

Australians at War Film Archive

William Soden (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/577>

Tape 1

00:33 **So if we could just begin at the beginning. Whereabouts were you born?**

I was born in Devonport in October 1925.

Did you stay there long?

Until I was about seven. Then Dad got transferred in the PMG [Post Master General's Department] to Ulverstone. We stayed there until I was about 11 and then we went to King Island, and that was it.

I can't wait to talk about King Island, but

01:00 **just talking about your dad, did he serve in the First World War?**

Yes, he was in the Light Horse and in the Second War he volunteered for the VDC [Volunteer Defence Corps] and he was a captain in that.

Did he mention his experience in the First World War at all?

Not a lot no. There were one or two photos. But he didn't talk a lot about the war. He talked a bit about Palestine and things like that. I was a bit too young.

01:30 **It went in one ear and out the other.**

So where did he serve, just Palestine?

I think just in the desert. Palestine, Beersheba. And his older brother, he served in the Light Horse and I think he went to Gallipoli. He served in the Second War too and retired as a full colonel. So we were a pretty like-minded family.

Did you have a big family?

No. Only a brother and

02:00 **one sister. My brother died some years back and my sister is in Ballina in New South Wales.**

Where were you placed? Were you the youngest or the eldest?

I was the second eldest. My brother was three years older than me, then there was me and then there was my sister Judith. She arrived about 12 years afterwards.

Quite an age difference wasn't it?

Yes, I think she was a mistake.

Can you tell me about your experience of

02:30 **going to King Island? Why did you go there?**

Dad was transferred to Currie with the PMG and they lived there for five years, and it was probably five of the happiest years of my life. Mixed up with horses and this and that.

Do you remember how you got there. Do you remember going there?

Oh yes. We went over on a little old ship called the Narrabeen. It took us six days because the weather in Bass Strait's terrible.

03:00 **And we would shelter here and shelter there and unload cattle at different little islands. But we eventually got there. A terrible trip though. Seasick nearly all the time.**

It does seem like a long time to get not very far.

Oh gee it's only 100 miles or something. No distance at all. I did it once by plane when Mum was very ill and I had to leave school

03:30 and go back to the island, but apart from that every time I would come home on holidays it would be on one of these little ships. And the smell...the terrible smell like tarred rope and...I would get an orange and peel an orange and put it over my nose so I wouldn't have to smell all this stuff.

How did you feel when you first arrived on King Island, were you excited to go there?

04:00 I was just thrilled. It was very awesome you know. There wasn't any electric power or water as such, or no reticulated water. It was a whole new experience, and especially horses. Everyone had a horse. Not everybody...the rich kids went to school on push bikes and the poor kids went on horses. The other way around now I reckon. But you could buy a horse for five pounds.

04:30 **What was your house on King Island like?**

Terrible. The last one was good, but there were some terrible little houses. They seemed terrible to me. But the lack of power was the main thing. I went back for a reunion about 3 or 4 years ago, and I went and saw the old house and I was there looking at it and a chap came out and said, "Can I help you?" And I said, "Yes I used to live here." "Oh come on in."

05:00 And I went in this house, and this would be 60 years I suppose since we lived in it, and everything was exactly the same. My bedroom was Emma, brother's bedroom. Mother and father's bedroom. And the only thing that had changed was that there were light globes and power switches instead of kerosene lamps everywhere. It was a great experience.

Can you tell us about your first horse as well?

Molly. Yes.

05:30 She was given to me. There was an old chap lived down the south of the island, and he was talking to Dad one day. I was listening in because they were talking about horses. I said how I loved horses and he said, look I've got a little pony down there. He said if your father can take you down, and you can ride it back bare back then you can have it. So away we went and I rode this little pony all the way back to Currie bare back. I was a bit sore afterwards but I got my first pony.

06:00 I used to ride that in all the Best Boy Riders and they had what they called gymkhanas. They'd have one a year and sometimes twice and I win the Best Boy Rider every time with Molly the little pony until...I don't know what happened. I had to ride another horse and it was the first time I was ever ridden, on a strange horse but she was a beautiful little pony. She wouldn't let anyone else ride her. One of the local yobbos one day pulled me off and he hopped on her and

06:30 Molly bolted with him and it frightened him. So he didn't worry me any more.

It was a pretty special relationship you must have set up?

Oh yes. I would get in the back yard and I'd stand on her back like the Cossacks and all them. I get her to canter and I'd sit on the back. I'd fall off every time but it was a lot of fun. I'd sit down and lay between her legs and do this and do that. It's a good relationship with a horse.

07:00 **Did you have a saddle and bit and things like that?**

I had a bridle and my first saddle...Dad made me one made out of chafe bags. Just over there with a sort of girth and little stirrups. I used that for quite a while and then someone gave me an old Light Horse saddle, and that was beautiful. I was thrilled to bits with this Light Horse saddle. And it looked fine too with this chestnut pony with this Light Horse saddle on it.

07:30 **Can you tell us about those horse competitions. The Best Boy and the Best Girl?**

Yes. You'd get on your pony and you'd have a circle. And you'd walk the pony, and then you'd trot and then you'd canter. Then they'd add up the points. Monica would always win the Best Girl Rider. Clever little thing she was. And I would win the Best Boy. They'd have another race called the Gretna Green

08:00 and you'd start off...the girl would be in the saddle and the boy would be on the back, and you'd gallop around, half way round this big circle, jump off and run across the opposite side and by that time the girl on the pony would be there, so you'd swing yourself up behind her and away you'd go and the first to the line won the race.

08:30 I'd win it and Monica and I would be pairs. We had a bit of success.

So you were good mates back there as well.

Oh yes.

It sounds like a pretty dangerous experience, did anyone come to grief?

I don't think so. Mind you full speed on ponies isn't all that fast. It's not like you're riding a race horse of 17 hands. No, no danger.

09:00 **Were those equestrian competitions quite an event?**

Oh yes. But there was no dressage or anything like that. Couldn't afford it anyway, to buy the jodhpurs and little cap and little jacket. Oh no it was just pretty ordinary, but a big thing.

I'm guessing a small community like that, every event would be quite well attended. You'd have a real community feel to it?

Oh yes. A lot of people would enter it.

09:30 It was nearly as big as the King Island Cup. Everybody on the island would go to those. A bit of a galloping cup and a trotting cup. One after the other. Everybody would be there but they'd have to leave early to milk their cows. It was a big dairy place and they'd be milking 70, 80 cows by hand. They didn't have machines. So that was a real big thing. My father ran the galloping cup once

10:00 with a horse 15 years old. I think he must have dosed it with something though.

Did he ride?

No it was all sulkies. This was a trotting cup. I tried it once in a steeple chase, and I thought it looked so simple. And there I was on this darn big grey horse about 17 hands and the hurdle's way up there then all of a sudden I thought he was going to go right up to it and jump over like I did with Molly, but when it was about 20 foot away,

10:30 all of a sudden it took off and landed on the other side. It frightened me so I didn't do it any more. I thought I'm too young to die.

What other sort of social events would there be on King Island?

Oh very social. They'd have their dances and balls. The people would intermix a lot. More so than they do these days. Like for instance when the cricket was on in England, different houses would entertain five or six

11:00 people and stay up all night and listen to the cricket. There was a place called the Dell and I used to go out and they would have these dances in the big lounge area. And there would be cushions all over the floor and you'd sit on those and the grown ups would dance and carry on. But it was a good social life.

Do you think your family found it hard to set up again some where new?

I think Mum would have done.

11:30 She would have found it pretty difficult. You know, without any power and water in the tank, and sometimes the tank would get pretty low. Especially for the horses. I would have to go and take the horses down to the nearest creek and top up the tank sometimes. It would have been hard on them. All right for me. But no, not for the parents.

Kids are so adaptable aren't they?

12:00 Oh yes. Very adaptable. But it was great fun. Kids these days talk about being bored and they've got nothing to do, but I was never bored. There was a hill called Bell Hill and we would go up there playing cowboys and Indians, except we'd have real horses. We had a race horse, not a bad race horse, a galloper, and I took that up there one day playing cowboys and Indians.

12:30 I tied this horse up and went on foot to ambush someone. When I got back it was nearly dark and I couldn't find the horse. Anyway I just snuck home and got up early next morning. Dad didn't know. Waited for daylight and found the horse and rode it home. I could have been in serious trouble with that.

Did you get up to much trouble when you were a kid?

Oh I don't think so. Not really.

13:00 I can't remember any trouble I got into. Dad took me to the police one day to scare me because I used to play up. So he said, "Right go up there and see the sergeant." Anyway I got half way up there and he said, "Oh come on back." I was frightened.

Tell me about Bell Hill. Why's it called Bell Hill?

Well it had a bell up on it. It was a pretty much wooded hill. It had a bell up on top. Someone would see the smoke from the steamer coming over, and they'd ring

13:30 this bell. And then give it dong dong for every mile it was out. So then the waterside workers or whoever would know there's a boat and it was going to be in about an hour's time or half an hour. I did it once, got up there just to see the boat and gave it a good old ring. That was great.

How many ships would come in to King Island?

Well we had the Tambar which would come from Melbourne probably once a week. And then the

14:00 Narrabeen or the Narracoopa or one of those from Tasmania. They'd come about once a week and they'd load up with cattle and cheese and all that.

Can you tell me about your schooling experience there as well?

Schooling. Well that was unique King Island. It had a little one room school. There would only have been 10 or 12 kids. Except ours at Currie had a big room and a

14:30 little room. I was in the big room and Monica was in the little room. She was 18 months younger than me. But it was very good. We had very good teachers. They'd come to school dressed in their suits. And we respected them. And oh god the headmaster. And of course they were pretty liberal giving us the cane as well. Nearly every day I would get four cuts or sometimes six.

15:00 But that was just recognised as part of schooling. Didn't hurt us...or it did hurt! You'd go back to your desk and you'd rub your little hands. It was good.

Was school far away from home?

No not in Currie. Almost in the centre of town. Ten minutes walk. It was set in a great big paddock, and we used to ride our horses after school. Because we'd ride our horses to school and leave them in this big

15:30 paddock and then after school we'd get them and have little races. That was good fun.

So you'd have 10 or 12 students...what, of differing ages all in the one class?

In the big room we were from Grade Four through to Seven. There might have been 20 odd in the big room and the little kids, I don't know how many were in there. The little horrors.

16:00 Monica was in there. And she says she can still remember the first day I came to school with my brother. And then, two new to school was a big deal. She said I arrived and there I was with my hair sticking out like a little sport. She often brings that up to me. No it was good fun, school. We had a little school library and I just read the entire library. All the books that P.C. Wren wrote like the Foreign Legion, Beau Geste and all those.

16:30 I was a great reader, still am.

Do you think there was more space for imagination in that sort of environment?

Oh yes. You had to use your own imagination. I mean we'd play cowboys and Indians and all that sort of thing. I'd get up in a pine tree with these big boughs and I'd make out I was Biggles. You know the Biggles series.

17:00 And I get up there jumping up and down, and I'd have this machine gun and I'd be tack tack tack, you know, shooting everything down. We made our own fun. No one was ever board. We'd make little aeroplanes out of paper and flick them about. I just can't think of other things we used to do. That was about it.

17:30 What did you know about the war when you were growing up? Was that part of your school education?

About the war?

About war generally and about the First World War?

It didn't figure in the curriculum a hell of a lot. We knew about it you know. We knew about Anzac Day because every Anzac Day we'd get the day off from school and have our little races and get a bag of lollies or something.

18:00 No, we weren't taught a hell of lot about it. I got most of my knowledge through books you know. I was a great reader and I'd read all about the war. The Second [World] War, well...I just forget...no, war started when I was at tech in Launceston. But I don't remember much about that. I wasn't all that interested in the war. All I wanted was to go to it and be a returned soldier.

18:30 That was what I eventually was.

Were there many returned soldiers on King Island?

Quite a few. I know Dad as a lines foreman, about everyone he employed was a returned soldier. There might have been a bit of favouritism there. If someone wanted a job and they were a returned soldier, Dad would give them a job. As a matter of fact, a hell of a lot of the King Island boys

19:00 went to the Second World War. I was on the computer the other day looking them up. I was surprised by the number of chaps that I had forgotten about. I saw them on the computer where they went.

Small communities like that must have been quite effected by people going away.

Yes. All I know is that King Island was one of the few places in Australia that didn't have petrol rationing during the war.

19:30 The car was the only means of transport, there wasn't any public transport. Not that there were too many cars on King Island. But it was...you didn't have to have a ration ticket or card.

Were there many First World War vets who had been injured or affected by their experience?

20:00 Not that I know of. I had heard all about blokes being gassed, but I don't think I met with any of them. The only bloke I met there was a bloke called Chappy Chalmers. He worked for Dad naturally and he was what was called a King's corporal, and that's a special rank given by the Queen. And no one could take that rank off him except the Queen or King. The King in those days. And he used to tell me a little bit about the war.

20:30 I'd go down there and talk to him and he'd tell me things I've forgotten now. That was 70 years ago.

Do you know what sort of picture he painted for you? What sort of impression did you get of war experience from him?

Only that they were all heroes and things like that. But I just forget now what the actual talk was. But a lot of returned men, I remember now, at King Island from the First World War.

21:00 I can't remember their names now, but there wasn't a lot of war talk went on really you know. It was more or less about football and horse riding.

But the fellow Chalmers, he was quite happy to talk about his experiences?

No, he never talked about his actual experiences. No we just talked about things in general.

21:30 **What sort of ideas did you have about the war when you were growing up do you think?**

Very glamorous. Oh yes, I couldn't wait. I told you before, I was just hoping that the war would go on longer until I was old enough to go to it. That's why I joined up when I was 17.

You mentioned Anzac Day before when you got the day off school. Was there a commemoration or parade or something?

Oh yes.

22:00 We'd have it in the Town Hall if it was raining. And if it wasn't raining we'd have it on the show ground. Then there'd be girls and boys races and I remember we would sing the 'Recessional'. I used to get sick of singing the 'Recessional'. And 'Rock of Ages' or something like that. But it was all part of growing up. More so in those days like it is now. Like, they don't have sports like we used to.

22:30 I don't think they have sports at all on Anzac Day now. Not really. I know they play football and that's about it. I mean with the services, naturally...the Dawn Service at six o'clock to half past or what ever. Then the half past eleven service. I used to always go to them. I'd go to the Dawn Service and then go to the other one. But not now. I either go to one or the other.

23:00 It's a bit hard physically to keep up with it all. Especially when you go to the pub and things like that. Those days are just about gone. I hardly ever drink now. Only after bowls or something like that, golf.

I was going to ask you about the drinking because now Anzac Day, a bit part of it is the pub afterwards. Was that the case when you were a kid as well, for the servicemen I mean?

Well I don't know when I was a kid

23:30 what the grown ups did. I suppose it was the same as they do now. I don't really know.

It seems like it's an occasion when all the war stories do come out?

Oh yes. Sometimes I think we were only trying to recapture or regain our lost youth because we were only then 17 or 18 or 19 or 20. We'd like to dredge up these memories.

24:00 There was a lot of that I think. I don't think its patriotism or anything like that.

Did you work on King Island or did you just go to school there?

Oh yes. I went to state school and then I went to Launceston to tech, then I got very home sick. I really did. I would cry at night and I'd miss Mum and Dad and I'd miss my horse.

24:30 So I went back to the island and got a job there ...I was an apprentice to a tinsmith or plumber. We used to work for the King Island Dairy repairing their vats mainly. The vats they made cheese in. And we made tanks, 1000 gallon tanks, 1500, 1600 hundred tanks. I used to ride my bike from Currie. That was about four miles.

25:00 And ironically the girl I knew just lived 100 yards away. But that's another story.

It sounds like an interesting story. Tell us about that?

Oh well. See Monica, she was still going to state school and I had left school. See I was 18 months older. And I was working at this cheese factory making the tanks and Monica lived just over the road, and every now and

- 25:30 again I'd sneak out to see if she was there and I'd give a little wave. Her mother came across her one day and she said, "Ah there you are Monica still making eyes at Bill over the road." "Oh no," we'd always do that. Have a little wave. That was all right.

Did you think you'd end up marrying Monica?

Yes. Funny enough you do something and you get granted a wish. Mine was always I want to marry Monica. We never

- 26:00 did get married, but we were very close. Never in a sexual sense. We were just close, and we still are you know. Nothing's changed.

What did you go to Launceston for? What were you studying at tech?

Everything. Woodwork, tin smithing and all that. But I didn't like it. I just couldn't wait to get home. Money wasn't all that plentiful and

- 26:30 I used to go out to the Kings Golf Course caddying. I might get sometimes ten shillings for the weekend and that was good. We used to go out on the.. and I thought I would buy a bike. So I bought a bike from John Kings and I think it might have been five shillings down and two and six a week. I just forget. But I know it was two and six a week so I bought this bike and away I went out to Kings Meadows and got my ten shillings a week.

- 27:00 Yes that was good. I don't know what caddies get these days but I think it would be more than ten shillings I reckon. More like ten thousand, playing for a real pro like Tiger Woods or somebody.

Could you sneak into pubs when you were younger?

Not at King Island. That was another ambition of mine to go into the bar. Not to have a beer but just to go in there. The only time I got in there

- 27:30 I was selling programs for the races. I went in there. I know at St Mary's I was on final leave I got thrown out of the pub because I was under age.

Old enough to go to war but not old enough to have a beer.

Yes. I didn't have a uniform on but this old bloke he knew who I was. "Yes," he said, "out. You're under age." It didn't matter.

So where were you exactly when

- 28:00 **you heard that war had broken out?**

I think I was still at King Island because I can remember the old school teacher saying the world's like a powder keg with a fuse about to be lit. So 1939, I'd be 14. No, I think I had just started at tech in Launceston. Around about that time anyway.

- 28:30 **Do you remember what you thought when you heard?**

Well...not a lot you know. I just listened to the news and heard about soldiers in the Middle East, Tobruk and El Alamein. But a lot of it didn't sink in. I was young and you don't think of the consequences. I used to look at these blokes, especially the artillery with their red stripe down

- 29:00 their pants, and thought it would be great to be in that. And of course the Light Horse. I badly wanted to be in the Light Horse. But that never eventuated. The Light Horse had just about had its day by then.

At that age were you aware of what the war was about?

Not really. You do come into politics when you're a kid. And I was still a kid.

- 29:30 I can always remember [Adolf] Hitler and [Benito] Mussolini weren't very nice people. No I don't remember much about any feelings about it.

Did your mention anything about what he thought about war breaking out or anything like that?

No not really. I knew he would have loved to have been in it. We were all a family you know.

- 30:00 Dad's older brother as I said was a colonel and his younger brother was in the army, and as matter of fact his son was in the air force and they served at the same time. That's unique...well not unique but fairly rare to have a father and son both servicing. I had other cousins and that and they were all in it. Just about all our family had someone in it.

- 30:30 **And on your mum's side of the family as well?**

Not so much. I might have had a couple of cousins on my mother's side who were in the navy or something like that. But I didn't mix with them after I grew up. Only when I was a kid about 10 or 11 when we lived in Devonport or whatever.

31:00 **So your father was quite keen to get involved again?**

Oh yes. He had the VDC, that's the Volunteer Defence Corps in Currie. I was in that too. I was only a school kid, but I'd march along with them. And then at St Mary's, when we moved to St Mary's. I had a uniform and little rifles. And that was great fun.

Can you tell us about the VDC on King Island. How many

31:30 **were in it?**

I'm a bit vague about King Island because it was in its infancy, but at St Mary it was on a bigger scale because we had our uniforms as I said and 303 rifles and we'd go to drill one or two nights a week. I can remember one Christmas at St Mary's Pass, the Elephant Pass and the older chaps would be on guard there checking people...

32:00 I don't know why. They wanted to go home for Christmas dinner so us young kids took their place for the day. That was a lot of fun pulling up these cars...who are you and asking for identification. Big deal.

So how did you get from King Island the second time to St Mary's?

So how did I get...

So you went back and worked

32:30 **making tanks for a while?**

Yes, yes.

How long did you do that for?

Oh, not all that long because once again Dad got transferred at the PMG to St Mary's. So I stayed there for a while and then Monica left. She went away to high school, and I thought oh blow this I'll give up so I went to St Mary's. I was a bit of a sook. So I went to St Mary's. While I was at St Mary's I managed to see Monica.

33:00 She was at high school and I'd get a ride to Launceston and stay at a hotel or something and take her to the pictures. That was about the limit of it. But St Mary's wasn't much of a town because I worked at the coal mine. I was working at the coal mine when I was 15 or 16 and I was working outside. You couldn't work underground until you were 16, so

33:30 as soon as I turned 16 I asked the manager if I could work underground...you got a lot more money. I was getting 21 shillings a day, and that was pretty good money compared to the 15 shillings a month I was getting at King Island. It's a very hard job in a coal mine.

Can you tell us about your different roles? Before you went underground what were you doing?

I was called a clipper. The coal bits would come down from the mine to what they

34:00 called the screens and we'd separate the coal into different sizes. It was pretty dangerous there too because you would try and undo this clip and if you were a bit slow it would go under the screen and cut your fingers off. It happened to one bloke one day, he lost his fingers, so one of the chaps said to make sure you blokes don't do the same thing, he nailed his finger to where he should have let the clip go.

That's a bit gruesome.

Yes.

34:30 So I went underground and got mixed up with horses again. I was what they called a 'wheeler'. You'd have this little pony towing the trucks here there and everywhere. But that was a hard job because the skips would come in and you would have to unload these big mine props. I was only 16 and I wasn't very...I was fairly big but I wasn't strong. Not like I was say five years after that. And I used to say

35:00 my prayers at night then and every night I'd pray for God to give me enough strength to do my work the next day. That's dinkum. Anyway he must have done because I always did my work the next day until I enlisted.

And did you stay at the coal mine long?

At the coal mine long? Look I don't really know. It wouldn't have been all that long because I joined up when I

35:30 was 17 and I think I went there when I was 15. Probably 18 months or something like that. But I wouldn't want to go back there and work again. And to get extra money, before the miners started work

say, half past six or seven, I would go in and start the pumps to pump the pits out. And that was eerie. I'd get frightened in this coal mine on my own. You imagined things. So ...

36:00 it was a relief when you see the little lights of the miners coming. It was money.

We're just at the end of this tape, no...we've got 3 or 4 minutes left. I just like to hear much more about the coal mine. Was there many people your age?

Yes quite a few. When I saw quite a few, there might have been 8 or 9 of us, all up around the 15, 16 mark.

36:30 I've never seen...I've seen one since and he died a little while back. All the blokes I knew have died. We're all at that age.

And what did they have in the way of actual mining tools?

Oh yes the miners would have their...they'd drill holes in the coal

37:00 and then a chap would come around with the dynamite or fracture as they used to call it and they'd do that and then they'd light the fuses and they'd knock off and come back the next day, pick up the coal and load it. It would have been a pretty hard job too. I never got around to do that. I was what they called a wheeler.

Did you get along well with those ponies?

Yes, they were very intelligent.

37:30 Because in a coal mine it's not straight. It slopes, and the little pony would be trotting along with these skips and the skip would catch up and hit them on the heels. So when they came to a slope the little pony would go to the side and trot alongside them. They didn't get hurt at all. No they were clever little things. And we'd take them out every night to the stables, ride them down and then pick them up in the morning and ride them

38:00 up to the mine.

Did you get along well with your co-workers. Were they good blokes?

Most of them. There was one bloke who wanted a fight me every night. I don't know why. He really did. He had to set on me. I never did anything to him but he'd pick on me and pick on me, and I thought to myself, one of these days I'll go to the war and I'll grow up and

38:30 I'll come back and get you. Anyway I did go away and I did come back and then I looked at him and thought what a miserly looking article you are and just ignored him. But he looked a big bloke to me 2 or 3 years before that.

Was he much older than you?

Oh yes, he was a man in his 20s. And when you're only 15 or 16 a bloke 25 is a big bloke you know. Anyway

39:00 nothing happened there. But he always wanted to fight. I don't know if I was belligerent or something like that. But there was one bloke and he used to go to the VDC and he wanted to fight me every night. Anyway eventually we did have a fight and we fought for two hours. And we said we'll come back and finish it tomorrow but I turned up but he didn't. I met him years afterwards and I said, "What a cream puff you are."

Tape 2

00:33 **So was it while you were working at the coal mine that you decided to enlist?**

Yes. I enlisted from there. Another mate of mine, Eric Ford, we both joined up. We had our medical examination at St Mary's and then we were issued with warrants to go down to the HMAS Huon. Anyway a couple of days before I was due to go I got a letter from the main

01:00 Manpower [Department] or the air force or was it the navy, so say I was working for a protected industry and I couldn't go. So that was a bitter disappointment. Anyway Eric was determined to get away and join the navy. See in those days you could legitimately join the navy at sixteen and a half. So that's what I did, I thought I'll wait until I was sixteen and a half and join the navy. Anyway Eric caused an accident. It didn't hurt anybody but it could have done, and he got sacked so Eric joined up and away he went.

01:30 So I waited until I turned 17. The squadron leader in charge of recruitment in Tasmania was a friend of my father. They had both served in the First War together. So I went down and told him who I was and he said, "Oh yes, you're Aubrey's son." And he said, "Look I'll get you to fill in a couple of Statutory

Declarations." He said, "Now you're unemployed aren't you?" And I said, "Yes." He said, "You're 18?" And I said, "Yes."

02:00 "Well," he said, "I'll sign you up as a trainee tech." So that was how my air force career started from that point. I went away as a trainee tech.

Do you sometimes wonder how life would have been if you had gone into the navy?

Well you don't know do you. I could have gone down with the Sydney or anything. I don't know.

It would have been a pretty different experience generally too I suppose?

Yes.

02:30 Oh the navy and air force and army, they're all different.

Were you particularly keen to go into the air force?

I wanted to go in the navy, but I couldn't on account of the manpower and that so, and when I went to the air force I just made a fresh application and said I was unemployed. It was a pretty good choice in the end. At least I got back.

03:00 And it was good money compared to the army and the navy. It all depended on your mustering of course. There were six different mustering courses, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6. Six was just a general hand or a mess man. Then you got to group 4 and then group 4. Three were drivers and group 2 were flight mechanics, flight fitters, flight armourers, radio technicians and all this.

03:30 After a while they graduated to group 1 and they'd be engine fitters and air frame fitters and instrument makers. There was a bit of a pecking order there.

Where were you hoping to get, to end up when you enlisted in the air force?

I just wanted to be a flight fitter. I wanted to work on aircraft. I couldn't join air crew because I think my age might have come out there, and in those days...like this was back in 1943, you had...

04:00 my education wasn't sufficient to get me into it.

What did your parents feel about you enlisting?

They didn't seem to mind. As I say, we were pretty war like and my brother was already in the army. It would have been hard on my mother. You know, when I look back on it, when I left there after my final leave to go overseas, I

04:30 just remember Mum a solitary person at the station waving as the train chuffed off.

So you actually enlisted in Hobart? Did you go down to Hobart to do that?

Yes. I had to go to Hobart and from there about 10 of us all left there and went to Melbourne.

05:00 We camped at the Exhibition Building for one night and then went to Shepparton which is where we did our rookies course. Marching every day. That was a terrible month. That was the month you had all your needles and your teeth out. Filled or whatever. But that only lasted a month and according to what you were going to be you were shipped off to different places. I was sent back to Melbourne,

05:30 once again to the Exhibition Building. I was moved somewhere after that and that's when we went out to Brunswick Tech. Then having passed that exam we filled in a form as to what we wanted to be. A flight mechanic, a flight fitter, armourer. I wanted to work on aircraft so I put down flight fitter and I was sent to Ascot Vale to the Number Engineering School.

06:00 That was the show ground and we all lived in...or I lived in number two pig pavilion and someone else was number 3 cattle pavilion. But that was great. I liked being at Ascot because it was pretty close to the city. It was interesting work. I learned all sorts of ...I learned how to splice wire, how to do stitching, different stitching, herringbone, and fabric

06:30 there was then dope and all this sort of business. Hydraulics and that was a three month course. Yes, the Brunswick Tech was three months and this one was three months. Then we had an exam and then after you were sent to a different station. I was sent to Laverton. That wasn't far out from Melbourne either. Get in there every night if you wanted to.

07:00 But all that training I did for splicing and this and that because for three months at Laverton all I did was screw down covers on the wing tanks, day after day. With this big screw driver screwing down covers on...I think it was the petrol cover. On the multi-engined dive bombers.

Was it exciting to be working on the planes though?

Yes, I loved it.

07:30 And every now and again there'd be some other planes. There would be some Beaufighters and I'd sneak over and sit in the cockpit of the Beaufighter or the Hudson. No, that was good. And after 3

months there I was supposed to go for a conversion course to become an air frame fitter which is in Group One. Then you're at the top of the tree. But I was posted away so that was the finish of that.

08:00 Melbourne was a really good place and on the notice boards...we used to stay at Air Force House or Navy House and there would be a notice there to say that Mr and Mrs So and So would like an airman or whatever to come out for a home-cooked meal. And we'd go out there and be welcomed in as one of the family and have a meal and on the odd occasion you could stay there over night. Melbourne people are very hospitable. I

08:30 don't know what it's like over there now, but in the war years it was fantastic. I can't speak highly enough.

Even more impressive was they had war rationing as well and to feed all those airmen...

Well I don't really...I suppose tea and sugar might have been rationed. I don't know because we were living in camp and you don't know what people have to put up with. And we'd go to the Dugout and various other service places and eat.

09:00 I don't about food rationing. I think petrol was the biggest bugbear and also tobacco. That was all pretty scarce.

It must have pretty exciting to be in a big city?

Oh it was. The biggest city I had been to before was Launceston, and all of a sudden there you are in Flinders Street and Collin Street and Swanston Street. Walk around the block trying to pick up

09:30 girls. Didn't have any luck. Too many Yanks there. The Yanks had just come back from Guadalcanal. They were there with this big arm patch with Guadalcanal. I admit they had been through a fair bit the poor old Yank marines. They got knocked about but we resented them. This was our place. Anyway I never had any trouble with them. I think the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] did. They had a pitched battle the night they came home from the Middle East. One night the

10:00 boys got stuck into the Yanks. Rightly so I think because they were taking their women and they were better paid. Over paid, over sexed and over here.

Was that pretty much true in your experience?

Yeah. Oh they were. Singly we got on all right with the Yanks but collectively we had mixed feelings about them.

What was their general attitude

10:30 **do you think, those Americans walking the streets?**

They owned the place. Buying it. Plenty of money. Plenty of cigarettes. Plenty of everything. That's how it goes, you live with it. Mind you later on I was with the Yanks for 15 months. I was attached to the 5th Air Force, US Air Force. But that was a different story all together.

11:00 We used to get around talking like the Yanks. God damn this and god damn that.

In Melbourne did you go to dances and things like that?

Oh yes. Good dances. Trying to pick up girls again. I could never pick one up. I did get friendly with one girl and I wrote...I saw her quite a lot regularly because I had lost touch with Monica. Monica swears I didn't see her in 1944 or 1945.

11:30 But this other girl used to write to me regularly, Monica did too of course. But we had a very friendly relationship, same as with Monica. The funny part about it, when I came back, I only saw her the once, whereas I kept on with Monica. But the girl who used to write me more than Monica I only saw the once, and we drifted apart.

12:00 **What was her name?**

Betty, Betty Flynn. She was a lovely girl. Really lovely. Every night in Melbourne I'd get on the train out to Canterbury and I'd pick her up and we'd go into Melbourne. I don't know what we used to do.

Go to the movies or things like that?

Yes things like that.

Was there much in the way of recruitment posters and things like that around?

Not that I remember.

12:30 I'm sure there would have been but I don't remember much about recruitment drives or things like that. No I can't say.

What about the newsreels before the pictures. Do you remember those?

In Melbourne, I think it was in Swanston Street. There used to be a little picture theatre that had hourly news reels and you could sit there all day. You could watch the hourly

13:00 newsreels... I think it only cost...I think it was a shilling or sixpence. And you could watch it again. If you had an hour to spend then you could duck into the cinema. I can't recall what it was called, but it had a name anyway. Going to the pictures or the movies was a big thing in those days. More so...I suppose now it's coming back again. We haven't got a picture theatre here anyway, so...

13:30 we get it all on the TV and the computer.

Were the newsreels attached to the feature films?

Oh yes. You'd have the Paramount British News and this bloke winding his little camera. And you'd have quarter of an hour of newsreels and then on with the main feature. We used to go to the pictures fairly regularly.

14:00 It didn't cost much. I don't know, threepence, sixpence. Maybe even nothing like the trams. No one ever asked us to pay on the trams. And I think even on the electric trains. I mean, we'd pay but maybe thruppence or sixpence. It didn't worry us.

Do you think people treated you differently when you were in uniform?

Oh I think. I think so. I think

14:30 if you weren't in uniform you might be the odd man out. I wouldn't wear my uniform if I was on leave, I'd wear civvies. But I don't think anyone ever said anything to me as a civilian. It was nice to get the uniform off. You were living in it night and day for months on end. It was just nice to get your uniform off.

I've heard stories of people in civvies being given

15:00 **white feathers and been given a hard time generally?**

Oh yes, I've heard about it. I think it did happen. If you were a civilian who hadn't joined up, you'd get an envelope with a little white feather in it. Just pretty cruel. I would never do that to anybody. There would be a good reason. It could be a married man with kids and he had to be there. So it was a bit unfair to label anyone a coward and give them a white feather.

15:30 A lot of funny things would go on with civilians. I tell you about that later.

In what way, what do you mean?

At one time, I'd been away for awhile up in the islands. I don't know if it was Borneo or New Guinea. Probably New Guinea. We got one of our rare Australian Comforts Fund parcels. We didn't get many because we were with the Yanks. But this particular time we got this parcel and I opened mine up and it had

16:00 a pair of socks in it. And the ladies name who made them. So I thought, I'll write her and thank her. Anyway I wrote and thanked her and about a month later I got a letter back to say, if I had known it was going to an air force person I would never have knitted them. That's a bit rough. It hurt me a bit. I don't know what she had against the air force. We had it just as tough as a lot of other people.

16:30 Yes something else about...I just can't think now, something about the civilians. It might come back to me later.

Did you enjoy wearing the air force uniform?

Oh yes, yes. I had the little propeller there. You could get the cloth ones or you could get the copper ones, so you would polish it up, so that said you were an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] and it got you sixpence a day extra.

17:00 And after you came back you would have your ribbons on so you would look pretty swanky. The ribbons and all that on.

During that training period where did you expect to be sent?

I just hoped I would be sent overseas. I just hoped and hoped and hoped. And then Number One Embarkation Depot, then Number Two, Number Three. I didn't want to go to number one because if

17:30 you went to number one it meant you wouldn't go outside Australia, and I wanted to go outside Australia. So I got this posting to 2ED [Embarkation Depot] in Sydney and I thought well that's great. It means I'm on my way. Then to Sandgate to 3ED and then I was eventually posted to a squadron.

And before then you went back to St Mary's briefly?

On leave yes. Every three months we'd get five days leave.

18:00 We'd get on the old Tambar and come home on leave and go back again. Now and again you'd overstay

your leave and you'd get your RTO [Regimental Training Officer] officer to say you couldn't get on the ship because it was full or something so you'd get a further three days. You'd give him a bottle of beer for it.

It would have taken half your leave just getting there wouldn't it?

Yes, you'd leave one day and be there the next. But it did take up a lot of your leave.

- 18:30 You would finish up with only 2 or 3 days. Especially if you landed at Devonport or somewhere and you had to go to Launceston or St Mary's. Or even if you put in at Launceston you would still have to get down to St Mary's. I forget now how we used to do it, but we did it.

Did you get the train to St Mary's? Was there a train there?

Yes a train would leave Launceston and go down to a place called Conara Junction.

- 19:00 Then you would change trains and get a little train to St Mary's. It would take all day nearly.

How was that last time, the final leave you had in St Mary's?

Oh yes, that's when the old sergeant kicked me out. It was only 4 and 5 days leave and like most of the young blokes we'd go and have a beer.

- 19:30 I was sneaking into pubs before I joined up. Anyway, but this time I thought blow the uniform I'll just put my civvies on and go up. This will be my last night almost, so I'll go up and have a few beers with my mates. And the old sergeant walked in, and yes, he did know me. He said, "Ah, young Soden, out, until you're old enough to come in." I just went and said bugger it.

- 20:00 **Were you think much about what lay ahead on that final leave?**

No, I didn't think about it. I just knew I was going to come home. I don't know if anyone had any premonitions that they weren't going to come home. There were times when I mightn't have come home...different little episodes, especially in Tarakan later on. But I never thought I would never get home. I got scared a couple of times but ...

- 20:30 **And so can you tell us about the process of getting up to your squadron. You stayed in Sydney briefly?**

Yes, that was pretty involved. I went to a place called Lindfield in Sydney I think it was. I don't know if I made my way up to find the squadron or what it was, but

- 21:00 I know I went to Sandgate in Brisbane to Townsville, and as far as I know I was on my own there. I got in the plane from Townsville to Port Moresby. I stayed at Moresby for maybe 3 weeks until they decided my final posting which was to 78 Squadron. And I was thrilled to bits because 78 Squadron was a fighter squadron. That was great news.

- 21:30 So then I got on a C47 and went to a place called Nadzab and the next day went to a place called Cape Gloucester in New Britain. And then I joined the squadron and that was home. I was home then. And it was my home for the next 20 months.

Do you remember meeting the people who were to become your friends for that period, the day you arrived in the squadron?

I didn't know a soul.

- 22:00 I've never met anyone since. The air force is different to the army. In the army, say the 2/14th is made up of people from Launceston and the north west coast. Different other battalions were made up of people from another area. But in the air force there were only maybe three Tasmanians and maybe 100 New South Wales,

- 22:30 50 from Victoria, so you know you were a pretty odd mob.

Was the interstate rivalry pretty strong. Did you get the stick for being Tasmanian?

No. Might be now, especially with football. But it wasn't in those days. I made very good mates, mainly Victorians.

What was Port Moresby like. What was your impression of that?

- 23:00 Oh gee it was a dump. It had been bombed. I remember once I went for a swim. I was always one for swimming. They had this big shark net around and I was swimming inside this shark net, and I dived down to get in the cooler water, it was too warm on top, so I dived down and there was this shark in the shark net. So that was the last time I went swimming at Moresby.

The climatic change must have been pretty huge coming from Tasmania?

It was.

- 23:30 Yes very much so. Especially, in the old money it would be 100 degrees at nine o'clock in the morning. It

was bad enough at Townsville. You know, hot.

Did you stay there long at Townsville?

A week or two. It wasn't much of a place, Townsville

24:00 in those days. If you went to a pub to get a beer you had to have your own glass. Anyway, what they used to do, they invented a glass called a Lady Blamey. You got a beer bottle and tie some string around it, soak it in kerosene or something and then light it and when it was out they would just give it a snap and the top half of the bottle would fall away and you had your Lady Blamey. I don't know why they called it that.

24:30 **It was a pretty rough town then wasn't it?**

Oh yes. Mainly Australian soldiers. There wouldn't have been too many Yanks there. But then again they were every where so I suppose they were there. But no, it was mainly servicemen.

And mostly men too I think wasn't it?

Oh yes. Yes I didn't meet up with too many women, service women at all anywhere.

25:00 In fact in all the 20 months I was away I never ever saw a white woman except one or two Yank women serving out coffee and doughnuts or whatever. And they had a big 45 strapped under their armpit. They didn't know we were Australians otherwise they would have worried about us. But we were like the Yanks. We didn't care.

25:30 Yes that's a long time without seeing a white woman. Did see many black ones. They wouldn't come near us. I think they had a pretty hard time with the Japs so they took to the hills. No, I didn't see many around much.

So I've got the impression that Townsville was a town or soldiers, a pub and a brother or two?

Yes.

Did you see any brothels there?

Yep.

26:00 If you were prepared to wait in a queue. I forget the name of the place now, oh, the Causeway. They would always talk about the Causeway. Oh we went there and had a look and there was a queue about 100 yards long and I thought oh blow this. So I never bothered about it.

And your experience of flying in the DC3 or was it the C47?

The DC3 or C47. It was called the Doug.

26:30 **The Doug?**

We used to call them the Doug, Douglas C47.

What was that like? Would it have been pretty primitive, pretty basic?

It was very primitive and it was cold because we would have on our shorts or just a short sleeve shirt on, and there's no air conditioning. I mean you're up there at 15,000 feet or whatever and it was really cold.

27:00 They had a row of seats along the side of the fuselage, so you could sit on that. But you wouldn't be up there for long. Not like when I came home, we flew all night and all day. But it was only for a few hours and we used that for transporting a lot from island to island. A couple of times we went on the landing ships, the LSTs [Landing Ship Tank]. The invasion of Aitape we went on LSTs. Borneo on LSTs.

27:30 All the others were by the old Doug.

It was a pretty loud thing too I guess. Not well insulated?

Oh no. Everything's all bare. Very stark. However, it was better than walking.

Thinking about joining your squadron, did you fall into a routine

28:00 **fairly easily. What was your working routine like?**

Once I was with the squadron? That would vary, vary a hell of a lot. I mean you mightn't even be working on an aircraft. You might be unloading a ship if our planes weren't there or if our airstrip hadn't been captured. Often we'd be there just when the airstrip was captured, then at Tarakan we were there before they captured the airstrip.

28:30 Or they captured it but got chucked off it again by the nips. No the routine was...it just varied you know. Normally you'd go to the airstrip. You might check the aircraft. You might even start them up. I used to start them up sometime if the flight mechanic wasn't there. Or you'd help the armourers load the bombs on, the gully tanks and things like that. Then the planes would go and they'd be gone a couple of hours.

29:00 So then you were usually near the sea so you'd go swimming. You'd hear the aircraft come back and away you'd go back to the airstrip and do whatever you had to do. Plenty of time the aircraft wouldn't even fly because of bad weather. So you would just do nothing. I don't remember being bored but it must have been, sitting in your tent all day. That's when we used to wander off into the jungle to see what we could find.

29:30 Souvenirs or something. Just for something to do.

Did you find much?

No not a lot. Now and again you'd find an old Jap dugout and you'd go in there and you'd find an old packet of cigarettes or something. Little odds and ends but nothing...you might find a rifle but really nothing valuable...except at Tarakan, that was a big civilian population.

30:00 And they just went. So there was a lot of stuff there but I didn't feel like invading someone's private homes or anything like that. Some did I suppose but I never did that.

Did you come across bodies or graves?

Oh yes. Forget where it was now. It might have been in New Guinea but we came across this big long hut. It may have been

30:30 50 feet long and 20 feet wide. And all these bodies were...we were pretty sure they were Japs, but it was hard to tell sometimes. They had their food there...one had his fork just coming up to his mouth and a mouth full of food. He was just laying there. We looked at these bodies and we just couldn't see how they were killed. One bloke had a big chip out of his skull. But we never ever found out just what killed them.

31:00 Whether they were strafed by one of our planes or whether the nips shot them or...but we just sort of passed through. We couldn't examine them too much. I reckon there would have been about 40 of these bodies there. Often think about that. Wonder what happened to them.

Was it quite a shock to see your first dead body?

31:30 It was a bit. I don't think I had seen a dead person before. Yes it was. I saw different other ones. There was another chap on the same muster, a flight rigger like me, he got killed. We used to ride on the wing tips. You know, you'd get on the wings and guide the pilot to where his plane had to be, and this bloke was sitting there one day and another Kitty Hawk came past and took the top of his head off.

32:00 That was the first body I saw and it was one of ours.

That must have been quite a fall out from that kind of accident at an official level. Was there much of an enquiry?

No, I don't remember one. There were a lot of things there but they weren't very big on enquiries when you're away like that. I remember once we were being smart and we were unloading on the beachhead and

32:30 we saw 178 Squadron...they were the orderly room records and we thought if we burn these we'll get a whole new set of gear. So we went and burnt it. All the equipment cards, and we were court martialled about it but no one worried. I just remember going to this meeting with these 5 or 6 air force officers and they asked a few questions, and that was it and we never heard anything more about it. They probably just thought, oh these young fellas you know.

33:00 Took pity on us.

What was discipline like in your squadron?

None. No discipline. That's what I mean, I was pleased to be in a squadron. We called the pilots by their first name. Maybe if he was anything above flight lieutenant we might call them Sir but the sergeant pilots, all on the first name. Bill, Joe, Jack whatever.

33:30 You wouldn't get to know them all that well because they would be posted back to Australia.

And the ground and air crews got along quite well?

Yes. Not a lot of class distinction. They lived in a different part of the camp to us. I know one flight sergeant, he actually

34:00 came and stopped in our tent. He said, "Do you mind if there's a spare bunk there if I come and live with you fellas." We said, "Right." And we knocked around with him a lot. Especially one day we went fishing. He managed to get this little 12 foot dinghy. We'd heard about how if you threw a grenade in the water you would stun the fish. So we went out to this reef, it was as calm as anything, and we were dropping these grenades in.

34:30 This freak wave came in and came and tipped the boat over. So there we are, about a mile off shore. So

the sergeant said, "I'll swim to shore and get help." So he got about 200 yards away and swam back. He said, "I don't like that." And I said, "Well I'll go then." I got about 200 yards and I looked down in the water, it was just black and still. And I know why he came back. It was the same reason I came back.

35:00 I was worried about getting bitten by a shark. I don't remember what happened to the dinghy. Things like that happen and you don't hear of any repercussions.

So how were you saved finally?

Oh same natives came round in a lakatoi. That's a little outrigger, and took us back in. Yes, they saw us there with the boat and out they came. Laughing their heads off.

Did you have much experience with sharks

35:30 **around that area?**

No, never saw one. I believe they were about. I've heard about airmen being shot down and when they got the body there was only the tops of them. They were floating with their Mae Wests [inflatable life jackets] on.

Did you go fishing much?

Not a lot. I don't know whether...I've got a photo I can show you there...

36:00 I think it was at Tarakan, or it could have been Morotai. There was this big lagoon and it was tidal. The tide would come in, fill the lagoon up then it would go out. And it would leave an area, maybe half an acre about a foot or two feet deep. And it all went through a little channel on the way out. One bloke managed to get some bird wire and we laid it across the channel and sort of trapped the fish so they couldn't get out. So we

36:30 would get in there with hand grenades and we got 70 odd fish. It fed the whole squadron for one meal anyway. It was great because no one had seen fresh fish, unless you were lucky enough to buy some off the natives, if you ever got near them.

How did you find the food over there?

Oh terrible. Try living for 20 months without bread or meat. I missed meat and potatoes

37:00 and bread. Now and again we'd get bread once the base caught up with us. We were always up in the front. We'd be the first ones away and now and again we'd get fresh meat. I think it was horse, but it was meat. We didn't see many potatoes. No, we mainly lived on Yank rations which were basically the same

37:30 as Australian, maybe a bit better than Australian. I know the sea rations there would be a little tin of butter, a little tin of grape jam and a little packet of five cigarettes in it. You wouldn't get that with the Australian army. Not jam and butter. Oh you might get a margarine or something. But just biscuits. No, mainly bully beef we lived on and what they called M & V, meat and vegetables.

38:00 Or 'goldfish'. That was herrings in tomato sauce and they were terrible. You'd put them in your dixie and you could not get the smell of these goldfish out of it. For weeks you'd smell it. Oh the food was terrible.

I've heard the M & V were a bit rough too.

Oh shocking. All and all the old bully beef is about the best, especially when it was in its native state. When it was cooked up with powdered potatoes or whatever it was,

38:30 it was edible, but when it was nice and cold and you had the luxury of tomato sauce, it wasn't bad.

I've heard that the Americans had some quite luxury items. Some of them got ice-cream and things like that. Did you get anything like that?

No, I know the navy did. When we were on a landing and we'd be on the LSTs, they were an American crew. Oh yes they were always having their ice-cream, but we didn't get any. Not we just got ordinary old rations.

39:00 After when the base unit caught up they would have what they called a PX [Post Exchange - American canteen unit], and you could buy a packet or a carton of Lucky Strike cigarettes and that would cost about three and sixpence and things like that. But with the Yanks too, we'd get a ration of...we'd get a carton a week free. And there may be a couple of Babe Ruth candy bars

39:30 and this and that. No they were pretty good especially...and when the PX canteens...we'd be just about on the move by the time they caught up with us. But they had all sorts of stuff in there. The first time I tried shaving cream. I had a brush and they had what they called barber sole and it was in a tube and you'd squeeze that out and use that. And that was the first of the shaving creams.

40:00 Of course it's all the go now. No one lathers their face with a shaving brush.

Tape 3

00:32 **Can you tell us about your family name and whether it has any origins in some part of the world?**

Yes, my sister is very keen on that stuff. She went across to Ireland to look at the cemeteries and things like that. And took me out to some place out at Edith Creek and we were looking through cemeteries. She went right into it you know. Most of them came across to England in chains.

01:00 Then settled in England and then got transport out here. My mother's side of the family came from Scotland. They were more gentile. I think we were a pretty bad lot, some of us.

I was wondering whether because Tasmania has a more obvious convict past, and whether that had much to do with your upbringing. Whether there was a proud tradition stemming from the convict

01:30 **era or not?**

No not in those days. I think now they tend to glorify the old convicts than what it was before. "Oh yes my father was a convict," making it something to be proud of. It's not something you should be ashamed of but at the same time I wouldn't make a big deal of it.

It's funny how it's very fashionable now I believe. It would be funny if they changed the terminology and called them terrorists.

02:00 **Oh yes, we've descended from a great line of terrorists.**

Oh yes, no wonder if your parents came from Ireland or something.

I've got a few more questions about King Island and the first is, was there one predominant religion?

No. I know the Methodist Church was opposite where we lived. And I was confirmed at the Church of England just up the road a bit.

02:30 I'm just trying to think where the Catholic Church was.

Well they probably thought they were the only ones there anyway so...perhaps they were over the far side. Ok, but was it distinct or was it pretty much all in together?

What the churches?

Well just the differing religions on an island so small?

I can't remember it being anything much at all. In my case you went to Sunday School and you either went to the Methodist or

03:00 the Church of England. There would have been a Catholic one but I just can't remember where it was.

That's all right. And I guess part of my questioning is about funerals, and in small communities funerals are very much a community event. Was that an unusual experience for a young boy on King Island to lose someone in such a small community?

Oh yes. I remember a friend of mine, I think he's

03:30 still alive. His father was killed. He fell off a horse or was bucked off a horse, and he was buried and the old school master took all of us big kids in the big room and took us to the funeral. It was a pretty big family turn out. I can't think now of a school teacher taking an entire class of 30 odd kids to a funeral. It was just respect for this boy who was at school with us.

04:00 **I also wanted to ask about festivals. Did you have festivals on King Island?**

No. The nearest thing to festivals would have been gymkhanas.

Well you talked a little bit about that but I would hear a little bit more about that?

Well it was mainly equestrian. From what I can remember the grown ups had their thing of what they used to do and the kids had our own. I know the men would go

04:30 full gallop with a sword or something getting these little rings, picking them up as they went at full gallop. There would be a Best Man Rider and a Best Lady Rider. But we weren't that interested in that. We were just interested in our own little kid things. It was a lot of fun. Great fun.

Would more than the islanders come? Would people come from Tasmania?

Don't think so, not really. Maybe the races they might have.

05:00 I don't think so. See travel in those days was a bit hairy. The planes were only five six seaters. No, travel was pretty difficult. Easy now of course.

I was reading in your memoirs about that particular gymkhana competition that you won and it sounds pretty hairy to me. You had to go at full gallop.

05:30 **Can you take me through like from start to finish how it operated?**

Look I'm not too sure. I think we started off with the girl in the saddle and the boy was behind the saddle just sitting on the rump. And we'd gallop half way and then the boy would get off and he'd race across and the girl would come galloping and then you'd swing yourself on behind her, and then the first one to the winning post won it.

06:00 I know Monica and I won it there once or twice, and my uncle and some other lady, they won the adults. That as pretty good.

It sounds it, and would the audience sit all the way round like carnival seating?

Oh no standing. I don't think there were any seats.

Just a big paddock?

And then there would be some version of

06:30 musical chairs. I don't know...I know the chairs were old kerosene tins, and you'd sit on that and then jump on your horse, but I can't remember.

That's all right. What about the mail. Your dad worked for the PMG, was his role delivering mail within King Island?

No, the post office people would do that. They were separate entities. There was the PMG who

07:00 put the telephone poles up, and then the post office. But I'm not too sure how the mail was delivered, whether the people had to come into Currie to pick up their mail. I just don't know. When you're a little kid you don't worry about that because no one wrote to me.

Of course not. And this might be out of your league too in terms of whether you had anything to do with it. Do you know if they were using Morse code in the post office?

Yes they were using Morse code yes,

07:30 because I can remember hearing this dit dit dar...yes they were still using the Morse code.

And you never had to learn any of that when you were training?

No. In the air force there was a mustering. I forget the name of the actual mustering...radio something or other. Anyway, it was a pretty tough course. We would see these blokes walking along like in the

08:00 airfield or depot going dar dar dit, dar dar dit as they were walking along. We thought these blokes were going off their trolleys. But it was that sort of course you know, when you're learning Morse.

And what about aircraft. Did you ever see any planes flying over King Island?

Oh yes there were quite a few crashes. The Lowina, the Laprina, Lowelia. They all crashed between

08:30 ...in Bass Strait anyway. Yes quite a few crashes there.

What, in the drink or on the land?

No, in the drink.

I would lay even bets that King Island would be a pretty good scrounging position for stuff coming off boats that had sunk or ...for example when those planes crashed did any of the fuselage end up on the island?

No, not to my knowledge. There was a seaplane crashed there just before I got there...

09:00 the Windhover. And you could still see that on the beach or where ever it was. And then there were...no, that's all I can recall, or the most interesting. They blew the aerodrome up. They had it all mined. I don't know if you know that. The King Island airstrip or airport or whatever you call it. They laid explosives all along it. Anyway there was this chap there one day and someone said, "What will you do if we're invaded?"

09:30 Oh he said, "We'll pull this lever, and blew it up, the whole airstrip." I did know the bloke's name. Monica would know, but I can't remember.

I'm sorry, but I'm trying not to laugh out loud, we're suppose to keep our voices to a minimum. Can you recall at what stage of the war he managed to do that? It was lucky he wasn't in the White House.

What was that again?

10:00 **He was lucky he wasn't in the White House.**

What was the question?

Oh, the question was, can you recall what stage the war that would have happened. Was it early on in the piece or what?

Yes very early, probably 1939 or '40.

What an idiot.

What happens if the Japs invade? Oh we'll pull this bloody lever.

Do you know if there were any other security measures taken to

10:30 **protect the island?**

No, I don't think so.

And your uncle, he featured fairly prominently in your memoirs too. Not the Brigadier General but the...

Oh Jack. That's Dad's younger brother. He was almost like an older brother to me. Jack went to King Island with us as a matter of fact and lived with us for ages. He was a fine bloke and right to the day he died he had this magnificent

11:00 black hair, a full head of it. He was a great horseman, Jack. We used to break the horses in. I had a go at it once. I did actually break one horse in. I was frightened before I did it but the horse just gave a couple of bucks and that was it.

Well Hollywood would lead us to believe that breaking in a horse is a fierce act of bravery.

11:30 Oh no. Now and again you'd get one which would really buck and carry on. But all the horses that Jack broke in and I broke in, you put the bridle on and then you lean over the saddle and get it used to weight. Then before the old horse know it you've jumped on its back and away you go. No it's nothing like the buck jumpers.

So if you ride a horse bare back for years

12:00 **without a saddle, is that an unbroken horse or is it a broken horse?**

Oh it would be broken. And from that day to this I still don't grow any hair on the inside there. The sweat and stuff, hair just won't grow any more.

Your horse Molly, your horse particularly, enabled you to do a bit of part time work when you were still a school boy?

Oh yes.

12:30 The episode when I used to deliver the bread. Yes after school I used to have this little cane basket and there would be about four loaves in it. I would go out...it might be two miles away, a big family the Kites. And I'd get home and I'd pick at it and I'd end up picking a bloody big hole in it. They complained about it and I got sacked. I got sacked off the

13:00 vegetable cart too. I'd do that Friday afternoons and Saturday mornings. I got let out of school so that was good you know. So I'd go and harness the old horse up and put him in this cart, and then these two old chaps, the Harrison twins they were, would have it all loaded up for me and away I'd go. I'd have a little list there, who not to give credit to...oh ok. So away I'd go

13:30 and I'd go to all the corners. And there was this lady. I knew her fairly well. I went to school with her younger sister, and she called me over and said Bill can I have this and that. And I said, look I'm sorry... I didn't like to say you can't, so I said, yes take it. So I gave them away and then I got back and they did a stock take and he said, "Yes fifteen shillings," or whatever, "you should have taken there," and he said, "you're short."

14:00 I had to admit then that I let someone have it on credit without putting it in the book. So I got sacked there.

We've heard a lot of sales about the Depression that a lot of produce sellers were really good with credit. What was the situation there on King Island. Why were some given credit and some not.

Because they wouldn't pay. Probably couldn't. The husband might have been out of a job or whatever.

14:30 They might have had two or three little kids and just couldn't get the money together to pay it. I was always a bit of a softy.

It would be tough in such a small place though to give credit to some and not to others?

Yes. Well at King Island I don't know if anyone was ever out of a job. It was very good for employment especially when the war started. They opened the scheelite mine at Grassy and kids were leaving school right left and centre to go and work

15:00 for ten shillings a day, which was terrific money.

What would they use the scheelite for?

Hardening steel. There was a big demand for it when the war started for the ordnance.

And you had a few other jobs...or one other particular job that you mentioned.

Turning cheeses. Well when cheese is made it's very soft, and especially the big cheese like the 40 pounders.

15:30 If you let it lay there it goes bell shaped, the weight all goes to the bottom and I had to turn it every day. And that was hard work because some of them would actually be up here. I would have to turn it over and my hands would be all greasy and oily, but I used to get paid extra for doing that. Because where I was doing the plumbing, that was an old cheese factory and there were cheeses in there that I would have to do.

16:00 And then down at the wharf I would go down on a Saturday afternoon if the boat was late and turn the cheeses down there. What I used to do with the little ten pound cheeses, they were all in the fair dinkum cheese cloth and the date stamped on them when they were made. So I'd look around and see this one was six months old, so I'd pull back the cheese cloth and I'd have Mum's apple core and I'd get that down there and I'd take some out

16:30 and then I'd break it off and then put the top back and just cover it over again. Beautiful cheese. Wish I could do it now.

I wonder what lovely home opened up their big pound of cheese and found a mouse had been there. I mean, these days they're covered in wax. So would the cloth literally stick to the actual substance and you just peeled that back?

17:00 No, after a while the cheese gets very hard and the cheese that sticks might be about an eighth of an inch of hard cheese. You can still buy the cheese cloth but no one uses it for cheese any more which is a shame because it's all plastic and wax.

Was there any skill to turning it or was it just hefty brawn?

Just muscle. No the little 20 pounders were good. I've got a feeling it might have been 80 pounders.

17:30 **That's too big to move isn't it?**

Yes I think it must have been, but look, I wouldn't be sure. But I do know there were 40s and 20s. And 40s were hard.

Everyone knows King Island cheese and dairy products are among the best but I don't know why. Is there a special kind of grass there?

Well so they tell me. They have a breed of grass called cocksfoot. And I think

18:00 it might be peculiar to King Island. But I've heard my father say it's one of the very few places in the world where they don't have to top dress. So the grass must be...it must be to do with the grass and the way it's made. It was very interesting the way they made the cheese because I used to spend a lot of time in cheese factories soldering up their vats ...big long vats, maybe as long as this room here. They'd be that deep and

18:30 they'd pour the milk into that and then mix rennet which is kind of a junket powder, and that would go all jelly like. Then they had these knives made of piano wire to take that through this curd. That's where the curds and whey came from. I didn't realise until after. The solid bits would be the curd and the whey was just the liquid that came off it. Then they'd have these in a mould, a

19:00 ten pound or twenty pound or whatever cheese, and that was it.

They must have really inherited some fantastic old skills from the old countries and so on.

Probably.

And before we leave King Island there was also I read in your memoirs about how you were fortunate enough to get a steer's horn for some of your adventures in reading.

19:30 Oh yes.

It did lead me to wonder about the abattoirs there.

Well I spent quite a lot of time there because I'd go past on my way to school and they would just throw

out the heads and that and we'd go along with a hammer and knock the horns off. They'd come away from the stump. It smelt pretty terrible too but we'd do that and amongst other little things. We used to delve around the intestines

20:00 and get the little unborn calves. We used to do all that sort of thing.

Did you work out the facts of life before anyone had to tell you?

What?

Well given that you're a country boy and you had these adventures in anatomy, did you work out the facts of life before anyone needed to tell you?

No, I was very naïve.

So it didn't sink in what was going on?

No. Very, very naïve.

20:30 **Oh and I wanted to ask about the whip?**

Oh the whip, yes. Dad made a beautiful whip. So long as you didn't leave it out in the wet and the sun. But you'd get the bull's penis and you'd cut it right back to the anus and by then it would be about that long. So then you'd get some fencing wire and put that through it and hang it up with a brick tied on the other end

21:00 and let it dry out. And when it dried out it was lovely and springy and you could whip like that and it would sting. If you used it on the horse and it got a bit wet and you'd put it out in the sun it would go rotten. There were magnificent whips.

Wow. So I guess you'd then attach one end to some leather and you've got...

Yes, yes. Or you might bind it with a bit of cord or something like that.

Heavens, well I have a whole new respect for that part of a bull's anatomy

21:30 **I suppose. And they'd have to be old bulls if they were going to be chopped up like that I guess. You wouldn't do it to a good bull?**

Well I don't know. I just know we'd see them where they chucked all the rubbish out and we'd get out little pocket knives and rip it out.

Just moving forward a little bit to when you were working in the coal mine. I wanted to ask

22:00 **what would happen to a lad who deliberately quit a job in a restricted industry so he could go...I mean, I know you did it in a round about way, but what would happen if you were to quit a job that the government said to stay put in?**

I don't really know. Probably when you joined up they'd say what was your last occupation or something like that. All I know was it was made pretty easy for me by knowing the old squadron leader.

22:30 No trouble at all.

And the letter from Manpower, nobody's yet been able to tell us what that was like. Was it a government letter or...

As far as I can recall. I don't really recall much. All I know is it was a big disappointment that I couldn't get away to the navy. This is jumping ahead a bit but I should have told it before

23:00 when I was talking about the Brunswick Tech. We used to go out there on the buses. There was an old air force corporal and all he had to do all day was call us into line and call the role. Anyway years after...well not so long after the war, maybe 2 or 3 years after the war, I was at the Beaconsfield Show and there's this old corporal. Civilian of course. And so I thought I would go up and say g'day to him. So

23:30 I went up and said g'day, and he said, "What are you doing?" And I said, "I've got a bit of a job with the Public Works, I'm a bridge carpenter." He said, "How much money do you make?" And I said, "About six quid a week." He said, "Look do you know anything about graders?" I said, "I've seen them work on the public works." He said, "Go over on Monday and tell the employment officer you're a grader driver. Because I know they want one." So I went over the next week and was interviewed by the employment officer

24:00 told them I was a grader driver and they said, right you're on. That was one thing the old corporal did for me because that was the start of a whole different series of jobs I had. It was when they were building Comalco.

A different world and different opportunities you can present yourself for, and people will believe you rather than needing five years of study and certain qualifications. You had another bit of work I can remember where you

24:30 **had this job where you had to turn ...**

Oh the clipping machine. Oh god that was a terrible job.

Yes the clipping machine. I didn't understand that when I was reading it. What was that about?

That was on a stand about so high and it had a handle and then a tube with...like hair clippers. You'd turn the machine and make the clippers work...much like electric clippers do. So every time a horse had to be clipped it would be me. I did all those jobs. I had to milk the cow.

25:00 Oh you stand there for hours and it wasn't easy to turn. Oh no that was a terrible job.

Look, I'm a bit of an urban nong, so clipping a horse, what part of the horse did you clip?

Oh sometimes you'd go right over it. And sometimes half way along the stomach, you do a line so the top half would have hair and the bottom half would only be little short hairs.

25:30 **So if a horse wasn't clipped would its hairs just get longer and longer. Not just its mane or tail but its actually body hair?**

Well it would come off at different times. I'm not really sure, like a dog, they lose their hair at certain times of the year. I rather think that's the case.

I've certainly never heard of horses needing to get clipped. I wanted to jump forward to after you joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force],

26:00 **and I'm interested in the medical you experienced and you said there was that month of vaccinations and teeth pulling. What vaccinations did they give you?**

Just the ordinary... the one which could make you pretty crook. I've seen people fall over on parade. So you'd have the vaccination and you'd have all these needles. I don't know, quite a few. We'd get them just before the weekend, so at the weekends you'd feel that crook you couldn't go into Shepparton

26:30 and enjoy yourself. Not that you could enjoy your self at Shepparton. It was full of air force people. Then you'd have your teeth out and they were butchers because I remember getting one filled one day and the bloke drilled drilled, and the drill got that hot, he would have to change the drill because it would be too hot to hold. Terrible. They didn't care.

Did they give you any pain killers?

No, not a thing.

Not even a drop of ether?

Not a thing.

27:00 **You'd have to tie a man down if you were going to do that to him wouldn't you?**

Oh...you just sit there and stand it.

Did they strap you down in case you had a go at the dentist?

No. We were strapped down later in the war for different little things but no not there. I don't recall... maybe if you had teeth extracted they might have given you a needle. Yes they would. They didn't do much extraction. It was all fillings.

27:30 **Did they seem like they took pleasure in doing this to you?**

I think there were a few sadists amongst them.

Horrible. And I wanted to ask a bit about...you were housed in Melbourne's Exhibition Building when you first came over from Tassie. Could you just describe that for me. I just get an image of thousands of camp beds.

It was just a series of little rooms made of plywood and

28:00 it was very temporary. Dozens and dozens of those. I didn't stay there for any length of time. Although it was really handy to the main city part of Melbourne. And right next door to the Aquarium and at night you could sleep because of the seals barking. I think it was seals, but they'd be barking all night long.

Where was the Aquarium then?

Just on the other side of the Exhibitions Buildings.

On Nicholson Street or the other side?

28:30 It was up Russell Street. The Exhibition Building is on your left, and just on the other side of that was the Aquarium...from what I can remember. I was never in there but I knew it was there.

That would be long gone. How about that. And flight riggers...I was reading something about flight riggers. I understand you had to do something with fabric patches onto wings. You had to make patches?

Yes, in those days a lot of the aircraft were

29:00 fabric. The old Tiger Moth, and the Mosquito. If they got a tear or something, you'd put a patch on it or sew it up. I never did it after I did the course.

Do you feel you could have been spending your time doing something else?

Well yes, I could have done. But who knows, I might have been posted to an elementary flying school where they used Tiger Moths.

29:30 All fabric.

And this business of metal filing. You said you had to do that endlessly?

Yes, that and a micrometer. You'd get it down to a thou, or two thou. Day in day out. And besides, electricity and magnetism, we did a course on that. I was a bit of a dunce, I didn't understand it.

Did you have to pass an exam at the end?

Yes.

30:00 I never knew anyone who failed. But yes we did have an exam.

Ok. And what was the point of all the metal filing? You needed it at sliver width to use for...

I don't know. Just to get us used to using a micrometer. You know one of those things...

Well take us through a micrometer? I don't know if they're used much any more are they?

No, I don't know if they use micrometers now.

So was it and what was

30:30 **it for?**

For measuring the thickness and all the widths...the inside microns and outside microns. I suppose the fitters used them, you know in conjunction with a lathe.

Ok. Now down to the Laverton Base. Did you like planes or did you just sort of end up in the air force?

31:00 I loved planes. When I was a little kids I used to make these paper planes. I had them all named. Hawker Demon, Hawker Hart and then you'd flick them away. I was forever drawing aeroplanes. And anything I could read. Biggles, I'd read all of those books. I was very rapped in it. I just wish I could have been a pilot, unfortunately I just couldn't train for it.

So what was it like getting down to Laverton,

31:30 **was there a lot of planes down there when you started your training?**

Yes there was an aircraft depot, but all we did was work on the multi-engine dive bombers, but there were a lot of other aircraft there. Lockheed Hudson's and Beaufighters.

Did you ever get the opportunity to sit in the cockpits of the planes?

Oh yes any chance I got I would sit in there and sit up in the pilot's seat and

32:00 pretend I was flying it.

Would you make ack-ack [anti-aircraft guns] noises?

No, not there. No, I used to do that at King Island.

Any pilots give you a shot up in the air?

Oh yes. Especially if you were the multi-engine squadron. Say a Beaufort. You could go up, and as a matter of fact there was an occasion when there was a Beaufighter squadron near by...no, it was a Beaufort,

32:30 and you could volunteer to stand in for the gunner to give the gunner a bit of a spell. So you could go up with them and have a little blast with a gun, you know.

Where would you shoot the gun then...they'd be dummy bullets wouldn't they?

Oh no. You would just aim it somewhere in the distance. Up high. You wouldn't aim it down below. Oh no, you could do that. As a matter of fact we had Wirraway at one stage. I don't know how we came to

get it. Maybe a

33:00 pilot might have turned up one day. We used to call it the old Wirraschmitt.

I'm trying...I did a bit of reading on 78 Squadron, please correct me if I'm wrong but is that the unit that was first involved after the first attack by Japan. They went up in Hudsons and Wirraways?

No we didn't have Kitty Hawks then. I don't think. They might have had the odd Kitty but it was mainly Wirraways.

33:30 **It was mainly. It was a very unsuccessful trip.**

Yes, the Wirraway wasn't any match for the Zero. I don't think the Kitty Hawk was much either.

No it took a while I think, and the Spitfire made the difference.

And we only had the older model Spitfire. The Yanks had all the good ones, like hand me downs. We were very much the poor relations.

Now over at Laverton was there a lack amongst equipment and other items that you needed? Could you tell

34:00 **that you didn't have enough equipment?**

No, not at Laverton. I don't think we lacked for anything there. I remember on my 18th guard. I don't know what I would have done. And I've got an idea we didn't have any bullets. Something like that but I know we couldn't have done anything about it.

Hit them over the head I suppose.

I reckon. We might have been too busy running.

Did they give you any combat training at all?

34:30 No, not apart from doing our rookies. We'd go to the rifle range and do that, and learn how to present arms and all that. But I knew all that from being in the VDC. As a matter of fact at King Island I was in the rifle club when I was about 13.

I don't know if we've talked to you much about the VDC. Which we should...you were just a little tacker then but what sort of gun did they give you then?

35:00 It was an older model...not a 303, I think they called it a 310. But it was a Boer War model and I know it had a thing like in the cowboys and Indians where they pulled this and you put your bullet in. It was only a single shot thing. It had a little breach and you'd slide your shell in there. That was all it was. But we were given the 303 later on.

What type of targets did they give you to practice on?

35:30 I don't know if we did much target...oh there was a rifle range there in Currie because there was a rifle club there. It was just the ordinary bulls eye target a couple of hundred yards away.

So back at Laverton guard duty, was that a regular thing or would you just be posted on duty for the night?

You'd take your turn.

36:00 You'd be rostered on and as luck would have it, it was my 18th birthday.

And the other thing, and you mentioned this earlier...the other thing that was particular to the air force was that it was very hard to make a unit of friends because you couldn't rely on seeing them for too long because they moved you around a fair bit.

36:30 No, you were always moving. You were always doing courses. We had that rookies course; engineering course at the tech; and the flight riggers course; and then you might go to a station and you might be there 3 months and you'd get posted to another station. In my case I was at Laverton when I got posted overseas. But you didn't get to know...and you sleep in a big dormitory

37:00 of 20 or 30 men. But in the squadrons you'd be much closer knit. Especially your flight. There would be two. There would be A Flight and B Flight, and you didn't want to know the bloke in A Flight. All you wanted to know were the fellas in B Flight. You'd be all camped together pretty well. Although I think in my tent we had a general hand and the rest of us were either flight mechanic, and me as a flight rig and a radio bloke,

37:30 you did mix in a fair bit in the squadron.

And was there much in the way of morale building going on there. Did they give you the opportunities for things like that? Did they arrange football or cricket matches between

flights?

Oh not really. I know once we were at Noemfoor I think it was where we had the South West Pacific Championships I think they called it. I think it was mainly us air force blokes.

- 38:00 I remember winning this underwater swimming thing and it was published in the Sporting Globe. I happened to see it. Someone sent it over. But no there wasn't much...except the picture shows. I was a great one for the pictures and I don't think...we didn't have our own picture show but someone in the wing would have it or the Yanks would have one
- 38:30 anyway. They had them all the time. And boxing matches and this and that. But no, we would have been lost without our pictures.

Tape 4

- 00:32 **Well on that note you were just saying how much you were kept in the dark on national events of the time?**

Yes, we had no idea. We might have heard that there were a few Jap planes flew over and dropped some bombs, but we didn't know that they nearly wiped a town out.

What about the more internal things that the air force were involved in like radar for example. Did you have any idea that members of the air force were involved in

- 01:00 **radar operations?**

No not the super radar. I know we had groups of radar. I don't know what they called them. Just a radar unit. Number 16 radar unit, and they were stationed all around New Guinea and northern Australia. But I never saw one.....(Video stopped) I think I soaked mine in kerosene so it kept

- 01:30 alight and then you just give it a sharp tap. It's quite smooth. Not sharp. That's all we used to drink out. Thousands of soldiers drank out of them.

I wanted to talk about the night life of Melbourne while you were a young soldier waiting for embarkation.

Well the night life for me was pretty non existent. I went to a couple of dances,

- 02:00 and there were one or two nightclubs. I think Mario's was the name of one up the top end of Russell or Bourke street or somewhere. No, our night life consisted of going around the square, Swanston, Elizabeth Street, trying to pick up girls. We never had any luck except for that one, Betty Flynn that I got friendly with and she used to write to me all through the war.

What was the magic password that allowed

- 02:30 **Betty to talk to you? What line did you use on her?**

I don't know. I think it was out at Luna Park and I was with this other air force chap and we struck up this conversation and we got on really well right from the kick off, and kept on seeing her all the time I was in Melbourne. And as I said, after the war I don't know what went wrong. Probably the same as what went wrong with Monica, you lose touch.

- 03:00 In Monica's case, her family moved to Yarram and I came back here and transport wasn't all that easy and we just lost touch for years. Don't think we lost touch entirely. There would have been some sort of communication. There always has been.

The music of that area was a pretty important part of a soldiers life?

Oh undoubtedly. You would hear a particular song and it would remind you.

- 03:30 Bing Crosby and Bob Hope and those Road movies. 'Moonlight Becomes You'. And every time I hear that I think of Melbourne. One song reminds me of the Exhibition Buildings. I went in there one day and there was a bloke on a piano playing this particular song, and that reminds you. And of course it was an era of great songs the war years.

- 04:00 A lot of melodramas about and things like that.

Can you recall any other song titles?

Gee...I had never heard 'Lily Marlene' until one of the reinforcements came up from Australia and for the first time we heard 'Lily Marlene'. It was probably months after it came out. It don't know when it was, 1943 or something. Yes, there were

- 04:30 heaps of songs. Monica would know but she's not here to ask.

Can you sing any of them?

I could sing once but after years and years of smoking I don't think.

A few lines from Lily Marlene?

I can remember the first few words of it. "Underneath the lamp light by the village square..." I forget the rest of that now. And,

05:00 "Moonlight becomes you, it goes with your hair. You certainly know the right things to wear." That's it.

Beautiful. And what about 'Alma's Tune'?

That was the one I was trying to think of. I forget the words of that now, but that was the song that bloke was playing in the Exhibition Buildings.

"It puts the kick in the chicken, the magic in June".

"It isn't the season,"

05:30 ...something...no. Of course 'South of the Border' came out in the early years and 'Amapola'. That was a beautiful song. I heard it once in a movie. It was about the gangsters in New York and this woman and they all grew up in this one neighbourhood, and

06:00 I think it was a fantasy and he'd get on the drugs and he's fantasised. I've lost track of the darn song now.

You mentioned 'South of the Border' and then...

Oh yes, 'Amapola'. I heard it in a film and it was played on a lute. It was a little haunting melody. You know what a lute can be like. "Amapola,

06:30 my pretty little poppy".

What about films then. Were you a film buff?

Oh yes. I wouldn't miss too many.

You mentioned earlier that for a soldier to get in it was only a few shillings, so you could have taken Betty or girls to the films.

I used to take Monica. She still remembers

07:00 going to see Waterloo Bridge I think it was. It made her cry.

And there were a lot of war films coming out obviously.

Oh yes.

Did you think they were depicting the experience well or were they right off the beam?

Right off the beam. No, right off it. Most of them were made by the Yanks, and of course the Australians didn't make many. Charles Chauvel's film that Forty Thousand Horsemen. But no, I don't think they were really all that

07:30 lifelike.

Have you seen any films since that you think come anywhere close to representing the experience?

Well I suppose From Here to Eternity...but that was a Yank film, but that might have been pretty near the mark. With Frank Sinatra and Burt Lancaster. It was a good film.

What about something like 'Saving Private Ryan',

08:00 **and some of the war sequences in that...did you see that?**

Yes. That was pretty authentic I believe. In fact I read an article where an Australian severely criticised that film. It might have been on TV...where this chap was using a rifle with sniper sights on and he said there was no way we could have tried to line up a target with sniper sights. But apart from that I would imagine it was pretty good. The

08:30 one thing I liked about it too were the uniforms. A lot of Yank films their uniforms were so immaculate. Freshly done, but these Yank soldiers were really typical because I was with them for so long and I knew exactly what they were like. They weren't glamorous in their uniforms. They were ill fitting and that which they would have been. Nothing like the perfect fitting that they were in that film...

09:00 Jag. His uniforms are so beautifully pressed and fitted. Tailor made.

What about wandering around checking out the Yanks in Melbourne at night. They would

have had the money to have them laundered where the Australians wouldn't. Did they look better turned out?

Oh undoubtedly. See the Yanks for one thing had a collar and tie. We did too, but we were in a minority. The army chaps

09:30 just had...well they put a tie on but it was illegal. But the Yanks had their tie and it was always tucked in the second button down you know. And of course a mile of ribbons. They would get a ribbon for target practice or something like. The poor old Australian. You'd have to have a declaration of bravery before you got a ribbon...until after the war when we got our ribbons you know. They were very well presented.

There was a big

10:00 **canteen apparently just opposite Flinders Street Station where soldiers went for a meal. Did you ever head in there?**

Canteen?

Yeah, a big building. There was a canteen, showers, accommodation.

No I don't remember. The only thing I can remember across from Flinders Station was Young and Jackson's Hotel with Chloe [famous painting] in it.

Were you able to frequent that despite being under age?

Oh, I was in uniform.

So they wouldn't turn down a soldier in uniform.

10:30 Oh no. If you were in uniform you were right you know. But I suppose legally you would have still been breaking the law.

What about freebies that soldiers managed to get...obviously public transport wasn't an issue?

Oh the trams were very good. You know, the old conductor wouldn't worry. Anyway half the time the trams were that packed you couldn't get on them anyway. But the trains...you'd get a ticket

11:00 if you were going out to Essendon, you might only get a ticket to go out to the next stop, to Spencer Street or whatever. But no one ever worried.

And what about other things, were soldiers given free kicks here and there?

No, you paid a certain amount. See you could stay at Air Force House. I think it was a shilling and that would be something to eat in the morning. And old chap would come around and wake you. Like you may say you want to be woken at 5 o'clock to catch a train to get

11:30 out to wherever you were. So he'd wake you. I think that would cost a shilling. The Dugout and those places were fairly cheap. I think you could have your toes and things, you know your feet looked after because a lot of chaps had sore feet from this and that. That would be all free - if you waited. Then there were free concerts you could go to.

12:00 What's that big place just up from Flinders Street Station. It's a big church or cathedral. They'd have...I went there 2 or 3 times. They had piano recitals and things like that. That was very good. But that was all free.

They've just done a big restoration on that, St Paul's Cathedral.

Have they? I haven't been down that way for years.

Ok let's talk a little bit more about getting posted.

12:30 **Had you heard of New Britain before they sent you up there?**

Oh yes. I had never heard of Cape Gloucester that was in New Britain, but New Britain...there's some famous place in New Britain. Was it Tarawa...I know we saw some Yanks going up there one day and they were saying goodbye to their mates and they were almost crying because they new they would almost be going to certainly get killed. I think it was Tarawa.

13:00 Anyway the poor old yanks, they copped it.

Well particularly New Britain. That was the scene of two big stoushes there obviously. So had you been able to keep up with what had happened there? Did you know much about what had happened the year before with the...

No. I didn't know much about it.

So you said you were fairly excited about

13:30 **getting out of there. You're moving closer and closer to the warmer climates. How did you manage with the change in the weather?**

It was pretty hard. It was all right for blokes who lived in New South Wales and Queensland, but not from Tasmania. Well you know what it's like here. Or you will before you go. Oh no, it took me a long time. I never did get used to it. Especially when you've got to wear a uniform. Up in the islands it was a different story. You just about wore nothing practically. Shorts maybe.

14:00 **I'm curious to learn how quickly the officers eventually gave up busting guys if they weren't in proper uniform all the time because it was just too hot. Well it was too dangerous to insist that men wear a uniform.**

Oh yes, yes.

You mentioned to Ianto [Interviewer] about arriving in Port Moresby and you had a fair bit of sitting around and waiting to do.

Oh yes. There was nothing to do at Moresby.

14:30 I mean I don't think there was any civilian population. I think they all left when the air raids started. And I don't even know how long I was there, but we used to be able to get this beautiful drink. It was a great big milk can full of beautiful blackberry juice, blackberry cordial. We were only allowed one little cup. Of course after...it was the first time we'd had anything like that for ages. You miss little things like that.

I think it was Ribena.

15:00 **Nadzab. That was an interesting place. Can you give me a bit of a visual depiction of what you saw there.**

It was typical New Guinea...I suppose you could call it a township. But all I saw was just this big long air strip. And I think earlier the Yanks had landed there or the paratroopers had landed there, or Australians. Probably Australians at that time. But that was just across from Lae where there was

15:30 a pretty heavy battle at Lae and all those places. But Nadzab was very uninteresting. All I did was sit there and wait until I got to New Britain.

And in the waiting, what do you do with yourself?

Well you probably wrote. I did a lot of letter writing just for something to do. I'd be writing to Betty or Monica or Mum and Dad, or Eric. The bloke who got the sack and

16:00 joined the navy. Or my brother who was in Darwin. There was a lot of letter writing because it was great fun to receive them and you could only receive some if you wrote some. So that's when you could write...if you had the paper. Quite often you'd be sweating and it would drip down over the page and you couldn't write.

A couple of questions there. The ballpoint wasn't invented then. So was it just ink and quill... not quill but...

Oh cut it out!

16:30 **Scratchy pen?**

Oh just a pen. That diary there...some of its in pencil, but I can't read the pencil now, it's...but actually, considering that diary's 60 years old, it hasn't...I did it with a fountain pen and it hasn't stood up too badly.

And would you carry that sort of material with you or would it be supplied at the various bases you were stationed?

In Australia

17:00 there were always places you could go to. Air Force House would have their own stuff in different places. But overseas, we did have a sort of a post office. It wasn't much of a post office, but we could post our letters there. No I just...I can't remember if we had to get our own writing pad or own pen.

17:30 I do know we had to have our letters censored. But that was no problem because most of the officers you knew and you'd say could you do this for me Blue. And he'd say yes and he wouldn't read it. Anyway I copied the signatures and I'd just post it. We didn't have any stamps. We would just put on it, 'Forward Area. No Stamps Available'. So there was no problem with stamps. We couldn't get them anyway.

Were there other places in New Guinea where you'd need stamps?

Oh I don't

18:00 think so. I think even if you were miles and miles away from the Japs, say like if you were at Moresby, and the Japs would be just over the border in Dutch New Guinea, I don't think they would worry about stamps. I think you would still just write 'Forward Area'. I don't know but I would imagine. But who knows.

Interesting. So this fellow, you say he would censor it for you but he wouldn't read it. What

would actually happen? Would your letter

18:30 **arrive without anything scratched out then?**

Oh yes. You'd leave it unopened but they wouldn't read your personal mail. They were just another bloke that you knocked around with.

So they would just say censored with a stamp?

Yes and then you'd initial it.

Ok, so if that's the case were you able to write to your family and tell them where you were?

I could have done but I didn't. I had that sense of duty...I might drop a hint

19:00 or two. But I would never say I'm now in Dutch New Guinea at a place called so-and-so and we're getting bombed every night. I never put anything like that in.

What secret language then did you come up with to let them know?

Oh occasionally I'd write a letter and give it to one of the pilots to post. They'd go home after three months and I might say would you post this for me in Melbourne. So they would do that for you.

I'm always fascinated to learn how people managed to let their

19:30 **families know where they were without exactly saying so. The DC3 or the DC10 or the C47, had you been in one before, before you started island hopping?**

The Douglas DC3. No I had seen them on King Island. In fact I think they were a DC2 back in those days. No I had never been in one.

Was it impressive for you?

Oh yes. Especially when

20:00 you're with one of the dare-devil pilots. You'd be flying along and there'd be another Doug going along beside you, and the wings would be that far apart. They'd be going like that. I don't know what they were doing but it was a wonder we didn't crash. I was scared that time too.

Would they fly low through New Guinea? I mean some of those flights seemed like they were going through valleys and so on and you could touch the foliage.

No. We flew over Shaggy Ridge in the Ramu Valley, but we were a fair way up, like 10,000 feet.

20:30 **Was it much of a view at all?**

Well you couldn't see that much. Not like a passenger plane. There weren't too many windows in it.

I thought they often flew with the big barn doors open...where the side doors open.

Oh no. Everything was all closed up.

Now, when you were finally to your

21:00 **squadron, was there anything there that made you feel like home. Like were you given your own bed, that was yours for a while?**

Yes, well they were all strangers. See I didn't know a soul and I just arrived there as a rookie, straight from down south as you called it. I was put in a tent with some blokes. Then when we moved I moved in with some other blokes and I stayed with those blokes for 18 months really, you know. And

21:30 I got to be real friendly with them. But when I joined the squadron I wasn't all that happy. Not until after.

You wanted to go overseas for so long, did it live up to your expectations?

Oh yes. But I was lucky. I joined a squadron, and you might not understand it, but being in a squadron, especially a fighter squadron

22:00 because it was the best you could hope for, because there would only be about 200 men in a squadron and you got to know just about everybody. And you were on the move all the time which was good. I pitied those blokes on a station say in Moresby for a couple of years. In the one place for 12 months. I think 3 months was the most we ever stayed in one place because we were always pretty near up with the action you know.

22:30 I think I told you, as soon as an airstrip was taken we'd move onto it. The squadrons were great.

What sort of connection did you have with the pilots then. Were you buddies or were you just working together?

I wouldn't say we were buddies. Just knew each other. Like Les Vaughan...I've got in my diary, "Les

Vaughan crashed my plane today.” Which he did. In fact he crashed it twice.

23:00 And so and so crashed my plane. That plane would be your plane because all you’d do is work on it. You know, do the pre-flight inspections and ...you certainly would never ever salute. I don’t think I ever saluted in the squadron. I saluted plenty of times in Melbourne. You were mainly on a first name basis.

Why do you think Australian soldiers disliked saluting so much?

23:30 Yes, it’s a bit like grovelling isn’t it I think. I don’t think there’s any need for it. You’re not saluting the man, you’re saluting the uniform they used to tell us. You might hate this bloke but you’re not saluting the person, you’re saluting the uniform. I think it’s a bit outmoded saluting.

Yes it does seem to have come from the old country doesn’t it?

24:00 Oh yes. It came from the knights in armour who had their armour and they had to go up like this and lift their visor then put it down. That was how we were taught to salute. The longest way up and the shortest way down. So the old knight in his armour had to go like this and lift his visor up or down and then let his hand drop down. Poor old fella.

Yeah I bet he liked civvies. And what about the Americans. I think they had fastest up and fastest down.

24:30 Yes they were very showy...like that. Very showy.

You know, getting back to this business of your plane. How many would you be servicing at the one time?

Sometimes three. Ideally two, and quite often one. But you know, the planes were always crashing. God, you wouldn’t have a plane that long and it would prang. You might have only one plane or you might not have any.

25:00 But you’d help the others out. I used to love getting in the planes and start them up, and rev it up and things like that. It was great fun.

Were you ever able to taxi them at all?

Oh yes you could taxi them. That wasn’t too bad. You would sit there and think, I could take this thing up. And I had no doubts because I had watched that many planes take off, and you’d be that close that you could see the elevators and what they were doing. And I would think I could get up there I would reckon,

25:30 but God knows how I would ever get down. That would be a different story. I was so used to taxiing the plane and hearing the motor and that and work the flaps, that was part of our job, up and down. No I wouldn’t be able to land one.

Nor could a lot of pilots by the looks of things.

Yes some of them were pretty rough. And yes, there were some very good pilots and bad pilots. There would be one or two who would be known throughout the squadron

26:00 as really good pilots and other ones were terrible.

So if you struck a bad pilot on your plane would you try and shift him from your...

No, no. They didn’t last long anyway. Poor buggers. We lost a few pilots. Shot down or whatever.

Apart from their obvious skills, could you tell a good pilot from a bad pilot from their attitude or

26:30 **how they dealt with you?**

No. You could tell by the way they landed. Some of them would land perfectly, others would bump, bump, bump. And taking off you could tell a good pilot. But I’ve forgotten all that now.

Did you see any unnecessary cowboying going on?

Not a lot. I mean there were a hell of a lot of crashes. We would average a crash a day.

27:00 There’s a photo there of a B25 US Mitchell Bomber, and that crashed on the airstrip one day, and then two others came in and they all crashed. A lot of crashes. They’d go to the end of the airstrip before they pulled up, or landed a bit short. A lot of planes we lost.

What was at the end of the airstrip?

27:30 Mainly jungle. We called it jungle. The army blokes just said they were going to the scrub. But the jungle was an American adaptation. We didn’t call it the jungle. It was just out in the scrub.

Now you were posted to an American unit. Were all your pilots yanks?

No, it wasn't an American unit. We were still an RAAF squadron. We

28:00 were directly under American control, and we were issued American rations and we dressed like yanks.

How did you dress like Yanks?

Their shirts and trousers, and some of their shirts were very good shirts. If you were lucky you would get hold of one of their shirts and trousers and one of their belts. They were better than ours. Oh no, it was pretty easy to get hold of Yank gear.

28:30 I mean we couldn't get Australian gear anyway.

And also back to the nuts and bolts business, when you serviced a plane, you're a rigger, would there be a number of different mechanics working on the plane or would you the plane be your responsibility entirely?

Oh no I'd share it. The flight mechanic and flight rigger worked as a team. He might have three planes, I might have two. We'd share the same

29:00 plane. And an armourer...we might have five planes because all they do is put the bombs on. And then there was an instrument repairer, he might have five planes. And so on, like the radio chap, he might have 3 or 4 planes. But he wouldn't have much to do. Ten minutes on one plane perhaps.

So who would be in charge of the duty roster of all of the planes then. Who's job was it to make sure that each of them were getting all the attention

29:30 **that they needed?**

That would be the flight sergeant and a corporal. But not a lot of ranks there. And an engineering officer who might be a flight lieutenant. No the ordinary work was pretty well maintained by just a corporal in charge of it. That's all. Not a lot of rank.

Ok. Did you ever see incidents where

30:00 **the work on the planes actually led to an accident, a crash of some kind?**

No not really. I was very frightened once. One of my planes crashed. He couldn't get his landing gear down and I thought, did I fill his hydraulic tank up or not. You worry when a plane crashes. You wonder now did the hydraulics work or did the flaps work and things like that.

30:30 But I don't think there were too many planes lost through loss of maintenance.

No, more likely guns and ...

Oh, yes. A lot of the accidents were pilot error and the machines being shot up. He might have lost half his elevators or something. Or his flaps might not have lowered or his undercarriage mightn't have locked in.

So could you walk me through...not like the whole day working on a plane, but the areas

31:00 **that you had to fix, connect, work with and maintain?**

Well first you would go to the strip before the pilot got there. And the first thing would be to kick the tyres and have a look at those. Then have a look...open a little thing in the fuselage and see that the hydraulic tank had plenty of oil in it. Then you'd get in. You'd try the controls. You'd see that the elevators went down that way and up when you went that way. And the ailerons.

31:30 Then if the mechanic would start it up and check the magnetos. Just rev it up. Check the brakes and make sure the brakes were working, and that was about all it was. And then when the pilot came, you'd help him put on his parachute and say tooroo, off you go and that was it.

Is it strange working on a piece of machinery, like

32:00 **a beautiful craft like that and see another fellow jump in and take it away?**

Oh no. You get used to it. No matter what work you did you knew it was out of your hands. Take it away.

How would you spend your day after that? You would keep working on the rest of the planes, but when you had done all of that for the day?

Well you wouldn't have anything to do. You'd go back to the camp. See, you'd only be gone a couple of hours and

32:30 mainly you were near the sea and you'd go swimming. You'd come out all wet and you wouldn't dry off because it was that hot, you'd have perspiration and you'd never dry out.

Then the rains would come?

Oh yes.

So, did you have an interest in where they were flying for they day and where they would be likely to be?

No we never knew where they went.

33:00 They might go over to Biak or somewhere. I don't ever remember saying where have you been? They might drop a lot of leaflets. Towards the end of the war they used to drop a lot of leaflets over mainland Borneo. But no, I can't say I was ever curious about what they did. You'd know if they were in action because they had six point five machine guns and they were taped over and when they came in and they were broken then you knew they had been firing.

33:30 Strafing somewhere. Or if the billy tank was gone you'd know they were fair dinkum because they had dropped their billy tank.

What's the billy tank?

Oh, it's the auxiliary fuel tank and it fits underneath the fuselage.

And what would that mean in terms of them seeing business or action?

Well it would make the aircraft a bit unwieldy because you had this great big thing hanging down. It would slow your speed down, so they'd use the petrol up in that

34:00 first and then drop it. They often came back without the billy can. And it was a cow of a job putting them back on too.

The business of moving into airstrips after they had been taken, I imagine that would have meant there was a fair bit of Japanese paraphernalia left around.

Yes there was quite often. And I remember we went across the border from Aitape into Hollandia.

34:30 (knock at door)

Yes, recapping. There must have been a fair amount of Japanese paraphernalia.

At Hollandia, just on the side of the strip was where they were assembling all their aeroplanes. We moved in pretty soon after they had moved out, and all their gear was there and it was good gear too. You know, their parachute harnesses and things like that. It was in pretty good order. But then you'd find a lot of other

35:00 stuff. You know, in their dug outs and fox holes whatever. I can't ever remember finding anything really valuable, just little odds and ends. Treasure for a while but when you move around for a while they get lost. I don't think I brought anything back except a photo of my mother and my diary. No, everything gets lost over the years.

35:30 **Odds and ends. I'm curious about those. Would they be personal items of a Japanese soldier?**

Yes, in nearly every dugout we found they had contraceptives in it. Why? But they were there.

No, I guess they weren't fortunate enough to be around the comfort women that were sent elsewhere.

No, not there. Not in the place we were. They may have had them there. I don't know.

36:00 But we didn't see any.

What about other bits and pieces. Rations they might have had or...

We did find some cigarettes at times. But they were very mushy because in the tropics everything goes. But we smoked a few of those and I found a rifle or two later on, but nothing that I could bring home.

What was the air force policy on souveniring

36:30 **or scrounging or pilfering even?**

Well it didn't worry them. In Ian Stanley's book, he put the air force in a very bad light there for going around looting and things like that. See sometimes there's nothing else to do, so as soon as the infantry went through you'd tag along behind them. I was there one day, amongst all these rifles and everything, and the infantry had just moved through this little place and

37:00 I went in this store and there's this bloke with his hands up going....I had my rifle and I was about to shoot him thinking he was a Jap. Anyway he was going "wharr" and then I realised he was Chinese. But I nearly killed him though.

How did you realise that? Back then I guess an Australian figuring out the difference between a Chinese man and a Japanese man might have been difficult.

It isn't really. I had a lot of trouble. Oh and besides that too, you get mixed up with some types of Indians. You know there's so many different races. Chinese, Japanese, Indian, then there's the Javanese,

Malayan. They've all got black hair.

So in this incident with the Chinese fellow how did he let you know?

Well by the way he was carrying on. Anyway, I realised he wasn't a Jap.

37:30 He was probably laying in bed crook you know or he would have been gone. So there must have been something wrong with the poor bugger otherwise he'd have gone with the others.

Tape 5

00:32 Every type of game whether it be mutton birds, peacocks, wild turkeys, snakes...there was a lot of game?

Did that come in handy during those Depression years?

Oh I don't know. It would for some during the Depression. I remember Mum and Dad telling some people once, that the Depression didn't alter their lifestyle one little bit because he had a Government job with the PMG

01:00 and they didn't notice it. But there were poor kids about. They would get on the free list for books and stuff.

Did you notice that much on King Island, the way people dealt with the Depression?

No, I don't think so. The Depression was in 1936 went I went there so we would have been in the Depression. But

01:30 no one seemed to be unemployed there really. Everyone had a job and there were poor families and rich families. We were about the middle. I used to want Mum and Dad to let me go to school without any shoes on so I could mix with the other kids.

Did you get teased for having shoes?

No, I just wanted to go to school like some of the other kids without my shoes. Boots.

Did she let you?

No, no.

02:00 No I wanted to be like the hoi polloi.

Can you tell me something about the hunting you did, the trapping and hunting?

Yes we did a bit. I stayed with a family at a place called Pearshape. And they taught me how to set the snares, you know with a spring and a stick and little nooses that they called neckers. Of course with the neckers the poor little wallabies would get strangled to death but with the leggers they'd still be alive. But not for long. As soon as you got them, whack.

02:30 **How did you kill them?**

Oh just knocked them on the head. But mutton birding was great fun. Putting your hand down the burrow and pulling out the mutton bird. But some used to crack them and break their neck but I used to just break their skull. Then you turn them over and squeeze them and let all the oil run out.

Very oily aren't they?

Oh yes. As a matter of fact mutton bird is very good for you. We used to feed our horses on it.

03:00 It would make them all sleek and shiny. Mutton bird oil.

You mentioned in your memoirs the first time you went mutton birding. You made a pig of yourself eating them straight away.

Oh yes. We had a great big frying pan. See the mutton bird's only about that big when you pluck him and that. Anyway I think we put about 24 in this big pan with a bit of bread and a bit of salt maybe. It was a marvellous feed.

03:30 You'd get out of the car and walk 50 yards and you had your mutton bird. It was good fun. Except if there was a snake down the burrow.

Did you get bitten?

No, I was too cunning for that. I would put a stick in and if something pecked at it you'd know it was a mutton bird or a penguin. And if nothing happened you'd know there was nothing there or a snake. And you'd always know too on the outside of the burrow if there was fresh dirt and fresh tracks. That was a mutton bird.

04:00 Because they wouldn't live in the same burrow. If you saw an old disused burrow it would be pretty safe to say there was a snake in there and you'd leave it alone.

Were there a lot of penguins there as well?

Oh yes. If you put your hand down a penguin hole they'd tear your hand to pieces, or an old mutton bird who was too sick to go away. They'd be savage.

Did anyone have reason to catch the penguins and use them for anything?

04:30 No.

I was wondering also about the drills you did with your dad on King Island?

Oh yes, learned how to present arms and slope arms and all that caper.

Did you find that was a great way to get along with your dad?

Yes, I used to get on well.

05:00 Yes when Dad died it broke my heart. I was a pretty sentimental, temperamental sort of bloke.

How old were you when your dad died?

I was married and the kids were going to school. I would have been 50 odd.

Just checking my notes. I was pretty sure I had another King Island question but it has escaped me

05:30 **for the moment.**

Yes I can't think of anything more that would interest you about the island.

Oh yes, I was wondering, you may have been too young to have noticed, but you said there was no unemployment or little. Do you think that was because people left and went to mainland Australia or Tassie?

Some would have done I suppose. But you see, when I was at school the King Island scheelite mine opened and that employed a lot of men,

06:00 and Dad's both brother's worked there. They came over from Devonport and worked there. I would have liked to have gone there myself at ten shillings a day.

That would have been all right.

Oh yeah. Big money.

Was there a real sense of being part of Tasmania or was there some sort of independent spirit there?

Not really. People seemed to lean more towards Victoria. It is slightly closer I think. I know the Public

06:30 Works or the Public Main Road as it is now, they were based in Ulverstone on the north west coast. But I don't know what the roads are like now. They were all gravel, but I've got an idea they're sealed now. I was over there a few years ago. I just forget. I was too wrapped up with being with Monica to notice.

I also remember she was in Melbourne when you were in Melbourne.

07:00 Yes she was nursing. But she swears I didn't meet her in '43, '44, or '45. But I think we did. Although the photo there was taken outside Captain Cook's cottage was after I came back. So we could have had a 3 year gap. Which is not unusual for us. We could go 3 or 4 or 5 years.

07:30 **Was she a nurse in the services?**

No. She would have been too young anyway. She was doing her nursing in 1943 and '44, and she would have been born in 1928 I suppose. She wouldn't have been old enough to go away.

I think they had to be 25 to go away.

I don't know about the women.

I know it was older than the men.

Oh we'd go at 18. I went through the war cemetery once there and you could pick out the age

08:00 of kids of 18 and 19. And in that book about Tarakan, it gives you all their ages, the ones who were killed in action. In the book I wrote I put it down as a 1000 killed in action, but then again it was hearsay and after reading that, it was a 1000 killed and wounded. So that's a fair few for a little action like that. Unheralded. I don't think there was very much written about it.

- 08:30 **We were having a look at your pictures before and your plane was called the Bonnie Doon. Is there a story behind that?**
- I don't know. The pilot never mentioned it but I had to help paint the bloody thing on. And another bloke wanted me to paint his aircraft in colour. You could do what you wanted with your aircraft and it was done with an oil based paint and it never dried.
- 09:00 I never got in a row but I felt stupid using an oil based paint when I should have done it with an ordinary paint. They all like to have their own little thing on their own planes. The Yanks more so. The bombs painted on and how many bombs and all this. But the Australians didn't worry about that so much. I don't know if we bombed too many places in the Pacific anyway. Oh we did, we
- 09:30 have bombers but not a lot. Nothing like it was in Europe
- So you pretty much had freedom to put what ever you liked on the planes?**
- Oh yes. Some might have been a bit lurid and the Yanks certainly. They'd have...I remember one, they had this picture of a lady with a heart around about there, and 'my heart belongs to daddy'. That sort of caper.
- 10:00 **Did many people have pin ups or girly magazines, pin up?**
- We didn't no. But the yanks did. I think we were more conservative.
- Do you think? Do you think the Australians and the Americans were quite different in that regard?**
- Yes.
- What else did you notice were the differences between the Australian and American men?**
- Well beside them getting fed better than us.
- 10:30 Although we were badly fed compared to the Yanks. It was just ordinary food you know. The same as you get in gaol I reckon. It's like being in gaol. You couldn't go anywhere. And I think the blokes in gaol would be fed better and have a room and bed every night. No there's no particular difference with us and the Yanks I don't think. Oh, they did, as I said
- 11:00 before, these USA girls were handing out coffee and doughnuts. We never saw anything like that. Plus their canteens were better than ours. We very rarely had a canteen. As soon as everything quietened down and the base unit came up, we'd be off. Three months and we were gone. Just as well too because you get sick of being in the same old place day after day. Very boring.
- 11:30 All right for six months, but see our normal tour of duty was 15 months. But I was one of the unlucky ones, I served 20 months, because the end of the war came and everyone wanted to go home and I was well down the list, young, single. So I served my 20 months. All my mates, the original members who served 15 months theirs was over before Tarakan,
- 12:00 and I think at the end of the day I would have been the longest serving member of the squadron. I think I was. Naturally I didn't know everyone in the squadron what, most of the original men, see I was a reinforcement and they might have been away 3 or 4 months when I joined them. So when the war came they had all served their 15 months and went away and left me, all my good mates.
- I meant to ask you about that. Did you have a send off for those guys. How was it when they went home?**
- I can't even remember
- 12:30 saying goodbye to a bloke called Bruce Laird, we were really great mates. And he wrote me when he got back to Australia. I went and saw him a few years ago. I just don't remember Bruce going home. We probably just shook hands and said see you later. No tears or anything like that. Just "see ya, tooroo."
- From the stories I've heard people didn't seem to stand on ceremony very much. Good on ya mate, see you later**
- That's right.
- 13:00 No we didn't make a big thing of it.
- Just talking about the Australian and American differences. Was discipline or the superiors different?**
- I think we were a pretty rag tag mob, well compared to the Poms anyway. Not that I met many Poms. I don't have anything against the Poms. No, they didn't enjoy the same lack of discipline that we did. Mind you, in the squadron it was a different thing
- 13:30 but back home in Australia it was all salute and Sir and that sort of thing. But there were no sirs up there. No, they were a good mob our pilots. And they were sergeants up to flight lieutenants. I think our CO [Commanding Officer] was a squadron leader but that was as far as it went.

Did you find that when new people came in they had to get used to that? People from Australia that is?

No, I think they assimilated pretty well.

14:00 Of course we were all old hands and soon put them right and said, don't worry about saluting him and this and that, you know. I got in a row once when this warrant officer just joined us in Tarakan and the war was over or nearly over, and he called out to me, "Hey you, pass up the peanut butter." Bloody peanut butter in great big tins. And I said, "If you want the so and so peanut butter get the so and so peanut butter yourself." Anyway it was passed off.

14:30 I think someone said to him, "Hey careful these blokes have been away nearly two years." So nothing was ever said about it. If I said that in Australia I would have been on a charge. Very disciplinary action. No they were good.

It seems like it was a different story when you were actually serving overseas. Was there a major difference between your training and your experience do you think?

In the training? I don't know what you mean by the training.

15:00 **When you were actually serving over seas did you find that things you had been told weren't true or they didn't tell you about?**

It's hard to remember things like that. No, everything sort of comes naturally to you. Of course most of the squadron were formed in Camden in New South Wales. So they knew each other before they went away and they had a bond as the original members of the squadron whereas I was only a blow in.

15:30 I assimilated very quickly. There was no problems there.

And in terms of your work, the maintenance, did you find that what you had been trained to do was carried out or was it a different story when you were actually...

I wasn't trained to do any of it despite the six months of training. We were virtually no more than tyre kickers. No, the training I had as a flight rigger never ever came into our daily work,

16:00 except the hydraulic tanks and the flaps and the undercarriage. They were very vital. But you could have done without any training at all. I didn't even have to start the aircraft. We did because we wanted to and to help the flight mechanic. So we'd start the aircraft and taxi it round. No, everything we were taught just never came into being.

16:30 **What about filing, no purpose?**

No. Not a bit. Splicing did come in handy later on. Many years after the war I had a job working for the Hobart City Council and I was splicing something one day and a bloke said to me, "Oh you can splice can you?" And I said "Yes." And he said, "How about splicing me a tow rope?" So I spliced him a tow rope with a eye splice on one end and an eye splice on the other, and then everyone found out and I think I must have spliced about 50 tow ropes.

17:00 I had nothing else to do so I thought I'd splice some tow ropes for them.

So the training served you well there.

Yes. We used to learn about riveting and how to rivet plate together. Well we never did that. There were other squadrons who dealt with that sort of thing. Not the squadrons but what they called repair and service units, and operational base units. We were more concerned with the immediate things,

17:30 not repairs. Oh maybe minor repairs. But I don't remember doing any minor repairs. Or the fitters might have done but I didn't.

Did you find you had to train people on the job when they came in there if their training hadn't taught them what to do?

Oh no they did. They were just like I was. Hadn't worked on a live aircraft. No it didn't take long. I know of two riggers who got posted, and they soon got the idea. They would come with you for one day and tell them, this is how you do a pre-flight

18:00 inspection. Which was nothing much.

You were talking about having to move a lot, every three months. It must have been a big logistical exercise to head off and set up again?

I thought about that in later years. Just how they organised it all. I mean you'd land somewhere and your tents would be there or whatever. You'd just pick a tent up and put it up and one thing and another. And

18:30 you'd go...behind the scenes were all organised for us.

What were you in charge of moving when you had to move? When you got the call to move

what would you have to do?

Pull out tent down, pack our gear, which wasn't very much. We had a couple of pairs of socks and a pair of shorts and a couple of shirts and that would be it.

You didn't have to organise all the tools and things like that?

No. Sometimes we'd have to stay an extra night

- 19:00 on a certain beach waiting to go, or on the air strip and we'd put up what we called gunyas. They were little lean-to shelters and we'd sleep in that. Yes, they were very handy the gunyas, a couple of ground sheets tied together.

I'd you to tell us about your arrival in Aitape?

Well that was a Yank invasion force. And we went from

- 19:30 Cape Gloucester on these LSTs. There may be a photo or two of the LSTs there. They were gigantic ships you know. We all lived on deck. It was too hot below with the smell of petrol and diesel. That was the very first invasion I was on, and we marvelled...we stood out from the coast a couple of miles while the yanks and bombed and strafed Aitape. When you look at Aitape you wouldn't think a soul would live..

- 20:00 You know, they'd be bombarded night and day for 2 or 3 days. Then when they thought they had caught enough Japs they'd go ashore. As a matter of fact I don't think there was one single casualty. There was one bloke, they call it friendly fire these days, one bloke shot another bloke. It was an accident you know. Or I suppose it was an accident. It might have been someone he didn't like.

It would be easy to do that wouldn't it?

Oh yes. I bet there were a lot of people killed, just shot by their own blokes

- 20:30 He might have been a terrible officer or something like that. He might have owned him money.

So during those 2 or 3 days of bombardment were you off shore the whole time or en route?

Yes we were off shore. Not far off shore, a mile, two miles. It's a marvellous sight you know, to actually see the bombs dropping. And they used the napalm. They would drop the napalm container and you see it drop with all the smoke.

- 21:00 It was an eye opening for me. I'd never seen anything like. Tarakan was a lot more spectacular of course.

Just before you headed off to Aitape, were you told what was going on and what was happening?

No we didn't get told anything. You'd hear on the grapevine. You'd get a burst. It was full of burst rumours. We're going here and we're going there and this and that.

- 21:30 But it didn't really matter because all parts of New Guinea were very much the same as the other. All palm trees and things.

Was it also on the rumour mill that you were heading into a dangerous area?

No we weren't told we were heading into a dangerous area. It wasn't a dangerous area because the Yanks had bombed everybody out of existence. But we weren't there for very long.

- 22:00 Near where we were camped there was a few bomb craters and we used to swim down to them to get into the cold water in these bomb craters. We did that at lots of places. Especially in the sea because the sea was warm so you'd swim out if you saw a bomb crater and swim down and get right down into the cold water. That was great. We were only at Aitape for a few weeks, a month.

Can you tell us about what you had to do when you landed there,

- 22:30 **and what you saw?**

I think we just went straight to the area that was designated to us and we put up our tents. In orderly, there's a photo there, in orderly lines you know. I was very lucky there. I thought I might get into serious trouble. I don't know if you know much about the 303, but to prove it, you open the bolt, push home the bolt which screws the trigger to signify

- 23:00 that it's empty. That's when you're going on an inspection. Anyway this day there was a rifle inspection out of the blue and I just got my rifle, pulled the trigger and bang, right through a row of tent. And luckily, gee I was lucky I didn't kill somebody. Just through force of habit. I didn't dream I had the magazine on. A full magazine anyway. That was one time I

- 23:30 was really lucky. Those other blokes were lucky too.

Did you get into trouble for that?

No, not a word said. They wouldn't have known where it came from anyway.

And where you worked in Aitape, was that damaged? Did you have to repair anything?

Oh the airstrip was all right. I don't remember much about the airstrip there because we weren't there all that long.

24:00 It would have been close to the sea naturally. Everywhere in New Guinea was close to the sea. I didn't go inland at all.

And was it pretty much the same routine there. Plane inspections ...

That happened very rarely that you'd do any of that. No, discipline was nothing. I don't know why we had this rifle inspection one day. It came out of the blue.

24:30 Broadcast over the amplifier. We had amplifiers all around the camp. They used to play these songs you know. Beautiful songs. As a matter of fact we found a Jap record one day and they played it over the loud speaker, day after bloody day we got this lar lar lar lar.

Did you see much evidence of where the Japanese had been when you landed or

25:00 **over the days after?**

Not at Aitape. We could have done but you forget after all those years. But as I said, we weren't there long enough to really get involved. It wasn't long before we crossed the border into Dutch New Guinea now West Papua Province, Indonesia].

Can you tell us about that?

Hollandia. Yes we were at Hollandia for a while and I know there was a lake called Lake Sentani. We went roaming around the bush or jungle

25:30 and we were very thirsty and I knelt down and drank big gulps of this water, and I could see all these worm things floating in the water and wriggling around in it. It didn't do me any harm. I'm still here.

Did you have much problem with diseases?

No. I had a bad accident, I think it was at Noemfoor. There was coconuts scattered everywhere

26:00 because of the bombardment all the trees were cut off. And all the coconuts were on the ground. I was at this one place and we had eaten all the coconuts that were on the ground, and I decided to climb up and get some and...I don't know if you know what linesman spurs are? They hook on you, with a hook onto your leg and you climb up the tree with a safety belt around you. Anyway I got up nearly to the top and the hook came out and I had the safety belt

26:30 on and that stuck me to the tree, and I went straight down the palm tree. It took all the skin off my chest. Off the ball of my thumb and up to there. I was in a bad way. The doctor would dress me every two or three days and that's the time they had to tie me down to the bunk. It hurt. Anyway I was there one day and I heard him say to the orderly, "If this bloke's not better in five days time we'll send him back to Australia."

27:00 Bloody beauty! But anyway I got better, so I never got back. Anyway it all healed over and they used to paint this artificial skin on. It would sting and you never felt anything like it. But it all passed.

What was that made of, the artificial skin?

I don't know. They would strap me down and they would get this stuff and paint. Up until recently there was still this big scar there. I don't know if it's still there now. I

27:30 had two there. I don't know what it was but it was very volatile.

So it was some sort of liquid that they painted on?

Oh yes. And smell! And I had all this suppurate under all this plastic skin and it went rotten and then they'd tear it all off. That hurt and then they'd repaint it until the last time when it healed up and that was goodbye to coming back to Australia.

28:00 I'd been away a fair while. I was probably away then for 20 months. No, about 15 months I'd been away.

Were you tempted to aggravate it at night to make sure you lasted the five days?

No. No, I was too scared and I would think, they'll rip all this off again. Be strapped down again. It was pretty...not medieval, but pretty spartan our medical stuff was.

28:30 You couldn't get tooth pulled or anything like. We had a doctor but I don't know if he ever pulled teeth or anything. We'd have to wait until the base units caught up if we were lucky. But by the time the base unit arrived we were off.

Any other experiences with the medical side of things?

Yes I got lockjaw or something. I couldn't open my mouth. So I used to bang it like that to break this thing away from my

29:00 jaw. I've got a touch of it now as a matter of fact. Usually from eating too many carrots. No, that was about...oh then I got an ulcer on my foot one day. I stood on an engine cowl and that flipped over and put a gouge in my foot, but that passed. That was only a minor thing. Oh and I had dysentery once, real dysentery. A lot of people in Tasmania

29:30 have said, "Oh I've had dysentery for weeks." But there's not such thing as dysentery in Tasmania. But the real amoebic dysentery. I have to crawl out of bed at night and get outside and all you'd pass would be slime and you'd feel as weak as a kitten. But you still had to go and do your work.

Really, you didn't stop?

No, I'd still go to work.

What did they do to combat it or treat it when you had it?

There wasn't much treatment that I recall that we had.

30:00 A magnesium pill or something like that. But no big deal. Just about everyone had dysentery in any case so you weren't unique.

Sounds like you were lucky to get away with not having malaria too. A lot of people got that.

I had a touch of it just after I came home. Of course we used to have Atebrin, you know the yellow stuff. No, I had a touch of that, only the one attack after I came home, and that was it.

I've heard a bit of that. That you stop taking Atebrin and it must lay

30:30 **dormant or something and come out and it comes on later on.**

Yes, probably does. I was home on leave...yes, the war would have been well over. I was back in civvies when I had a malaria attack. It was bad you know. I just got hot and cold and that was it.

We're approaching the end of this tape, but I wonder if you could tell me some more about Hollandia? What you were doing there and so on.

31:00 That was a place I told you about that we took, and the Japanese aircraft were still in various stages of construction. I think they were Oscars [Oscar was code for the Nakajima Ki-43 fighter bomber] actually not Zeros. That's where we found a Jap rifle. I used to have a photo of that there. We got this Jap rifle and all the ammo when up in the hills and cut down a whole tree with rifle fire.

31:30 That's about it. A lot of the time that's all we did. We just roamed around. There was no work to do you know. The planes mightn't have landed, or the weather mightn't have been too good. We did a lot of roaming around. I think it was at Hollandia, I was roaming through there one day and came to this clearing and there was this beautiful solitary orchid all on its own. I was miles away from the camp and I got a bit panicked and thought gee I'm a bit too far from camp and so I scooted back to camp,

32:00 I got a bit scared. Only a little bit scared. I was only scared twice...really scared the whole time I was away. But that was later on in the piece. That was at Tarakan.

I want to ask you about that later on. Did you have a good look at the Oscars? Did you have a good look at the Japanese planes?

One flew over our camp one night and strafed

32:30 a village and killed about 80 blokes I believe. And they strafed a picture show there once. I did see the plane go over and I saw another one at Tarakan, that would be later on in the piece when I saw them drop the bombs.

But there were some at Hollandia under construction or something?

Yes, it must have been an assembly place for making these Oscars. They were in various stages of construction.

33:00 Some of them had wings and some were attached to fuselages. So it was quite a big depot there. But apart from that there was nothing remarkable about Hollandia. One airstrip like another. You get sick of seeing all these airstrips. They all look the same.

What did you notice about those Oscars that you saw. Those close up ones under construction?

33:30 **No. As a matter of fact, our squadron, I think it was at Noemfoor, they shot down 8 of them in one go once. Of course the Oscars weren't anywhere near as good as the Zero. And the Kitty Hawk was just too much for them. Not that the Kitty Hawk was that much of a fighter but they were better than the old Oscars.**

And what was that rifle like. How did that rate compared to the 303?

A big heavy cumbersome thing.

34:00 It was this long. But we had the time of our life with it.

It would have been pretty powerful then to chop down a tree.

We probably fired about 300 rounds between the three of us. We took it in turns until it eventually fell over.

Was there anything to shoot at? Any animals or game up in that area?

I don't think so. I don't think I saw one animal. All

34:30 I saw was a kangaroo at Port Moresby going down the hill one day.

I had no idea there were kangaroos there.

It could have been a pet of somebody's. They might have taken it there. But that was a kangaroo. I remember it distinctly coming down towards our camp. They might have been part of the set up there. I don't know.

And other than that, no other

35:00 **wildlife you saw?**

Not that I can recall. There would have been wild pigs somewhere or other. There would have been crocodiles at the place we were at because I knew one chap got taken. One of the bomber crews, he went in swimming one day and an alligator got him.

I definitely want to talk about your next location.

35:30 **From Hollandia...you were there for how long? A few months?**

We went to a little island called Noemfoor. We were there quite a while. We were there four or five months which was a long time. It was a little coral island exactly one degree from the equator. What's a degree...sixty nautical miles. So we were sixty miles from the equator. Very, very hot there. But we were right on the sea there. The airstrip was made of coral.

36:00 We had to dig our slit trenches through all this coral. We got them about that deep. Nothing remarkable about Noemfoor. Just swim, swim, swim.

It doesn't sound so bad really does it?

Oh no. It wasn't all that bad really. It is after you've been away from home for so long. As I say, six months is a breeze, 12 months you're getting sick of it and 15 months you're

36:30 nearly off your head. And 20 months like I was, you think oh bugger it.

What were you doing at Noemfoor. Was it more of the same or did you have different duties?

No, just the same old thing. The planes would go and you'd go away, or go back to camp and swim and then come back in again. If they were going straight off again, you'd refuel and rearm if they had shot their canons. No, it was pretty ordinary.

37:00 **Were your pilots engaging the enemy much at this stage?**

It was at Noemfoor that they shot down these 8 Oscars. There was great jubilation that day. We knew it had happened because when they came in they usually shoot up the strip. You know, zoom up and come down. But this time they zoomed along and we saw the belly tanks had gone, so they had been in action. And they did a victory roll. They rolled over and came down so we knew then there had been some action. And we found out as soon

37:30 as they landed. They'd shot down these Jap aircraft. That was a big thing for the air crew. It was great.

Was there a sense of pride when the planes you were looking after were involved?

Oh, not really. You just take it as a matter of course. It just might have been that your planes might have been grounded that day. Mine were involved in it.

38:00 I couldn't tell you much more about that. There's a whole heap...an air force publication describing it all. I don't know where that is. It's found the way of most things.

Tape 6

00:35 **We were just talking about Noemfoor. Were you mostly...were you busy would you say?**

Not really. Might do one...or sometimes I might do two or three. It would depend on the weather of course because up there it rained a lot. Sometimes they couldn't go. No, never very busy.

01:00 When you were busy it didn't entail much. Just still doing the pre-flight inspection, helping to refuel and rearm.

Did you find your postings varied much in terms of food and basics and all that?

No, everything was pretty much the same. The same old tucker all the time with the US Army or the Australians.

01:30 The only thing that did differ a bit was when the Australians got proper beer, or maybe when things quietened down you might get two bottle a week. And with the Yanks, you might get beer off them or when the PX caught up, you might get a can of American beer there which was terrible stuff. I could tell you a story about that later at Tarakan. No, it was pretty weak.

02:00 **And so you spent something like four or five months there?**

I think about four. I've got it in my list over there on my record. Yes, I think it was about four months. I remember reading something about an aquatic carnival.

Was that at Noemfoor?

Yes, that was at Noemfoor, the south west Pacific Championship which I won.

Can you tell me more about that?

No it was a nothing.

02:30 They were all air force blokes. There might have been a few Yanks. There might have been a few people from other squadrons, but it was mainly us.

What events did you have?

Oh, swimming under water. And I was always pretty good at swimming under water, of course, before I ruined my lungs. No, that was all there was. It was good enough to get a mentioned in the Sporting Globe and that was it.

Was it well attended?

Pardon?

03:00 **Was it well attended?**

Oh I suppose nearly all the squadron would have been there. There was nothing else to do. A lot of times there was nothing to do. We either ran out of targets or the weather was bad.

I was wondering about that, what you did about down time. Did you have card games or...what else could you do for recreation?

Well we did play

03:30 badminton...not badminton as it's played here, but we had a net, about so high. We'd have the little shuttle cocks and ping pong bats. And we'd play for hours. It was great, I used to love it. We'd have two on this side and two on that side and flick this little feathering thing back and forward. And then of course we'd write letters and wander off into the bush and see what we could find.

04:00 We'd look for fruit and things like that. You'd often come across the native garden with tomatoes or something in it, or bananas. I suppose a lot of the time you were bored. But you can be bored anywhere.

Would you just help yourself to the gardens or would you have to barter with the locals?

Oh they'd be gone.

04:30 They'd be gone...when the invasion started they head for the hills. Not that their gardens were all that great. Just one or two little things there. Cucumbers, or you might find some bananas that had been cultivated. It wouldn't happen everywhere but now and again in different parts of New Guinea.

I suppose because you weren't going to be there long, would you try and maintain those gardens?

No, we wouldn't worry about them.

05:00 We'd just take what was there and leave it. The poor old natives would have to fix it up again when they came home.

Did you pretty much get the sense that you could be told you could be moved at any time?

Well all the rumours would go around that we won't be here long because they're about to take this place and that place. No, mainly you'd just take it as it came. You'd really know because you were a

fighter

05:30 squadron and you'd know you would be that far from where the action was. When we went to Morotai that had barely been taken. That was a Yank turn out. That's where we went to from Noemfoor.

Were you still under the auspices of the Americans at this stage?

Yes. At Noemfoor and when we went to Morotai we were, and then we were taken over by what they called 1st TAF RAAF First Tactical Air Force,

06:00 RAAF, and that's when we shifted under Australian command. And the Yanks petered out and probably went to the Philippines, and then the army took over and we started to dress like Australians and get used to Australian tobacco instead of Lucky Strikes and Chesterfield.

Was that a bit of a struggle?

Oh not really. It was hard at first having to roll our own. But we got used to it.

Were you much of a smoker before the war?

06:30 No, I didn't smoke at all. No we were issued with Yank cigarettes, a carton a week. Some blokes didn't smoke at all so they'd give you their's. So by no time at all I was smoking 30 cigarettes a day which is more than I smoke now. Nothing else to do really so you'd smoke and smoke and smoke.

Was there much peer pressure? I mean it seemed like everyone smoked

07:00 **really.**

No, no. A lot of blokes didn't smoke. As a matter of fact a lot of them would get hold of a kerosene tin and fill it up with cartons of smokes and solder the lid on and send it back to Australia, and they used to get there. It's a wonder they did, send back contraband. But they did.

Did the non smokers use cigarettes as currency as well?

07:30 No I don't think so. One of the bloke's in our tent, he'd get his carton and chuck them over and say, "Does anyone want these?" Cigarettes were nothing. They were that plentiful. Sometimes later with the Australian Army they'd get a bit scarce, the same as a lot of other things.

Did the nature of the work or set up change much when you became Australian or under Australian control?

08:00 No, exactly the same except we had to put up with more provosts [Military Police], whereas the Yanks didn't worry too much about service police. There were a lot of provosts with the Australian Army and they were pretty hard men too.

Can you tell me something about them?

Not really no. We had a jeep once...you could pick up jeeps anywhere. They'd be on the beaches everywhere and you'd just pick up a jeep. The MPs [Military Police]

08:30 pulled up one day and took our jeep off us. But that was later in the piece when nearly all the fighting was done. No the Australian Army blokes didn't like the provosts. But it was all part and parcel of what the army's about.

You say you never knew where you were going or when, did you know what was going on in that area?

Not really.

09:00 No, not really. You didn't really know about a place until you got to it. Then you would find out what it was like. But one place was very similar to another you know. You went to that tent, you went to the airstrip, you wrote home, and you went scrounging for whatever you could get. It was all the same. Apart from Tarakan. That was a whole new thing. That was my first contact with the real war.

09:30 **And that was after Morotai I think. So you went to Morotai after Noemfoor?**

Yeah we went from...we flew into Morotai.

You flew?

Yes. That place had only just been taken because I remember even the shelling went over us. They just made it sound like tearing paper. And I could swear that I could see it. But memory's a funny thing.

10:00 I don't know. I don't know if I saw the shelling. But they did fire. The Yanks were behind us and the Japs were on the other side so they would shell the Japs. But no one was ever killed. They never fell short or anything.

So were the Japanese returning the fire?

No, the poor little buggers didn't have a canon I don't think.

Were there any raids or anything like that?

Oh yes. They had a lot of raids. I went through my diary

10:30 there and I saw one night we had two raids and five red alerts. A red alert is when something shows up on the radar and they'd fire three red tracers. That was a red alert and you'd know because they were very close. But we had five, and I think we had five on New Year's Eve and two raids as well. But raids were nothing. We'd just sit

11:00 outside. Yes there were a lot of raids at Morotai. But the red alerts were a nuisance because you had to get up. You'd think well I don't want to get killed inside here. Anyway, just getting out and watching the searchlights and watching the anti aircraft barrage

11:30 with all the tracers. Now and again you'd see a little silver thing up in the apex of the searchlights and you'd no that was a Nip plane. But we were always safe because we never camped near the airstrip. And the Nips would always go for the airstrip. I know one night they got a B-24 Liberator, I think it was. A P-47 Thunderbolt and a Douglas. I think that was about the most damage they ever did. But there were a lot of raids.

12:00 **Were people injured in these raids?**

None that I know. Well our tent was splattered in mud. Got up next morning and our tent was all covered with mud where a bomb had exploded and thrown the mud over us.

It must have been close enough then?

But we were never frightened. No, we were never frightened of an air raid. Mainly because we were too ignorant and didn't realise the danger, but we were always away from the airstrip and we didn't worry

12:30 too much. That's why we never dug our little shelters too deep.

And Morotai was that pretty much the case of more of the same. You'd set up and do checks on the planes and have your time off and things like that?

Yes very similar. There was heavy fighting still going on around us. That was with the Yanks, for quite some time.

13:00 And they nearly squashed everything, they went away and the soldiers of the 9th Division came in. We were glad to see them. We'd been with the Yanks for 15 months and got a bit sick of it. It was just a nice change to see the familiar khaki green and all that sort of business.

Had you known about where they had been and their experience? The 9th...

How do you mean?

13:30 **Maybe I'm confusing my questions. Had you....**

I had great admiration for them. This mate of mine who was in the 9th Division, and they'd been through Tobruk and El Alamein. They came home and did a bit of jungle training and straight off. No they were a terrific mob, the 9th Div.

14:00 **Did you get many stories out of them about where they'd been?**

No not a lot. This good friend of mine and I got this jeep one day and picked up these two soldiers. One was that chap on the covers, Jeff Chambers and he did that operation the day before the invasion. He'd been there but he didn't tell me much about it. I don't know what happened to Jeff now. I'd love to know because he was in the 2/13th Field

14:30 Engineers and they did this little job and then he joined the commandos. I went to see him one day and he had these commandos in his tent and they would frighten you just looking at them. They were a villainous looking mob, these commandos. I think they had been through a pretty rough time and kept to themselves. And I was only allowed in because I was a mate with the chap who was in the tent with them.

15:00 **Were there many Tasmanians among them?**

There would have been. Later at Tarakan. Surprising enough I met a chap who I went to school with at Ulverstone. Yes, I met up with him. I hadn't seen him since I left school.

You hear about those coincidence of people meeting up away and finding friends and relatives.

I met a couple of cousins, a cousin of mine, Uncle Jack's son

15:30 who was in a Spitfire squadron. I met him and then I met the chap that lived next door to me at St Mary's. He was the in air force and he was there, and a few others you just run across, only by accident. You wouldn't know where they were. You wouldn't be in contact but they'd just be there and you'd say I know that fella.

Did you know anything about where your brother was or hat been?

No, only...he didn't tell me

16:00 he was at Darwin but he would have been at Darwin because I know the battalion he was with, and you'd hear that from different other soldiers. They'd say, oh yeah they were at Darwin.

It must have been a lot of that, word of mouth, like where's such and such.

Oh yes. It was the same with the squadron. You'd find that you knew they were somewhere

16:30 or probably took over when we left one.

In Morotai I was wondering, if you had all these raids on the airstrip, did you have all this repair work to do?

I don't know, see we were never involved in repair work. That would be the repair and salvage units.

Didn't you all pitch in and get it operational?

No, no. All the tradesmen, the RSU [Regimental Support Unit] would be in service units

17:00 and they'd do all the dirty jobs and half the time you wouldn't worry about it. They'd tow the aircraft away and that would be it, you wouldn't bother. There were plenty of aircraft there. Of course with the Yanks anyway, they'd keep us supplied with their hand me down.

And the strip itself would the need salvaging?

Oh yes, sometimes they'd have air force crews, Air Force Construction

17:30 Squadron would come out with their bulldozer and things like that. They'd keep them repaired. We were actually helping building the airstrip with those great big metal sheets that lock together. We'd put those over the marshy or boggy ground, and that would do as an airstrip, and that worked. But that was because there were probably so many crashes landing. They didn't seem to worry the pilots though, they were quite happy really.

18:00 **I think you mentioned...I don't know if it was in your phone call or memoirs, you mentioned about a pilot baling out and everyone watching as...**

Oh yes, Squadron Leader Kinnonmont, yes. I don't know where that was. I think it was at Morotai. We saw this aircraft come over and about 3 or 4 feet of the main plane was missing. He got up there and did a roll over and down he came with his parachute, and everybody cheered like mad.

18:30 Congo Kinnonmont, and then a patrol boat or air sea rescue went out and fished him out of the drink.

Did many people survive baling out?

He was the only one I actually saw. But one of my pilots, who crashed one of my planes. He baled out and survived and wandered around for two or three weeks in the jungle to get back to base. He did a remarkable job. I forget his name.

19:00 Pilot Officer Harvey or something. But he survived. He just lived off the land until he got back with the squadron, or the natives took him back to where they thought we were. But we did lose a few that never came back of course. No, they'd be shot down or just crashed for some unknown reason. A lot crashed on landing but I don't recall anybody getting killed landing an

19:30 aircraft. They'd get killed in other ways, either being shot down or aircraft fire or whatever.

In those cases when you didn't have a body to bury, did you have some sort of ceremony for them?

No, not that I know of. No I don't recall. Only that chap at Cape Gloucester who got his head cut off when the aircraft landed near him. We buried him.

20:00 I can still see him now with the blanket over him and his boots sticking out. No that was the only burial I went to. Saw a lot of graves at Tarakan though. I can't tell you much more about that.

Did you lose any mates in the pilots? Any friends of yours?

20:30 Not that I was close to. There was Les Vaughan and a couple of others who was on good terms with. No, they all survived, they all went home. There was one, I wasn't on familiar terms with him but he was my pilot. He might have been a flight lieutenant so he was a bit up in rank for us to be friendly with. I strapped him into his cockpit this time and

21:00 away he went. He never came back and no one ever explained why he didn't. I don't know what happened to him. He was a nice bloke to. Getting into his aircraft this day...the wings you wear must have came unstuck because after his plane took off I found them on the ground, his wings. And I thought, I'll give them to him when he comes back. I brought them home with me as a matter of fact. I

don't know what happened to them in the finish.

21:30 I'm afraid I was the last one to see him. However it was all expected.

How did people deal with that. Did they have ways to brush off the expected?

No, there's no such thing as counselling. I mean you handle it on your own. The pilots might have more of an insight into death than we did.

22:00 I mean pilots were getting killed fairly regularly. Us blokes were pretty safe. They put up with a few hardships, but only in real danger a few times, but that wasn't until Tarakan anyway. The air raids you wouldn't class as being dangerous.

It seems strange to say that now doesn't it?

Yes.

Compared to what else was going on?

Oh yes.

22:30 We used to welcome the air raids. Whoopee....go down and look at the tracers and the search lights. We got that way, the different colours, we'd know the big 105 canons and the 40 millimetre ones. We could identify them by the sound they made. The put on a big display when the war was over. All these canons going off and the searchlights.

23:00 But that's another story it was back at Tarakan.

So did you go directly to Tarakan from Morotai?

No straight from Morotai. We loaded ourselves onto the LSTs and they'd be chockablock you know. You couldn't live down below. I think we were at sea for about four days. We'd sleep up on the deck. It was beautiful you know. You'd look over the side and see all

23:30 the phosphorous. The bow wave would be full of phosphorous. It was nice. But we didn't get any of the Yankee ice-cream though.

Were they American LSTs?

Oh yes, wholly and solely. I don't know if Australia owned any or not. They might have one or two now, but then...we might have had the LSTs at some time.

24:00 Mainly American navy. Yes, they'd call out at night, "The smoking lamp is lit," so you could maybe light up a cigarette, and at dawn you'd see all these little Yanks at their action stations with helmets like that on, all standing by their guns. We didn't mix much with them. Not the Yanks, not the navy.

Four days seem like a long time to be on one of those?

I'm almost sure it was four days.

24:30 It's on the record there when we left Morotai and when we landed.

Was it fairly cramped?

Yes it was a bit. See not only...see all the heavy stuff went...see they put this power door down and then they'd drive them in and fill it right up and then a lot would go on deck as well. A lot of trucks and things would be on deck. You wouldn't have much room to move. A place to sleep and that.

25:00 **Did you know what you were heading into or what was going on?**

We knew we were going to Borneo. Jeff told me they were going on some really hush hush mission and he knew where we were going to, but I didn't. He didn't tell me. And he said, "This might be the last time I see you old mate." But I found him again in Tarakan, we met up again.

25:30 Yes, I'd dearly love to meet him again, Jeff Chambers. He should have been decorated but he was never. The same with a lot of them. That's what makes me mad, when some bigwig General or something has been to some theatre of war, you know one of the little wars we always have...so and so, hero of so and so. And it makes me that bloody mad.

26:00 I think of all the thousands and thousands of real Australian heroes in war graves all over the world, you know. And a lot of blokes who survived the war, relatively unsung and no heroes, but a lot of those blokes who probably didn't even see a shot fired and they're called heroes. Anyway that's me, I just get mad about it.

It's a different story these days isn't it. Different wars. Can you tell us about the process of landing at Tarakan?

26:30 **What was the day like?**

Oh gee. We might have stood off...we got there the day before the invasion, I think. And we were stood out to sea and watched the bombardment, and the smoke coming from the oil tanks. And talk about a bombardment. The Liberators came over, the B24s, and once again you'd see the bombs dropping. You'd see the P38 Lightnings dropping their napalm

27:00 bombs. That was a great thrill to see all that. Anyway, the next morning we came in for landing with the infantry and all that, and we got stuck in the bloody mud so we had to spend the night in the LST. I remember waking up in the night. There was a big clang on the deck of the LST, it was a bit of shrapnel that the Japs had sent over. I don't know where it landed but it sounded like it was right next to me, but

27:30 it could have been 150 yards away, you know. Anyway, the next day we got up and then they sent us up to a ridge which was between the army and the Japs I think. And we were supposed to guard this ridge. There was an air force lot along there, and then there might have been a navy lot and an army lot. I remember one bloke there one night came around to all of us and said

28:00 he was bringing some soldiers and not to be too perturbed about it. Then he went along to another section and a bloke went "Halt who goes there?" Bang bang bang and shot the poor bugger. I know what was said and I won't repeat it. But they were getting a bit trigger happy. But that was only the second time in your life I was really frightened. I was frightened of dying.

28:30 Because we were on this ridge. The Nips had a nasty habit of infiltrating with hand grenades or anything that would explode. It might be a land mine and they'd hurl it in, and there would be quite a few killed with that. I was there this night and I'd finished my guard duty, I was laying down trying to get to sleep. I was that frightened you know. Any minute you'd expect to hear a bang. And

29:00 about four in the morning I felt that sleepy and tired, I made myself go to sleep. I thought well if I wake up in the morning, I wake up, and if I don't wake up, I don't. So I was really and truly frightened. All I could hear was this toke toke toke...Japanese machine guns, and the soldiers called them Woodpeckers because of the toke toke toke they made. So you've got all this toke toke toking going on. Yes, pretty frightening.

29:30 Anyway we were up there for 2 or 3 days and survived. By that time the squadron was housed in some old Dutch barracks. That was paradise, floors, walls, ceiling. That was really good.

In that couple of days was that fatalism common to the people you were with? You know, if it happened it happened.

Yes, I think you had to be fatalistic about it.

30:00 You had to think if I'm going to die I'm going to die. If I wake up in the morning then that's a bonus. It still applies to life today I think. Every day you woke up it's a bonus.

Yes I think we don't necessarily...we take it for granted a bit don't we?

Yes.

How many of you were there on guard up on that ridge?

Five or six of us I think. Probably a couple of guard and the rest of us having our rest you know.

30:30 That was very eerie, I wouldn't want to do that again. I'd live it all over again bar that little piece of action.

What did they expect you to do. Were you just observation or were some sort of defence?

We were supposed to kill anyone who came near us. I did fire my rifle there once. It was in the daylight and there was a bush down below and we saw this bush move, and we thought it's a bloody Nip, and so I got my rifle and I was shaking like that, but I let a shot

31:00 go, and a dog came out, so it was a dog making the bush move. But I could have sworn it was a Jap, only 100, 200 yards away. But the little devils, they'd creep right up.

You can see why that person got shot accidentally then, in that sort of environment.

Yes. Yes, there was never any enquiry about it. One of those things that happened during war.

That five of you, were you all ground crew from the RAAF?

31:30 What on the ridge?

Yes, all from your unit?

Yes. Oh, no, there were a couple of army sections there along this ridge. I don't know just how many but I know there were navy and army and air force. No, I was glad to get off this ridge and get into camp.

32:00 **So can you describe to us...what happened to you next. What was going on?**

The airstrip hadn't been taken. See there was fighting going on all around us. What did we do? Oh yes.

We captured the airstrip and then the Nips countered attacked and took the AIF off it. So in the meantime we were down unloading these ships. And...

- 32:30 oh yes, unloading the bombs out in the jungle. That's what made me so wild with the wharfies. We were out there in the middle of the night, and the Japs probably all around us you know. I'm not saying they were 2 feet away, but maybe 100, or 200 yards, you know. They were so close at Tarakan.

And it doesn't matter if they're there or not, if you think they're there...

- 33:00 There was another time I was a bit frightened too. Eventually the airstrip was taken and our planes landed, and we had to go out at night and stand guard on it. That was a bit eerie too. So I used to get in the cockpit of the Kitty Hawk and close the hood up and ack-ack-ack...and hope no one came. Yes that was eerie.

Was there any raids on the wharves when you were unloading the ships?

No, oh there might have been one or two trying to get through,

- 33:30 but there wasn't a lot of air raids on Tarakan. A few would come over as I told you, strafing...picture shows. There was a story going round as we lined up for our meal one day. One bloke looked around and behind him was a little Nip. But I think that was a joke. I don't think that happened.

I've heard that story before too.

Yes, I think it went the rounds. Another one was true because I saw this one. There was this bomber...a Jap bomber came in

- 34:00 and no one took any notice. It wasn't quite daylight and you couldn't see the Rising Sun on the fuselage, but you could see enough that you could see the wheels were down. Anyway we saw this bloke coming in with his undercarriage down, and then up came the undercarriage, pushed his throttle forward and laid about 3 or 4 bombs along the airstrip. He was a pretty brave little fella that Nip. That's true.

Was there much in the way of respect

- 34:30 **for that sort of bravery?**

No, I don't think so. We didn't have any respect for them. No. I don't think the AIF did much about taking prisoners either. I don't think the Yanks did either because there was a story when we were at Aitape. There was a river just the other side of our camp and the Yanks had a prisoner of war compound with about 20 or 30 Nips in it. One of the

- 35:00 Yanks stuck up and undid the door and let them out. And of course the Nips headed straight for the river and ...because they couldn't come through the army camp with us on one side and nothing on the side. And the Yanks waited until they were half way across and went pink pink pink and shot them in the water. That was great. We didn't care. All's fair in love and war. No there's no such thing as chivalry.

- 35:30 We'd all heard about what they had been doing to prisoners of war you know, and how they were getting on and the shocking things they did, so we didn't care less what happened to them.

So that news was starting to filter through about what was going on in the POW camps?

You'd hear about it, yes. But we didn't get a lot of news about what was going on there. All we knew was that the 8th Division and the 6th Division were prisoners of war.

- 36:00 The 8th particularly, in Changi and Malaya.

Was there anger towards the enemy or was it just a matter of doing the job?

I don't think there was any such thing as anger or hatred. We couldn't care less how many of them got killed. And when you saw the napalm, you wouldn't think oh poor cows, in the middle of that they're getting burnt to death. You wouldn't think about.

- 36:30 You get pretty blasé about all this stuff you know. Particularly if you had been away for as long as I was, you couldn't have cared less. I was trying to think...any other Japanese stories. I think it's all forgotten now. Probably wasn't important enough at the time to remember. It didn't stay in your memory like when I was with the RAAF and found this grave,

- 37:00 you know and did that.

Yeah, can you tell us about that. That was when you were doing some patrols?

That was when...the AIF were getting severely knocked around, and they'd been up in the bush, as they called it, for ages, and probably not getting fed and not getting much sleep and they were worn out. They sent them into an air force camp...it wasn't our air force camp, they were sent to an OBU, an Operational Base Unit.

- 37:30 I don't know what they had, but Ian Stanley put in his book that they had the hot showers and sheets. Well maybe they did at this operational base unit, maybe they were officers, but I don't think our officers did. We all ate the same food and everything, no matter who they were...the wing commander

or squadron leader. They got in line like we did. Anyway...what was I going to say about that?

38:00 Oh I lost my thread.

That's all right. We're nearly at the end of this tape. I'll just get you tell us about volunteering.

Oh yes. These men coming in had to be replaced, so they asked for any volunteers. So us single blokes were selected to go. So I joined part of the 22/3rd Infantry, probably C or D company.

So were you selected or did you volunteer?

Oh yes I volunteered for it.

38:30 I didn't care less. I thought I'd get away from here, a bit exciting. I used to go on their fighting patrols. About then the Nip resistance had just about finished. They were just about wiped out but we still did the fighting patrols. I'd get in the middle. I think the patrol was 8 men. There would be forward scout, he'd be the bloke in danger all the time. And the bloke at the end, he'd have a Bren gun so he was a target for the Nips.

39:00 I'd be in the middle. And one day we came across...in the jungle, these little mounds and the corporal said, "This is a bloody Nip grave here." You could tell by all the food tins lying around that they were all Japanese. So out with the bayonets and we dug away until we bared the head, and then out with the bayonet and chop, chop into the teeth and put them in a little bag and put it in their pocket. Most of the Japs had gold teeth or silver teeth. And I think some of the blokes might have made a lot of

39:30 money with the gold teeth. But it was the truth, I was there. And I know the bloke who did it. I wouldn't tell you his name or anything about him but it happened. But I didn't have a problem with it. I couldn't have cared less what they did. The Jap was dead. It wouldn't have been too good if he'd been alive you know. Anyway he was really, truly dead.

Did you find that shocking none the less?

No, not a bit.

40:00 I had no qualms. No it was just part of a day's work. I just saw it happen, and so what.

It seems like the rules were completely different in war weren't they?

Yes. I've read stories about men going and doing things that they would never ever have done in peace time. Religious people, you know. They'd lived a good clean life but not when they got away and heard

40:30 what the Nips had done to different people. They go through it all and probably joined in.

Tape 7

00:33 **On the last tape we were talking about the things people found themselves doing. Can you tell any stories of things that happened that obviously couldn't happen in peace time?**

Oh I don't know. I really can't remember things like that. I remember one funny incident. The infantry went through this village and we followed on you know.

01:00 And we looked up and there was a Jap bent over like this, and we thought oh my God, we're going to get killed. So we stood there, and this Nip soldier didn't move. And we thought he's bloody dead so we walked up and here he was, all charred with skin like brown paper. What must have happened, a flame thrower must have zapped him, killed him and his body was still sort of preserved.

01:30 I never forgot that. That frightened us a bit too. I don't know if he had a rifle in his hands or not, but it was just like he was leaning over a rifle.

Did you hear of anything happening that you totally didn't agree with? Or thought people had maybe crossed the line a bit too much?

No never. You couldn't cross the line with the Japs anyway. Digging up their corpse and knocking their teeth out, that was all fine you know. Never

02:00 ever sympathy for them. Not even when the army would put their flame throwers down their little dug outs. What the Nips used to do, they'd grab a woman, maybe a Malayan woman or something like that, or a native of Borneo, and take them down the fox hole with them and get them to call out. "Don't come, it's only women here." The Jap would be there too, but the AIF didn't mess around. They'd go...

02:30 just give them a squirt. That happened quite a lot. They would kill the woman...she could have been a friend of the Japs, but they knew there would be Japs in there because they thought it would stop the AIF from putting the flame throwers in there. But they didn't feel any compunction about that.

You were in a unique position I suppose for a RAAF fellow to have that connection with the AIF as well.

03:00 It wouldn't happen very often. It would be unique. That's why it makes me mad when they say, oh you ground crew, you wouldn't do anything. I didn't have to be frightened a few times. I should have been frightened a few more, but your ignorant. I wasn't frightened in the air raids and that, maybe I should have been frightened. I was just being young and stupid and you don't think about these things. You're immortal.

Did the infantry guys seem different to you in their experiences

03:30 **or just them themselves, characteristically?**

No, they were just ordinary blokes, although we did look up to them. They were heroes, which they were. Oh no, we looked up to the AIF, and we'd help them when ever we could. I was great mates with this Jeff Chambers and he used to tell me a lot about the AIF, and introduce me to a lot of AIF men.

04:00 No, that was a good friendship.

Can you tell us some more about those patrols that you did? Were you frightened the first time?

Oh no. I knew I was safe because all these blokes were experienced soldiers. I think most of them had been to the Middle East. It was just one line of us. We'd go down these little trails and see what was there. We never saw any Japs, but one day we met...we were walking along and there was a group coming down this way

04:30 and we thought this is it, this is a Jap patrol. It was one of our own. Another air force one and there was an air force bloke leading the patrol. He just said, "It's all right mate, it's only us." No, that's about all we did, we'd go out on patrol. But the funniest thing, one morning I woke up and here's two of our own blokes, going hell for leather fighting each other. And the Nips were only probably quarter of a mile away.

05:00 They were stripped off and bashing at each other. One was a corporal and one was a private. They'd had a disagreement over something, I don't know what. But it was a bit incongruous that they were fighting each other when the Nips were just over the hill.

Did those blokes get in trouble for that?

No I wouldn't think so. No when you're up at the so called front line, there's heaps of things you get away with.

05:30 Things you wouldn't dare do in Australia of course. If this corporal and private had been fighting in Australia they would have got court martialled, or the private would anyway.

So how many patrols did you end up doing?

Only a few. I can't remember now. I think we might have only been there for 3 or 4 days. I think our aircraft came in and I had to go back and do my work.

06:00 And that's when...while this was going on...you've probably heard this story too. They had a little canon up in the ...I think it was Tiger Hill. I know when I went on patrol we passed it. But that was where that canon was. Anyway it was either on wheels or on a railway line. And every now and again they'd wheel this canon out and fire about 3 shells out onto the airstrip. It was only a nuisance thing. I don't think they would have killed anybody. A lot of the air force

06:30 blokes would have been there at the time when they used to wheel the canon out. I don't think I was ever working on the strip at the time, but it did happen.

Did that actually ever injure anybody or was it just more of a

No, it was only a little nuisance thing. They'd wheel this canon out and put three shells on the airstrip, and then wheel their little canon back in the cave or wherever they had it.

07:00 But it was captured not long after. Yes, I think it was on a place called Tiger Hill.

Ok, I read that the HE [High Explosive] and the napalm used to take Tarakan was more in those few short days that they had used in the entire Middle East

07:30 **campaign?**

Yes I would say so.

How did you cope with the sound or the actual physical assault on your ears?

No, that wasn't problem. The sound wasn't all that great, even when there was a naval bombardment. You could hear it all but it was never bad. I didn't think so. And when they were dropping their bombs and the napalm, that wasn't all that bad.

08:00 You were just looking at them and you'd say gee look at that. There's another one.

What is the smell of napalm?

I can't really tell you that because at Tarakan there was always an oil smell there. A very powerful smell of oil because that's what it was, an oil place. So all you could smell was oil. I smelt it for years after.

Is it like petrol in that you will conjure up

08:30 **and be taken back to a place immediately?**

Oh yes. But it was a great sight to see a naval bombardment and then an aerial bombardment. You wouldn't think anything could live, because they blasted that place I think for 2 or 3 days before we got there.

09:00 I think they bombarded it from the air. And when you look at the place and there's not a tree standing. They were cut off about 30 feet up, and you would think that nothing could live. But at Tarakan, well they did wipe everyone out along the coastline and it wasn't until they got inland that the real resistance started and we copped a lot of casualties.

It's hard to imagine because you look at the map and those islands

09:30 **seem so small.**

They do don't they.

Housing thousands and thousands of soldiers on both sides. Well speaking of thinking of nothing lives, did you ever see dead animals as a result of the bombardment?

Just outside our barracks on Tarakan there was a dead draft horse, and that's the only animal I saw. They towed that away somewhere. And that dog that I shot at once. They were the only dead animals I saw.

10:00 I don't know why they had a draft horse there but it was there.

No I don't know why either. And what about birds? Would the birds just shoot up into the sky?

No, I didn't see any birds at all. I think when the bombardment started the birds would just go. Well all their trees were cut down 20 feet up. No, not birds at all that I remember. It's

10:30 a wonder that there weren't ever any birds.

Now I'm just trying to recall the dates that you landed on Tarakan. It was March wasn't it?

Yes, 2nd or 3rd of March, and I think we left Morotai about the beginning of March or the last day of the last month before. So we had a 4 or 5 day LST trip.

I was fascinated by your stories of that before?

11:00 **Just that whole American interaction and how there was no interaction between yourselves and the navy guys there. I was looking at the photographs there. How did you place yourself on one of those. Did you just find yourself a little hidey hole and keep your head down?**

Where's this?

On the LSTs?

No, you just find room to lay down or whatever. You didn't have to worry because they were beautiful nights you know, warm.

11:30 No you just found...you could go below but you would have the smell of the petrol and diesel. But we used to sit up on top, maybe on the bed of a truck or the roof of a truck or whatever. No we didn't have a problem.

The death of 'Diver' Derrick [Sergeant Thomas Derrick, 48th Battalion, VC, Sattelberg 1943]

12:00 **I take it you didn't know him personally.**

No, but I heard about it because he got his VC [Victoria Cross] at Sattelberg and we flew over Sattelberg not all that long afterwards. No, he was a real hero. We knew of Diver Derrick because he had already won the DCM [Distinguished Conduct Medal] and then he went to the Middle East and won the VC at Sattelberg with the 2/48th Battalion.

12:30 I saw his grave. He had his little cross, KIA [Killed In Action]. And he didn't have to go there because he could have gone home with his DCM and VC being a lieutenant. But no, he wanted to stay with his men and paid the price.

So as tragic as any death is, does it hit home a little harder when someone as

13:00 **remarkable as Diver Derrick is killed in action?**

No it didn't really hit us. We just thought poor bugger you know, and the way he died. He was kept in the jungle all night...there was another bloke with him, but they couldn't get him out. I think there were bullet holes all down here. They did get him out and I don't know if he died before they got him out or what.

13:30 Anyway he died and that wasn't all that far from where we were.

Forgive me if you've mentioned that before but when you are landing in a situation like that, do they arm you at all?

Oh yes, we carried our rifles all the time. We all had a 303 and one of the unit had a tommy gun. I know my mate Bruce, he was a proud possessor of a tommy gun. I don't think he knew how to use it because he never had to, but

14:00 no, we didn't have the Australian Owen gun which was far superior. When we went with the AIF they all had the Owen gun. The tommy gun had too many moving parts in it I think.

It was World War I surplus was it not?

Yes.

You said earlier that you had already heard about the atrocities and the cruelty of the Japanese in the POW [Prisoner of War] camps, how had that filtered through to you?

I don't know.

14:30 It was just rumours you would get. Someone had told someone who had been connected with it. You just don't know how it all gets back, but you hear rumours and you take for granted that they're true. I think in this case they were true but you just hear things. You might say, "How did you find that out?" and you say well, gee.

Well what about some more tall stories. The army must have been the heartland of a good yarn

15:00 **that had no basis in reality but was worth retelling?**

Yes, I can't recall much of that. No I really can't. I'm trying to think...you get all the rumours. You have a job trying to separate truth from rumour. Even now, and even in memory you think did I see that, was I told that? Fiction becomes fact after a while.

15:30 After 60 odd years you can't separate it.

Fair enough. Well let's go back through...and I know you've been through this, but I've got some different questions. Landing on Tarakan and getting set up. How soon after setting foot on land were you somewhere safe?

Well, as soon as you landed, you might stay on the beach or you might go inland and set up. I think they stayed

16:00 on the beach in the little gunyahs that they rigged up. I don't really know because I was up on this ridge.

The more I hear you talk about that the more strange it seems that they sent you up there.

Well we had nothing else to do.

But...well I wanted to ask you about that again. What kind of view did you have from up there?

A fair view. You could look down to the oil fields and things like that.

16:30 Apart from the actual view, I know on one side it was just bush and that's where the Nips were, and on the other side it was just open country where the oil fields were, or the oil farms I think they called them.

And is the aerial battle still going on when you were up on the ridge?

No, I think that would have been just about finished. Oh no

17:00 they were still bombarding from the air when I was up on the ridge.

So did that give you a fairly interesting view of what was happening?

No more than anywhere else, I don't think. I think even from where we set up camp you could see it. And we were much closer to the Nip, although that might have been why we didn't see much up there... because we were too close and they might have been frightened of getting the

17:30 soldiers, the Australians.

And you talked a bit about fear before. I'm wondering amongst the men up on the ridge where you had to keep watch at night, do you talk about your fear with each other or do you talk

about anything but?

I just can't remember what we talked about. Half the time I was too bloody frightened to talk.

Would you let them know you were frightened though?

18:00 Oh god no. You wouldn't let on you were frightened. I used to think I was the only one who was frightened, but I don't think I was. I think there were a few others who got a good scare, but I was so young, I was only 19. A lot of the Infantry too, they were only 18 or 19, but they were trained for it whereas we weren't. Apart from our first rookies course, we didn't fire a rifle much or anything you know. Whereas the infantry blokes they would

18:30 have been drilled pretty hard, and they were used to it, where we weren't. And they walked into it too.

Did you get any ribbing for being younger?

No, I don't think so. No, I think I told you when I was 19, I was the longest serving member. I might have been nearly 20. I had my 20th birthday after the war had finished.

19:00 I had a note in my diary there. "I'm 20 today." I didn't do any work! I went and found some cucumbers and that was my 20th birthday. I must have had my 19th there somewhere too because I know I had my 18th at Laverton. Then I was posted overseas not long after I had turned 18. About a month after I think.

Was there ever any celebration of birthdays.

19:30 I don't recall it. No one seemed to mention birthdays. A little mate, little Billy Bantam. The war was nearly over and he was posted to us and we got this issue of Australian beer, and little Billy got stuck into this beer. He got hopelessly drunk on two bottles because he was told if you sipped the beer slowly it will make you drunk. So we used to try and get drunk on two bottles of beer each,

20:00 and Billy went missing. We searched all night and eventually found him in our rain barrel. Luckily it wasn't full of water, but there's little Billy sound asleep in this rain barrel.

Was he in the water at all, I mean was there any water in it?

Oh yes. There was water in it, yes. I don't even know how he got in it.

Did you get hung over at that point?

Oh yes, and to cure that you'd go down to the airstrip and start a plane up

20:30 and push the stick back and open the throttle, and you'd get this beautiful cold air come over you, then if the pilot left his oxy mask in the cockpit, you'd turn the oxy on and breathe this nice cold, clear oxygen and let the slip stream run over, and that was great. I didn't mind that one bit. You wouldn't be allowed to do that in Australia. Start a plane up.

Did you ever try that without being drunk...

21:00 **like that would give you a natural high wouldn't it?**

The oxygen? I don't know. It was the only time I ever tried it. No I don't think it would give you a natural high, because the pilots wouldn't want to get on a high because they'd want all their wits about them. It was great stuff.

Up on that ridge ok, so there's nothing discussed between you in terms of how you're feeling, do

21:30 **people in that situation, did they talk about their loved ones at home?**

No, you might know if a bloke's married, but that's about it, or got a girlfriend. No, I used to feel sorry for the married men. I know one bloke, he made a lot of money up there making little artefacts out of Perspex and toothbrush handles. He used to make little brooches and things.

22:00 He saved all this and sent it home to his wife and she cleared off with another bloke while he was still up there. I always felt sorry for that poor fella.

How would you hear about that for example? I just have a feeling that men would be circumspect about their personal life and might not share that information.

He might have told a close friend about his problem. He might have been sharing a tent.

22:30 Not my tent, but he was probably sharing a tent with someone else and probably got the letter one day where she said she had someone else, and he might have broke down and told someone. It was very true. He was a very enterprising bloke. He used to make these things out of Perspex, and he used to get a toothbrush with a coloured handle and make it into the shape of something or other you know.

23:00 A bird or a aeroplane. I used to go and sell them to the Yanks for him. I used to get a commission and I would make some sort of money. And the Yanks were very gullible. They'd spend their money on this

and that to send back to their girls in the States. Yes, so he made a lot of money.

Now you weren't serious enough with Monica to worry too much I suppose, but did it occur to you that she might be swept off her feet by an American officer?

23:30 No. No, not knowing Monica. No I never...she did go off with another air force bloke, she told me one day. He lived in the same town as her. And even now...I mean he's dead now, but she was talking to me about it the other day. She said she should have gone to his funeral but didn't. No, I never had any fear of Monica going with a Yank.

24:00 With Monica it was just a mixture of respect and admiration and affection. And that's how it was, and over the years now it's got a bit deeper...now she's on her own, it's a whole different set up. I suppose it is. But we've never consummated our friendship. Put it that way.

Well I want to deviate for a second. I want to ask you a bit more about

24:30 **making commission of sales to the Americans. Did you experience any other enterprising arrangements going on?**

Yes, the pilots would fly down south. I know one chap, he was a fairly high ranking bloke. He took all his ammunition out of his wing tanks where they fold the ammunition. He emptied that out and flew back with it full of beer.

25:00 So instead of ammunition he had bottles of whisky. He would have made a lot of money. In those days you would get 14 or 15 pounds for a bottle of whisky. And that was an enormous amount in the 1940s.

How many weeks wages would that be 14 pound?

Oh gee. Well I was getting ten and six a day. So not a lot of money.

25:30 What? Ten shillings a day, say 3 or 4 pounds a week. So fourteen pounds is a lot of money.

So more than a month's wage.

And I was lucky, I was on good money. I was pretty much the same as an army sergeant or corporal. I was in a higher mustering. I was one of the so called elite. Not that meant anything much, but it did in your pocket.

26:00 Ordinarily you would get six and six or seven shillings a day, if you got ten and six a day then that was a pretty good leap.

If that fellow was to turn up with all that alcohol in an area where rumours were rife, what sort of charge would he be put on if he got caught, and how did he not get caught?

What, just selling grog?

Well the method with which is came upon the grog?

Well he was openly published a while back

26:30 but at the time...well this bloke...he was a bit of an ace this bloke. I think he was a flight lieutenant, might have been a squadron leader. But it was a well known fact that that's what he did, this was during the war. But I don't think they would have done too much you know. Unless he ran into a Nip plane and fired a bottle of whisky instead of a bullet. It would have been his own fault.

In terms of getting drunk, I know

27:00 **it must have been hard to do it because you really didn't get access to your rations, but when was it ok, when was it sanctioned to be able to drink, or were you supposed to be on duty all the time?**

Well we never got that much so it's hard to say. There was very little alcohol because we were too far forward all the time. The Operational Base Units enjoyed all that sort of stuff. But I remember at Morotai, no, Morotai or Tarakan. I met a bloke

27:30 I went to school with at King Island. Anyway we managed to get these two bottle of Yank beer, and it's as weak as water. And he was saying, "Come on, get stuck into this, this won't hurt you. You can drink this all day." Anyhow he got himself drunk and he said, "I'm going in for a swim." So he ran along and tripped head over heels and gashed his head open and that was the last I saw of Dixie. He died not long back so he survived the war. And he reckoned the Yank beer wouldn't

28:00 hurt you.

Now look, did you have any knowledge...this is tracking back a bit...but did you have any knowledge of the Morotai Mutiny?

The Morotai Mutiny?.

Yes, the Morotai Mutiny?

No, I heard about it. As a matter of fact I was talking to a chap the other day about that. He knew all about it. I don't know whether that was when they mutinied about going home.

28:30 No, this had to do with the ship and the ship's captain. He wouldn't put them off the ship he said, I'll feed them, but I won't put them off. So that's all that happened there. But I don't know what happened because I came home on a big Liberator bomber, one of the elite.

Ok, and I also know this is back tracking but I had a question from before, and it was about these girls with 45 automatics and doughnuts.

Oh yes.

It's really a striking image.

29:00 **Did you see them or did you just hear about it?**

Yes, I saw them. I lined up for my doughnut and coke or whatever it was. They had a bloody great 45 automatic, and they were a pretty heavy weapon the 45. They had a strap down on the shoulder holster.

It just conjures up images of that film 'Apocalypse Now' and the girls came in to do the girlie show, but were they in uniform?

Oh just khaki shirt and trousers.

29:30 But I only ever saw them the once.

And did you have any idea if they were in any particular service or just volunteer aides?

I don't know whether they were part of it. They were the equivalent of our Women's Army Corps. And there were some US, but they were civilians, they were entertainers. So they would be WACs [Women's Army Corps] or something like that.

Ok.

30:00 **Now, this business of volunteering and joining the patrol. Is that something you would have done at any stage or was it as a result of getting really bored?**

Yes I would have done it. You don't have any sense at that age.

You said you didn't have the kind of training that was appropriate. So did you have any idea what you were getting yourself into?

Oh yes. We knew that the AIF got knocked around badly

30:30 and a lot were killed, 200 or 300, and a lot were wounded. We knew it wasn't going to be a picnic because we had heard about Snake Track and Tiger Hill, we had heard about these from different people. Snake Track is probably one of the best known places in Borneo. It was the track that led up to where the fighting was. We walked up on the way to where we were going to. Freda or Margie Hill, I don't know.

31:00 **So how many days patrol would you be out on?**

Only about four. We weren't up there all that long. And I think the soldiers came in for three or four days and just had to rest and slept in these sheets that I've never heard of.

How many men on the patrol unit?

I think it was a section. I think eight or nine men. I couldn't be really sure but it wasn't a lot and it wasn't just two or three.

31:30 Maybe eight.

And were you the only RAAF member amongst them?

Yes.

What was that like then? Did they treat you...were they happy to see you or with a bit of suspicion?

Sort of mixed feelings. But, like the chap there who I went to school with, and that made it a lot easier to introduce me to the others. We just sat around and talked and there was no big deal really.

I imagine that would have greased the wheel quite a bit.

32:00 Oh yes, it helped.

But it would be a fairly intimate arrangement though, a group of people out on patrol. You'd almost have to mind read each other wouldn't you?

Yes, and the poor old forward scout, poor bugger. He was right out in front, and if he got down you'd get

down and then he'd say come on. Forward scouts didn't last all that long I don't think. They would just get picked off. Same as the bloke with the Bren gun on the end. He would be

32:30 the one they'd go for...get him and then they only had ordinary rifle fire.

Was there any incidents?

No.

How many patrols did you go on?

Three or four. It wasn't a lot you know. I don't even know exactly what we did. I know we just set off in line, and you'd come to a spot and you'd look at this and that and see the Japanese

33:00 food tins. You'd know the Japs were here yesterday because everything was fresh. So that's how close we were. We didn't know how many Japs were looking at us either. They could have been up a tree somewhere, which they would do. Put a sniper up there and pick the men off.

How do you kind of maintain your intestinal fortitude when that's happening?

Oh, I don't think I had any of that much. When you're young you see things different.

33:30 **But it would still maybe effect your nerves to the point of putting you off solids for example.**

It did effect me in one way because after I came home I stuttered for about three years, four years, and that's all gone now, but there for a while I would stutter.

How badly for example, in every conversation?

No, just mainly when I had a drink.

That's an interesting...

Well, whether that's due to the

34:00 war experience, I don't know. See my experience was pretty unique. There's not many air force blokes who went through the same as the men in the squadrons. See if you were in a repair unit then you were well behind and things like that. But the men in the squadrons they had to tuck in anyway, and I wanted to be in a squadron.

Well that's interesting because I wanted...

34:30 **I do not want to offend you in anyway, but I wanted to ask you about this question of being considered to be in a cushy job and whether that came up when you were in patrol?**

I don't know. No, it was never mentioned because I think they realised that they had only been away from Australia for five minutes and we'd been away for 18 or 19 or 20 months. Which means a lot, your length of service. That's how we'd measure a bloke. We'd say "How long have you been up here?" "Oh 3 or 4 months." "Oh you don't know anything."

35:00 And we'd say, "Well, I've been up here 15 months," and they'd say, "Oh gee."

What if you had been up there say in stores for 15 months. Was that considered a passable amount of time, even if the position itself had been fairly safe?

I don't know but I rather think so. If you were in a forward area 15 months was 15 months, and it didn't depend on whether you were a pen pusher or whatever.

So did they ask you for tips?

35:30 **About how to survive in the scrub and so on?**

No. You found out yourself.

The patrolling, would that have lasted about how long?

The patrol? Oh you would go on a patrol and it might only last half a day.

No but I mean the amount of time you spent contributing to those patrols?

Oh, I was only up there a few days.

36:00 But such a lot happens in four days. You really see the war as it is. The same as when we would hear this tock tock tock at all hours of the day and night. You realise that those Nips aren't very far away.

Is it a little bit like living with the sound of police car sirens, and you get used to it?

Pretty well I imagine. Pretty well. It just had this remarkable sound,

36:30 tock tock tock. That's why the blokes called them those bloody Woodpeckers. They never seemed to stop. Night and day you'd hear it. It was just over the road there somewhere, you know. It didn't do to

think too much about it.

What was your attitude to the Japs by that stage. Did it ever get personal or did they remain this enemy...

No very impersonal. You couldn't care what happened to them you know, if they got killed with a flame thrower

37:00 or whatever. You just couldn't have cared less. It was just completely impersonal.

That image of you finding what looked like the petrified Japanese killed by the flame thrower...did it give you the opportunity to go up and have a good look at who this creature was?

I went right up to him after we found out he was dead and not alive. It was just that his skin was real taut, like stiff brown paper.

37:30 It's amazing it didn't putrefy, but it could have only happened the day before, I don't know.

I know you mentioned the teeth, but in that situation would you go through their pockets and things?

Oh no. Not through any sense of honour, it was just a matter of touching a rotten sticking corpse. That was only reason.

I mean more, did you have any orders of relieving any dead Japanese of secret papers or important helpful

38:00 **information, compasses?**

Oh yes. The army blokes would have done all that. But I don't recall them...I think they only dug this body as far as his head and took his teeth out. I don't recall them actually taking him out of the grave and going through his pockets.

And Australians have a tradition of having a pretty good sense of humour even in the most macabre of circumstances, was it

38:30 **something that was laughed about at the time?**

I wouldn't say it was laughed about, maybe talked about. But it was all in a day's work sort of thing. This time we went along and here was this group of AIF blokes stripped to the waist finding this mortar, and they did that just like it was an ordinary day's job. You're passing the mortar bomb and whoom up it goes, another one.

39:00 It might only have gone over the road because mortars wouldn't travel that far I wouldn't imagine. Yes, those things you would just take them all in a day's work.

Tape 8

00:31 **Well, let's talk a little bit about the crafty Japanese flyer coming in and you recognised the rising sun on its fuselage. Did you not have like an IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] system for working out whether they were friend or foe?**

They did have something. But this bloke wasn't picked up on the radar or anything. He just came in.

It was his lucky day.

01:00 And one flew over our camp once too on his way to strafe something. You just saw him whoom and away he went. They were pretty brave, there's no doubt about that. Well you just have to look at the Kamikaze pilots.

What was the view of those among the ground crew or even the pilots. For example do you think they would ever consider doing something like that?

No, none that I know.

01:30 **What do you think is the difference between the Japanese and ...**

Oh it's their culture. Their Shintoism and all that sort of stuff. It's bred into them, the Emperor's god, and that sort of thing. But the typical Australian, no. No way we'd do it.

After the patrols and after Tarakan has been taken, was it sort of back to business as usual for you?

02:00 Oh yes. Our aircraft were still flying. As a matter of fact they were dropping leaflets on Sandakan, that's

on the Borneo mainland. So our planes were up nearly every day.

I take it you wouldn't have had any idea of what was happening in Sandakan at the time?

No, we didn't know about the Death March. We were going to go...the rumour was...only the war finished...but we were going to go from Tarakan

02:30 to Kuching, but we never got there.

So you said that you didn't see any women in all that time. And I'm wondering about the medical setup, what was there? If there was no base hospital anywhere near by and there were no nurses anywhere near by....

No, not that I ever saw. Except the RAP, the regimental aid post. I never ever saw a nurse.

Where would the critical wounded be

03:00 **sent then from Tarakan?**

Oh they'd go on the hospital ship, the Manoora or something like that. And that is where all the nurses and doctors were with the critically injured. Or maybe...maybe they might have been flown home, but I think most of them went on one of the hospital ships, the Manoora or...I forget. One of those.

And given that you didn't see a woman for nearly two years, and a lot of the other guys would have been in the

03:30 **same boat, young men aren't supposed to be able to cope if you know what I mean without female company, how did you all cope?**

Oh well. I was very naive. I was practically a virgin all this time. I was overseas when I was 18, just when I should have been enjoying myself. The married men would have found it much harder.

04:00 But there weren't a hell of a lot of married men. Everyone seemed to be single like me, but there were married men. But yes, I think they would have done it pretty badly. I think that's why they sent them home every 15 months.

And what about the local women then. Did any of the men just simply lose it and feel the need to have some female company?

Oh yes. But their kampongs, which is camp, they were entirely out of bounds. There were prostitutes in the

04:30 kampongs, and some of our blokes went at night into the kampongs and were caught by the military police. They were arrested. I know I stood guard on one, but I don't know what happened after that, but I don't think much would have happened to him. Why should it.

So you don't think they would have been dishonourably discharged?

I don't think so.

And that's what I'm wondering. They're asking men...who science now will tell us categorically have certain needs,

05:00 **to go to a place and do without those needs for a year or so, and I just know that nature will win out at every stage. So the men must have found alternatives.**

I reckon yes.

When you were guarding this fellow, did you talk about the incident?

No, no. I just stood outside. And I knew one of the blokes too, he was from our squadron, but I didn't indulge in any conversation with him. He didn't feel like talking anyway.

05:30 Poor bugger.

Would that be the sort of stuff of rumour around the camp?

A rumour?

Yes, that such and such had gone off to one of the kampongs?

Oh yes. Well this was actual fact because I was guarding him, two of them. And they hadn't been up there for very long. They had only been up there for two or three months. I wouldn't like to have seen them if they had been away for 15 or 20.

What would the men of the village or the kampong have to say about that? Would they be allowed to take the law into

06:00 **their own hands?**

I don't think it ever came up. I went to the kampongs a couple of times and I had this family I knew, and

they fed us and we'd take some bully beef, and they'd fry up bananas and things like that. It was quite good. As a matter of fact they come around often to do our washing and we'd give them bully beef and stuff like that and they'd take our laundry away. I could speak a bit of Malayan, I

06:30 had no trouble.

And how did you start to pick up the Malay, just through them, or...

Yes just through them, and we might have had a dictionary of what to say. But mixing with the Malays when they would come to the camp we'd learn it... You would learn all the little phrases. I just about forget them all now. You know, when you don't use it. We could carry on a conversation most of us.

07:00 It's a pretty easy language, Javanese...Malayan.

What did you learn then from the Malaysians about their experiences with the Japanese?

Oh...they'd say 'malanda'. Malanda is their's for Dutch. Malanda titi mar goos... I think they were treated pretty badly.

By the Dutch did you say

07:30 **or the Japanese?**

No the Dutch. And Nippon man, he bad too. No, the old Dutchman he wasn't very popular.

And what about the allies...do you know if they could make a distinction between the Americans and the Australians?

Well there weren't too many Americans on Tarakan, or mainly Borneo. It was mainly Australians. There was a handful of Dutch and maybe

08:00 a handful of Americans. No doubt they could tell the difference. It just never came up.

What other language did you learn...you said you couldn't remember but that sounded like it came back pretty well?

Oh yes, if I was over there again. In fact I was in Singapore a few years ago and I could manage a conversation with a lot of Singaporeans because they speak Malay.

08:30 But some words you never forget like bagus... bagus, bagus, and if you want to accentuate something that's very good...like bagus is good, and if you want to say it's very good then you say bagus, bagus. Very simple.

And did you learn their names for example?

Yes, I did but I've forgotten now.

That's all right. And what else did they do for you in exchange for food?

That's about all. They would come to the camps and we'd give them bully beef.

09:00 Sometimes we'd cook for them and other times just give it too them. They'd do our washing. I don't know if there was anything they could do. No...that's about all they did for us.

Do you have any knowledge of them working for the officers in terms of letting them know where Japanese encampments were?

Oh they may have done with the army and no doubt they did. I'm pretty sure they would have done you know.

09:30 Nippon man up there, or whatever.

Ok.

That's where the word orang-utan comes from incidentally. Orang is man and utan is jungle...man of the jungle, loosely translated. We found that out when we learnt it.

Well there were orang-utans around were there not?

We had a little monkeys. There were a lot of monkeys there. This poor little bugger was bomb happy. Every time a plane would fly over he would go into spasms.

10:00 Poor little monkey.

What would it take for him to go into a spasm?

When an aircraft flew over.

Just any old aircraft?

If one would fly over fairly low, this little monkey would go into hysterics. He'd been bombed that many

times he would associate the noise of an aircraft with being bombed.

Would it ever try and attack anybody?

No, not our little monkey. He would just sit on a pole there and carry on.

And jump up and down or...

10:30 Yes, jump up and down and shriek.

What was his name?

Oh I don't think he had a name. Just the bloody monkey.

Well Australians were famous for their nicknames, did you have one?

Oh yes. Arc Royal. Arc Royal was an aircraft carrier like a flattop, and the back of my head was flat so I got from flat top to Arc Royal.

11:00 Nothing really thrilling about it.

A long one but did it stick? Did your nickname stick for the duration?

Yes, in the latter, a mate of mine started that one when we shared the tent just before the war finished.

Now, what made a fella a good bloke in the services?

Well, one, that they could tell a reasonable yarn.

11:30 One that would offer to do your work for you. That happened to me. I had to get a bloke to do my work once when the Manoora was in, and this friend of mine who got drunk and split his head open invited me onto the boat. And I used to go there for 3 or 4 days. I would get a mate of mine to do my work, to cover for me, because on board this ship I would get ice cold water and that was unheard of in the air force.

12:00 And meat for the evening meal. God almighty, that was unheard of having meat 3 or 4 times in a week. And iced water. So that was a good mate of mine that did that. He said, "You go Bill, I'll do your daily on your plane."

That is a nice thing to do for someone.

Oh yes.

What made a fella a bad bloke?

12:30 Anyone who thieved any of your stuff. There wasn't much of that done but if you did then you'd be ostracised.

That would be handled internally I imagine?

Oh yes. Yes, you wouldn't bother reporting that to an officer or anything like that. You'd keep that to yourself.

What sort of theft went on then?

Oh, well it wouldn't be money because we didn't get paid very often because we had nothing to buy with our money. But

13:00 someone might have accrued something like tins of fruit or some fresh fruit. I know one bloke, I don't know how he got it but he finished up with a thing of cornflakes one day. He was a scrounger this bloke. He had all sorts of stuff, and if someone had stolen that you know. It's not the value of the stuff, it was because supply would be very short.

13:30 **What about homosexuals in the forces. Did you ever encounter any?**

Oh yes. We had one or two in the air force. But I was pretty naïve about homosexuals. And as a matter of fact, when I had come home after the war had finished, I went out to this party, and I was talking to this bloke and that bloke, and it was only later I found out that they were all homosexuals. You know lesbians and all that. But they were ok. I've got

14:00 nothing against them. They were good people.

Oh no I'm sure. It's just that it was not talked about in the army or navy or air force I'm sure.

We had one or two maybe in our squadron. But no one took any notice. You live and let live.

And was it discussed in the way that you might discuss that someone was a bad bloke because they ripped you off, or someone was a good bloke. Was it ever discussed?

14:30 No, not to my knowledge.

A wall of silence.

I think at one stage he might have shared out tent. But there was never ever talk. He was just another one of us. I don't even know what mustering he was. He might have been a flight mechanic or an armourer...I think he was an armourer. It didn't make any difference.

And just to change weirdly, I wanted to ask about the iced water on that ship and how on earth they had iced water?

15:00 They had all their means. They had generators and electricity and all that. There would have been water coolers. I don't know how they work. It was just a little fountain and you'd put your cup under and at meal times they'd put this big slab of meat...that's peculiar to the navy I found out. In the air force it would be cut up for you but in the navy they'd plonk it on the table and you'd cut your own slices. And fresh bread too, God Almighty. These blokes have got it made.

15:30 **A bit of style by the sounds of it. In those last...no ok, whereabouts are we in regards to what's happening internationally. Are we in about July or August at this stage when you've taken Tarakan and you've been there for some time?**

When we took Tarakan?

You said that was March

16:00 March?

March '45.

Yes, that's right because we left Morotai around about Anzac Day. Funnily enough we invaded Aitape on Anzac Day so it seemed to be a bit of a pattern there.

I've gone backwards then. I need to check your...you took Aitape on Anzac Day which is

16:30 **in April. Tarakan...I thought Tarakan was after that?**

Yes. We left Morotai somewhere about Anzac Day...

Oh you mean May then. So Tarakan was in May?

I thought it was in June. It might have been May. I went out on patrol in June and the fighting was nearly over.

That's right. Now I'm back on track with it.

17:00 **So around about this time, things are really taking an interesting turn because the Japanese are definitely on the back foot. Was that obvious despite the constant tock tock of the Woodpeckers every day?**

The war was...well there were still a lot of people killed in June. A lot of the AIF were killed in June and right at the end of June. But most of them were in early June and May is when they copped it all.

Had you heard

17:30 **much about the end of the war in Europe?**

Oh yes. VP [Victory in the Pacific] day wasn't it? No, VE [Victory in Europe] day. And we were VP day. And when VP day had come along we thought wish we were down south in Melbourne where everyone was celebrating and this and that. Bruce this mate of mine, he got home. His 15 months were up and he got back.

18:00 Most of them did. It was only us later blokes who were kept up there. I missed out badly there.

So first of all VE day in Europe. When you heard about that, was it celebrated?

Not a great lot no. I don't know how long before we heard about it. I don't think it would have been that very day, although they would have been in radio contact. I don't know how long it was before we heard about VE day.

18:30 **And what about the bombing of Japan then and VP day?**

That was the best thing. And I even say now, and a lot of goodie goodies say that that should never have happened. They don't stop to think, if we hadn't have bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki we would have invaded the Japanese mainland and there would have been thousands upon thousands killed. A lot more than was lost in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japs would have fought to the last man,

19:00 and we would have bombed and bombed and bombed.

Ok, I'll just wind you back a little bit. As you said there was thousands of deaths...no not thousands, I'm exaggerating, I'm getting tired. There were many deaths still occurring all the way through June and July, and the AIF was still taking a battering. So tell me, where were you when you heard the news that Hiroshima had been bombed?

On Tarakan.

19:30 Oh yes and God the cheers went up. It was unbelievable. Look, I told you, there would have been thousands and thousands of Japs and Australians and US killed if that hadn't have happened. Well you can imagine what we saw at Tarakan. That's what it would have been like on the Japanese homeland. I think there would have been a million or more, plus a lot of allied people. No, that was a good thing.

20:00 **How did they break the news to you?**

I don't know. 'Hey have your heard this, or that'. And 'you beauty that means the war will be over in a couple of days'. Oh no, I don't know how...see we were in radio contact with the air force. I don't know what radios in the plane would pick up, but they would have got some radio messages. Well they would have been in constant

20:30 touch with headquarters ...RAAF headquarters would have radios and everything.

So it would have gone around like that.

Yes.

Can you recall what your response was at the time?

You beauty. And they would be saying, the war could be over soon. And then when the war was over, God you should have seen the island. It was alight with tracers and searchlights and there'd be 105 canons

21:00 or the anti aircraft guns would go off, and there was a lot of jubilation.

Can you recall how long that went for, the firing into the air and...

A couple of days and a couple of night. And then Gracie Fields came and visited us, and I think there must have been thousands and thousands of men who watched her. That was after the war, not long after. Just about everyone I know went and saw Gracie Fields.

21:30 **Tarakan was pretty messed up. Where would Gracie have set up the concert?**

There was some big clearing there. It was like a bowl from memory and we all sat and stood up around this big bowl. There were thousands there, many, many people It was good that. That was about the only show I did see. The Americans, Bob Hope and all that crowd were up there but

22:00 I don't think Bob went too close to the front line, or any of them.

Tell me a little about Gracie Fields' concert then, was she accompanied by a band?

From memory I don't know. I know Monty Banks...that was her husband at the time, he was there. And I remember a lot of the songs she sang. I don't know if they had a band or they played a record over the amplifiers. I don't know.

That's ok. What

22:30 **were the songs she sang?**

Oh gee. 'A Lassie from Lancashire' was one. I get a bit mixed up with her and that other famous English singer. I forget her name too.

Would that be Vera Lynn?

That's it, Vera Lynn. I get mixed up with her songs and Gracie Fields. She was a great singer Gracie Fields. I would like to listen to her now

23:00 but I never hear her. I hear Vera Lynn a bit.

That must have been a very balmy surreal atmosphere.

It was. Yes I've never forgotten that. Everyone I've spoken to since the war, "Hey did you go and see Gracie Fields?" "Yes, I was there." I don't know how many thousands there would have been but it was a lot of people anyway. Your memory gets a bit dim but you just remember huge amounts of men there.

23:30 **And would the men join in with the singing or would they be quiet?**

No, I don't recall anyone joining in. They could have done but I just don't recall it.

And what about heckling? Did they call out I love you Gracie?

I didn't hear it. I don't doubt they might have done especially the blokes up the front row, but we were way back to buggery.

For example then, was she just like a tiny speck on the stage?

Yes, we were a long way back.

24:00 **I bet there was a bit of ...**

It was well amplified. There were amplifiers all around this...like an amphitheatre from memory.

I just bet there was a bit of palm greasing to get good seats?

Oh well, yeah.

And what about...I noticed you had a couple of photographs of some Japanese fellows standing around. Was that after that?

Yes. What happened there, one of our blokes

24:30 found this Nip camera and there was a film in it so he took it back and got the film developed. And that's part of it, I had all the rest. I had about 7 or 8. They were good photos of these Japs in their full dress uniforms. That's how I came to get them.

They seemed rather relaxed.

Oh yes, the Nips took them themselves. I don't know what happened to them. I think I had 8 of them and they had beautiful uniforms on with their white shirt and all this,

25:00 and the swords. And another bloke, he looked like a private. He's there and a couple of doctors, and there was a photo of their hospital. I think they were hospital staff. They could have been doctors. There was one of a Chinese girl there. I think that was on the same reel. No, that was a bit of a find finding the camera and the film intact. We had our photo units and we all printed our own photos. If you could get them developed

25:30 it's easy to print a photo.

So that explains that. Now in those last days I imagine a number of men are going to go home soon. They've got the points or they've got good reason to be heading home. Are there sort of promises made to keep in touch?

Yes, you make those promises. I did get in touch with Bruce, but not Jeff Chambers,

26:00 which I regret because he was a hero. I don't know what happened to him, probably dead.

And do you go through a process of exchanging addresses ...

Oh yes. I've got them there in my little diary. There's a bloke called Darky and Bruce Lairds of course, and others I've got their address there. I was in Sydney once staying with my daughter and there were a lot of Lairds

26:30 in the phonebook and I struck the right Laird, and it was Bruce and he came all the way in from Manly somewhere to pick me, where I was staying with my daughter at Mosman, and we had a night out together. That was great.

So what's it like then with all these fellas suddenly leaving. Often turning up to camp and there would be another lot gone?

Well there was no feeling of sadness that I recall. I just thought how lucky they were to be going.

27:00 I know one bloke, he was a corporal. He was a fitter and went from Tarakan to Morotai and his plane sunk. It suddenly developed engine problems and they landed in the sea. Anyhow, I think they found him after a couple of days and sent a boat out and picked him up and took him home. But he lost all his own little possessions you know. That was the sad part about it.

Well it would have been sadder if he had died

27:30 **after the end of the war?**

Oh yes.

Do you know if that happened at all?

I know one or two of our pilots got killed after the war. They were good pilots too. They went back to Sale I think it was, after the war and they got killed in some little aircraft accident. Probably others did too but I've never heard about it.

What about incidents of Japanese aggression after the surrender? Was that to your knowledge?

28:00 I don't recall, not at Tarakan. They were just about all dead you know, or taken prisoner. Although I don't think the AIF liked taking prisoners. But there might have been one or two isolated cases, the ones who didn't know the war was over actually. That happened quite a bit. Not only in Tarakan but all through, you know the Philippine Islands and everywhere. I think even in New Guinea. Up to a few years ago they were still finding Japs there who didn't know the war was over.

28:30 **Did you see any Japanese POW's taken in Tarakan?**

No. I saw them at Aitape. But no, although they would have had a prisoner of war compound there. But no I didn't see any.

OK. How were you coping with the fact that you were stuck on Tarakan and everyone else was going

29:00 **home after the war?**

I took it badly you know. After 20 months away and I had just turned 20.

Why was that? I mean you weren't married or anything but surely you had the points to go home?

Well I did. But they took the married men first. I don't know what points they would have had. But I didn't get home until...in fact I was lucky getting home when I did, because my sister was very ill and I got a telegram to say

29:30 that she was very ill, and I showed it to the Adjutant and he believed me because I started to cry, and I got home a little bit earlier than what I did. I'd had enough too because it was fairly late in the piece when I got back.

Now I think you said before or I read it in your memoirs, some high jinks you got up to in that period of time involving in one case, a jeep, and

30:00 **another case a Wirraway?**

Oh yes the old Wirraschmitt. God knows where it came from. It just arrived. The same as our little dinghy, it just arrived. And as far as the jeeps go, you know. Everything was just tossed on the beach and you could just go along and get hold of a jeep, and if you had some paint you could paint HU, that was our squadron.

30:30 I didn't bother with this one so the military police took it off us.

Was HU, was that an acronym for something?

No, just the squadron. HU was 78 Squadron and GA was 75 Squadron. BU was 80 Squadron. And then there would be Y, or HUY was my plane. Or HUT and that was how you identified the different aircraft.

31:00 **Being a bit of a scrounger myself I can only imagine that after the war's finished if there's thing left all over the place...**

Yes there was.

So was it just a situation like...what do you call it, owner owners, or buyer beware of finders keepers?

Yes. There would have been a lot of stuff left behind. Particularly aircraft and they would have soon been stripped. The natives would have stripped those

31:30 of the guns and things like that, if we didn't ourselves. I don't know what happened.

Well did you see any incidents of the locals turning out to salvage some of the goods?

No I didn't. No, the natives left us pretty well alone except in Tarakan because they were more or less civilised and they would come through the camp. But in New Guinea, no, you would see very few.

32:00 **Ok, and just back to that Wirraway situation again, how many joy rides did you manage in that?**

I went up twice, actually flew it once. Got up there and the pilot said...I forget his name, it could have been Les Vaughan or one of the others. He said, "Do you want to have a go?" And I said, "Yeah." So he said, "You've got hold of the control column." So I took the control column and just flew along. That was easy but landing and take off was a different story. No there's no big deal flying an aeroplane.

Was it satisfying after all that time fixing them up?

32:30 Yes, it was good. Real good.

You didn't think about flying all the way home?

No.

Did the food improve at that stage or did things start to get difficult to get because of the supply ships?

Yes, food improved a little bit. We started to get fresh meat, a bit more often. The first time I had fresh meat I was terribly sick.

33:00 I hadn't had fresh meat for so long and I had a go at this bloody dead horse...I'm sure it was horse because it was real course, you know. But it tasted good.

How would they cook that for example. Would it be barbequed or...

Oh I don't know. All I know it was just food. I would think they had some sort of oven affair.

And what about other luxuries after the war, did they become readily available?

33:30 No, we actually had a canteen, had chocolate and this and that, and you could buy this. So that was great to be able to get chocolate. You missed chocolate a fair bit. I was always a sweet tooth. Oh no, things got a lot easier. Once the war was over the supply ships started to bring stuff in and the aircraft, the Douglas brought in most of our stuff.

34:00 Every time you saw a Douglas come in you'd say, hello I reckon our mail's in that.

What do your parents make of the fact that you're still not home? Are you parents writing to you asking why you're not coming home yet and what can they do about it?

Yes, as a matter of fact I let them down badly. They had a hotel here in Beaconsfield and I was supposed to come home. And because of Monica I stayed

34:30 in Melbourne for a couple more days. They came up to meet me and I wasn't there.

Well let's talk about getting your posting home then, how did that come about? Do you just get a note or does an officer turn up and say, Soden you're out of here?

I just forget how they told us...even in Australia postings to different places. I think we

35:00 might have got a slip of paper saying to report to such and such a place at 1700 hours or whatever. I just really forget.

Well tell me about your trip home then.

Yes. We left Tarakan back to Morotai to an operational base unit. I tried to find our old camp but couldn't find it. The jungle just completely took it over after a month or two.

35:30 So you wait, wait, wait, and you go out to the airstrip to see if you could get a ride on a Liberator, and at last I got a ride on a Liberator, you know, the big bomber. And we flew all day I think or all night? I know we had tea in Darwin and then flew all night to Laverton. And half way across we got a petrol leak. Where we were, we were in the bomb bays

36:00 and all we had were a couple of slats to sit on. Anyway with these fumes they had to open the bomb bay doors to let the fumes out. And there we are, nothing between us and the ground but the slats. After a while it got cold too but then they closed the bomb bays up and that was it. We landed at Laverton about 8 o'clock the next morning.

Were you afraid you'd fall through?

36:30 Yeah a little bit. Not to all that extent. At one stage I crawled through up to the nose of the aircraft where normally someone sits, the navigator or the bomb aimer or something, and I travelled all over Australia laying in there. That was good.

Could you see out from there?

Oh yeah, yeah. I could see the ground such as it was, a lot of red dirt.

What about the stop over in Darwin...I can't even recall,

37:00 **you hadn't been to Darwin before I don't think?**

No, not ever.

So what did you see there?

No, nothing. We just landed there and they brought us something to eat, refuelled and back in the plane and off. We were only there for an hour and a half or something.

Was it a good feeling going back amongst the other men you were flying with or was everyone just over it and wanting to get back home?

All we wanted to do was get home. As a matter of fact we had a few POW's who sat up one end of the aircraft. They wouldn't speak to us,

37:30 poor crows they just huddled there. It affected them pretty badly.

Did you know then what had happened?

We knew they were POW's. They'd been on the Burma Railway or Changi or somewhere or other. Oh no that altered their personalities no doubt.

But did you know looking at them anything of their story or ...

No they wouldn't talk to us. And I think we might have been told not to approach them.

38:00 Just leave them be.

Tape 9

00:33 **The climate must have been a bit of a shock?**

Back here? Froze. Forget what time of the year. It wasn't the middle of winter but it was cold. We got out of the plane at Laverton...although it was cold all the way actually, so we didn't notice a big difference but it was cold. Yes, and then I went on 40 days leave. That was all the leave I had accrued all the time I was away.

Did they

01:00 **give you any preparation for returning back. Did they give you a better set of clothing to come home in for the cold weather?**

No, not until we got back. I think when we got back we got re-kitted. I think that one of Monica, I've got an overcoat on and everything, so we must have been outfitted again.

And did anybody meet you at Laverton?

No.

01:30 Oh they might have done because I would have had to get from Laverton back into Melbourne. I don't recall going the same as I did when I was stationed there. No, it could have been an air force transport. It took us right to the, what's called Rangeford. And on my papers it says I was at Rangeford for nearly 45 days or something. I've never been to Rangeford, then I found out later they renamed it. It was the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

02:00 They called it Rangeford. Poor old Melbourne Cricket Ground. That housed the Yanks and the marines when they came back from Guadalcanal and it housed us as a discharge centre.

What time of year is it that you come back to Australia?

Look, I would have to look at my diary. I can do that. So it was just getting on towards

02:30 summer. September isn't it.

Now your sister who was critically ill. What was wrong with her?

She had a twisted bowel. It was very serious as a matter of fact. I was really upset. I forget who sent me the telegram, my mother or brother or father. But when I showed it to the old Adjutant he said, "Look I'll get you on the first plane out." Which he did, but then I had to wait at Morotai to get a ...

03:00 to hitch hike a plane back to Melbourne.

So when you're back in Melbourne, you said your folks were a bit annoyed that you didn't go straight back to Tassie, so what did you do?

Oh, I don't know where I stayed. But I stayed there and took Betty Flynn out and then took Monica out a couple of times. And funnily enough after that that's when Monica and I parted company.

03:30 **What did you tell her about Betty?**

No, I told her the other day as a matter of fact and she perked her ears up. No, I had my 40 days leave and then I went back to Point Cook just out of Melbourne. I was there for about 2 or 3 months. Because I was still in the air force in 1946. I saw Monica in all that time, and then I came home and got discharged and

04:00 Monica's family moved to Yarram in Victoria, and then that was it, we parted company. It was 15 or 20 years before we started making contact again. Sometimes it would be the instigation by one of us and sometimes it would just be a fluke, like playing golf or something like that. But we were just in touch all the years and here we are still in touch. I've spent more time with Monica in the last three months

04:30 than I did the whole 60 years I knew her before.

So...what did you sort of make of your experience after you got back. Were you the man you wanted to be? Was being a returned soldier what you thought it would be?

Yes, I badly wanted to be a returned soldier. No, I was just glad I did it. I thought, I'm home, I'm safe.

05:00 And that's about all you can say about. But they were the best years of my life. From when I was 15 to 20, you know, the few years at King Island and then the air force, they were good years.

And did the war make much sense to you after you got back? Did you think it achieved something?

I never thought about it much. You see we were forced into the war.

05:30 Well, so were the Yanks at Pearl Harbour, but the Nips invaded Singapore, and that. But we were very lucky that they didn't land in Australia, and if it hadn't been for the Battle of the Coral Sea where the Yanks saved us, I don't think there's any doubt about that. But at the same time I don't think the Yanks saved us because they liked us. I think they just wanted to use Australia as a gigantic staging camp to get back to the Japanese mainland. They saved us but

06:00 they wanted to use us as a base.

And had Melbourne changed very much when you got back?

Oh yes.

In what ways?

The days were gone when you would get invited out to people's places. There was just a subtle change. It was a very friendly place. It wasn't unfriendly when we got back but it just wasn't the same.

06:30 It was a marvellous place Melbourne. I used to go down to Luna Park, the Zoo. There were so many things and places to do, and it would cost you practically nothing you know. The Zoo was free. Luna Park cost you a little bit.

When you had been in the service during the war and you mentioned that you could kind of go anywhere, that you had a kind of a passport to anywhere. Was that still the same when

07:00 **you got back?**

It changed a little. The houses weren't thrown open to you like they were before. The war was over and rightly so. A lot of the people were getting discharged, and the houses weren't open like they were before. But they were tremendous those people.

A lot of fellas just wanted to come back, find a girl and get married.

Yes, yes.

07:30 Yes, unfortunately all we wanted to do was get married and most of us were too young.

Do you think you were still too young then?

Yes.

So you had been to war but you felt too young to marry, well that sort of sums it up doesn't it?

I don't think you should get married until you're about 25.

What about Tasmania. You managed to get back there during your 40 days leave I imagine.

08:00 **And did your sister, did she improve?**

Oh yes, she got over it. She's living at Ballina at present.

You had a brother who was in the services too. What was his story. Did he come home safely?

Oh yes. He served in Darwin and had a pretty dull existence being stationed in Darwin. I wanted to be up there where the action

08:30 was. No he survived it all right and came home. He lived and worked in Sydney. Then he and a few mates won a big lottery in Sydney and came back to Tasmania and spent his money and spent his last few days where he came from. He was a diabetic and it killed him a few years back, and that was that.

So did you find it a little bit hard to settle down

09:00 **though?**

Yes I did. A lot of us did, we were all pretty wild.

Do you think you were bomb happy?

No, I just think we were just a bit wild after what we had been through. You didn't want authority. You just hated authority, the figure. You were so wild you wouldn't do this and you wouldn't do that.

What about the law, did you run into trouble there?

09:30 Only once. My father had the hotel in Beaconsfield and the police...we had a sergeant of police and he

used to come...the only crime in Beaconsfield in those days was drinking after 10 o'clock or drinking under age. That was the crime scene. Anyway this policeman came in and said, "Close the bar!" And I really took to him, not physically but I really did sound off and

10:00 Dad intervened and said, "Hey, look he's just come back and he's been away for nearly two years." So they forgot about. But I was put out with this authority.

I can imagine. And were you treated as a bit of a war hero amongst your family and friends?

I don't think so. No. I never put myself down as any sort of hero.

But I was wondering just in that small enclave whether they were fairly delighted with what you had done?

Oh no. I don't recall.

10:30 There were so many of us anyway. You can't have a town full of heroes. As long as it's been interesting there's no harm done.

So long as you're enjoying the experience?

Yes, it's all right to talk about it, I don't mind. So long as it goes over all right and it's worth your while.

Did you find you talked about it much immediately after the war?

11:00 Not a lot. No I haven't talked about it. As a matter of fact the last...since I got back with Monica, I've told her things that I've never told anybody else. Just how things go you know. Mainly because we've known each other for so long, and had so much in common, and then you can talk about things. I've never mentioned a lot of things to anybody. I never thought it was interesting enough anyway.

Do you think it's the idea that there's no interest or

11:30 **you just don't talk about it?**

Oh, there's no interest to me really, unless I'm talking to someone else who was in the squadron, or a squadron at the same time, so you have a bit in common and you talk. But apart from that I wouldn't dream of discussing it with a civilian.

Did you have much to do with the RSL [Returned and Services League] or your unit after the war?

Not with the squadron, but I go to the RSL every now and again,

12:00 but almost a thing of the past now because we're all old, except the Vietnam chaps, they're reasonably young.

What have you got out of that, going to the RSL?

What have I got out of it? Oh nothing much. Oh the little outings and things like that, you know. They've got a bus trip down to Swansea next month or something.

12:30 We have these barbeques and things. But that's about it, it's pretty low key. I don't worry about it too much. I don't know...I only know one or two who were in the air force with me, so I haven't got a lot in common with anybody.

Especially after the war, straight away, but also generally, did you notice a difference between service people and non service people?

No.

13:00 I haven't. No, even chaps my age. Sometimes I don't know if they're ex-servicemen, except on Anzac Day. We put all our medals on and then you know where they've been, sort of thing.

Have you been pretty active on Anzac Days?

Pretty active?

Have you marched?

Oh I march at the Dawn Service but now I don't. I go to the half past eleven one.

13:30 And then we go down to the Senior Cit's meeting rooms and put a barrel on and I stay there with a couple of mates until it's all gone, and then that's Anzac Day. We don't have race days. When I was a kid at King Island we used to have races and one town or school would compete against another but that's all gone. There's not much in Anzac Day any more. Capturing your lost youth.

14:00 **Do you go into Lonny for that or is it up here?**

No up here. I went to Launceston once, I forget why, for some reason. Yes, I went up there 2 or 3 times but with the way the drinking laws are now so long as you could drive you were ok. But not any more.

After six beers you're gone, on the breathalyser.

14:30 **When you came back did you find that your relationship with your dad and brother had changed because you had all been serving?**

No, it didn't change. Not that I know of. No, nothing seemed to change. You're just back and all of a sudden you're out of uniform and you have to work for a living. And you're not looked after like you were in the air force.

15:00 You were fed and paid and clothed. That was the good part about it.

Did you feel pretty loose, cut free?

Oh yes, you feel different all together. It was a funny feeling after being in uniform for so long, and all of a sudden you're a civilian and you have to go out and find work.

15:30 **It must have been difficult for you too coming back to Tasmania when a lot of your squadron mates probably weren't from here?**

There was only...I don't know of anyone in the squadron from Tasmania. I know one or two were in the same wing. Another bloke was in one of the other operational base units. I see him now and again. Yes, they were about the only two who were in the same theatre.

16:00 And you miss it too. It would be nice to be in a squadron where they are together but they don't have them. I think every now and again they have one in Brisbane or somewhere, but I don't think it's a big deal. See we're getting all too old to have a few beers with. I know now when I have a few beers all I want to do is go to sleep. Not much life in me.

Who have you kept contact with?

16:30 No, only Bruce Laird. I went to see Bruce. But apart from that no. There's really no one now. There was a chap who was in 75 Squadron but he doesn't remember much about it and I can't really talk to him much about it. One chap from the OBU, he was the President of the RSL, I had a really good talk to him. He remembers everything.

17:00 He took a diary and wrote in it while he was away like I did. It was a shame it wasn't like the army where you'd be all from the one place.

I'm intrigued by you keeping a diary too. It doesn't seem that common really. Did it help you?

Oh yes. It's nice to look back on it you know. Every once in a while every few years something will come up and I'll see if I've got that in my diary, and oh yes, that happened. Or

17:30 you know.

I was also wondering about the process of writing your memoirs and going over it and putting it all in words as well. How did you find that experience?

Yes well, I wanted to write. I've written a few essays. I wanted to get my Bachelor of Arts. Because I didn't have enough education, I had to write some essays until they accepted me.

18:00 I was running the caravan park at that time so I had to drop out from the external course. So I decided to write the book and a few short stories. I wrote it all in longhand and then a friend of mine, Jane Exeter, edited it for me and she did a good job too. But we had a row too because she wanted to put something in and I said that's woman stuff, this is about a man. Anyway mostly we got it my way as it should be.

18:30 **You did well to beat an editor.**

Yes. She did well on that. Well she used to run her own talk back radio programme a few years back with 7LA and she was pretty knowledgeable....I've written a story since....oh it was in that and you would have read it...The 'Taking of Tarakan'. I wrote that a long time afterwards.

19:00 And the diary was handy for that because there were little excerpts in that about where I was and what I did, you know.

Did you find all those memories come flooding back when you're sitting down to write about it?

Yes it does. Once you sit down, yes. Once you get going everything sort of flows out you know. Your pencil can't keep up with thoughts sort of thing.

19:30 I've written a few short stories too. One or two about the war and one or two about football, and different things. But I didn't publish anything.

It seems to be it would be quite a beneficial thing for veterans to do, to sit down and write them out?

I think it would be. I think it would be, especially those who went through the mill. I don't mean a bloke who was only overseas for two or three months, but anyone who went through it, especially the army chaps who went through hell at Tarakan.

20:00 Not only Tarakan. But it would do them the world of good to just sit down and let it all come out.

Do you think it's been beneficial for you. You seem very well adjusted.

I don't know. I don't think I'm very well adjusted, I don't think.

How do you mean?

Oh I don't know. I don't really know. I get very nervy. I get nightmares at night. For a long time after the war all I would do is dream about dead Japs,

20:30 and I'd thrash and...when I was away with Monica, we shared the same room, didn't share the same bed of course, and she said, "You're a terrible man to sleep with," and I said, "I didn't sleep with you," and she said, "Well in the same room." She said I would thrash about and call out, and one night I was calling out for the police. Bugged if I know. And my nerves aren't too good.

Could you describe one of those dreams about the dead Japanese?

21:00 They were always dead and I dream they were in coffins up in trees. You would see up in parts of New Guinea there, the natives would be put in a thing up in the trees. Well I used to dream about the Japs having their little sleep up in the trees. But that's a few years now since I had them. I dream about more mundane things now.

Did you find in those dreams that you were afraid?

21:30 Yes, terribly afraid, yes. Someone was after me and I'd hate to be Monica because I used to have nightmares about Monica. I couldn't find her. She'd be somewhere and I couldn't find her, but I haven't had one of those for about 10 years, so I've adjusted there.

This is kind of a broad question but how do you feel the war affected you or changed you? It's a pretty big chunk of anyone's life

22:00 **from 18 to 20.**

It is. The vital years. You see I don't feel I was ever a teenager. Or I was a teenager but from 17 to 20, I was away, and then the years before that working in the coal mine and that wasn't much of a teenage life, work all the time. I feel a bit cheated out of my youth. Whether I was or not I don't know. But I feel that sometimes,

22:30 that I wasn't your typical teenager.

I was wondering what positive effects there might have been from your war experience?

Apart from learning how to splice tow ropes, I don't think much. I learnt how to do a back stitch and herringbone stitch.

On a personal level what do you think you might have gained from it?

Oh I don't think I gained anything. I really don't.

23:00 I got a disability pension out of it and I suppose that's made up for it. I get a 100% disability pension and that makes me comfortable. So I can thank the war for that.

Can you tell us what that's related to?

No, not really. Just an assortment of different things.

Ok. But would you say you had an entirely negative experience? It doesn't seem like it...

Oh no. Not a negative

23:30 experience. No. When I look back it was all positive, I think, you know.

Do you think you had a good war?

Yes, yes. Well...figuratively speaking I had a good war, but no, apart from the few times when I was absolutely frightened, it was a good war. At the time it was a good war, but looking back

24:00 on it, I can remember the good times. There were some times....one time we got food parcels and they were left out in a clearing and it rained so you couldn't read who they were addressed to, so everyone took one parcel each. I don't know who's I finished up with but it was really nice. Some poor mother sent her son a cake and I ate it. But it was nice, and I suppose someone got mine you know.

24:30 So you take the good with the bad.

I've heard this phrase a couple of times now, a good war. What do you think makes it...what is a good war? Why is it good compared to other people's war?

Well shared experiences. Even sharing those few nights on the ridge, that was something and sharing all the other bits and pieces. Your first air raid. It's all part of a good memory. Might not be for some people.

25:00 but for me it was.

Do you personally know of anyone who had a pretty rough trot during the war?

Well I don't, not in the air force, but no doubt there were with the army blokes. Especially the POW's, that was a shocking war. If the war had have gone for another two months, if they hadn't dropped the two atom bombs, I doubt if any POW's would have survived. I honestly believe that because they were on their last legs of life.

25:30 They would have carked it. They had a pretty rough time. I don't think I would have survived it, I wouldn't have been strong enough. But they did, most of them.

You might not have thought you could have done 20 months overseas either when you were 17. You don't know.

Well that's true.

26:00 Probably a bit tougher physically when you're 18 or 19, I don't know.

That's pretty much all my questions now. I was just wondering about a really broad question. How do you feel the war changed Australia?

That's a difficult question.

26:30 It made us more dependent on the Americans because we all know, or should know, that the Americans saved Australia and for whatever reason, it doesn't matter. But we realised just how dependent we can be on other nations. I mean we know how many people there are in Indonesia. That worries me because I think God look what we have in Australia. Even during the war we couldn't do much. All that stuff was American, most of our war ships and our aircraft.

27:00 Or a lot of them, all American. And I thought well if Indonesia attacks us just what have we got. We'll have to call on the old Uncle Yank again, Uncle Sam's men. That worries me, Indonesia. We never did have really friendly relations with Indonesia. I don't think we did. God, there's that many of them. Millions of them.

27:30 So in our case I don't know how we could ever defend ourselves, not with the few aircraft we've got. However, that's why [Prime Minister] Johnny Howard's being so good to the Yanks. There's method in his madness. The time might come when we want them as our allies. But I'm not a politician so I don't really know.

Well thanks so much for that.

INTERVIEW ENDS