're in there to the entire course, and so we just filed in and

37:00 we just selected, and it just turned out that the fellow next to you was a Canadian, or a Scotsman or an Irishman or whatever. So that's how it was kind of voluntarily. And that mixing and international bonding grew as the course progressed.

And what kind of

37:30 **respect did you have for each others flying?**

Well it, you rapidly, like any school it rapidly becomes obvious who is doing well and who is heading the course. The thing naturally evolves of its own volition. And you know who does well in ground school and so on. You know we had some

38:00 university undergraduates with us, and maths and navigation, you know they had been doing science or something. Breeze, they didn't even pay attention to the instructor you know. Those kind of fellows, I've seen them at school. So that's the answer to that.

38:30 **And what about LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre], did you encounter?**

No there was no, I have never seen nor have I heard of LMF in any of the training programs. It was only when I got to England that I heard of it.

And when did you hear about it?

39:00 Oh I must have been in England almost a year when I heard about it. I had heard about it but it wasn't a subject for great discussion, and I wasn't personally aware of any of it happening.

39:30 I've only really heard extensively of it since the war. I think it's a bit, what the word, anachronistic? It's a bit old fashioned, I think it was something, this is my personal view, from the First World War. I think as the war progressed, speaking for the RAF any rate, they gradually

40:00 began to assume a more enlightened attitude towards it in which psychology and psychiatrists were introduced. You know it was treated in that vain as time progressed, I was well aware that the Americans were treating it in the American Air Force,

40:30 from what I have heard, along that basis. They had a much more enlightened approach than the RAF, than the British did, at that time. But I think it was rapidly in the stages of transition to this more enlightened view that you get now. I mean they used to parade the fellows and strip them and they were drummed out of the service. And the moment they passed over the boundary of

41:00 the RAF premises the British Army arrested them as deserters, you know. But I've only heard of that since the war. Can I have a break?

Tape 5

00:21 **Ok David I would like to take up this tape by talking about the musterings you were talking about earlier, how was it that you were chosen to be a single engine pilot rather than a twin engine pilot?**

The recommendations for that

01:00 started in my experience after the completion of the elementary flying training school. That's the Tiger Moths at Mascot. And it was there that the instructors formulated and began to formulate an idea of your personality and you suitability for single engine pilot categorisation or a multi-engine. And a general tendency

01:30 a starting point was age. Usually the younger fellows, you know the nineteen year olds or the twenty

year olds were chosen for the single engine and ultimately to be fighter pilots. And the older fellows say twenty-five to thirty, they were selected for what they called twin engine or multi-engine categorisation. So age was the initial determinant.

02:00 Then personality, younger fellows were supposed to be more daring, fool hardy, more risk taking, whereas chaps from say twenty-five onwards were allegedly more cautious and so on as you got older.

02:30 So that was basically the criteria on which those selections were made. And a lot of that was disproved later on in the war itself when you have got the reverse applying, but that was the determinant.

What were the supposed advantages of being

03:00 **risky or game, to be a single engine pilot?**

Well I think a lot of that was gained from or had its origin in battles like the Battle of Britain where the very

03:30 existence of the country hung on that thread. You know if the British had been defeated in the air you know, at that crucial time it would have thrown open the UK to invasion, you know, there would have been no air cover. And if they'd have gone, if the UK had gone down, as I have read the whole system of democracy, might have had a domino effect on the rest of the

04:00 democratic English speaking nations. So I think that where a lot of that thinking originated from, and also the general aspect in the community that as you get older you become more cautious. And you don't have to throw a multi-engine bomber aircraft around the air in evasive daylight tactics

04:30 and most of the RAF's work was at night. Whereas in the Battle of Britain, a lot of single engine work took place in daylight. So everybody could see one another.

So perhaps quicker reflexes?

Yes, well I encompassed, that goes with youth, it goes

05:00 unsaid but that's included in that kind of criteria, yes. Although the fellows that were slightly older and managing four engine aircraft, they had to have their wits about them and their reflexes about them too. So it's not to say that they didn't, and one had to measure up, you had to qualify for what the medical people called A1B. Medically, don't ask me to

05:30 give you that in detail, but it meant ten ten eye sight. Reflexes responded to the laid down medical criteria and your blood pressure was right, and your pulse rate. All of those things took place at the original recruitment depot, and subsequent medical tests that you were subject to as you went along.

06:00 So that's as I understand how the selections were made. Now having done that, when I got to England with my draft, a lot of that concept went overboard because the RAF and the Americans too, but I can only speak of the RAF, they were starting to suffer horrific losses

06:30 at night over Germany you know. They were losing hundreds and hundreds of aircrew per night. So the replacement situation became critical and they had to then draw on fellows that had been trained on single engine aircraft like I had. And again the good old air force you were told you were

07:00 going there, and when you arrived there it was a twin engine advanced flying school which led into Bomber Command and multi-engine aircraft. So the contingencies arising from the strategic and tactical situation, that is losses and so forth and so on,

07:30 meant that the higher authorities had to be very flexible in a lot of these early training program concepts.

Upon arriving in England as you referred to before, I was wondering what rank you were throughout your training period up to that point?

Well I had all kinds of rank.

08:00 When I was first called up and went in I had the ranking of the lowest form of life known on the planet, that's the air force slang and that's called AC2. That's aircraftsman second class. After we'd completed our initial training, three months and just prior to going to elementary flying training school

08:30 we were promoted to LAC's, which stand for leading aircraftsman, and from having nothing on your sleave, you got a little propeller. Just a little cloth propeller here and that denoted leading aircraftsman. The WAAAFs, the girls, when they got to that rank they were called LACW. Leading aircraftsman women. And then the next rank

09:00 I held was sergeant pilot. And then from there I was promoted to flight sergeant pilot, that's where you wear a crown above your three sergeant stripes. This is all over a period of time, and then I was promoted to warrant officer, and there's a warrant officers badge you wear down here on your sleave. Then I got a commission and was made pilot officer and went on from that to flying officer.

09:30 **And as you referred to earlier it was in England that you received your wings?**

No, in Canada. We didn't quite get to the end of training in Canada when we broke for lunch. I got my wings on the 23rd of October as I mentioned previously. And they were awarded in Canada at Aylmer. That was the Canadian service flying training school.

10:00 And from there we were given ten days leave, and I with some others went down and spent the ten days in New York, and then when that was over we had to report to another manning depot as the Canadians called it, or as we call them here in Australia embarkation depots. A manning depot in Halifax on the east coast of Canada.

10:30 And that's where all the big convoys assembled to make the trip across the Atlantic. So I got my wings in Canada.

What happened to your rate of pay when you got your wings?

They were all increased. You got, well depending on what you graduated as, see most of us graduated as sergeant pilots and just under a third

11:00 as I remember it, got commissions or became pilot officers. The rest of us got commissions, or let me rephrase that, a lot of us got commissions later on in what they call in the field. So the rates of pay varied with your rank as you went up the line and then increased again when we got our wings and

11:30 became sergeant pilots. And then there was a pay increase again when we became flight sergeant pilots, that's the crown above the three stripes. I think we only call them staff sergeants, and the pay was increased again when you became warrant officer, and then when you got a commission and became a pilot officer and so on up the line.

What were you receiving as a sergeant pilot?

I don't know, but the

12:00 one thing that I can remember is that when I finished in the air force I was a flying officer and with all of my field allowances and so forth it was the equivalent of seven pounds a week. Which wasn't too bad when families were being raised during the depression on four pounds ten, that four and a half pounds. So if you want to translate that to when Australia went metric, and that wasn't until the early sixties so you've got inflation

12:30 factor in there, a dollar was, a dollar was the equivalent of ten shillings at the time of the transition so seven pounds would have been fourteen dollars. But you had to relate that to the cost the living, so it wasn't too bad.

That brings me to my next point of interest

13:00 **in that when you do arrive in England which, while not princely in fact was at least adequate I imagine to satisfy your means?**

Yes. We had board and lodging and clothing, so the basic elements of society were taken care of, I mean they might have been a

13:30 bit Spartan, and were very Spartan later on which we haven't got to yet, but yeah it was adequate.

Well I'm wondering how you put some of that to use, especially in a place like London when you arrived. So could you take me from your disembarkation point in Britain to when you arrived in London?

14:00 Well first of all before we do that, I would just like to take you from Halifax in Canada. We were anticipating going across in a convoy from Halifax to the UK and to our surprise we were put on a train again, a troop train and taken down to New York again. To New York Harbour where we were put on a pedestrian river ferry and ferried down New

14:30 York Harbour and we wound up alongside the Queen Elizabeth where we joined fifteen thousand American troops who were going over to England. And we had about three hundred aircrew, and they were mixed. They were Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians and British, who had been training in Canada, or some of the British fellows who had been training in the US.

15:00 And that was something I forgot to mention, some of the British fellows that we had on course with us in Aylmer in Canada, this is just before we got our wings, our last training course, they had done their elementary flying training, or basic flying training as the Americans called it in America. In Texas and Oklahoma and California, under an agreement that

15:30 Churchill had reached with President Roosevelt, and then they came up to Canada to get, to complete their service flying training. Where others on the course, Englishmen had completed the whole thing in the US. So there was a vast training program going on in the North American continent. So a lot of these English fellows, or English, Scots, Irish and Welsh, got to be fair, did their whole training

16:00 mixed in with the Americans in the US. That was after Pearl Harbour I hasten to add.

And then aboard the Queen Elizabeth you were then with this multi-national force?

Yes.

Did you feel on par with all of the other pilots?

They weren't all pilots. See fifteen thousand Americans were infantry, and artillery and army.

16:30 All kinds of musterings or categorisations or qualifications. It was part of the American build up. The Queen Elizabeth and the Queen Mary were basically engaged in a shuttle service backwards and forwards as the American build up was taking place in the UK prior to the invasion on the continent.

And where did the Queen Elizabeth take you?

17:00 Well left from New York and she ran unescorted to Greenock in Scotland, which is the port of Glasgow. And the reason she went unescorted, well most convoys at sea proceeded at the speed of the slowest freighter, which is about

17:30 eight knots. The Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth could do about thirty-two. You know they go like the hounds of hell, zig-zag. And they were equipped with the latest radar, and the lasted asdic, that's anti-submarine detection. You know they could pick up stuff ahead, you know. It was a tremendous risk, but it worked because neither of them were sunk as we know now. And on both of them, but I can only speak with authority on the

18:00 Queen Elizabeth, there were two meals a day. The Americans ran the ship, everything except, they had a British crew in the engine room. They were the fellows down with the levers and the wheels and the propellers and up on the bridge. But other than that the Americans ran it, they did the catering and the administration,

18:30 and as we filed on board everyone was handed a coloured card and it had little rectangular squares in it and it gave you the times that you would have your meal for the four days of the crossing. And the meals started, from memory, at five thirty am, don't forget they have got to feed fifteen thousand people. They started at five thirty in the morning, and that's

19:00 breakfast and it finished at eleven am. And the second meal of the day started at half past three in the afternoon and finished at nine o'clock at night, almost a continuos flow. And you didn't have the same time slot every day. You had to look at your coloured card to see, oh day 1 I'm on seven thirty for breakfast and day 2 its eleven o'clock in the morning, and my second meal is going to be at half

19:30 past three in the afternoon. Get it? And it was well organised, we went into this enormous galley, and the first thing you were handed or you grabbed off the pile was a pre-pressed aluminium tray and it had indentations pressed out at the factory. And you got the tray and a knife and fork and spoon, and you slid along the counter and they went plunk plunk plunk.

20:00 You know, a packet of wheaties, two sausages, three potatoes and so on. And they had to keep it moving, you know, coping with that kind of catering. And the whole thing was overseen by their military police, not that anyone got out of line. But they told you to slow it down, or wait a minute.

20:30 So it was well organised, well controlled.

It certainly sounds it.

And we were in a cabin that was originally designed for two, we were in a cabin for two in peacetime and it had accommodation for fifteen. They were wooden bunks built into the side of the wall. Tier shaped, I mean like a ladder,

21:00 and to get up to the top bunk you put your foot on the bottom mattress part of the fellow right on the bottom, and you went up, if you were right on top. And in these bunks you couldn't sit up. You had to get in, go in sideways and lie, you had about that much movement. So if we had have been torpedoed we wouldn't have had a chance, but we weren't. So it was

21:30 a calculated risk and it worked.

From what you say I guess it was a risk and a well organised one,

Its called calculated risk I think.

To convey so many troops of different services to Britain. I'm wondering given those regimented eating sleeping lifestyle

22:00 **on board the ship, how did those conditions change upon arrival in Britain?**

Well we were taken from Greenock by troop train to a town on the English south coast called Bournemouth. And it was controlled by the RAAF, and it was known as 11 PDRC. That's Personnel

22:30 Depot and Reception Centre. And the accommodation, the British government or the RAF had commandeered blocks of flats and we were accommodated in them. The actual rooms in the flats had

been cleared out. Some of them even to the extent that even the carpet had been removed, they were bare boards, and bunks had been put in. You know six or eight to

23:00 a room. And that was the sleeping accommodation, and any number of those blocks of flats had been commandeered, it was martial law in the UK. And then we ate at what in peacetime had been an indoor bowling green, a huge place, bit bigger than modern bowling alleys. And that had been converted into a mess as they call it, or in

23:30 peacetime an English dining room. And you walked in and over a long wall there was a long counter again about chest high, and behind it there were lots of WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] who were cooks, and that's what they had enlisted for. Or associated with food distribution, and again you slid your trays along and they put a sausage and a spoonful

24:00 of mashed potato, a brussel sprout and so on. Maybe a sweet, cup of tea. And then you took that to long trestle tables.

What were your feelings upon arriving in Europe at that, well periphery

24:30 **even, but where the war was happening?**

Well my personal feelings, I was caught up again in the excitement of once again of the unfolding of something completely unexperienced before and unseen. It was a noticeable change from Canada and the US in the sense that everything was blacked out. From the railway train on the way from Greenock to Bournemouth

25:00 which is in English terms a fair distance, we would think nothing of it here. You could see how everybody was doing their part where there was a vegetable plot in the backyard. There was a vegetable plot on what little space there was left between the actual railway track or line and the fence of private property. Everything was cultivated, you know they were growing vegetables

25:30 because the rationing was pretty savage in the UK and they were into their third year, well two and a half years into the war when I arrived. Bearing in mind it started in 39. So those were the things that struck me immediately. And everything was blacked out of course. And at night, until you got used to it, you almost groped your way around. But that became second nature after a while, your sight adjusted and everybody was doing it.

26:00 It was all done in good humour.

What was your experience at Bournemouth, was that a training centre?

No that was purely a holding depot, to receive the aircrew either when the received the aircrew direct from Australia, or when they arrived from Canada, or even if they had come from Rhodesia,

26:30 but most of the Rhodesian trained fellows and the South African trained fellows usually went straight to the Middle East, you know to Cairo and the western desert. But not all. And the Canadians, they had a reception depot of their own, and so did the British. And so Bournemouth, in my time, was purely Australian.

In your case then, from Bournemouth you

27:00 **progressed where?**

Well once again we were given some leave after we arrived and we went up to London and had about ten days in London and then back to Bournemouth. And I waited a couple of weeks in Bournemouth until I was posted to an RAF station at a place called Sywell

27:30 just out of Northampton, flying Tiger Moths. And the reason for that was that there was a hold up in the training program, there was further training to be gone through, more advanced training yet again, because the weather had been so crook. For instance there was fog and snow and the flying conditions were atrocious, we just couldn't fly.

28:00 And so the training programs came to a halt and you got a backlash right down the line. So what are we going to do with these fellows, you know they are pouring in from Australia and Canada and Rhodesia, and so they sent us on courses, you couldn't have fellows kind of hanging around. And some of them were sent and did an army course, or army courses. And I was fortunate, we were

28:30 sent to an elementary flying training school and flew Tiger Moths.

I imagine since you mentioned the leave in London, I imagine at that time there was also an influx of personnel to that city, in your nice dark navy blue uniform, you had only shortly before received your wings

29:00 **and pay rise, how do you spend that leave time?**

Well again it was a new experience, and in my initial stay in London I stayed in the hostel run by, actually I can't remember it now, its named like the Victorian Empire Society.

29:30 And they had taken over a building of some description, and they had equipped it with bunks, one on top of the other, that sort of thing. And there was a canteen, and by canteen I mean you got a kind of canteen type breakfast, and you could stay there for some minimal sum, I forget what it was. But it was very cheap. And that's where I stayed with some of my mates in

30:00 my initial stay in London. Later on we became more sophisticated but that's for later on. And London of course was cosmopolitan. Everyone was in uniform, including the women. That's not to say there weren't civilians, I don't mean that. But it seemed to be predominantly uniform. And the movie theatres were open. Everything was blacked out at night, couldn't se a thing,

30:30 and there were dances and lots of entertainment. English pubs. So it was, that was a pleasant leave, it was in the winter. It was cold but that was ok.

I'm also wondering, you say that this period where you were doing elementary flying again, on Tiger Moths again,

31:00 **having progressed to Harvards in Canada, was this almost a backward step?**

Well I don't think anything connected with flying is backwards, its all good experience. But it was easy, after flying a much more powerful aircraft, you know you go back to an elementary one it's a pleasure.

31:30 And the instructors were delighted to get us because what they had been used to was fellows like I used to be once, you know never flown before you know and you've got to take them from scratch, and they are capable of making the most horrific blunders or not. And you suddenly given a class of fellows who have already qualified and know what they are doing, they had a ball the instructors.

32:00 You know it was great, we used to do unauthorised aerobatics. I hasten to add there was an authorised training program that we had to do, but dealing with already trained personnel, you know, from the instructors point of view it was a breeze.

32:30 You know when they said do something we could do it.

Still how is it that flying in these open cockpit Tiger Moths in the winter and yet you can still call it a wonderful experience?

Well first of all it was easy, that made it wonderful. You know it wasn't as thought we were going onto an even more advanced aircraft, it was easy to do.

33:00 There was no pressure, there were no ground subjects, there were no examinations, it was just flying. It was, for me and my immediate associates, and I cant' speak for anyone else, it was almost like being in a private flying club. Almost recreational flying. It wasn't meant to be by the authorities I suppose but it was.

I assume that those conditions were again different from anything you had

33:30 **encountered, how many errors or accidents resulted from these new conditions?**

None at all. Because you already had trained aircrew flying these aircraft. And with an instructor, as I say it was almost like being with a private flying club in peacetime. Another aspect that I haven't mentioned, when we arrived at Sywell,

34:00 or Northampton, that's the English town, there was no accommodation for us in the aerodrome. It had been a private aerodrome during peacetime and the RAF had taken it over. So it didn't have very many facilities, like what the RAF called ablutions, that's toilets and showers and bathrooms. And so our draft was billeted

34:30 in the town, and billeted with the civilians. Again, marshal had been invoked, and the background to being billeted was that the authorities came around to your home and knocked on your door. And said I understand you are Mr Jones? Yes. How many bedrooms have you got Mr Jones? And you

35:00 had to say I've got one, two, three or four. How many beds have you got? So many. How many are living here? Oh so you've got so many living here but you tell me that you've got seven beds, well we are going to allocate so many servicemen to you, which will be billeted to you. But you are not required to feed them or provide sanitary or toilet, bathroom facilities, just

35:30 the bed. For which you will be paid threepence a night. Which in modern Australian vernacular is barely three cents. That's what they got. We in turn were picked up by a double decker bus from the railway station and there was a flight sergeant stood on the rear deck of the double decker bus and he had a clip board, and he'd say

36:00 two for here. So if you had a mate you'd say come on Jonesy we'll take this one. One, three, so that's how it was worked out, they left it to us, it was a bit of a lucky dip, I got a one. In the morning you had to get up, and it was dark, it was an English winter, you know the sun didn't come up until about ten o'clock in the morning if

36:30 it came out at all during and English winter. So it was dark, and we had to walk to a corner where an air

force bus picked us up and took us out to the aerodrome again where we immediately got undressed again and had a shower and a shave and then went into breakfast and the day started flying. And then the reverse applied in the afternoon, you went back and had you evening meal and the bus took you back into Northampton and it was up to you what you were going to do at night. So

37:00 those were the billeting or accommodation arrangements.

I understand you had experience flying on some new aircraft at other locations in England?

Oh yes that's later on in the flying training program. After, I must tell you one thing as an aside if we've got time. The very first night

37:30 in this billet, I had come from Canada, hot showers, ablutions, everything laid on. So when I knocked on the door the owner of this, they were all English terrace houses is the best I can describe them. And they are all jammed up like that and they have got a front yard about a metre to the footpath,

38:00 and they are two storey. And there is row after row after row after row of them. You know in the streets, and they all look the same. It's easy to get lost. Anyhow the bus dropped me off, with this big kit bag, and I knocked on the door and this young woman came and it turned out that she was the eldest daughter. And the family had gone out somewhere, that's the mother and the father and

38:30 the two younger sisters. Anyway I introduced myself and she had previously had had a serviceman billeted there, this is the eldest daughter, and so she said it is upstairs, first on the right, that's where you are. So I went up and there was a bedroom there and I put my gear down and I thought I'll have a shower. So I found the bathroom and it had, what I had at

39:00 home was a gas heater. There was a pilot light, you stuck a match you lit the pilot light you turned it around, it exploded a ring of gas tubes which in turn heated water. And you turned a lever and it came out in the form of the bath, because the Poms [British] didn't have showers. So I filled up the bath its up about this level. Anyhow I had a bath and I went to bed

39:30 and I was out to get the six o'clock bus you know. First time I'd ever caught it, and so I ran out and I fell over because it had snowed during the night, there was all of this white stuff. You know a boy from the Australian bush, what's this white stuff? Anyway I came back that night after the first day at the aerodrome, and was confronted by her father, this is after we had said hello. He said, and his

40:00 wife is standing beside him, he said you had a bath, as though I had committed some major crime. He said the billeting arrangements don't make any provision for you having a bath, he said we're rationed here, you know this was him talking to me, I wasn't briefed, nobody had told me. So I was in the gun

40:30 with them, I didn't get off to a very good start with that. But in time I remedied, my mother was sending me food parcels from Australia, you know tinned sausages and peaches, which the English hadn't seen for two and a half years. And I used to give them my food parcels. But before that I had a carton of Sweet Cappel, they are Canadian brand cigarettes, and I gave

41:00 the old man of the house, you know he is younger than I am know. I gave him a packet of Sweet Cappel and that started the reconciliation process, and then I followed it up, I gave them the whole food parcel you know. And great friendship came out of all that. So that was virtually the living conditions. From there,

I'm sorry David the tape is about to run out.

Tape 6

00:31 Pick it up from Sywell and then I will whiz you through the AFU [Advanced Flying Unit] and then out through Scotland and out to India.

Ok well David if you would like to take me along that path now.

From Sywell I was posted to what is know as an AFU, and that is an Advanced Flying Unit. At a place called Watton in Norfolk, in the county of Norfolk in East Anglia. We had further training on

01:00 aircraft known as Miles Masters, Mark I, II's and III's.

And from there?

We had sixty hours further training there, which included night flying and then we were posted to an Operational Training Unit at a placed called Tealing, which was seven miles north of Dunedin in Scotland where we began training on Hurricane aircraft.

01:30 **The Hurricane is a plane that you subsequently had some experience with, what was your impression of that aircraft?**

No, I hadn't had any experience with a Hurricane.

Subsequently.

Oh subsequently. Yes well I became operational on it later.

How does that aircraft stand out in your memory?

Well it was very powerful.

02:00 And my first flight in it was awe inspiring, because it had such power and it had a Rolls Royce Merlin engine in it. Which was the aircraft engine that had fought the Battle of Britain in Spitfires and Hurricanes. And it was a beautiful aircraft to fly. Didn't have any vicious traits at all like some aircraft do.

02:30 And I got about, from memory, fifty-five hours further training on the Hurricane at this Operational Training Unit at Scotland, and in the advance section of that training program it was the first of our live gunnery exercises where we were firing

03:00 eight machine-guns into ground targets.

What was that sensation like?

Well it was a new experience and it was pretty exciting, and it began to introduce me a sense of realism of what I was about to experience. And it was a way of breaking you in as far as the RAF were concerned.

03:30 Getting you conditioned to what was going to happened, and also it involved things like more accuracy, firing at a given target. You fired at a known target which had like bullseyes, and the spray of bullets was removed and recorded and assessed, and they told you how far

04:00 off to the left or right you were, or how bad a shot you were. Or you weren't too bad or you were excellent or you were terrible. So you were assessed. It began to make you aware of what was required and what the effects were.

What other armaments of this plane were you introduced to in that advanced training?

That was all. Eight machine-guns, they had a

04:30 303 calibre, four machine-guns in each wing with that particular mark of Hurricane. And that was known as the Hurricane II B. It also included, the program also included formation flying, from two aircraft to four aircraft to a whole squadron. And there was a night flying program too.

You were still a flight sergeant?

05:00 While I was there I was promoted from sergeant to flight sergeant, and then that brought about the completion of the training program at the Operational Training Unit. There were a few ground subjects. But nothing like previous training, it was concentrated more on flying.

05:30 **As a flight sergeant and flying in formation were you expected to take up a particular position?**

Yes, where you were told you were to be in the formation. And you were to get into that position and maintain it. For that particular exercise.

Was it not a routine position in the formation?

Yes but I mean I might be in one position on Monday

06:00 and a different one on Tuesday, and a different one again on Wednesday. It depended on the exercise, and where the flight commander said he wanted me and where he thought it was appropriate that I should gain additional experience. So that one was given comprehensive experience in all of these positions in all of these different typed of formations, so that when one got onto an Operational Squadron, or to use an Americanism, a Combat Squadron, you had already

06:30 done that in the training program.

And where did you learn of your posting?

Well when we completed the course we were given leave and once again went down to London. Had several weeks in London, because it transpired that we were waiting for a ship to take us out to India, but we didn't know that. But that's why we got this longish leave, most of

07:00 which I spent in London. I also went to Liverpool for a week or two. So that's how I spent the leave, in between the completion of that, it was the last of the training programs. Then we got notice that we had to report again to another embarkation depot in England, a place called West Kirby. Where we were assembled and then we were taken by troop train again

07:30 up to Greenock in Scotland, and boarded a British troop ship called the Moolton. M O O L T O N. Who had been on the Australian run before the war. And that took us out, we didn't know where we were

going, but we went out through the Mediterranean and arrived at Bombay in India.

Unaware as you said of your destination, what

08:00 **sights and smells greeted you on your arrival?**

Well you could smell India at least forty to fifty nautical miles out to sea. Its so, is the word pungent? Anyhow there is this earthy smell that only you get in India and it radiated out to sea at least forty to fifty miles, and I wasn't the only one, the other fellows could pick it up on the ship too.

08:30 But after I had been there a couple of years I didn't notice anymore.

Was it recognisable, could you tell that India was your destination by this smell?

Well we knew by this time, see we went out in convoy, we left Greenock in convoy this time. You know eight or nine ships escorted by destroyers and Escort Sloops of the Royal Navy. And we went through the

09:00 Mediterranean, and as we went through the Med [Mediterranean] certain ship broke off and turned to starboard or to the right. And you know the crew on the ship said they're going into Algiers, you know that's Algiers over there and they broke off. And we were the only ship left that arrived at Suez and went through the canal and through the Bitter Lakes and

09:30 down through the Red Sea and stooped off at Aden for a few hours and then across the Indian Ocean to Bombay. So we knew by that time, and we were the only ship in the convoy and you're going down the Red Sea, and we obviously weren't coming back to Australia, because we had a lot of British army troops on. But we knew by that time where we were going, and the crew of the ship knew anyway.

10:00 **What were you aware of operations in India at that time?**

I didn't have much awareness of really what was required or what me may be required to do, because we went into a holding camp. Or an air force station or base at a place called Poona and we were there for two months waiting for a posting to a squadron.

10:30 **Having gone through the Empire training scheme and based in the UK for some time I presume you were aware of events back in Australia as far as the war was developing in the Pacific. Was there any consideration of, or desire to**

11:00 **return to defend your home country?**

Yes there was. We had actually asked in Canada, when we were training, we had a visit from air vice marshal Gobbles who was the Australian air attaché in Canada, he came around and saw us and we asked could we go back because things were looking pretty grim and he said there was no possibility because there was simply not enough aircraft

11:30 available for you. And we've got more that enough personnel in Australia, Australian trained to man them. And most of the aircraft arriving were American and they were taken up, because the American were arriving in considerable volumes at this time and they had their own aircrew. So there wasn't the equipment for us any rate. So that told us what the situation was at home,

12:00 and we had accepted that by this time and knew that our destiny lay in the UK or in the European theatre or the Middle East or as it turned out in India and Burma. We were absorbed into the RAF and we virtually because RAF except that we still had our Australian uniforms, and Australian rates of pay, and

12:30 hopefully Australia would have us back when the war was over. There was no repatriation scheme in those days, we didn't know how long we were going to be there for, so we accepted all of these things. And we knew that there was no possibility of going back home to Australia because of those prevailing conditions.

Were you receiving correspondence from home, you talked of getting care packages?

13:00 Called food parcels, yes my mother used to send one about every three weeks, and there was regular mail. Well my family was writing regularly and I was writing back. But that didn't mean that they were arrived regular, you know they were held up on the way through various contingencies that arose, ship was delayed, you know.

13:30 **I'm just wondering whether any of the correspondence you received was expressing a hope that you would return home to serve in Australia?**

I can't ever remember receiving a letter along those lines and I would think that my father being in the RAAF would be well aware of those conditions that I have just mentioned.

14:00 So that it was never specifically expressed, no I think the family understood that I was away for an indefinite period.

You're time in Bombay, as you mentioned was spent waiting for a posting?

No I only had a couple of days there and then I went up to

14:30 Poona which had what they call an ATP, an Air Transit Pool, and we waited there for a posting.

That posting finally came?

Yes.

Where was it going to send you?

I was sent to Dum-Dum airport. D U M dash D U M. Dum-Dum is not what we think it is in Australia, it is an Indian name. It is right

15:00 now, in the year 2003, the international airport of Calcutta, it's the Mascot of Calcutta. And we were sent there to await a posting again, and employed in an air freight depot supervising the loading of cargo to the forward troops. And I was there for three months waiting for a posting.

15:30 And billeted, you know commandeered home that the air force had taken over.

You say cargo destined for forward troops of which army?

Oh the British 14th army which was commanded by Bill Slim who later became the governor general of Australia.

16:00 **And what was their position in relation to where you were? How forward were they?**

Oh they were a couple of hundred miles forward. Calcutta was a big base, you know it was a big shipping port and stuff was pouring in from the UK and the US. The Americans were flying the hump into China from Dum-Dum [?]. One of two airports, there was another one called Barrackpore [?], about ten

16:30 miles up the road from us. So it was a big freight depot and it was servicing the British 14th Army and all of the personnel in it plus running supplies to China over the hump. The Americans were trying to keep China in the war as a forward base to try and bomb Japan.

The hump you speak of is?

17:00 The Himalayas. You know Mount Everest, twenty-eight thousand feet. The transport planes had to negotiate heights up in at least twenty-thousand feet. So that's what Dum-Dum was used for. And then from Dum-Dum we got a posting, there were four of us at Dum-Dum,

17:30 all Australians, and we got a posting. Three of us went to 5 Squadron, and the fourth fellow went to another squadron, so that's where I joined 5 Squadron. Which was equipped with Hurricanes, II C's, and the Hurricane II C was armed with four twenty millimetre cannons.

5 Squadron was?

It was an RAF squadron. And its personnel were multi-national

18:00 once again. English, Scotch, Welsh, Irish, Canadians, New Zealanders, several Americans still in the Royal Canadian Air Force, so it was what's referred to as a mixed squadron, or an international squadron.

The three, yourself included, the three Australians you spoke of that were assigned to 5 Squadron, how far had you progressed with them

18:30 **through the scheme?**

I had only met them at ATU, my last advanced training program in Scotland. By that time, in the RAF, its different from the army, you're split and you're split again and you're split again after that. Whereas

19:00 I don't know anything about the army, but I know that you were transferred as units or regiments or battalions. And you were recruited from the district. You know I was serving with fellows that were from, an American with us that was from Alabama in the US serving in the Canadian air force. Another fellow from Auckland,

19:30 English from all over, Canadians from the prairies, you know it was a mixed bag.

The friendships you had made with Australians that you had made through the various stages of the training program, what contact did you keep with them?

You mean after the war?

No during, when you had been posted, as you say you had been split and split, and yet you did have

20:00 **friends that you were associating with earlier?**

Well practically no direct contact with them. Because I didn't know and wasn't told where they had been sent to any rate. So you lost contact the further along you went, the further and further you were split again and split again. I would hear

20:30 probably in letters from home that Tony's mother said that he was now in Italy, and that's the only contact I had of possibly where they were. And a lot of them were killed any rate and so you know that was lost, and so any contact wasn't really made until

21:00 after the war. And so the contact that you're asking about for me was fairly consistent right through the training program, but as we got split and went into various theatres of war we lost contact until it was re-established perhaps and hopefully after the war if they survived.

As you say

21:30 **that's quite different from other service experiences. How much of a sense of isolation, given that you're now in India, in a very very different environment to that which you had been in before, what isolation or what sense does that give you?**

A very complete sense of isolation,

22:00 in the national sense, not in the personal sense because you still had fifteen pilots on the squadron, so you know you had those as mates, and then there was ground crew as a back up. So one wasn't isolated on the basis of other human beings, but one was isolated in the sense that you were completely and absolutely removed from

22:30 Australia. And there were very few Australians to be in contact with in India and Burma. There was a couple of fellows on the squadron with me, and occasionally we'd run into some Aussies on other squadrons but by this time we were absorbed completely into the RAF. And then to be put into a country like India and Burma with a culture that is completely unknown to us.

23:00 So we were isolated in that sense, there was no Bondi Junction, there was no Ettalong, Palm Beach surf. Bondi surf. There was that sense of isolation. And there was no know repatriation scheme, where unlike the Canadians and the Americans, they knew that after three years they would be

23:30 repatriated and recycled again if the war was going to go on for ten or fifteen years, they might have six months at home and then be sent somewhere else. But we had nothing. They did subsequently start to repatriate fellows that had been away for four years or something to Australia, but it was pretty scanty. So

24:00 that gave a feeling of isolation from Australia. I used to wonder whether I would ever see Australia again, let alone my family. Because of those factors, we used to ask the adjutant, he was in charge of administration, you know, he said I don't know what you're talking about chump.

You say there were fifteen members of the squadron?

No there were fifteen,

24:30 sixteen pilots on the squadron. There were twelve aircraft. With roughly four reserve aircraft, so that operationally to fly as a full squadron there were twelve pilots required to be in the air, and you had about four or five spares on the ground that you could rotate.

Were you still a flight sergeant at this stage?

When I first joined 5 Squadron, yes I was.

As such,

25:00 **what level of command was there, how many pilots are under your command?**

Well there really aren't any, you're all fairly equal. Except maybe in the air if you're experienced and have a lot of operational experience you might be the leader of a section of four aircraft or two aircraft. But you could get, some

25:30 of the anomalies in the RAF, you could be a warrant officer with considerable experience leading two pilot officer that had got commissions direct from the training program. So that where it put me as a flight sergeant.

And what difficulties did you face, in that rank with

26:00 **that role being nominally senior to some other pilots, given that these other pilots are strangers to you and different nationalities to you?**

Well there weren't any anomalies, I mean we all adjusted fairly quickly. We were all kind of equal as far as flying was concerned, and things were happening so quickly that there weren't any

26:30 anomalies in that sense, I mean nationalities had nothing to do with it, we were all one. So there were no problems there.

What operations were 5 Squadron flying?

We were basically in ground support, close support of the army,

27:00 and we were using our twenty millimetre cannon beating up Japanese transport and troop positions and we were also engaged in what the RAF called rhubarbs, that's two aircraft going out, this is in jungle country, in mountainous country, following the roads, if you could call them that. Winding through the jungle

27:30 down to as low as about fifty or sixty feet above the jungle treetops looking for Jap transport camouflaged in under the jungle trees. The Japs as a rule didn't move except at night, and you had to develop the skill of being able to pick them up, as they are camouflaged under this copse of trees, and that came with time. You know when you first done it you didn't have a clue

28:00 but the old experienced hands could tell. On another squadron near us they had a Canadian who was colour blind who should never have got through the medical recruitment examinations. I mean had he been picked up he would have been knocked back. Anyhow he got through and qualified and when he got out to India and Burma where the jungle was, and it was green, camouflage is slightly

28:30 different toning and his colour blindness could only tell black and white, and this Jap camouflage stood out like organ stops. But he is an anomaly. What I am saying is that ultimately you'd be able to, it comes with experience. And once we picked them up we then attacked them with these twenty millimetre cannons. There were four, two on each wing of the aircraft. And on my first trip ever,

29:00 there were two of us, and I was led by a senior English pilot, and we got some return fire and I got this great gaping hole in my left or portside wing where some return fire had hit me. You don't know it had hit you until it has happened, there is no explosion sound, and you don't see it, it wasn't a tracer, it just blew a hole. And on my second trip we were about two hundred miles

29:30 inside Jap territory, and we were searching for Jap transport, you know you are about fifty or sixty feet above the jungle treetops, weaving because the roads wind like that. And my leader was what was known as a British Latin American Volunteer. Or BLAV's as they were called, and he had a

30:00 Distinguished Flying Cross already. And why they were called BLAV's, the British Latin American volunteers, they were usually the sons of Englishmen who had settled in Argentina and Brazil and they were connected with Vesties, you know the big English networks? We've got them here in the Northern Territory. They own ranches or cattle stations as we know them, and the abattoirs, and canning. And they were out in the Argentina and Brazil, connection with Vesties and similar

30:30 organisations and they had been out there for several generations but were still English. And they usually sent their children back to school in the UK, girls included. And these fellows were of enlistment age when the war broke out, and you know some of them went up in the RAF. And although some of them came from Rio de Janeiro and you know cities like that in South America, they spoke with English public school accents.

31:00 They could have been born, bred and never left Oxford if you know what I mean. Anyhow he was my leader and we caught this Jap staff car out in the open moving, you know in daylight. And we were down pretty low and we climbed up to get some height to go and attack him, and my leader went in first and I'm behind him, but at a respectable distance, I hadn't turned and he was already on his way down,

31:30 and the next thing I saw he did this vicious kind of pull out and he rolled over on his back and he went in upside down, into the jungle you know in this great bloody yellow flame and all smoke shot through the jungle, he'd been hit by return fire see? And I got the shock of my life you know. I could barely hang on to the joystick

32:00 you know or the control column, my hand was trembling like that. So it looked like a trap to me and I broke off the engagement, at about a hundred feet you know, and I've got a nine thousand foot mountain range to get over, plus a hundred miles to get, or at least a hundred and fifty miles to get to it, to get over to get back to the base

32:30 that we were operating from. The border of India and Burma. And also it was in the dry season and the jungle catches on fire like we have bush fires here. So there is smoke haze is right down from the deck. So there I was.

And you managed to return safely?

Yes, well I had to keep fairly low to keep under

33:00 the smoke haze so I could map read, you know we got back to our map reading in navigation in training. And I was fortunate to hit the Chuman [Mekong] River which runs on the Burmese side of this great mountain range which is a spur off the Himalayas. And I hit an island, or recognised an island, big river and I was able to map read and I could pick out where I was and then I climbed up, around

33:30 and around and around. Got up to about ten thousand feet and crossed this mountain range. And I called up control, there was about four channels, and I asked, I gave a mayday call, and that's an

emergency call and they tell you to go over to channel C, and then you ask for a homing or a course home. And they gave me a course to steer and it brought me right in over the estuary.

34:00 And when they saw this lone Hurricane in the circuit, this is what my mates told me later, they all said oh poor old Nesbitt didn't last long did he? Gone on his second trip.

This was only your second flight with 5 Squadron?

Yes. And it was the this British Latin American volunteer who had bags of experience

34:30 and a Distinguished Flying Cross, he was only twenty-three as I found out later, but I was, how old was I? Twenty, and it was he that was lost you know. But everyone on the ground thought it was me that was gone. So that was quite an experience.

Besides all of the other questions that that story raises, what procedure do you go through when

35:00 **you have lost your partner in flight, upon your return?**

Well you're just debriefed when you get back on what happened. You know what were the operational conditions, what was it you were attacking. And I said oh I think it was a Japanese staff car by the look of it. And describe what had happened, which I just told you. And the intelligence officer, he's known as the IO,

35:30 he's the one that debriefs you and when you come back he records it all and its sent up to chain of command to be dealt with you know as they think appropriately. And that was it.

Well that's the official procedure after return, I'm wondering how mentally you deal with something like that?

36:00 Well there was no counselling as we know in modern day Australia in the year 2003, where say the fire brigade fellows are counselled and debriefed after a fire. You were dismissed, well by dismissed they said, well that's all Nesbitt. And went back to, I flew back, we were operating from a forward airstrip and we flew back to our base. Went back to another fellow and I didn't fly,

36:30 I was given two days off, and there was no deep, no psychiatric debriefing or counselling as we know it in the year 2003, you just got on with it.

What do you do or what happens in the squadron to mark the loss of a pilot?

37:00 Nothing really, you just got on with it. I know what you're getting at, the loss rate was so high, particularly in Bomber Command in England, they were losing hundreds of fellows a night. There was no, there was no official arrangement made for grieving or anything like that.

37:30 If that's what you are implying or rather asking. Asking of, it didn't exist. In more civilised theatres of war, where they had messes with bars and there was alcohol available you had a few drinks and looked to see if you were on the next day. And I know that the English WAAF's, that's the Women's Auxiliary Air Force.

38:00 The girls on some of the operational stations were told don't get emotionally involved with aircrew because they probably won't be here next week. That was unofficially said, you know you would never find that written down in instructions or orders. So that was my experience, and a lot of other fellows, but I can't speak for everyone.

38:30 **Given the type of base you were operating from, different to where you had been elsewhere, where would you go and what would you do to wind down after a flight?**

Well we were under very kind of primitive operational conditions. The time I am speaking of, we were either in tents or bamboo huts,

39:00 and at one stage, the stage when we were surrounded by the Japs, we were in trenches with canvas over the actual trench, and sandbags. And we were at that particular stage we were guarded by Ghurka troops who were on sentry posts, you know. So it was real kind of front

39:30 line conditions. A bit later on when we were further back but still operational it was nothing like movies or anything like that. We amused ourselves at night, being Australians, one of my Australian mates, he was a farmer, and we usually lit a fire, you know

40:00 boiled a billy. And you could buy tea in India, and sometimes there were food parcels from home, and we'd heat up some sausages that came in a tin. Or we'd go down to the local native village and buy a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK , and they would kill it and clean it for us you know, for a couple of Indian rupees. And I'm answering your question what do we do, this is just one instance.

40:30 And this fellow that had been a farmer he got a kerosene tin, do you remember kerosene tins? There about this high and they used to have kerosene or petrol in them and they are light sheet metal. And you can cut the lid out, and then you get a piece of metal and make a cylindrical circle like that and you slide it into the tin, a kerosene tin is about that high, about those dimensions.

41:00 Cut the lid out and you get a bit of sheet metal, lay the tin on its side, put the metal in like that and stack it with earth with a bit of moisture, make it mud. That's an oven. We used to get a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK from the native village, start a fire you know about six o'clock at night, we had our mess such as it was. And you put the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK in

41:30 and we might have a can of tinned tomatoes from home or one of the Canadians might, and stuff the WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK with the tomatoes, and put it on slow. And it might be ready by half past ten that's night. Then we'd cut it up and share it and sit around and talk. And one fellow had a gramophone, that's right. Manual, wind up. And the old thirty-three and a third records. So that's at one stage

42:00 how we amused ourselves. No concert parties.

Tape 7

00:31 **Ok David I would like to take up your story again you've just described a fairly hair raising incident and you've described you general operations in some detail, but what was**

01:00 **the primary purpose of your squadron?**

Our primary purpose at that time was direct support of the British 14th Army, and the Japanese looked as though they were going to break into India, and in fact some of their advance parties got down into

01:30 a place called Dimapur. Now if that had happened, it could have changed the whole course of the war. In other words the British and the Americans probably would have had to withdraw troops from the Italian campaign, and maybe those that were building up in the UK for the invasion of France D Day to stop the Japs. If the Japs got into India,

02:00 there was insurrection brewing in Bengal as it was known then, to rise up against the British. So it was touch and go whether we would hold or not. And we were surrounded in this period that I'm speaking of, our advance air strip was in the state of Manipur, which is an independent Indian state. It's about a hundred miles

02:30 long and fifty miles wide and the Japs had got in behind us in strength. And we were surrounded, it was like a Stalingrad only we were the Russians holding it against the Germans, if I can use analogy. And it was touch and go. And the only thing that kept us alive was that we, the Allies happened to have the air superiority

03:00 at that time and our transport aircraft in great numbers were able to keep us supplied with ammunition and food and evacuate the wounded. And we just held, and that was all. Just held on the ground. So that our role was the direct support of the British army. By British army, it was also made up of

03:30 lots of Indian army regiments and battalions. Sikhs and so forth. Bengalese, all kids of people from India. Because in those days India was one, there was no Pakistani petition. So that was our role, close support of the British army.

And you were a fighter pilot flying Hurricanes?

04:00 Yes.

How many fighter pilots were there in the squadron?

Sixteen. We at full strength we operated twelve aircraft as a squadron, but there was any break down from that, you know you might have a section of four, you might have a flight which is a section of eight. Or you might have just two of

04:30 you. Depending on the requirements of the day, what was needed. We were notified early in the morning, or maybe the night before s signal would come through. So the intelligence officer he would debrief the coding and say this is required, and we would act appropriately. But we were right up immediately behind the front line at

05:00 this stage. In fact we were being shelled from a Japanese mountain gun. And that's when we were in the trenches with sandbags. Didn't go on all day you know, they might lob a dozen or sixteen onto us at night when you couldn't spot them. They wouldn't do it during the day because maybe we could pick up their flashes you know, from the muzzle

05:30 and take appropriate action, you know knock them out. So that was pretty hairy. And at one stage Jap patrols actually got into our airstrip. But we used to retire into boxes, and a box was a kind of trench system with sandbags and sleeping accommodation was in that box, and we had Ghurkas, you know, around us,

06:00 sentry duty. But it wasn't like that right through the whole campaign, that was when it was really touch

and go and it looked as though we might lose, but we didn't.

And strategically what's the difference between a fighter squadron and a bombing squadron?

Well a bombing squadron is usually composed of twin-engine or multi-engine aircraft.

06:30 And their function is long range bombing of the enemy's cities or ammunition dumps or naval bases. Or appropriate targets like that. Whereas fighter squadrons, their function initially is to defend the air space over which we're based on. And any intrusion by their bomber forces, and later

07:00 on in the war when they were accompanied by fighter escort and we did the same. So that's roughly the difference. And fighter squadron, going back to England, it was the fighter squadron that fought the Battle of Britain, basically over London and the south eastern counties, kept the German Air Force at bay. And that was touch and go too. This is not

07:30 part of my story but I now read that the RAF had three days to go before they collapsed. Then you and I wouldn't be sitting here. That's another story.

And how well do you feel like the Hurricane performed?

Well it was a beautiful aircraft to fly, it had no vicious habits. And I think it did a magnificent job.

08:00 It formed part of the twin combination in the Battle of Britain with the Spitfire, it was they that saved England and the democracies and so on down the line. But even at that stage it was becoming obsolete, and it was used in India where I was largely as army support, and

08:30 the actual fighter tasks were take care of by the Spitfire which was a more modern aircraft. But that's not to say that the Hurricanes weren't used as fighter aircraft. But our function, in the squadron I was on was close army support and the escort of

09:00 transport suppliers who were dropping supplies by parachute to forward army units.

You mentioned that you would fly in a formation or a grouping of four at a time, and that sometimes you would be in different positions within that formation. I'm wondering if you were

09:30 **confident or more confident in one particular area or position in that formation?**

No I would say I was comfortable in all four positions. Although I wasn't awarded the number one position in a section of four aircraft until I became much more experienced in what I was doing, which I was subsequently. But I could fly in any position, that was taken care of in this

10:00 long training program, it was a long training program. Took over a year.

And you've described the position you were in at Assam as very tenuous, how would you get news of where your enemy was?

We were briefed by the IO,

10:30 that's intelligence officer, he was an RAF officer. And we also had an army liase officer attached to each squadron, and he got the information through, usually on land line phone, from his headquarters, came down the chain of command. And they would brief him as to what was happening and where we were in danger

11:00 and where we were required, and there was a critical situation in position X or Y or Z. And then they'd give us a general briefing of where the situation stood as of now., So we were well briefed on the war in that sense. But as to the war in other theatres, it was a bit scarce. But we weren't unaware. But we got the detail of

11:30 where we were, in this sector that we were in, because that was essential, I mean that was the work we were doing.

And what did you think of your enemy at this point in time?

Well I had no personal contact with them so I didn't think of

12:00 them, their air force personnel as individuals. I didn't hate them or anything like that personally, but I knew that they were my antagonists in the air. We all had some sense of foreboding if we were forced down into Jap territory as to what would happen to us, and that was pretty gruesome. We'd

12:30 heard tales of fellows being forced down and taken prisoner, or Indian troops being captured oh the ground and the Jap's tying them to a tree with barbed wire and using them as bayonet practice. We had a Battle of Britain pilot shot down in Japanese territory, and he managed to force land and get out of his aircraft, you know, uninjured.

13:00 And he took refuge in a Burmese village for the night, and that was ok they fed him and so forth, and the next morning a Jap patrol arrived, someone in the village had betrayed him to the local Japanese

army, and he was beheaded. So we had this kind of feedback that, we didn't talk about it but we were

13:30 aware of it that you know the last thing you wanted to do was to be forced down alive in those kind of, could arise, could arise. I mean some fellows, we subsequently found out after the war, weren't that badly treated and wound up in Rangoon Gaol. Which was the civilian gaol in Rangoon pre- World War II which the Jap's turned into a POW [prisoner of war] prison.

14:00 And most of those fellows under pretty hard conditions survived and were released when we recaptured Rangoon. But there was this sense of foreboding I guess, you know I hope I'm not forced down.

I'm wondering if you had any lucky charms?

No. No I didn't

14:30 anything like that. I've heard of them, and read of them since the war, but I didn't. And none of my immediate mates had them that I can recall.

What type of jacket did you wear?

15:00 Well it was our clothing. When we first arrived we were issued with what was called a Beaden suit. I think its spelt B E A D E N. Beaden was the man who invented it. It was like overalls, and it had a pocket for a tin of bully beef, and a receptacle for pencils. And you know all that kind of stuff. And it was made of khaki, and we were operating in tropical conditions and the humidity was unbelievable. You know,

15:30 prickly heat, and every known skin disease, and malaria and dysentery and danghy fever and hepatitis, it 3was called yellow jaundice in those days. But it was so hot that we dissuaded it, and the more experienced we became we wound up flying long khaki slacks and a khaki shirt. You know long sleeves, and maybe a singlet,

16:00 flying helmet and that was it. Some fellows, even unofficially, you weren't supposed to, flew in shorts. Cooler. But god help you if you came down somewhere, because if you've got to spend the night in the jungle with all of the creepy crawlies. You know tics,

16:30 and leeches and mosquitoes, so you really needed to be covered as much as possible. So that was the type of clothing we wore. And then you had a parachute and a Sutton harness and so on that you put over that.

We've heard a couple of stories from other about carrying for example a

17:00 **knife, or some extra bits and pieces to help you if you came down. I'm wondering if you carried anything like that?**

I started to, and so did my mates. And then as we became more and more experienced we discarded more and more. And the only things I carried as I became more experienced,

17:30 particularly towards the end of the war, was a revolver and I had a knife. You know we used to be given a tin of bully beef and a packet of malted milk tablets, which saved one fellow who was shot down and managed to walk back undiscovered by the Jap's. I'm not saying it wouldn't save lives but it was uncomfortable (UNCLEAR).

18:00 (UNCLEAR). Oh and a water bottle, we always had a water bottle. Because you know with that tropical heat and ninety-eight percent humidity, you know you'd sweat. And the less experienced you were, I remember my initial flights I got out of the aircraft and my shirt and slacks were as though I had been under the shower.

18:30 Leave Weight Watchers for dead you know. So that's the clothing, or where I was any rate. But I do know that there was those kind of things that you described.

And what did you fear most?

Well to start with one was apprehensive,

19:00 you know before you went out on a flight. But once you got in the air, and got into it, any fear or apprehension left you, because you were so involved in the job. And I've heard of competitive swimmers that had the same you know, they're shaking until the morning before, and they're on at eight o'clock tonight, and right up

19:30 until they step on the block, and the moment goes or the whistle blows and they hit the water, it all vanishes and you're involved in the exercise. And I found that's that happened with me, so that the actual operation, or the mission as the Americans called it was ok, it was the apprehension before, the build up to it. I'm only

20:00 speaking personally.

Well that's a very interesting point, and again I'll go back to Assam where you were surrounded. It sounds like you were probably being called upon to be in a fairly high state of

readiness most of the time, can you describe the daily routine there?

20:30 Well we flew during the day, so that took care of the day and then at night, at its very worst situation we were in this trenches with canvas tops, you know the top of the tent over it. And we ate, the eating conditions were fairly primitive

21:00 because the food was rationed. And it was a great tribute to the English cooks, you know they did wonders with the bully beef, and dehydrated potatoes and we had what they called soy link sausages, God only knows what they were made form, but they did wonders with them you know. There was no entertainment under those conditions. We

21:30 were great talkers, we'd talk amongst ourselves about all kinds of things. But there was no external entertainment or amusement, at that point in time. It changed as time went by. Later on when they really

22:00 got organised they had mobile movie shows.

How long were you at this place?

Well we moved around, three forward airstrips we were on at that stage when things were pretty grim, so the Jap's had broken through into India. Doesn't get much publicity here in Australia,

22:30 if any. So that was about four months. And then as we held them, the Jap's our conditions started to improve slightly, you know we weren't in the trenches, we moved back to a base a bit further back. And we were in bamboo huts with concrete floors.

23:00 No showers. We had a pump that had been set into the ground by army engineers, and you'd pump the water out, into a bucket. And you stood there and poured it over yourself and soaped yourself and pumped again. And so the conditions were primitive. And the food was, pretty hard, you know.

23:30 What they sometimes call iron rations. But it brought out the best in everyone. And again we had this kind of mixed personnel or international composition on most RAF squadrons and it was great basis for talking. You know when you were thrown back on that, there were no amusements. Got interesting life experiences,

24:00 you know what I was doing before the war in Alabama, I couldn't get a job, you know or somebody from New Zealand and stuff like that across the whole spectrum. So that kind of kept us going. Brought out the best in us.

You just mentioned that you spent approximately four months here, what year is it?

We're now in 44.

24:30 **You mentioned earlier that you were aware that at some point there was a Japanese encroachment onto the aerodrome, can you tell me**

25:00 **how you would start off your day in terms of your operations?**

Well the encroachment was only at night. It was by a couple of patrols. We didn't actually see them but we thought it comprised of about eight fellows, several patrols of eight. And they got in within the parked aircraft and put hand grenades in them and blew them up and

25:30 withdrew straight away, back into the hills and the jungles. So it wasn't hand to hand fighting, I wasn't crossing swords with a Jap. That's what happened, and of course when it's happening you don't quite know what's happening, how many are involved, whether the Emperor and the whole of the Japanese population has arrived or it was a patrol of eight Japanese. Or several patrols, but it was dangerous

26:00 and everybody was on what they call stand to, you know you've got your revolvers out and stay wide awake and extinguish all of the lights and stuff like that. But that was at the very, it wasn't four months like that, but it was several periods. When the situation was really critical.

26:30 **I'm wondering if you ever felt in danger yourself?**

During that period oh yes. When we were surrounded and things were looking very dangerous as though they

27:00 would break through, even onto our airstrip, I'm thinking well I wonder if we will ever got out of here you know. I mean if we had have been in the air and they had broken through well we could have flown back to rear bases you know. But if you're on the ground and they break through and cut you off, God only knows what would have happened to any of us. It'd have been Stalingrad again, because I think there was about

27:30 seven British divisions surrounding . It was big, didn't get any coverage, nothing is known of it here. But it was certainly critical, anyhow that passed in due course. And then when we held them and the army started to slowly drive them back into Burma.

28:00 **Well can you tell me where you went after this period of time?**

After that, well we still continues to operate but we were further back on a more civilised aerodrome and the food improved. And we were there for about another month,

28:30 and then we were withdrawn back into India proper. And went on what the RAF call rest. The whole squadron is withdrawn from the frontline, including the ground crew. And we went back into India to a place called Baisakka [?] Pattan and the whole squadron was stood down and everyone was sent on leave. And they did major maintenance on the aircraft, and the ground crew went on leave and

29:00 stuff like that. And I went with my mates to what the British called hill stations. You know in the Himalayas for instance you're nine thousand feet above sea level and they call it a hill station. You know we call it an alpine resort in modern times. So that's what happened, and we went on leave, and the news came back to learn that we were going to be converted onto American P47 Thunderbolts.

29:30 **And what type of plane is the Thunderbolt?**

Well its an American single engine aircraft, its got a radial engine as distinct from inline engines that the British aircraft had. They were mainly Rolls Royce, and it's made by Pratt and Whitney, they're

30:00 aero engine manufacturers, still in the US. It was much more powerful and it had a greater range and a greater height assessment. And it was capable of carrying a fairly heavy bomb load. It was known as a fighter bomber, and it was supplied by the Americans to the British under the lend lease agreement, that's how we got it. And the RAF converted

30:30 two Hurricane squadrons at a time, they were withdrawn from the frontline and you did the conversion course in the rear areas. And I think we did from memory about forty-five hours on them learning to fly them. And then we moved back up to the front and started the second campaign. And

31:00 I had a fairly horrific experience in the conversion to Thunderbolts. I had thirteen and a half hours on this new aircraft, and I was sent up to do my second hour of aerobatics, you know you've got to do loop, the loop and roll off the top, and you've got to teach yourself, there is no instructor, it's a new aircraft. And I decided to do a roll off the top. That's a loop like

31:30 that, and a roll off the top, you get to the top of the loop and then you roll and you come out straight and level like that. And I must have pulled it in through too tight because, the speed washes off, you go into a high speed stall and the aircraft staggered and went into an inverted spin. A conventional spin is when you spin like that and you're on the top of the spin, you know the cockpits here and the undercarriage the wheels are there and you

32:00 spin like that out of control. But in an inverted spin the aircraft flips on its back and you spin and you're on the outside. Now in an inverted spin the centrifugal force forces you down and in like that. Whereas in an inverted spin, which is very rare, and there is no known recovery from it in the Republican's Aviation Handbook, they were the

32:30 people that produced the Thunderbolt, you were flung backwards and outwards. And I couldn't get my feet on the rudder pedals because I'm forced back and out. And the emergency release to jettison the canopy, you know over you? Was up there forward, you had to lean forward. And with this reverse centrifugal force, to try and get my hand up it was like as though it was covered in lead.

33:00 And I couldn't get to the emergency release latch to jettison the cockpit hood. And I was trapped and you know I thought this is it, what will my mother think? Those were my thoughts, this was all in a flash. And next thing I know the aircraft recovered of its own volition, standing

33:30 on its nose slightly inverted, and I had gone into this spin at thirty-three thousand feet and when I flattened out I was at three, so I had spun thirty thousand feet inverted. And when I looked at the instrument panel, it's like the dashboard on your car. You know the speedometer and the fuel gauge and the revs and all the instruments was all covered in a thin coating of oil.

34:00 And when I landed and taxied back, and there was oil on the cockpit floor, you know down there, the engineering officer discovered there was an oil tank, just forward of your instrument panel, you know like in your car your dashboard, it was like a beer barrel that just contains oil. And it was supported by aluminium struts just forward of the instrument panel and the firewall.

34:30 And the initial flip was so vicious, I had a gash here where I was flung backwards and there was a protruding bolt here that gashed my elbow. But this eighteen gallon oil tank was thrown up against the bolts that secured the instrument panel to the fire wall, you know a bit of the bolt comes through like that. And it sliced the tank like you'd slice a sausage with a carving knife, and the oil spilled out

35:00 and came right over the instrument panel and onto the cockpit floor, so I was lucky to get out alive. So that was the training program, so now we're moving back up to the front and it's ten to four.

That sounds like an amazing and very close escape.

35:30 Oh yes I was gone except the thing recovered of its own volition.

So where were you sent on operations after training on the Thunderbolt?

We moved back up into an area known as the Arakan. That's A R A K A N. Which is a coastal area where

36:00 India meets Burma and the Bay of Bengal. And we were operating from an earth airstrip which had been bulldozed out of some rice paddy fields. And some grass had grown over it, so it was like a grass field but it was a strip, and there was jungle to the left and a few patty fields over here on the right. And our accommodation

36:30 was bamboo huts. And that's where we started our operations from.

Ok David can you tell me about operations up at Arakan?

Yes well we were operating from this airstrip that had been bulldozed out of the jungle and some adjoining rice paddy fields. And

37:00 one of our first operations was escorting transport aircraft again to drop supplies by parachute to forward isolated army units. Well forward in the front line. And that was followed by long range escorts to Rangoon. Escorting RAF Liberator four engine bombers. And American B 24s, they were the same aircraft with different numerology, it was a mixed group.

37:30 And we, rather they were bombing, there's a big rail junction just out of Rangoon called Malagan. And they were bombing the rail yards there and we were the kind of long range fighter escort. And that trip we had long range tanks under each wing, and under the belly. Three. One under each wing and one under the belly. And they were ninety

38:00 gallons each, and you switched tanks you know. You had to watch your watch, so that gave you the range and that took just on five hours return. And the next day you were so buggered that you were given the day off, and sometimes two days. And we spent a lot of the time we weren't required to do anything lying on our stomachs

38:30 on our charpoys, which, that's Indian for bed or bunk. Because everything for five hours you revolve on your coccyx, which is the tailbone on the end of your spine. You can do all of thins, but your lashed in by Sutton harness again, but you never get away from this contact of your coccyx on your parachute. Which was hard, because the parachutes by this

39:00 time also had the addition of a dinghy. You know an inflatable dinghy? Because part of those operations became over water, so if you came down over water you could inflate your dinghy. And that made it harder you see? So you had this posterior soreness, that's putting it politely. And that's why we spent most of the time lying on our stomachs I mean

39:30 we walked around too. So that was a kind of recovery period that was given to us. Now following that we got back into close support for the army again. Supporting the British army in their Arakan campaign, and by this time the Jap's were slowly starting to go into retreat. And we were using heavier bombs. Carrying up to three five hundred pound bombs,

40:00 one under each wing and one under the belly. You either had long range fuel tanks or you could carry three five hundred pound bombs. And we were bombing designated targets. The army would signal through the chain of command back to RAF group headquarters and then it would come back down the line to the army liaison officer, who he with our own intelligence officer would brief us.

40:30 They'd get a big map out and put it on the wall like this and they'd say well this is where the position is. You've got to bomb that. So that was the close support, so we're doing those three types of operations, long range, down into the Malay peninsula, close support for the British army, and then escorting transport aircraft

41:00 dropping supplies by parachute to very far forward 14th Army troops. And that campaign lasted for eight months.

Well our tape has just come to an end.

Tape 8

00:31 **Ok David I will just take up your story again. You've just described your operations at Arakan, I understand that you were fid upon and hit at some point, when did that occur?**

Well it happened lots and lots of times.

01:00 But the time that I actually brought back the marks where I had been hit, or the holes, when I was on Hurricanes, my first ever trip I got a blast through my left wing or port wing as they call it in the air force. And on subsequent occasions while I was still on the Hurricanes

01:30 you could see the bullet hole marks where it had gone through the fabric, and they were less

discernable in the air, because they smaller. But they were picked up by what we call the riggers, the ground crew. The riggers look after the fabric and the body of the aircraft, and the fitters look after the engine, that's how it's divided up in the RAF.

02:00 And the riggers picked up these bullet holes. And with bullet holes of that kind of dimension you don't see them or you don't hear them unless they hit you personally. But when, sometimes when the Jap's were using tracer, a tracer you can see it coming up. And that's usually

02:30 interspersed in your ammunition belt so that you can adjust your aim. Most of the lethal stuff is invisible. If you use too much tracer you can trace where it is coming form so you can eliminate it. But the people that are firing use it so that they can adjust their

03:00 line of sight you know. So what I'm saying with a lot of, unless it is a big hole, which I had on my first ever trip, and I felt it, there was a bit of shudder in the aircraft and I could see. The smaller stuff you don't see, you don't hear it, you don't see it until you get back on the ground. Unless you get

03:30 a lot of it you know and it rips the aircraft to shreds. So that was my experience of, they call that return fire. Or flak. And often you'd see it bursting near you.

And when or you've mentioned that you flew in the Hurricanes in

04:00 **formations of four, did that formation also apply to the Thunderbolts?**

Oh yeah. Same configurations. Two, four, eight or a whole squadron of twelve. When you did the long range escorts to Rangoon and the Malagan Railyards and down into the Malay Peninsula we operated as a whole squadron and usually in association with other squadrons.

04:30 So the bombers were here and then you had what you called close escort, they were probably just two thousand feet above them weaving. Then you had medium escort, they were up about another five thousand feet, and then right up operating at about twenty-eight thousand feet, you had what they call top cover. And that's how they were protected. And then as we got more sophisticated,

05:00 in addition to that we had a squadron that would go ahead and do a sweep before the main force arrived. You know if there was going to be any Japanese air opposition they'd try and entice it into engagement and sweep the area. And they had in addition to all of these close escort, medium cover and top cover and the advance sweepers, as the whole configuration

05:30 withdrew you had other squadrons coming out covering the withdrawal. But that came later in the war as we got sophisticated about a lot of things and we got air superiority.

And how was the number 5 Squadron affected by losses in

06:00 **those two campaigns in Assam and Arakan? What type of losses were there?**

We had four fellows shot down by Japanese return fire from the ground. And we had another

06:30 three lost in bad weather. You know the approach of the monsoonal season, the monsoonal fronts can extend almost from ground level up to about thirty-five thousand feet. And you have, you can't penetrate through them, or if you are caught in them you have to look for gaps to get through.

07:00 Modern aircraft, like jumbo 747's in the year 2003 going to England in the monsoonal season they can get up so high they fly right over the top of them any rate. But we're dealing with World War II aircraft which didn't have that capacity. So we had losses from bad weather, you know you can't see the mountain ahead of you and you

07:30 fly into it. Or in the monsoonal season you can get vertical air currents that go vertically upwards at a hundred km's an hour. As much as that and the one next to it coming down at the same speed, so if you get into it it just tears you apart. So we had weather losses and losses from enemy action. Mostly in our cases, seeing as though

08:00 we were doing close ground support work, we got what you call return fire or flak. And we had we had a few losses when we were doing conversions on the Thunderbolts through unknown causes, they just crashed. Several things were suspected.

08:30 Loss of oxygen. We all had oxygen masks, which I forgot to tell you, connected to an oxygen tank which you turned on from about ten thousand feet upwards. Whether they became disconnected or it was a fault in the fuel lines we don't know.

09:00 And with the Thunderbolt in dives we started to experience what was, practically nothing was, it was an unknown, we were approaching the sound barrier, which modern air forces are well and truly versed with, but in those days nothing was known of it really, and some of our fellows got into compressibility dives. Which as you approach the sound

09:30 barrier the aircraft is forced down like that and it goes into a kind of outside loop and you lose control and rivets start to pop out of the wings, and you lose your flying configuration. And they crash, and that

was suspected too. So there were losses like that.

10:00 **You've mentioned that your squadron comprised of sixteen men and you have just described different occasions when you would lose men, how would your squadron be brought up to full capacity?**

Well first of all the sixteen men that would be pilots or the aircrew component. We also had ground crew support, you know people that were qualified in engine maintenance

10:30 and what they call fuselage maintenance, they were the riggers. So there were a hundred plus of those people and admin fellows and medical staff. But the replacement of aircrew, that would be almost immediate, somebody would be posted that was waiting in one of these aircrew transit pools. And by that

11:00 time this vast Empire Air Training Scheme was in full swing so there was steady resupply coming through all of the time.

And what type of protocol was there for established long term crew and incoming, new pilots?

11:30 What do you mean by criteria?

Protocol. I'm wondering what was your relationship to the new fellows?

Oh the new fellows coming in. Well I guess to some extent they were rapidly assimilated because the requirements of life and death, you know, did away with a lot of stuff that one would go through in peacetime.

12:00 I guess there was a certain feeling for a very short period of time a new boys first day at a new school feeling. But that was rapidly dispersed by the requirements of our operational commitments, but they were rapidly assimilated and adequately trained. And with some of them it might have been their second tour,

12:30 depending on who you got. We didn't know who we were going to get until they arrived. Its like if you're a school teacher and you get a replacement and she's just out of teachers college, or you get a lady in her fifties and this is her third high school, if I can use that analogy yes.

13:00 **You have mentioned, particularly about Assam that there was not much knowledge of the notion that the Japanese were going to break into India. How do you think you and your colleagues felt about the war you were fighting in that particular theatre?**

Well once again we did as

13:30 we were told. We went where we were sent, we didn't question it. And one regarded it, well at least the fellows I was with regarded it as a part of the whole you know. If we weren't here we would have been sent to the Middle East or Italy or over Germany or France, you know operating out of the UK

14:00 or somewhere in the Pacific.

And in what way do you think it was a necessary war?

I don't think it was unnecessary because we had made so many appeasement concessions in

14:30 years leading up to the war, Germany had been allowed to reoccupy the Rhineland, they'd been allowed to march into Austria which was a free and independent country. They marched into Czechoslovakia, they marched into Poland. We kept on appeasing and throwing another body to the wolves.

15:00 Eventually you keep it up and then it's your turn, so that's why I think that it was unnecessary, and when the Jap's bombed Pearl Harbour we didn't have any further options any rate. And when they took Singapore and they began to bomb Darwin

15:30 so at one stage in all that chain of events it become necessary. You either stand up for yourself or take the alternative. So I didn't think it was an unnecessary war, I think it became necessary and it was forced on us by our lack of preventative action in all of those years

16:00 from 1933 when the Nazi's came to power until finally a stand was taken against them in 1939.

I didn't actually say it was unnecessary.

Yes you did.

No I didn't I said in what way do you think it was a necessary war. So I didn't say it was unnecessary.

16:30 I mean I'd sooner stay at home with my girlfriend than go, but (UNCLEAR). Ok.

And can you tell me anything else about your

17:00 **operations at Arakan? You were there for eight months all together, and you have mentioned that you were flying in monsoonal weather occasionally. Where were you living or what type of**

17:30 **living arrangements did you have at Arakan?**

Well we were living on the airstrip immediately adjoining where we landed and where the aircraft were parked when they weren't being used. And the accommodation was bamboo huts made of bamboo, all the accommodation was bamboo huts. Even the floor had kind of bamboo mats on it.

18:00 And the messing or the eating arrangements were the same. I was in hospital at one stage with dysentery, and I was in, again in a bamboo hut with a charpoy. That's an Indian bed you know, the mattress is rope intertwined like that. Just put a ground sheet on it. And the,

18:30 it was what the RAF called a mobile field hospital, always on the move. And some of them were bamboo huts and others were tents. And the ablutions and the washing facilities where I was there were a couple of, you know what a forty-four petrol or oil drum looks like? Forty-four gallon drums, because we hadn't gone metric in those days. Filled with water, and they gave you an enamel dish, and you dipped down into it,

19:00 weak from dysentery, and put it over yourself and soaked yourself and then another dish washed the soap off, dried yourself off. So those were the living conditions. But things had improved slightly. We had some Americans close by and they had a mobile movie unit that used to go around to various units. And they used to loan us their movie camera

19:30 with the operator, and we'd get one of the recent productions out of Hollywood. And we were also beginning to have a good leave system. Where we could get a weekend leave in Calcutta. Every squadron had a Harvard like we trained on in Canada and that was allegedly for communications and blind flying practice.

20:00 Blind flying is two of you get in the aircraft and the fellow in the front pilots the aircraft and you pull a hood over yourself and just fly on your instruments to simulate flying in the cloud. Well that was also used, we were allowed to take that aircraft up to Calcutta for the weekend occasionally. And bring it back. And you'd have to get a load of grog in Calcutta that was unprocurable where we were.

20:30 Go down to the local native markets and try to buy some tinned stuff that had its origin in Australia, or the US or Canada. So there was a slight improvement in the living conditions. And we had also started to follow the British army into Burma proper. And we were landing at forward airstrips there, and operating out of those airstrips on targets as they swept

21:00 into Burma, and we were advancing towards Rangoon and the Malay Peninsula, and what was then known as French Indochina. Then we flew back to where we were permanently based late in the day, you know before it got dark. But the medical arrangements I think the RAF were excellent. The doctors in these

21:30 mobile field hospitals, in my experience anyway, a lot of them were Harley Street specialist. That's the London equivalent of what Macquarie Street used to be in Sydney. And the care was excellent, they couldn't control the conditions we were living under, you know the illumination at night was a Hurricane lamp. And often the fellow in the bed next to you in an RAF mobile field hospital

22:00 could have been a Harley Street specialist himself who was in with malaria or dysentery or yellow jaundice, now called hepatitis A, I think is the one you get from infected food. You know so it was democratic, and I think the care was excellent, only the prevailing conditions.

And what type of illnesses did you,

22:30 **when did you get sick?**

I had I was, my first hospitalisation I had malaria and yellow jaundice as it was called in those days. You got all yellow. Now called hepatitis B I think, it's the one from infected food.

23:00 Any rate I had those conjointly and I was on leave and I went into a British army hospital. Which had been built in-between the wars when Britain was in India. And that was excellent medical care, I was well looked after and I was given three weeks leave, you know to recuperate. And then my next hospitalisation was with dysentery and that was the one with the RAF mobile field hospital. And a

23:30 mobile field hospital were always on the move. You know pack up the tents and get your syringes and your medical gear packed, we're now moving a hundred miles down the road, or a hundred kilometres. Pitch the tents. So those were my two hospital experiences. And excellent care

24:00 under the conditions, in both instances.

It sounds from your descriptions that your operations particularly in Arakan were fairly physically draining. I'm wondering if you managed to get opportunities to recover

24:30 **your strength, or whether you would exercise to keep fir or how you would exercise to keep fit?**

Well we were relatively near a beach and when we weren't flying our flight commander would get a truck and we would all pile into that and go down to have a swim at the beach.

25:00 So that was how we dealt with that. But there was no physical exercise or anything like that where we all touched our toes as a squad.

Can you tell me a bit more about how you saw the differences between the Thunderbolt and the Hurricane in the

25:30 **handling of the plane?**

Well the Hurricane was a much more modern and more advanced aircraft, and it had a greater range and it could reach targets in areas that the Hurricane could never reach. It had a greater payload capacity,

26:00 it could carry more bombs and more ammunition and more fuel and reach distant targets. Or it could reach close targets. It was kind of multi-talented if I could use that human expression. And it could reach heights that the Hurricane never could. It had a radial engine which was air cooled which didn't have any problems in the

26:30 intense tropical heat and humidity that we were operating in and under. Whereas the Rolls Royce engine was liquid cooled, that powered the Hurricane, and it had certain heating problems and required more regular maintenance programs to be implemented. The Thunderbolt's engine

27:00 adapted well to harsh tropical conditions, and it also did well in Europe where it was colder, so you know it was multi-talented in terms of the climate temperature control. It was a more comfortable aircraft to sit in.

You also mentioned earlier

27:30 **that you would be sent out on operations to find camouflaged enemy Japanese transports. How did you camouflage your own planes?**

Well when you did camouflage them we had a kind of netting with bits of green rag hanging down from it which gave a mottled effect. But as the war progressed

28:00 we had air superiority and our chances of any interception you know of being bombed on our own air strips diminished as the war went by, so there wasn't the urgent need of camouflage that there was in the early days of the campaign. The army, you know the British army was still camouflaging their trucks, right up on the front line and so forth but I'm talking about where we were further back and based.

28:30 So the need for intense camouflage diminished as the war progressed, we gained air superiority and you know the Jap's were on the defensive.

And when did you camouflage your planes?

When they nearly broke into India, that time I was telling you about, they were camouflaged then with netting flung over them. And also the

29:00 aircraft was painted in camouflage colours. You know mottled green and brown and all of that stuff. Later on in the closing stages of the war we even had Thunderbolt's that were still all silver as they came out of the aircraft factory in California, or Texas or where ever they were made. By that time we had

29:30 air superiority the absence of camouflage means that the weight of the aircraft is reduced because it takes X gallons or litres of paint to camouflage them. You know whereas if you don't have, and it take so many cans which must weigh so much which increases the weight of the aircraft. Whereas if you just use it as it emerges

30:00 from the aircraft manufacturers factory or plant, and they were silver, it means it doesn't have to drag that weight along. So you reduce your fuel consumption, or you increase your speed. But that only came as we were getting on top of everything later, towards the end of the war.

30:30 **And where were you at the end of the war?**

When it actually ended? Well which one do you mean do you mean the one in Europe or the one against Japan? There were two endings.

Well tell me about VE [Victory in Europe] Day first.

31:00 Well I was on leave up in the Himalayas nine thousand feet up at a place called Missouri. Which the British had established, you know when the Raj operated there for two hundred years or whatever it was. And another fellow and I, another Australian, we were staying in this nice hotel, tennis courts, swimming pool,

31:30 they had a small dance band. Nice dining room it was great. That's where I was when VE Day happened.

Can you describe how you got the news?

Yeah somebody heard it over the radio, and then it travelled like

32:00 wildfire by word of mouth. It was a sense of great relief, you know. And then one began to know that it was only a matter of time before the whole thing was finished. At least there was an end in sight. And I felt for the first time that there might be, there just might be a chance that I might get back and see Australia.

32:30 Because we used to talk amongst ourselves, oh it will go to the end of 1946, might even go to 1947. And we didn't know how long you'd be away. But with that news I felt that there was some hope, you know, that it wouldn't be too long. And you wouldn't want to believe that while we were up there,

33:00 on leave, we heard through the grapevine that all Australians and Canadians and New Zealanders were being withdrawn from India and Burma and repatriated. The Canadians were going back to Canada, and we were going back to Australia and New Zealand and the British were going to take care of the campaign against the Jap's through India and Burma.

33:30 And then when I got back to our squadron, it was all true. And then the signals came through and we had to all assemble at a central place in India called Boupow [?]. They gathered all of the Australians into this big RAF camp or base. And then we started the process of coming home. We were moved to another camp and then eventually while we were there the news came through, a

34:00 couple of months had passed, the Americans had dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, it was all over. Then it was just a question of waiting fro a ship to bring us home to be repatriated. So that was where I was when the war ended, in Europe and against Japan.

34:30 **And can you tell me about the mood in your squadron when you got the news of VP [Victory in the Pacific]?**

Yeah, they had been withdrawn from Arakan, the monsoon had started again. You can't use these earth strips that have been bulldozed out of the jungle or a rice paddy fields, you need concrete runways or bitumen. And we had been withdrawn. I

35:00 only learned of this subsequently, the plan was that we were going to make an amphibious landing on the Malay Peninsula and try to retake Singapore. And we were going to be part of that campaign, but that all fell through you know with the rapid

35:30 events that took place almost one on top of the other. I think from memory the war in Europe ended in May and Hiroshima was in August, that's what four months? Three months. So it was fairly rapid from then on and at long last we were going home.

And what type of celebrations

36:00 **did your squadron participate in?**

Well I was in the celebrations up on leave in the Himalayas for the VE. And we had a big dance in the hotel and a great night, and that was my memories of that. And VJ [Victory over Japan] Day or VP [Victory in the Pacific] as they call it here, we were in a holding camp waiting

36:30 to be repatriated any rate. See the Australians and the Canadians and New Zealanders were being withdrawn from India and Burma and the British RAF were going to do it on their own, and we were going to come home and be integrated into the RAAF here and you know go forward in the Pacific. But the Japs collapsed and it was all over.

37:00 So we eventually got on the ship at Calcutta and were repatriated.

And can you tell me about when you returned home, when were you demobilised?

I wasn't demobilised until January 1946.

37:30 And in that period of time I went into the military hospital at Concord, I had some gastro-intestinal problems from kind of post dysentery, and I guess yellow jaundice.

38:00 And I had had malaria and my weight was down, I think I was, in those days I was about nine and a half stone. What's that? It's about a hundred and twenty pounds, and there is two and a quarter kilos to, I was about roughly, my mental arithmetic is crook. I think I was about sixty-two kilo's,

38:30 which is pretty light for a fellow. I'm seventy-four now, so I had lost a bit of weight. But I picked up and I was well looked after in Concord. Then I was demobilised in January 46.

And how difficult

39:00 **did you find it adjusting after the war?**

I think it took me about two years to settle down. I was very restless after that kind of life experience, you know constantly on the move, something new unfolding almost on a monthly basis. And I missed the bonding and comradeship and companionship of the fellows.

39:30 The air force and aircrew fellows, when they were demobilised scattered like the wind, because the army for instance, from what I know of it and have read of it, were recruited from a given area, you know were all from Dubbo or all from

40:00 Adelaide or Brisbane. And when it is all over and you are demobilised you tend to congregate in where you came from. But the air force, and particularly aircrew they were recruited from all over Australia. So that when it was all over they scattered like the wind. And I have read that the American example for instance was exactly the same. So there was a feeling of unsettledness,

40:30 and I missed this bonding and companionship and good fellowship. And was a bit lonely. And particularly someone that had similar experiences and you could share similar experiences you know. So I found that

41:00 unsettling.

Well I know our tape is just coming to an end so we will have to leave it there.

Tape 9

00:30 **David before we move to talk about the end of the war, I would just like to go back to the number 5 Squadron. How, or did it play or what type of role did claims on your targets play in your squadron**

01:00 **like how would you keep track of direct hits?**

Oh with close support the army usually signalled back whether what they had requested of us had been successful. In other words had we hit or obliterated the Jap's in a certain spot, we were told, usually at the very latest the next day. You know

01:30 you'd often get a congratulations, well done, Jap's completely eliminated or position eliminated, able to advance stuff like that. So the feedback was quite good and we knew whether we had been successful or not. With the longer range stuff like to Rangoon and the Malagan Rail yards and down to the Malaya peninsula,

02:00 assessments could only be made after what they called PRU aircraft had followed up. That's photographic reconnaissance aircraft they would go over it, usually at enormous heights and with this high tech, even in those days, photographic equipment they would photograph the results of where the area had been bombed. And that in turn would be brought back, developed in the

02:30 photo laboratory then it would be analysed by experts. And they could tell by looking at the photographs what had been hit and what hadn't. And an assessment would be made and you would get a percentage of success then see? It was forty percent successful, or only ten percent, or you missed the bloody thing entirely. So that's how the two were assessed, so

03:00 we had an idea of what was happening. On the others, when I was telling you about the rhubarbs, where two aircraft were flying you know about fifty feet above treetop level, jungle treetop level. And where we discovered Jap transport or some gathering of Jap equipment or troops. That could only be

03:30 assessed by what we had left destroyed or not. They were too small and too difficult to find to send a reconnaissance aircraft out and photograph a truck that you had destroyed you know. But the kind of major things that the army asked for in direct support, and the long range stuff where PRU air, photographic reconnaissance unit aircraft went over, that was assessed. So there was

04:00 a degree of accountability.

And how would your morale be related to those direct hits, those successes?

Well we would get a feeling of self esteem and satisfaction out of the fact we had done a good job and we had supported the army.

04:30 And what we had been asked to do was successful or it was ninety percent successful, or forty percent successful. So we had an idea. And it engendered a feeling, usually when it was successful, you know satisfaction for the effort entailed. And it reflected on your self esteem. We needed something like that in some of the god forsaken spots we were in.

05:00 It wasn't like the fellows in England who had access to English cities or civilisation when they got a few days leave or a days leave or something like that.

And how do you think in hindsight do you feel like the number

05:30 **5 Squadron was being run?**

Well I think it was very well run indeed, I think the whole RAF with which I was associated. I mean we were virtually integrated into the RAF, I mean there were all Australian squadrons in England but there were none in India and Burma, and there were very few in the Middle East. So we were virtually

06:00 in the RAF. And I think that it was very well run. It was staffed, to the best of my knowledge, and from what I have read subsequently, by some of the finest officer material from the English speaking nations in the world as they were constituted at that point in time. And the RAF had

06:30 in addition to their own native Englishmen, Irishmen, Scotsmen, and Welshmen, there were Canadians who had enlisted in the RAF in peacetime as career officers. There were Australians and New Zealanders. There was even the odd American who had joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and stayed in it, who had achieved high rank. Most of the promotions to the

07:00 higher echelons were achieved by those fellows from, broadly the English speaking world, throughout the world from those countries. They were promotions almost without exception on merit, they weren't political. Whereas the Luftwaffe I have since read, that's the German Air Force, a lot of their high ranking appointments were made on political

07:30 standing. In other words foundation members of the Nazi party. A good party man and happened to be in the air force so they got promotions to high ranking positions from which critical tactical and strategic decisions were made. And they were made by men who were not the best material available.

08:00 Whereas my experience in the RAF and from what I have since read they culled the best out of the English speaking world. Then that reflected on how the whole thing was run. Sure there were glorious cock-ups and botches and you know in a five or six year war, it's inevitable that there are miscalculations made, but by and large I think it was well run.

08:30 And I have great admiration for them, and I mean they spread right across the English speaking world.

And who were your immediate superiors?

Well I had,

09:00 in my immediate, in a squadron structure you have the commanding officer then you have the two flight commanders, A flight and B flight. And my first commanding officer was an Englishman who was a graduate of Cranwell which is the English air force Duntroon if I could put it that way, career officers.

09:30 And he was a great bloke. Then he did his time or his tour and he was replaced by a fellow from New Zealand who was in the New Zealand Air Force. And he had got out of Singapore in the nick of time and instead of kind of being evacuated down through Australia, they managed to get on a boat and get to Solon

10:00 and stay in India and he eventually became, after serving in various ranks and flying duties he became the second commanding officer we had. And he was ok, and then I had another one who was another Englishman, and they were all ok. And then the flight commanders that I had, who did I have?

10:30 I had an Englishman, a New Zealander and an American who had stayed on in the Royal Canadian Air Force as my flight, there were other flights. I was in A flight

11:00 there were others in B flight and they were all ok. So I think they were very fine officers and I think we were generally well led. And that was my personal experience, and I've got mates who don't speak along those lines in their

11:30 personal experience but I can't comment on that because it didn't happen to me. So no doubt there were idiots and clots around, but generally speaking it was pretty well run. And it was devoid of as I said, comparing the Luftwaffe with the RAF it was

12:00 devoid of political appointments.

Well from your stories and descriptions today it sounds like the number 5 Squadron was quite effective but also under some very trying conditions, particularly when you were surrounded. When were there moments when you would personally feel like you were going to crack?

12:30 Well I don't think I ever felt that I was going to crack, there were moments when I was pretty apprehensive, and I wondered when we were going to get out of here if we were going to get out of here. But I don't think I ever experienced that emotion.

13:00 There were times when I wanted to go home, I would have given anything to see my family, you know. But other than that I was ok. I mean the food was terrible and the humidity was unbelievable, and the dermatitis and

13:30 itchy rashes and malaria and all of that stuff was always around. Prickly heat is what I am trying to think of. But to some extent you became acclimatised to it too. I remember we had a Scotsman with us and I had been used to a bit of heat, you know living in Sydney, and

14:00 this was the first time this Scotsman had barely been out of Scotland you know, and they had as we understand it a perpetual winter. And he was lily white and he got out to India and he was a poor devil with the massive prickly heat see? And he was saying, sitting in the corner, oh they'll have to send me home, have to send me home, I can't stand this. And he went up and saw the medical officer and he gave him some calamine lotion and told him to

14:30 go back to his tent and shut up. I knew he had no chance. But he probably acclimatised eventually. But we had already been through it you know, so it helped.

You've also described your respect for how the squadron was

15:00 **being run. When would you feel that perhaps you disagreed with an order or, were there any occasions like that?**

No I never disagreed with any of the operational orders because

15:30 I knew that the underlying fact was that you did as you were told or else. You know if you were in the German army you were taken out and shot, they didn't muck about, so I had that kind of concept. I didn't put that phone on.

So David, you've described a number of planes today that

16:00 **you flew during your war service, which plane was your favourite plane?**

I think it's a dead heat between the Tiger Moth and the Hurricane. And the reason I say that is because they were beautiful aircraft to fly, and they were forgiving.

16:30 And any mistakes you made the aircraft would almost self correct itself. Getting into a spin for instance, often an aircraft shudders because of lack of speed to stay in the air. Now high speed aircraft can be vicious, they just flick and you're gone. Whereas a Tiger Moth would rattle shake and roll for twenty minutes

17:00 and send out signals, and then it would drop its nose and say did you hear that? I'm exaggerating. You know you'd get bags of warning and it would almost self recover in a lot of situations. And it was relatively easy to fly. And the Hurricane was like that too, it often used to float, you know, and if you were about to go into a spin from lack of speed or whatever, you know it would give lots of shuddering and warning

17:30 signs, and then it would drop its nose and it would glide. Whereas the Thunderbolt and the Harvard would just go phht. So those were I think if I had to make a choice, the most likeable I think dead heat those two. But then other factors intercede, operational requirements, longer distance greater heights, faster speeds.

18:00 So they're my two favourites.

And post war how did you cope with missing the flying?

Well I missed it very much. I had investigated flying privately and the cost per hour was prohibitive.

18:30 And the time involved. I just forget what it was, I think it was fourteen pounds an hour. And you had to go to Bankstown, and fourteen pounds immediately after the war, fellows were raising families on five, and if you want to translate that into metric and it still doesn't allow for inflation, fourteen pounds was twenty-eight dollars.

19:00 And that was in, when did we got metric, 1963 I think [actually 1966]. That's twenty-eight dollars in 63 so if you want to triple or quadruple that to get it up to 2003 it was a lot of money per hour. It represented in excess of the

19:30 standard basic wage that Australia was getting in 1946. So economically it was out of the question. Then there was also the time in travelling, I didn't have a car then, and would have had to gone to Bankstown. And could have only done it on weekends and the aircraft might have been booked out over, you know there were all kinds of, so eventually you accept the loss.

20:00 I channelled my withdrawal symptoms from that into surfing. And I was doing a bit of study and I was back at work and so, but I was unsettled for about two years. And I have talked to a lot of my mates and a lot of them had the same experience.

20:30 Bit I couldn't generalise on that. I mean some fellows slotted straight into something or other, but I missed it.

That's very understandable, what do you think is, when you reflect back is your proudest moment?

21:00 I think there are two that possibly are a dead heat. It was when I first landed when I had been solo on my own in the Tiger Moth out at Bankstown airport. And the day I got my wings.

21:30 And that's my proudest yeah, there are lots of other good moments, but they're the two great senses of achievement. That I had made it you know. Yeah.

22:00 **And how do you think your wartime service in the air force changed you?**

I think that it accelerated my transition into maturity. I remember a girl

22:30 that I had known before the war that worked in the same insurance company that I did, you know, and she said, we were going up in the lift and she said you've changed you know, you're no longer a boy. So that was an outside unsolicited observation so I think it had a great maturing effect. And it may have possibility the beginning of the advent of some wisdom.

23:00 The key word is some. So you know it was a very valuable experience and I wouldn't have missed it for the world, but I wouldn't volunteer to go back and do it again, because the odds would be stacked against you.

23:30 I mean its impossible, but if I was reduced to my youthful, you know if the tooth fairy waved a magic wand and I was nineteen again and had that kind of physical and mental youthfulness, but knowing what I know now I wouldn't do it again. But I wouldn't have missed the experience for the world. It's

24:00 a bit contradictory isn't it?

And what do you mean some wisdom? What wisdom are you referring to that you learnt from the war?

Well lots of instance I guess, but I guess one

24:30 has been exposed to all kinds of human beings from various cultural backgrounds and geographical backgrounds and various personalities that you can sum up people and assess people much more quickly and accurately then you could if I'd chugged along in the insurance company for the rest of

25:00 my life. So I think it gives you that kind of wisdom. One of the side effects of that or the off shoots of that is that you learn to, or I did any rate, to behave appropriately in company from your kind of worldly experience. You learn when to shut up.

25:30 And when it's golden not to say anything, you know stuff like that it taught me. Also it gave me a respect for authority and orderliness, you know if you are going to have a cultivated civilisation one

26:00 has to be aware of those things and conform to some sort of law and order. That's in a wider sense, and in a personal sense you learn to appreciate people and assess them and, so that helps you kind of get on. Or that's what I think any rate, that's what helped me.

26:30 **And how important was it post war for you to receive recognition of what you've partially referred to as a forgotten force or a forgotten war in the Burma area,**

27:00 **the Burma theatre of war?**

Well I am, my mates that were there are conscious of that. Even in England the 14th Army which was General Slim's army who later became Governor General of Australia, even in the UK that's referred to as the forgotten army because they're evidently I wasn't there all of the time,

27:30 but their focus was on the 8th Army in the Middle East in the desert, and Montgomery and the landings in France and D-day in the European theatre. And the 14th Army was forgotten you know. So you know it's not a misconception, it's a fact. We were on the end of the supply line you know we got what was left over from other theatres.

28:00 what was your question again?

I am thinking of post war, and how important it was for you to receive recognition of your tours?

Well I think on the closer personal level, people I knew knew where I had been and what I had done and were conscious of it. So I knew that they knew that I knew that they knew. So in my immediate

28:30 grouping I was ok. But in the wider community I knew that we'd been forgotten. It was also known as the forgotten air force, or in the RAF its known as the lost tribes of the RAF. But that was at a kind of national level, but I didn't suffer that at the personal

29:00 level of my immediate contacts. So I didn't have any loss of self esteem or whatever the modern Vietnam veterans feel, the rejection by the community. There was none of that, the things that I had to cope with were things that I have spoken of earlier, the loss of bonding of companionship, knowing

fellows, you know

29:30 something that one only experiences under those conditions, and I've only recently finished reading a German book. It had been translated from German the fellows in the German army who felt exactly the same. So it is a national phenomena. And I've just finished reading another book on the American Civil War and some of the effects it had even post war then. And those fellows missed this

30:00 kind of bonding, so it's a general kind of thing that's experienced by people who experience that kind of experience if I can put it that way. And having read of those things even in recent times I now know for sure that my feelings and reactions were perfectly natural and human and that I wasn't suffering from some

30:30 deep psychological disorder. And we weren't rejected by the community or, there was none of that stuff, never heard of it.

And what about dreams, did you suffer nightmares on return?

No.

31:00 **How have you kept up with your many acquaintances and mates that you made through your wartime service?**

Well it hasn't been easy because as I mentioned earlier we have been scattered all over the world. I mean fellows I knew that lived in Canada or New Zealand or Scotland you know. But we have formed an association here in Sydney called

31:30 South East Asia Air Command which is comprised of fellows that served in India and Burma, and we've been going for about twelve or thirteen years now. And I've been the inaugural secretary and treasurer of that for eleven. And then our original and founding president died about eighteen months ago. And

32:00 I was elected unopposed to the position of president of that association, only because nobody else was silly enough to take it on. So here I am stuck with the presidency. I can't even get a secretary at the moment, I've got a treasurer and a small committee, but I read generally in the community there is a lack of volunteers in the Australian community now.

32:30 Not quite sure why that is, I think I know. That's another subject. So that's how, getting back to your question, that's how we've kind of maintained it for all of these years. And I'm in postal contact with two,

33:00 three of the fellows that I was with. And those letters are intermittent. There is one in England, one in New Zealand and one in Canberra.

And when Anzac Day comes around every year, what do you think of on that day?

33:30 Well we have an association and a banner and we march you know. Then after the march is over we go down to the Royal Automobile Club and have a nice lunch, and book a table, and there is upwards to thirty, but sometimes as low as twenty. Depending on who is crook or who isn't.

34:00 So that's what we do. My thoughts vary from Anzac Day to Anzac Day, and they're not necessarily about the war in any depth. I could be thinking of,

34:30 as time recedes, I could be thinking I wonder what I'm going to do with the grandchildren when they come up from Hobart next month, and another time it will be something that happened during the war. So, and I am glad to see the company pleasant, you know we had a great lunch and this last one,

35:00 not that we haven't had others, but this most recent one we all got on well together because everybody knows everyone, there is no breaking the ice. We also have two meeting a year of the association in one another's homes, we stay away from the clubs. And we usually have a barbeque meeting. I've got a barbeque out here

35:30 and so have most of the others. And its BYO [bring your own] food and drink. You know you bring your own chops or sausages or steak, and your own food and your own grog. And the host provide the venue, we have two a year. And it's going to be your place in October and his in February, and mine, you know we go around in a rough rotational thing. And

36:00 we have two other functions a year at the Sydney Marine Club where we take the girls, you know your wife your partner or your girlfriend. And there's no formal thing there, we just gather in their outer bar and have a few drinks and then go into lunch. And we go to the bistro, where it's up on the blackboard and there is fish and chips and oysters and calamari.

36:30 Its lovely and there is great big plate glass windows looking up and down the Parramatta River. And we usually meet at the quay, and there is a River Cat, a catamaran ferry that runs all the way to Parramatta and that drops you off at the Abbottsford wharf, which is immediately next to the Sydney Marine Club. We do that twice a year. Or you can drive there if you want to in the car. So that's what we do now.

37:00 **And how did meeting your wife help you do you think transiting from your service days to civilian life?**

Well I didn't get married for six years after the war, so I had largely done my adjustment by the time I met her.

37:30 **Well we're coming to the end of our session today, is there anything you would like to say in closing, or if there is anything you feel we have missed out on?**

38:00 Well in closing I would like to say it has been a wonderful experience meeting you both and engaging in this kind of journey back into my past. From my point of view it has been enjoyable.

38:30 It has probably been emotionally and mentally helpful, because I have learnt as I have got older that sharing and talking about things is good for the talker, so I am conscious of that aspect. I am aware of both of you people, your professionalism and how well you have

39:00 conducted yourself as individuals and professionals. And I think that you do your organization credit and I think that it's really a noble exercise what you are engaged in and I bid you farewell.

39:30 **Thank you very much.**

That's for the tape, that doesn't mean I'm not going to talk to you from now until the time you back your car out.