Australians at War Film Archive

Richard Cresswell (Dick) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **Thanks very much for talking to us. We can't do it without you, and it's a real pleasure to meet you. Can we start with where you were born?**

Yes. Sure.

Yes, talk away. I'll prompt you with some questions.

01:00 I was born 1920 in a little village called Franklin Village, about four miles south of Launceston in Tasmania. When I was about four years old my father died, so my mother took me to the UK, and I stayed with an aunt there for two or three years before I came back to Sydney. Those days were fairly hectic for Mother and myself, because it was the start of the Depression,

01:30 and we weren't that well off. So I went to school in Manly and Manly West, and Double Bay and eventually when I was just coming up to eighteen years of age, I decided to join the Air Force.

Did you have any siblings?

No, I was the only child of that marriage. My father was forty nine when he married Mother, who was then about twenty eight. She was a de Havilland. She'd flown in 1911.

02:00 So that's probably where I got my bloody ideas about flying from. But anyway, Mother and I settled in Sydney, until I joined the Air Force when I was about eleven days under age when I joined the Air Force. So I still haven't been paid for the first eleven days. That was the 16th July, 1938. That's roughly my early life story. Nothing interesting.

02:30 **We'll come back and talk about that in some detail. Perhaps you could take me through a summary of your service life.**

I joined number 24 course, pre-war cadet course, based in Point Cook in those days. That's where the cadet college was, it was a year's course, and a pretty extensive one too. Initially I learnt to fly on DH60s, which is the Moths, de Havilland Moth.

03:00 That was our initial trainer. The advanced one was a thing called Western Wapiti, great big bi-plane, and these Wapitis were used by all sorts of frontier by the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force], and they came to us after they'd finished with them. Interesting course. It was a very hard course. Met a lot of friends on that course. Still two alive. And from there I was posted to 3 Squadron,

03:30 and that was a Demon Squadron, Army Cop Squadron, based at Richmond, New South Wales. By that time, of course, war had broken out and so they decided to make me an instructor. Initially a Navy instructor, again at Point Cook, and then to CFS [Central Flying School] Camden, to do instructors. So the next nineteen months I spent at Wagga, which is No. 2 Service Training Flying School [part of EATS, the Empire Air Training Scheme],

04:00 commanded by Wing Commander Frederick Scherger [later Air Chief Marshal Sir Frederick Scherger; Chief of Air Staff, 1957-61], who was a marvellous CO [Commanding Officer], really was. And from there I was posted to the Americans in 1942, the first American Fighter Wing to come to Australia which was the 49th Fighter Group, as a liaison officer and instructor, and from there to 77 Squadron in Perth, so I spent about nineteen months with 77 Squadron, back to Australia to the Fighter OTU [Officer Training Unit]

04:30 at Mildura as Chief Flying Instructor, and a few months later, in early 1944, up to Darwin, Wing Leader of the Spitfire Wing. At about that time they decided to make me Formation Commander of 81 Fighter Wing, which was a B-40 Kittyhawk Wing, then to be based at Darwin. It never happened.

05:00 They [the wing] went to Townsville, so I stayed at that wing for a while as Commanding Officer, then Wing Leader, until March '45, and came back to Australia to do a Staff College course, and that was

roughly my wartime experience.

Can you just elaborate and give us a little bit more detail of where you went with 77 Squadron, and when?

05:30 Yes. 77 Squadron was formed by an RAAF Squadron Leader, who stayed there about three or four weeks, and then they gave it to me. In April ’42. No, we formed in Perth at Pearce [Aerodrome], whilst there they decided that Pearce was a target, therefore moved me out. So I took over the Dunreith golf course, just out of Perth which is now, of course, the main aerodrome.

06:00 I took over two or three beautiful houses there, four messes and quarters, and so on and so forth, and we formed two fairways into a good runway, about three thousand feet, so we could operate the Kittyhawks, and in July ’42, I was told we’ve got to move to Darwin. So I was told by the OC [Officer Commanding], he was a bloke called,

06:30 Nick, up to Darwin and find out what’s there. When I got there, a bloke called Dad Bladen, Air Commodore Bladen then, he was OC of North Western area. He said, ‘There’s nothing here, Cresswell. Build the lot’. So I got back to Pearce, got hold of five good capable people, gave them up to sixth three thousand pounds to spend,

07:00 they went across to Adelaide. They bought everything. Utilities, beds, palliasses, straw, ton and a half of beer, tools, everything. Especially trench tools, that sort of thing. So that’s how we started off, by buying all our own stuff for the squadron. And we eventually moved to Darwin in August, ’42. And between Alice Springs and Darwin, there was a dirt road, just dirt, there was no road at all.

07:30 It was a good navigational aid because you could see the dust rising from the road as the trucks were going up. Anyway it took thirteen days to get the squadron, by train, by road, and by air, to Darwin. And I was slightly abused by the then Chief of the Air Force, a bloke called [Air Marshal George] Jones, ‘why did I take so long?’ So “Dad” Bladen, the OAC [Air Officer Commanding] at North Western area said, ‘What’s your answer? So I said, ‘Send the CS [Company Sergeant] a map of Australia’.

08:00 Which he did. So, that CS and I have never talked. Never liked each other. At Darwin, we were there from August ’42 to January ’43, and we didn’t experience any daylight air raids at all, but they did come at night. And I was the only night flying, night pilot available, or trained, so I got an aircraft one night in

08:30 late ’42, November ’42, and shot down one Betty Bomber [code for a Japanese Mitsubishi G4M bomber]. And that was our first victory, and the only one in Darwin. In January, by ship to Townsville, to Milne Bay, the aircraft flown to Amberley, Queensland, we refitted a new model of the B4, the Kittyhawk, the model K,

09:00 and in February ’43, we arrived at Milne Bay, took over from the Yanks [Americans] that had been there, and we stayed there about three months, then to Goodenough Island, north of Milne Bay, and I came back in September ’42, back to Australia, to the OTU. They’d had the squad there for nineteen months.

Where was that?

The OTU?

Yes,

At Mildura, in Victoria. I went to 2OTU, Fighter OTU. The extensive operational period of that nineteen months was Milne Bay, Goodenough. That’s where we were based and we flew a lot of bloody missions across to the south coast of New Britain. Looking for enemy transport ships, small boats. Concentrations of enemy.

10:00 Lost a couple of blokes over there, including the future CO. I’d picked Daryl Sproule, who was my Senior Flight Commander to take over from me. It was agreed to by the Air Force. He was also a Tasmanian, as it turned out. Unfortunately, the last trip I did I had six, the Wing Leader had six, we were ten minutes apart. Daryl Sproule had six aircraft and he was shot down, and later beheaded by the Japanese.

10:30 So I kept it going until a bloke called Buster Brown, or Bruce Brown came up. Whom you’ve just interviewed this week, I think, and he took over the squadron from me. So that was the 77 Squadron period, and then, of course, I had the squadron again in Korea, for fifteen, fourteen, months. But that came later.

What did you do between the . . .?

Well, in ’45 I came back, March ’45, did my staff course at Mount Martha, which was where the Staff College was, went in as Director of Training in Melbourne, in charge of all the fighter areas, and then, where did I go from there? Oh, Williamtown. I was posted to Williamtown in 1946,

11:30 stayed there for two years, I was CO for about a year, where we trained pilots for the [British Commonwealth] Occupation Force in Japan. We had three squadrons in Japan, the Occupation Force, and the 77/82 and 76 Squadron. After ’48, posted to, become a member of the Directing Staff at

12:00 the new RAAF Staff College being formed at Point Cook. So from ’49 to early ’50 I was back at Point

Cook again. And I knew the Air Force realised I didn't like being a bloody staff officer, so they posted me to take over 21 Squadron, which was Assistant Air Force Squadron at Laverton. It had Mustangs, and later on, Mustang Vampire jets,

12:30 so I stayed there until the then CO of 77 Squadron was killed in Korea, a bloke called Bruce Spence, and the next thing I knew I was told, this is on Sunday morning, told to leave on Monday for Japan. And three months later I was told I had volunteered. So I stayed in Japan, with the squadron, Japan and Korea,

13:00 from September '50 through to October '51. And that was another hard exercise, because we initially were the only Mustang squadron in Japan. The Yanks had transferred their Mustang squadrons to F80s, their first jets, called the Shooting Star. In the end they had to transfer five of their squadrons

13:30 back to Mustangs, because Mustangs were the only aircraft then capable of carrying the weapons load necessary to stop the Koreans from coming down in Korea. We had several moves in the Korean campaign. Initially we operated from Iwakuni, which was the Air Force base in southern Japan,

14:00 so it was an hour's flight across in the morning, and an hour and a quarter back in the afternoon, and we generally did two or three missions. Of course, they used to land at a place called Taegu. Where we were re-armed and re-fuelled by the Americans. And they were long hard days, because it was about quarter past four in the morning to about half past six at night. And I was flying each day, so it was a pretty tiring sort of period for most of us.

14:30 We were then transferred as a member of an American Fighter group, a Mustang aircraft, 35th Fighter Group to Pohang. That was on the east coast of Korea. And we operated from there for a couple of months, but the group was transferred to Hamhung, in North Korea. Near the Chosen Reservoir, and there was an interesting story there. Because the Chinese hordes

15:00 were coming in, and at once stage of the game, we finished up with the only squadron actually operating out of the three Mustang squadrons. The Yanks had sort of, gone south. So we got, we evacuated Hamhung, the strip was called Yompo, Y-O-M-P-O, down to Pusan. And we were there until April '51,

15:30 again doing long trips. Sometimes, the longest trip I ever did in a Mustang was eight and a quarter hours. Wasn't bad for a fighter aircraft. I finished up with a pretty sore bum, of course, with a bloody CO2 bottle for the dinghy stuck up the back end. But there were lots of long jobs, three, three and a half, four hours. And we flew and operated all over Korea.

16:00 There was no specific target area. We were just told, we went where we were sent. In April, I took the squadron back to Iwakuni [Japan]. And transferred the squadron to a [Gloster] Meteor jet, British jet. It wasn't the aircraft I wanted. I wanted the American [F-86] Sabre, but they just weren't available. So we operated the Meteor jet right through from

16:30 July '51, to the end of the war, which was July '53. We lost about thirteen Mustang pilots in the Mustang days, and about twenty six in the Meteor days. We lost a lot of aircraft. We lost about fourteen or fifteen Mustangs,

17:00 and about forty six Meteors in that three-year period, in the total Korean War. It was interesting flying the Meteor, because an inferior aircraft then to the Russian MiG 15 [fighter]. I only flew them for a while, because I was transferred to the American forces for a while. But the blokes that flew the Meteor,

17:30 they liked it, they thought it was a fairly rugged aircraft, and it was safe, it had two engines for a start, even though our losses were pretty high. In total we lost forty two pilots, in the Korean War, of which seven were RAF [British Royal Air Force]. We had to bring the RAF into the scene, because we were terribly short of fighter pilots, and when they brought the Meteors out to Australia, out to Japan,

18:00 there were four RAF instructors, and those guys wanted to fly the Mustangs too, so I gave them fifty missions each, and we all went to Japan, over to the Meteor. But they suggested I use the jet-trained RAF pilots, if we were short of pilots. I said, 'Sure', and of course in Germany they had Meteor Wings. So we got pretty highly-trained pilots from the RAF.

18:30 I think it was thirty seven was the total number of pilots we got from the RAF, in the last two years of the Korean War. Some of them, one became Chief of the Air Force, RAF. Another one, John Price, was out here last July, at the… ex-Air Vice Marshall. At Williamtown last July, we had our fiftieth anniversary

19:00 of the Korean War. And after Korea, I came back to Fighter Ops, Wing Commander Fighter Ops, Director of Operations, Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne, and stayed there about eighteen months, and got a posting back to Williamtown.

19:30 Out to command the Fighter OTU, Operational Training Unit, which is jet based. And I stayed there for three years, at Williamtown, until my last posting in the Air Force was DOSP, Director of Operational Policy.

Where was that posting?

20:00 At Melbourne, yeah. Director of? No, Director, any way, DOSP. And then I resigned from the Air Force in April, ’57. Not sure why I did it, but I did.

We’ll have some time to discuss this, we’ll come back to that,

20:30 **but perhaps you can take us through your post-war, post-service life?**

Well, I left in ’57, I went up to salvage work in New Guinea, West New Guinea. I was talked into it by a friend of mine. This guy was quite interesting too. I was commander of three thousand New Guineans West New Guineans. Who scratched the ground for bits and pieces of war wreckage, war refuse, which I sent back to Japan.

21:00 All sorts of things went back to Japan.

Some sort of sense of irony there.

So I stayed there about fourteen, fifteen months, and I got a very bad case of hepatitis. Very bad. So I came back to Australia, and took about a year to get over the hepatitis.

21:30 And then I joined Bobby Gibbs, who, have interviewed him?

Well, we haven’t.

Someone has. Joined Bobby Gibbs as his chief pilot. Gibbs had Sepik Airways, in New Guinea, our New Guinea. East New Guinea. He was flying Stukas, three German aircraft, Stukas, and about eight Norseman. Single-engined thing, like a Beaver.

22:00 So I went up there as chief pilot for a while, and stayed there about fifteen months with him. Then I came back to Australia, and I joined an organisation called Hawker-Siddley Group

22:30 which commanded many aviation factories throughout the world. Also owned real estate, and railways, goodness what. It was a big group. So I eventually finished up as the Canberra-based rep for the whole group, worldwide. And stayed there fifteen years, with them. But the advantage there was, about every two years, I got a three-months trip around the world. And everything I could get hold of.

23:00 I was the first to fly the Caribou, which the Air Force eventually bought. 748s, Midge fighters [Folland Midge micro-fighters], anything they built, wherever they were, in Canada or England, I flew. So I kept my flying up on all sorts of aircraft until I had to stop in 1974 because of heart attacks. But that was a very interesting job, being based in Canberra

23:30 representing a large, worldwide aviation engineering group, and of course, maintained contacts with my Air Force friends, and civvie friends and the government. See, in the squadron, one of my original pilots was John Gorton [Prime Minister, 1968-71]. I taught him to fly in 1940 in Wagga, when I was instructor, and he finished up

24:00 as one the guys that escaped from Singapore. And he and I maintained our friendship right through. And I had many other senior guys, that came to the squadron in the initial days, in ’42, at Pearce, and most of them have gone now, but we retained a good friendship all those years after the war. In business, and flying, and general ex-Air Force associations.

24:30 Anyway, I resigned from the Hawker-Siddley outfit, whilst still based in Canberra, in 19, must have been about 1970, ’75, then set up a small organisation in Canberra,

25:00 where we sort of renovated old homes. Another guy and myself. I did that until about, ten or twelve years ago. In the meantime, after I left the Hawker-Siddley group, I and my wife separated and I went to live in Tamborine Mountain,

25:30 west of the Gold Coast, for about ten years. And the only reason I came back to Canberra, my then wife, third wife, died, and both my girls were in Canberra, and they said, ‘Come back to Canberra, Dad,’ and I said, ‘Too bloody cold’, and they said, ‘No. Come back’. That was seventeen years ago. Still in this area. So, that’s roughly the story of my life.

26:00 **So, Dick. Just a couple of points. When were you first married?**

I married a fairly wealthy girl, who’d already lost two husbands, in the war. Anyway, because I was away fifteen months in New Guinea, I lost that wife. So I married again in ’59, the mother of my two children.

26:30 And then divorced her in 1970, I think. And married again in, god, when was I last married? Must have been 1979, the third marriage,

27:00 and she died on me a couple of years later. So that’s why I came back to Canberra.

Right. That’s a good summary. We’ll go back now and . . .

I did a few things in that period. I flew with the Navy for a while.

When was this? After you left the Air Force?

No, I was still in the Air Force.

When was that?

That was in 1953, no, 1952. I was back in Melbourne, and a couple of guys and I shared a unit in St Kilda.

27:30 Both Navy guys. One called Nat Gould, who's still alive, and the other guy's dead now, an English guy. Anyway, because I didn't have an Air Force mess to go to for drinks and so on, they said, 'Oh, come to my mess. Join my mess'. And we had the Air Force mess in 426 St Kilda Road. So guess who was left on Friday nights. Just the three of us, three bachelors. By the time all the other guys went home. And they dared me to go to the deck and I said, 'Easy'. Anyway, to cut a long story short, I did a full deck course,

28:00 ADLES [deck flight training] course at Nowra, and flew off the old HMAS Sydney, old straight-backed Sydney, the first Air Force carrier we had. Only did two landings, but that was enough.

Catapult launch?

No, this was straight decks. No. No catapults. They had catapults on board, but we were straight off.

They run it into the wind and just go for it.

28:30 Well, you could do up to forty five knots. In a heavy wind, you'd probably get a good forty five knot wind across the deck before you took off, so no trouble with the Fury. And these were lightly loaded the aircraft. Beautiful aircraft to fly, the Fury. So I did a couple of Antarctic trips, whilst I was with de Havilland, and that's why I joined de Havilland. How I became a member of the Hawker-Siddley Group. After I resigned from the Air Force I had no job.

29:00 So word got out that they wanted a pilot to go to the Antarctic. On a Beaver. So I went down there a couple of times, on what they called the Summer Cruise. But they were interesting trips, they really were. Because they were on floats. I went aboard a Danish ships called the Magadan, my ship was the Magadan.

29:30 We put the aircraft in number two hold, always loaded it over the side if you wanted to fly, and they were very interesting trips. And of course, the scenes down there, the picturesque, the ice, beautiful. I'd like to go down in a 747. Qantas asked me once, and I said, 'Oh, no, I couldn't'. I wish I had now.

30:00 And they wanted me to go down as a sort of an instructor, to tell the people on board what it was like down there. But I understand the 747 flights down there are bloody marvellous.

Yes, I did one early this year with my mum. But you only get to look out a little window. And of course, I'd love to get up on the flight deck where the best view would be, but it was still amazing.

It is amazing.

Another world. I wish we had got time to talk about that,

30:30 **but we might go back and talk about your early years, if we could. How did your family come to be in Tasmania?**

Well, my father was a railway engineer and designer. He designed all the Darjeeling-Himalayan railway systems and eventually became chairman of the company, which was based in Colombo [Ceylon, now Sri Lanka]. But he, my mother used to do odd trips. She was fairly wealthy, I gather, in those days. Quite a few boat trips.

31:00 I think she got torpedoed once during World War I. And met my father when he was going home to England from India, on holidays. About 1918, I think. No, in 1919 they got married, and he said, 'I've bought a property in Tasmania'. Sight unseen. Which a lot of people did in those days. And he bought an apple orchard, pears, and a quarter acre of strawberries

31:30 at Franklin Village just south of Launceston. Which is now, ever since we left it, it has been a girls, no, a boys' home. But Mother was only twenty eight, I think, when they got married, and he was forty nine. So they had me. I don't remember anything about that property. I remember once playing with matches. I must have lit my hair, because

32:00 my father grabbed me and dived me into a duck pond. With me in his arms. That's what I remember about Tasmania. I went back there a couple of times, with my two girls. And I have a lot of friends in Tasmania, too. So, that's how I became a Tasmanian. And my father died in 1924, so

32:30 my mother took me to England, and I stayed with my aunt, my father's sister, for two years. Before coming back to Australia.

Why did your mum bring you back to Australia?

Oh, Mother came back to Australia. She got married again, to another Tasmanian. That broke up, apparently. So when I came back, and I landed at Woolloomooloo, I came back in the care of the

captain. I was about six years old, I think, and that was quite an interesting trip,

33:00 on the old Orontes, and next time I saw Mother she was on the wharf at Woolloomooloo, when we landed. 1926. or maybe ’27. Anyway I stayed in Sydney, right through, in various places, up to the time I joined the Air Force.

She must have been quite an influence on your life, as your father wasn’t around?

33:30 **What sort of woman was your mother?**

There’s a photograph of her there. She was very English. Very much so. Quite an interesting woman. She had flown in 1911. How much flying she did, I don’t know, but she was written up for a while. I think it would have been in the old Cashman Props in those days. If she actually flew herself, I don’t know, I think so. But she was part of the de Havilland family,

34:00 so there was some connection in the blood system. But she was a very interesting woman. Because she’d travelled a lot before World War I, or during World War I, she had seen a lot of the world, and she made me appreciate how big the world was. And how interesting it was, which probably helped me,

34:30 gain my interest in the world, world affairs, and travel and so on. She was a lonely woman. She should have married again, but no such luck. She also wanted a big family. Only had me. I wanted a big family myself, when I got married. I wanted six boys, and finished up with two girls. A female dog and a female grandchild. So we missed out on the male section of my family. I’m the last of my lot, my family anyway.

35:00 It finishes with me. Because my family’s fairly old. It goes back to the 1600s. But, no more males in the family. Mother and I got on very well together. We talked normally and naturally to each other. We argued like hell about all sorts of things, because I was living in a modern world,

35:30 compared to her world. And she died when she was seventy seven. Some years ago now. The second marriage, I came down to Canberra and built a house down here, Actually I designed it and got a building licence to build the house, myself. And we made a little flat in it for Mother, so she came with us.

36:00 **It’s extraordinary, to be flying in 1911, for a woman.**

Yes. Well, she was wealthy. And she was a playgirl, I would think. Played around a bit.

What did she tell you of her family, the de Havilland family?

Not much, because she was the brat of the de Havilland family. It was a big family. The main lot was Hatfield, of course, the designers of various aircraft. Do you know about them. She didn’t tell me very much about them. Her mother died at her birth, her father had nicked off to South America, and she was brought up by her mothers sister, who was the wife of the Poet Laureate,

37:00 of England at the time. What’s his name? Martin Tupper [Martin Farquhar Tupper, 1810-89, was a minor author and poet and was never appointed Poet Laureate]. And Tupper’s wife brought my mother up. Forgot about that. Never told me very much about her earlier life, except she travelled a lot. Obviously well educated. So even when my mother got married to my father, there was twenty two years difference. More,

37:30 about twenty two years difference in their ages. That was a bit of a mystery, too, in fact, because I hardly knew my father. I fact, I didn’t know my father. He died when I was four.

What do you know of him?

That he came from a small family in the UK, Norfolk. He entered university at Oxford. He was the youngest to get his Engineering Degree, in Civil Engineering.

38:00 Railway Engineering. Stayed a couple of years in the UK with the railway system, and was transferred to India, and he became Chief Engineer of the Darjeeling-Himalaya Railways, and eventually Chairman of the company. That’s the railway that goes up into India and turns under itself. The Darjeeling. An historical area. Somewhere around here, I’ve got the whole story about that. Stayed there most of his life.

38:30 He joined the Indian Army as an engineer. I don’t know what rank he was. Probably captain or major. He spent some years in Japan. Helping to design their railway system, that must have been about 1909, because we finished up with a lot of Japanese bits and pieces in the old house.

39:00 He’d also travelled in Australia a hell of a lot. That boomerang behind your head there, he was given that by an Aborigine in 1897, I think. But I know he walked from Darwin to Adelaide. In those late 1800s. He got around a bit apparently.

Tape 2

00:30 **Even though he wasn't around, how much of a presence in your life was the memory of your father in your family at the time?**

Well, quite a lot, because I never finished up with a father or step father. So he was the only sort of senior male I knew. It had to be my father. Mother told me a lot about him,

01:00 but he obviously was a pretty clever bastard. Well, he topped his Oxford course for a start, The Indian experience was quite something, having designed and built the Darjeeling-Himalayan railway was quite an achievement in those days. And he finished up as the then Managing Director and later on, Chairman of the company.

01:30 So he must have been, he was no fool. I missed him, because when I was very young I needed an older bloke to talk to. And I never found that older bloke. Mother's so-called friends, male friends, in the late '20s, '30s, were no interest of mine at all. Oh, there was one guy from New Zealand, whom I liked.

02:00 But I think Mother would have liked to be married again, but she missed out. Yeah, I missed my old man. I think any single man does. You like to have people around you, family around you all the time. His brother came out to Australia for about, oh,

02:30 twelve months, about 1947-48, Geoffrey, but I didn't get to know him very well. Father had a brother and a sister. The sister looked after me in the UK in 1924-26. But she and I kept in contact for years,

03:00 until she died many years ago. I finished up with two cousins, they're still alive. They're in their eighties. And I keep in contact with them. The girl Barbara and her brother, Patrick. And any time I used to go to the UK, which was quite often in the old days when I was working, and stay with Barbara

03:30 and the kids, but we're all growing apart because we're getting older and getting sicker. She's a pretty sick girl. She's got some sort of disease. I think she's lost her memory. But her kids, she has four, and their kids, of which there are eleven, they keep in touch with me some of the time.

04:00 if I went back to the UK, I'd have sort of no trouble staying with the family. I'm planning next year to go back. But a lot depends on my health. So far, things are improving. In two or three months I could be semi-normal again, but, so not having any direct family, apart from my two girls,

04:30 especially the younger one, Claudia, she's 42, and she's got a daughter aged fifteen. And the eldest one I see when she gets back to Australia, because she's spends a lot of time in America, but the girls are pretty good. They always come around and look after me and see me. Take me out to a nice lunch somewhere.

What sort of kid were you?

Oh, we had a flat at Charles Avenue in Potts Point. I liked the water, so I built myself a sailing canoe to fit two people, and a bloke called Paul Harts and myself, used to sail around the harbour, from Woolloomooloo across to Manly, sleep on the beach at night,

05:30 come back next day. I was adventurous. I like doing things. Making things. I joined the Sea Scouts for a couple of years. I became a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] physical instructor. But when I came back from the UK, Mother took one look at me, and said, 'Oh, boy, you're thin', or words to that effect,

06:00 and she handed me over to a Swedish School of Instruction at Bennett's Building, which is still there in Sydney, and they built me up a bit. And got me interested in gymnastics, and I became a junior instructor there. So when I joined the YMCA, that was the small job I had, a junior instructor. It was quite good fun. I've always been a healthy bloke, up till recently.

06:30 I like the sports, especially swimming and sailing, and tennis. Not football. Cricket occasionally. In my school days. But I couldn't be still. I had to do something all the time. That's why I got interested in doing up old homes and renovating, and doing odd jobs for people.

07:00 During the Depression days, that's how I earned my pocket money, repairing all sort of things in houses. And in 1935 I went to Westinghouse in Rosebery in Sydney, and I was an electrical apprentice. I spent nearly three years there, before I joined the Air Force, but that was an interesting job too. Because those days, our first year as an apprentice our pay was twelve and sixpence, for a forty-eight hour week, a six day week.

07:30 I used to drive seven miles to work every morning and seven miles back every night.

You had a car?

No, a bicycle. This was pre-war, bicycle. That's another way of keeping fit. But I was swimming, in those days before World War II, at Rushcutter's Bay Swimming Club.

Who were your sporting heroes?

08:00 Who were they? Bidolph was one, he was Olympic swimming champion. He came from Manly. But I had no real, apart from him, because he taught me all about swimming, I had no real contact with so-called

sporting heroes.

08:30 I still admire some of our cricket heroes, especially going back to our Bradman days.

What did you know of Bradman at the time?

Nothing. He was a name. But I was never directly connected with any sporting hero structure.

What sort of student were you?

09:00 Lousy. I went to Double Bay after the Manly school, Double Bay, then to Randwick High. I did about three years at Randwick High. I passed, just. Intermediate. But I wasn't a good student. I liked doing things. I should have gone to a practical school, engineering school. Not to an ordinary high school system.

09:30 When I was at Westinghouse, my two and a half, three years there, I went to Ultimo Tech at night time, to get technical training, but most my technical ability came from doing things myself. For instance, in the Air Force, in 1946, '47, end of the war, I was at Williamtown, as CO,

10:00 and the guys there were doing all sort of crazy bloody things. So I formed a school of apprentices, in all sorts of areas, using Air Force tooling, machine shops, you name it. Some of these guys learnt quite a few trades during that time. Whereas they were doing nothing. Sitting around on the tarmac waiting for something to happen,

10:30 because there was no decision on the future of the Air Force, in those days, 1946, '47. So I formed the first airmen's club in the Air Force. Against all bloody orders. I thought corporals and all those guys below should have their own club, be able to get their own beer, that sort of thing. So I turned the airmen's mess into a club. Against orders. Got away with it.

11:00 That made them very happy. Then I found that quite a few guys were getting full in Newcastle. And one or two prangs, not serious ones. So I got hold of the local police in Newcastle, and I said, 'Come up and do some flying'. I had Vampires then. So I said, bring them out to Williamtown, and I'll give them a flight. Same as some of the press boys. Bring the press out, Give them all a flight. Then I got very little co-operation from Newcastle.

11:30 None of my blokes were ever in trouble. And if they were, they were put in jail straight away, and I was phoned, or one of my senior guys was phoned. 'We've got so and so in jail'. OK. We'll come and get them. But we finished up with very good liaison between the Newcastle community and ourselves. Which is essential.

As you were growing up, where did your organisational bent come from?

12:00 Well, I was well trained by Scherger. Scherger was then a Wing Commander. CO of RAAF, Wagga No 2 Service Flying School, where I had nineteen months with him. He was very keen to make sure that his senior instructors knew what they were doing. I did a few silly things down there, and he punished me by giving me another job.

12:30 And he gave me OC Night Flying, because I love night flying. And OC Weapons Training, because I liked Weapons Training. Used to take teams down to Cressy where the Armour Training Camp was, from Wagga. Six or seven aircraft at a time. Wirraways. And, for instance, one night, lovely moon light night, end of flying. Got hold of one of the Erks [an aircraftsman]

13:00 and took him up, just to sort of fly around the sky for a while, and I flew down the main street of Wagga, in front of the local theatre, at seven minutes past eleven, one Thursday night, just as Scherger and his wife are coming out of the theatre. So Scherger, next morning, had me really fronted up. He said, 'Oh, by the way, your Flight Lieutenant's coming through today, I think. I'm not quite sure, whether you're worthy of it'.

13:30 So that night, I finished up in the officer's mess. In the far corner, reading a paper. And all the guys are whooping it up because they'd all been promoted, or quite a few had been. Scherger came in, 'Oh, good evening, Flight Lieutenant Cresswell'. Got my Flight Lieutenant. 'Come and have a drink. Oh, by the way. You're also PMC of the mess. That's President of the Mess Committee, of this Mess, now'. Christ, I was only nineteen. And so I became PMC of the mess. He kept giving me responsibilities.

14:00 **Did you have to grow up quick as an only child?**

Oh, I believe so. I was on my own a hell of a lot. Yes, I suppose so. There were a few, I was living in the Kings Cross area in those days. Only children of parents,

14:30 we seemed to form a bit of a club. A bit of a mob. For instance, we'd go swimming together, North Bondi, but I became a very junior member of the North Bondi Surf Club, when I was, oh, about mid sixteen, fifteen, sixteen. Quite a few of us did. And we enjoyed that. So, you're learning all the time, when you're young.

15:00 You had to be those days. Depression days are pretty lousy days.

What are your vivid impressions of the Depression?

Well, you've got to live with it. I was very young, didn't know much about it. But money was bloody short, food, transport. Although we used to scale trams, rather than pay our way. Did a lot of walking, hiking.

15:30 Trips up to the mountain area, Katoomba, up around there, as kids. It was an adventure. Sometimes we'd get free trips by train to Katoomba, by talking to one of the conductors in the baggage area. They used to take us on board, say, 'Go and hide yourself'.

16:00 But I suppose growing up in those days was a bit difficult. But you made your own way in life. So I didn't discipline myself properly until I joined the Air Force.

Were you English, or were you Australian?

I was Tasmanian. In attitude,

16:30 I suppose, English because my mother was, so very English. And a lot of her friends were, too, people I met. Bit I soon became Australian when I joined the Air Force.

How strongly were your feelings of Empire?

I think the scare in 1937, '38, there maybe another war, made me Empire-conscious.

17:00 The Australian attitude generally was, we're still a colonial part of the Empire. Not like now. I suppose, yeah, I was English, until Air Force days. Then became very Australian. But don't forget, from 1942 onwards, I was always a leader. Commander of a Squadron, or Wing Leader of a Wing,

17:30 or Commander of a group. So, responsibility was put on my shoulders at a very early age. Remembering, the Air Force was only about three thousand, six thousand people, in 1939, when war broke out and we eventually expanded to be the fourth biggest Air Force in the world. So it was early days. You were promoted fairly rapidly and just had to accept responsibility.

As you were growing up, what did you know of the RAAF?

18:00 Not much, except from Movietone [newsreels] or through the papers. There was no one near me that belonged to the RAAF. Till I became interested. Initially, my aunt in England, said, 'What you should do, Richard', always called me Richard, 'come across to the UK and join the Royal Air Force,

18:30 for six years as a cadet'. And a five year apprenticeship. So that made me interested. So I applied for the RAAF and got no reply. So I applied to the RAAF and got in straight away. Rollo Kingsford-Smith and I were on the same course.

Pardon?

Rollo Kingsford-Smith and I were on the same course. So, all my friends, real friends, are from those early days in the RAAF.

What did you know of Australia's Anzac position?

19:00 Those days? Nothing. We knew a mistake had been made in Gallipoli. We learnt that fairly rapidly, from our so-called history teachers at the college. And from talking to people. But Anzac had to come, because it was two nations, like, way out in the distance.

19:30 Way out. Long way from the UK. They had to get together. We were doing the same job anyway. But even now, I believe that celebrating Gallipoli, is not quite the right thing. Because it was all a bloody failure, let's face it. We lost a lot of people doing it. Anyway, it's become a tradition now. The youth seem to like it. Good.

20:00 **What did you dream about, when you were growing up, what did you really imagine that you would like to do?**

Well, what was going to happen in the future? Because I had no idea what I'd be doing. I thought I'd enter the engineering world, which I did by becoming an apprentice at Westinghouse for nearly three years. And I was going then for my AIME [Australian Institute of Mechanical Engineers],

20:30 which is a Bachelor of Engineering Degree. And I decided to hop out and join the Air Force instead. So, really, my future thoughts were a bit muddled until I settled down within the Air Force itself.

Apart from your

21:00 **discussion with your auntie, was there any germ of the idea that you needed to fly, or that you needed to travel?**

No.

It could have been Army, Navy, Air Force, didn't matter?

It wouldn't have been Army. It would have been Navy or Air Force. No, we thought the Army guys always had a hard trot. But when my aunt suggested I should join the RAAF Cadet scheme, then I became very interested in the Air Force. And that's why I joined the RAAF in the end.

21:30 **What did you know of her flying exploits?**

Not very much. She said she flew with a lot of people, around about 1911, and she showed me a copy of the airplane magazine which had her name written in it. But not very much. You see, I didn't see that much of Mother, although I might have lived with her, for about seven years.

22:00 After I got back to Australia. Didn't talk very much.

Did you have friends at that time?

Lots of young people like myself. We were all good friends. I think I told you. We formed a sort of a mob in Potts Point, Kings Cross. We guys that were fairly lonely, or . . .

22:30 **How lonely were you growing up?**

Oh, that's why I had to do something all the time, generally with my hands. Or get involved. One of the pre-war jobs I had was cleaning sailing boats down at Rushcutters Bay, Messengers. In Sydney. And through that I joined the eighteen footers [skiffs]

23:00 as a jib hand, for about a year. It was fun, sailing on the harbour. Especially on the weekends when the eighteen footers were racing. But after the war, a friend of mine bought an eighteen-metre, Marconi-rigged yacht

23:30 called the Aoma on Sydney Harbour, it was a New Zealand ship and we sailed that. Often. Up the harbour, up the Heads, up to Brisbane, back again. Or towards Brisbane. Not as far as Brisbane. I was always interested in sailing, or being on the water. Even being in the water, because I used to love swimming a lot. I tell you those Antarctic trips.

24:00 They were rough trips. The round bottomed hulls, designed especially if the ship was caught in the ice, the ice would put pressure against the ship, and push it, push it out of the water. And never crush it. But boy, did they roll. Oh, god.

Seasick?

No, I wasn't seasick. I was one of the lucky ones. The ship had about thirty eight crew and about forty passengers.

24:30 The passengers were Australians changing over every year. At Mawson or Davis Bases [Australian research bases]. But I never got sick, luckily. But some of the guys did.

Back in Kings Cross. Fairly tough sort of place to be part of the mob?

Oh, it was tough. Used to have street fights, you know, but generally fists.

25:00 We had a couple of razor gangs around there. But we never saw them. Oh, we'd sort of reckon the Challis Avenue was our property, our area, our responsibility. So, you'd fight for your area, you might say.

Who was in charge of your mob?

Me, I suppose.

I thought that.

Seemed to be most of the time. There were quite a few rundown houses there,

25:30 and old properties that had gone to ruin. Around Elizabeth Bay and Kings Cross. Especially Elizabeth Bay. So we used their grounds quite often, for our meets, for our fights, you name it. For our barbecues.

What was the name of your mob?

Oh, Christ, I don't know what it was. I suppose it was called the Cresswell mob.

26:00 **How many were in the Creswell mob?**

Up to a dozen. Varied. Five, six, seven, sometimes full number. Ten, twelve. It depends if we were free when we got together. And none of the guys were at school with me. We were all different people. One bloke called Paul Hinds, he was quite an interesting bloke. He joined the Man Magazine organisation after the war.

26:30 But he and I did a lot of sailing together.

Would you describe that as your earliest leadership experience?

Cripes. Officially it had to be 77 Squadron. But in the early days, I suppose, being with the boys before

the war. In our mob.

27:00 But as far as leadership is concerned, apart from being trained by Scherger at Wagga for that nineteen months, the 77 Squadron. I certainly became a leader, with lots of responsibilities. Unknown in those days, but luckily, in the squadron, I had some pretty senior guys, John Gorton was one. Bill Meacham, and Gough Manning, and a few other guys. Jimmy Cox.

27:30 Even though, you see John was nine years older than I, but they knew they had to respond to their leader's instructions. And they became a team. I had a bloody good team in the squadron. Especially the ground crew. Another think I learnt under Scherger was, keep in contact with the ground crew. The guys that do all you servicing of aircraft, and domestic staff and so on.

28:00 And I learnt that lesson very early with Scherger, and I did with the squadron. Plus sign. All the way through. I had no trouble at all commanding squadrons or wings. Because all the ground crew knew me, because I used to wander around and talk to them occasionally. A lot of other leaders didn't. Which was a great mistake.

Yes, it's very important to have that relationship.

Yes, bloody important.

They say that's why Qantas has got a very good safety record because you have got a very good relationship between the maintenance and the . . . .

28:30 That's very true.

Just getting back to your joining up, were you motivated by nationalism, or the desire to fight?

No. I knew the RAAF, I knew a war was imminent in Europe. This was in 1937, '38. And we were told that as soon as we got to Point Cook, in July of '38. That there will probably be another war in Europe soon.

29:00 No, I just joined the Air Force because I wanted to fly. That's roughly it.

Can you look beneath that desire and figure out why?

Could be aunt's influence, and my mother's influence. You see, I told you it was my aunt that got me interested in joining the Air Force, by asking that I consider joining the Royal Air Force. I applied but got knocked back. Well, not knocked back. No answer. No.

29:30 **If you had been accepted into the Air Force as ground crew, would you have continued to join the Air Force.?**

I don't know. Probably not. You see I joined the Cadet Scheme, which was a flying scheme. Had I stayed in the Air Force, which Scherger wanted me to do, when I decided to resign,

30:00 he said I would probably finish up near the top, according to him. Although he said I was 'too tactless to be the top leader. I wouldn't get on with the politicians. He was dead right.

Can you tell us how your transition from the Cadet Corps into . . .

Flying.

Into flying. Into the RAAF.

Well, the cadet system was at Point Cook,

30:30 it was twelve months, you worked roughly six days a week. A lot of sport amongst it. There was twenty eight subjects to be covered, so you're pretty flat out. And from that you got your commission, Pilot Officer, and you were posted to whatever squadron they decided you should go to. I asked for flying boats. I just wanted to fly flying boats. Again, it was on the water, which I loved.

31:00 They said, 'Sorry, Cresswell, you're a Fighter Pilot'. I thought, 'What the hell's that mean'. So I became a fighter Pilot. Apparently a pretty good one, over the years.

Can you tell us about your first experience with the discipline with the military?

Well, the cadet system was a pretty hard system. Very disciplined by the people that ran it.

31:30 The WODs [Warrant Officer Disciplinary] are pretty strict people. You had to do everything virtually on the run. You had no spare time. From the day you entered the cadet system, you were on the run all the time. Because you're under instruction all the time.

32:00 The Cadet Course was split up into two. Junior cadets, senior cadets. The seniors ragged you a bit. But you got used to that. You lived with it. My first area of discipline would be at Wagga, under Scherger. When he got me, you might say, punished for doing some silly things now and again. Gave me extra jobs.

How competitive was it to get into the cadets?

Bloody. Seven hundred and thirty of us joined up.

32:30 I applied in early 1938. About forty four got in.

Why did you get in?

I don't know. I had no trouble.

What was the selection process?

A Wing Commander and a couple of Squadron Leaders interviewed you. In my case,

33:00 I was pretty healthy. In fact very healthy. Young bloke. I seemed to have no trouble. I had a lousy education record, really, because I only passed the Intermediate, just. Where most of the guys that joined up had Leaving Certificates. I don't know. No one recommended me, or advised me at all. I just passed the interview.

33:30 The first six months I had a very bad instructor. He had five students and all were scrubbed in the first six months, except me in the end. The Chief Instructor happened to be Dad Bladen. He said, 'You're OK, Cresswell. What's wrong?' I said, 'Oh, it's that bloody silly instructor we've got, Sir'. He said, 'Yeah. We've got a problem there'. So the other four guys were scrubbed, and I stayed in the Air Force.

34:00 Dad Bladen said, 'You may have to do a repeat Senior Course, an extra six months'. But they gave me a bloke called Flight Lieutenant Hicks, on the senior course, flying Wapitis. And he was bloody good.

Why was this guy bad?

He should never have been an instructor. You see, there weren't any instructor courses before the war. They just picked out the odd bloke and said, 'Oh, you better be an instructor for a year or two down at Point Cook. And get some more flying experience'. So these guys were just pilots.

34:30 They didn't have their instructor qualifications. If they did, they didn't know how to use them. But the guy I had initially was very bad.

Can you tell us about your first experience of flying, leaving the ground, and taking control of the aircraft?

I took nine hours forty to go solo, which is a long time. To go solo in a Moth. It was a D860.

35:00 Normally, it's about six or seven hours. Max. Again the fault of this bloody so-called instructor. He wasn't good.

The cut off time was ten hours, and if you didn't you were scrubbed.

Well, it varied quite a lot. Yeah, there was a cut off time. You had to go up to the Chief Instructor and be tested by him. But I went solo.

35:30 I had no trouble after I was solo.

What was the vivid impression of that first time you went up into the air?

I don't know. Nice to be free, I think. Free of not having someone else telling you what to do. It's a long time ago. You're talking about 1938.

But surely, no one forgets their first solo?

No, you don't forget your first solo. I felt free.

36:00 And I know it was a lovely day. And the aircraft was in good nick. And the Gypsy Moth, that's the aircraft before the Tiger Moth. They were a bloody good aircraft. Ruddy reliable. But I had no trouble going solo, really, except, although we did our first sixty hours, before they did the check out, and they scrubbed the other four.

36:30 **How fearful were you of being scrubbed?**

Oh, I was at that time, because it was pretty obvious that we would all be scrubbed. I didn't know why. And the instructor couldn't tell us. But he was a bad instructor. The other guys, one finished back in the Air Force, and survived a few years, another one finished up as a senior pilot in commercial aviation.

37:00 I'm not quite sure what happened to the third and fourth guys. One's still alive and lives in Western Australia. I contacted his brother about six years ago. But when guys left the service, like cadets, you hardly ever saw them again, or maintained contact with them. Because you were so flat out doing your own thing. And don't forget, by the time

37:30 we finished in July '39, it wasn't very long before we had a war on our hands.

How aware were you of these growing hostilities and the possibility that you might go into

battle?

Well, we knew we were going to be involved. And I was looking forward to it in many ways, because of more action, a more active life.

38:00 3 Squadron initially, I called a bloody aeroclub system. This was with Demons at Richmond, in July ’39, until the war started. And we were just messing around, trying to be pilots. Bloody small Air Force in those days.

Tape 3

00:30 **The RAAF in 1938, was a very small organisation.**

When the war broke out there were three thousand six hundred and fifty blokes in the Air Force, total. That’s September’39, so there would have been roughly the same number in ’38.

How prepared was that organisation for a coming conflict?

Not too bad. The Cadet Course, I was in No 24 Cadet Course, post-war, this is World War I.

01:00 Now about a third of those guys normally finished up in the UK, finishing off their cadet course there, joining the Royal Air Force. Round about ’37, ’38, ’39, we decided to keep a lot of people in Australia, because there was an expansion program, for instance, the new aerodromes being built at Wagga, at Richmond was finished, at Laverton, Pearce, Darwin. All in the course of construction.

01:30 Because we could be going for quite some time. The squadrons, we had in those days, I think, two or three, Citizen Air Force Squadrons. Called the Weekend Pilot. 21, 22 and 25 Squadron. Perth, I think was the third one. Finished up with four or five citizen squadrons in the end.

02:00 Now these guys had a permanent crew in charge of the squadron, you might say. Two thirds of the total came from citizens who wanted to be involved. Some pilots, a lot of ground crew. The permanent squadrons. We had nine squadrons, and a sea plane squadron, 1 Squadron, 2 Squadron, 3 Squadron,

02:30 that was about all, I think. Four squadrons. Oh, 6 Squadron.

What was the vision of this Air Force, at the time?

To exist, I suppose. We seemed to be under control of the Royal Air Force policy, but they were trying to break away from it, and in the end, our Air Force did. Especially towards the outbreak of war.

03:00 It was a very small Air Force. When I joined 3 Squadron, which was July ’39, after a year at Point Cook, Cadets, I wasn’t very impressed at all. I felt it was undisciplined and some of the pilots, boy, I wouldn’t have given them their bloody wings, but they got them. In fact, a lot of those early pilots in 3 Squadron were killed. Because of lack of ability, basically.

03:30 When they arrived in the desert in 1940. In fact, I wasn’t very pleased with the 3 Squadron. At one stage of the game, I thought I would get out of the Air Force. I wasn’t happy, at all. When they made me Navigation Officer the war broke out, and then we started to really get stuck into things. We were flying off the coast, about twelve mile off the coast, in our Hawker Demon, carrying old World War I bombs,

04:00 one hundred and twelve pound bombs, looking for submarines. That was a pretty frightening experience, too, being so far out to sea. Away from the coast.

This was after the war had broken out?

Yes.

With the Demons. What did you think of the equipment that the Air Force had at its disposal?

Well, the old equipment it was worn out before we got it, you might say. But we were already getting the Lockheed Hudson, from America. And we started the Wirraway, to build the Wirraway.

04:30 Or thinking about it. So we were trying to modernise ourselves the best we could.

Another question about vision is that, in July 1939 it was almost obvious that something would occur in Europe.

Oh, Yeah.

Were you being trained to fight in Europe?

We weren’t being trained to fight in Europe. Even in July ’39, there was still no, you might say, post-training or wartime training, really.

05:00 Apart from doing your normal job. All right, 3 Squadron was an Army type squadron, so you co-operated

with the Army, and that's the way we were being trained, with the Hawker Demon. But there wasn't any, it wasn't even near what we would experience in World War II.

How did things change, and how quickly did things change, when the war broke out?

Bloody rapidly.

Can you talk a little bit about that?

05:30 Yeah. Well, see, in 1937, we had already arranged with the RAAF in Rhodesia, New Zealand and Canada, about a training system, which became the EATS [Empire Air Training Scheme]. So in 1937, that was planned, that was on paper, so it was ready to go. And we knew we had to expand fairly rapidly, in our training areas. Which we did. The

06:00 we rapidly formed elementary flying schools, that was the Moth, the Tiger Moth then. And certifying training schools, which was the [Avro] Anson and the Wirraway. And they were all formed, well, Wagga was formed in 1940. I was one of the original members. That was the EATS. So we got organised fairly rapidly,

06:30 by bringing back into the service, retired NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] and ground crew, and of course, through the Citizens Air Force, officers and pilots. So by 1940 we were well and truly in the training scheme. Because that went right through until 1945. We only turned out, I think, about twenty six thousand aircrew, through our training scheme.

07:00 But Rhodesia turned out a lot more. So did Canada. New Zealand turned out quite a lot. But, without that Empire Air Training Scheme, we would have had trouble in World War II.

What was you personal reaction to the outbreak of war?

Well, it's happened. We knew it was going to happen. It's happened, and it's not going to be very nice. I thought I'd be involved by being in No 3 Squadron,

07:30 on overseas commitment straight away, as most of 3 Squadron was. In 1940. But I became an instructor. Which I'm glad now, because it taught me to fly. And nothing better than being an instructor to learn how to fly, because you never know what your student's going to do. They did some crazy things, some of those guys, too.

In hindsight, you can recognise that that was a very valuable thing for you to do.

Oh, very valuable.

At the time, how did you feel about being posted to Wagga as an instructor?

08:00 Well, I started to enjoy it, because, when I arrived at Wagga, they gave me thirteen students. I still only had about six hundred hours, total flying. With the instructor course behind me. I said, 'Hey. Come on'. 'Well, we're a bit short of instructors'. I said, 'You must be bloody short'. After a while, I got down to about four or five students at a time. But we were flat out, as instructors, in those early days.

08:30 We were so short of them. Boy, you learn to fly. There's nothing better than taking a student up who's not quite sure what he wants to do. Or how to do it. One bloke froze on me in a Wirrawy. He froze on the stick, he was in the front cockpit. And I couldn't break the hold. In fact, going down, we'd lost the canvas off the side of the aircraft. It was ripped off. So, forever afterwards, I always carried a spare stick in the back of the cockpit.

09:00 In case, you could bang him on the head. To break his hold. Never happened. But in some cases it did.

Could you explain that set up for us. Training in Tiger Moths? The two-seat set up with the instructor in the back, is it? Can you talk about the Tiger Moth and how that was organised?

That was a Wirraway.

Oh, Wirraway.

That was the advanced training. There was tandem seating, and we both had control,

09:30 but normally, you'd try and talk to your student. What to do and how to do it. But there were occasions, where students used to freeze on you. They'd lose control. And they'd stiffen on the stick, firmly. And you had all the trouble trying to break that hold.

10:00 **How close do you think you came to being in an accident in your time as a trainer?**

Oh, I had a few. Wagga had a few. Because I became in charge of all night flying. All the test flying came my way, too. And quite often, I'd get a lousy aircraft and force land. I've had about twenty odd forced landings, in my Air Force life. Only one was a dangerous one.

10:30 I landed wheels up once. I had to. One night, in rough country. But most of the forced landings are caused by duff engines. The only engine in the Wirraway wasn't very reliable. We had troubles there. But of course I was doing test work as well, so most of the forced landings came my way, as it turned

out.

11:00 **Can you take us through what it's like without your wheels in a forced landing?**

Oh, a forced landing's a straight forward thing. Depends upon the cause of the landing, forced landing. In my case, where I had a forced landing with wheels up, it was with a duff engine. She'd cut. But when you're flying you're constantly looking for odd little spots around the countryside. There maybe a forced landing area.

11:30 It's second nature to you. Especially in those days where you're flying low flying aircraft and not that reliable aircraft in those days. Now it's a bit different. So in my case I saw a field, bit rough. And went for it, and got in all right. But there's a procedure, too, for a forced landing, and you adopt that straight away.

What sort of impact does it have when you land like that, on the pilot?

12:00 Oh, a forced landing? Well, we don't like it to happen. But it does. The other forced landings were at night time, a lot of them. With the engine slightly on fire, so I had to cut the engines. Caused by a leaking engine, so I had to cut the engine and force-landing in a wheat field, somewhere. But Wagga itself, where I did most of my forced landings, was pretty open country. It was wheat fields.

12:30 So you had no trouble sort of getting down all right, wheels down. The Operational forced landings. I had one in a Kittyhawk, north of Milne Bay. I landed on a little missionary strip, got a way with that one. But generally the Operational aircraft I had, it was the Kittyhawk, later on the Mustang, and the various jets, all very reliable aircraft.

13:00 In fact, the squadron in thirty thousand flying hours, never had a forced landing caused by mechanical failure. Which wasn't a bad record. That was the old Kittyhawk. In the Mustang days in Korea, a lot of blokes got shot up or shot down, but we had no mechanical troubles, at all. Again, you're relying on your ground crew to keep your aircraft serviceable.

13:30 Apart from the design of the aircraft itself.

In those early days at Wagga, what was the accident situation like?

Apparently pretty high. The accident rate, the death rate, wasn't very high, maybe two or three a year. But accidents, like taxing accidents, touching people, toughing each other in the air, in formation flying, was pretty normal.

14:00 Again, you had to introduce discipline in the system. Which I did. I finished up with two flights, I was a Group Commander and also a Flight Commander. In Advanced Training squadron at Wagga and I used to get rid of instructors that weren't that good. Purposely. Much to the consternation of some of the other guys, because they said, 'Oh, bloody Cresswell again.

14:30 If he doesn't like a bloke he sacks him'. Well, I didn't sack him because I didn't like him. I sacked him because he couldn't do the bloody job properly. And I used that right throughout the squadron in my operational days. In fact, quite often I sent people home. In Korea, I sent eleven blokes home in the end. Who obviously weren't trained to cope. These are Mustang days. When we were based in Korea

15:00 I used to go across and meet four or five replacement pilots that were sent up by Qantas. On one occasion I was talking to one of these guys, and I said, 'How old are you?', and he said, 'Oh, so and so, I only got married last week'. I said, 'What?' A young sergeant pilot, and we had no Operational Training Unit organised in Australia in those days, so he came up as a fresh pilot with no real operational training behind him. And he was very surprised when I sent him home the next day.

15:30 Back to Australia. But those sort of guys you couldn't accept. We were going into a war situation, it wasn't a very nice one, so, and two or three other guys I sent home like that.

What did you learn in those early days about command?

What did I learn? I suppose everything about command. Again, I thank Scherger. For his excellent command he had of the Wagga Training Base. He was the guy we all looked to because

16:00 he was a very good leader.

How did Scherger inspire you?

Well, he was well-known, even in those days. He was a pretty famous Air Force pilot. A pretty tough one too, And could do everything in the air. But he was a good leader on the ground as well. And you've only got to talk to ground crew,

16:30 to know what your leader's like. And they'd all say of Scherger. 'Oh, he's the best one we've ever had'. But Scherger was good. Very good indeed.

What characteristics make you a very good leader on the ground?

Ah, communication, with the ground crew. That's essential. You must know your ground crew and talk

to them, and understand them. Listen to their worries, and complaints. Fix things when you can. Apparently I was a good fixer. I used to fix things pretty rapidly.

17:00 Sometimes against the Air Force policy. So I got known for being a good commander on the ground. Any Erk could talk to me, any time at all. Providing he sort of talked to his NCO first, and his flight commander, that sort of thing. But some guys, when I wandered around the hangar floors, 'Sir, we've got a problem with so and so'. He'd describe the problem. I'd say, 'OK. I'll fix that'.

17:30 Some occasions, they actually used to say, 'Our NCOs not a very good NCO, Sir'. I'd say, 'Why not?' 'Well, he won't listen to us' So on and so forth. 'Well, you don't sort of sack your NCO straight away. You find out exactly how good they are. Sometimes you promote them, or push them sideways into a course. To benefit them,

18:00 and benefit the unit as well. Our move from Perth to Darwin was quite something. It happened in August. I'd sent about a hundred and twenty blokes by train. Well they got onto trucks at Perth, at Dunreith, our new airfield, which is now Perth air port, to Guildford,

18:30 with about a hundred tons of equipment. They got onto a train there, at Northam. Changed trains at Kalgoorlie. Across to Port Pirie, changed trains there. To Alice Springs, then into trucks. From Alice Springs to Batchelor air field [Northern Territory] where we were going to be based for a while. They did it bloody well. It took thirteen days, but they got there.

19:00 But oh, they had a hell of a job, because they were handling all the gear themselves. All the equipment. The equipment they had to pick up in Adelaide. And before I said that we picked up refrigeration, transport, beer, straw, palliasses, beds, cooking equipment, tools to dig trenches. Lavatories, and so on.

19:30 We had to buy everything in Adelaide. Pick it up, take it up to Darwin. And we came very well equipped. With a ton and a half of beer we had on board, too.

What was the setup that 77 Squadron had in Darwin?

Well, nothing. My advance party went up by air, about a dozen blokes. And they got some of the tents up, that sort of thing. Otherwise, we started from scratch. We had a kitchen, a mobile kitchen,

20:00 which was a great saver. We actually started from scratch. Setting up shop. And don't forget, you're flying all the time. You never stopped flying. No, we were well organised. We finished up with a very good camp in Darwin in the end, at a place called Livingstone. It's one of the road strips, down from Darwin. It was an American road strip initially,

20:30 but we took over from them. We had a very good camp there, and we had the pipeline coming up from Manton Dam to Darwin, and we could tap into that. So we had plenty of water, even though sometimes it was bloody hot in the afternoon. But, oh no. Each camp I had was well set up. When we got to Milne Bay, I found a bloke who, he only died a couple of years ago,

21:00 he'd worked on Taronga Park Zoo in Sydney. He was a builder. I said, 'Ah, what about building a mess for us'. He said, 'OK'. Using cane. He built an NCOs Officers Air Crew mess, at one end, and the airmen's mess at the other end. And that was a bloody good mess, it really was. Very well run.

21:30 In fact, he and a bunch of other lads who'd been in the building game, did a hell of a lot to make sure the squadron was comfortable, even on the tarmac. Building shelters for the guys. Because some of these guys had to wait there until we went away on a two or three hour trip, and got back again. We had good airmen. We still have a very good squadron association. My old squadron. It's a very strong association.

22:00 Probably the strongest in the Air Force. A lot because a few of us oldies are still alive, so we see them. I go up to Williamtown, oh, four or five times a year, once every two or three months. Or I used to. And talk to the ground crew and aircrew and so on. In fact, the young air crew these days say, 'How did you operate during the war?' and we tell them, and they say 'Christ'. Now, of course, they have everything laid on.

22:30 **Let's talk about those early days at 77 Squadron for a while. Particularly in Darwin. You were a very young man, given command of an almost completely new squadron,**

It was a new squadron.

in a very frontline area..

Very, yeah. We missed out on daylight raids when I was in Darwin. The Yanks got them, we took over from the Yanks, and the only raids we had were at night time. And the only night flyer they had up there was me,

23:00 so I got the night guys. Two on the end, as I've been told. But daytime raids were nil, none. They stopped about, the week when we got there, the Yanks still had charge. And the Spitfires came up and took over from us. So we spent most of our time sitting on our bloody arse waiting for something to happen.

23:30 It was then called standby. Or state of readiness. And we got awfully annoyed about that, so any spare time available outside standby, I got the squadron air borne straight away. Morning and night, or late night. The first Fighter Sector was formed in Darwin in my time. It operated very well,

24:00 but it was when radar was at Cape Forcray, that was on Melville Island. Purely a directional one, it could tell us what direction, it very rarely could tell us the height of the aircraft. In fact it wasn't able to really. But we guessed the height because the enemy came in, normally, at about twenty two, twenty three thousand feet anyway. To get the range they wanted. So I spent most of my time, on the squadron,

24:30 exercising the fighter Sector wherever we could, getting to know how they operated. Doing a lot of formation flying, and tactics. High formation flying. And tactics. Waiting for our first daylight raid. In fact, I had a very highly trained squadron, but they hadn't really fired a gun in anger. Which was a great pity.

You said before you were quite naïve at the time.

Well, I was.

What did you mean by that?

I was young.

25:00 Didn't know what was going on in the world. I'd never been a leader, as I became CO of 77 Squadron. Even the jobs that Scherger gave me at Wagga, were just fairly routine, I suppose leadership jobs. Like night flying, and taking armoured camps down to Cressy Armoury Camp. Another jobs that Scherger gave me, and he gave other blokes all sorts of punishments too. It wasn't just me.

25:30 But we learnt a lot under him, by example or by direction. But I felt when I became CO of the squadron, 'Oh, this is bloody good. Why me?' sort of thing. And the OC of Western Area then was De La Rue. He was my first CO at Richmond in 1939. He'd been a skipper, between the two wars, he'd been a skipper before the mast [on sailing ships].

26:00 And he was a hell of a nice bloke. He said, 'Well, Cres, you're a leader now'. I said, 'What's that mean, Sir'. 'Oh, a lot of bloody hard work'. But he was good. He was always helpful. All our senior guys in those days were bloody helpful. They really were'.

What was the hard work? What difficulties did you have being a young CO at the time?

Being on the job all the time, twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. See you had to check out that the right flying instructions were given to your pilots,

26:30 that the few NCOs were doing their job properly. Don't forget when I joined the squadron, they gave me five senior NCOs. Engines, Rear Frame, Electrical Radio, Armoured, and a bloody good WOD. And those guys are the basis of your squadron. They'd had the experience in the Air Force, and knew what was going on. Whereas most of the blokes in the squadron, and in the ground crew, had just come off the streets, or through a training school.

27:00 So you're starting from fresh. In fact, I had two guys that were always going AWOL [Absent Without Leave] in Western Australia. One was called Clark and one was called Johnson. And they'd front up to me on occasions, and I'd say, 'Oh, Christ, You two again. What are you up to this time?' And they'd say, 'Oh, we want to go home and see the family and so on'. I'd say, 'I'm going to punish you this time. You're going to both work on my aircraft'. One was an engine man and one was an airframe man.

27:30 I couldn't wish for a better two. They stayed with me right throughout the rest of my career on the squadron. Nobby Clark and Knocker Johnson.

Some of your men would have been older than you in age.

Oh, lord yes. A lot of the aircrew were.

What problems did that cause?

Oh, I suppose a few. But don't forget I had the Squadron Leader's stripes on my shoulders. So I was the boss. But blokes like John Gorton, who I've mentioned was on the squadron,

28:00 out of Singapore, oh, I suddenly ended up with sixteen pilots out of Singapore, they were all the Fighter Pilots posted to me initially, and then posted to other units. And John Gorton was one of those guys that came out of Singapore. And he'd been already shot up and shot down, had a bad prang and smashed his face up. Been sunk at sea coming out from Singapore. The ship had been torpedoed. He'd been on a raft for about twelve, fourteen hours.

28:30 And he was a sorry mess. In fact, the first thing he said to me, he said, 'You don't remember me, do you, Sir?' I said, 'No, I don't'. He said, 'You trained me at Wagga'. And he showed me a photograph of his original face, and said, 'Gotcha'. He was badly smashed up. But he was a great help, in many ways. Because he was older, and senior. He'd been flying in the UK, too, for a while, before he joined the RAAF. A lot of the guys in the squadron were Perth based.

29:00 Some of them older than me. We got on very well. Once we got the idea of a team. The squadron's not

run by an individual. It's run by a team of people. And once they got the idea and got settled in, and it was fairly straight forward. I could leave things for other people to do. Well, that was essential, too. Passing on, your ability to pass on responsibility to other people.

29:30 That was essential. Whether it be flying, or looking after the ground crew, messing, accommodation, sickness. I had a very good doctor, too. Very good doctor. And he was essential. All these top blokes were essential to the squadron. And I used to give some of the responsibility to NCOs. I'd say, 'Well, you know about this. That's your job'. 'Oh, Can I?'

30:00 I'd say, 'Course you can. Who's your boss?' 'Oh, engineer officer so and so. We don't think very much of him'. I'd say, 'Well, forget that. report to him. Tell him what you're doing. And I get to hear about it anyway. But it's up to you. You've got the experience and you've got the nous, pass on the information. Direct it where you have to. Train where you have to'.

You mentioned John Gorton. Who were the other key members of your team at that stage?

30:30 Oh, Bill Meecham, came from Perth. He became a top bloke in Perth later on. Gough Manning. Jimmy Cox. My 2IC [Second in Command] was a bloke called George Shave. He was in 12 Squadron at Darwin, during the raids there, and he got badly smashed around. Not physically damaged, mentally damaged. And he came back to me, and because of his seniority, I made him 2IC.

31:00 The other guy was Daryl Sproule, he came from Sandy Bay in Hobart, he was to take over from me. And the day of takeover, I handed over the squadron, too. He was shot down and later on beheaded by the Japanese. But my senior guys were all experienced. George Shave from Darwin, Daryl Sproule had been shot down in flames, in a Brewster Buffalo, 21 Squadron in Malaysia. Before he got back to Australia.

31:30 But George Shave was a very interesting guy. He was an engineer, as well as being a pilot. And in Darwin, one night, we were night flying, his aircraft burst into flames. And he crash landed on the beach, north of Darwin. And we all eventually got out to rescue him, that sort of thing, and I said, 'What happened?' He said, 'Oh, buggered if I know'.

32:00 I said, 'You did your own maintenance. You signed this aircraft as serviceable. Tell us what happened'. He said, 'Buggered if I know, we've lost an aircraft'. I said, 'We certainly have'. But it burnt out. But he always blamed himself for aircraft blowing up. I don't know what happened. Probably a loose bloody petrol line. Got hot. Caught fire.

32:30 **What things made you angry at that time?**

Carelessness. By anyone in the squadron. I got angry with people on occasions. You had to. Because you saw something happen that shouldn't happen. This is the thing you're trying to avoid, you trying to get, not a perfect outfit, but a near perfect outfit. Assembled under your command.

33:00 **What sort of examples of carelessness would come up?**

Well, taxing accidents, wing tip to wing tip, wing tip on the side of a hangar. One occasion, at Pearce [aerodrome] where we formed the squadron originally, a sub was messing around in the cockpit, who should be there. He was an electrician. But he put his screwdriver across a couple of terminals and the guns went off.

33:30 Well, luckily the guns were facing that way. It only blew out a hangar door. That's all that happened. That's carelessness. The guy sitting on the wing beside the guns got a bloody fright. But he wasn't touched. But things like that. Taxing accidents by the aircrew were the worst ones. Ground crew forgetting to put chocks in front of the aircraft, or

34:00 not putting petrol caps on properly. So they started to leak a bit. That sort of thing. Small things they may not be dangerous, but should never happen. And gradually the squadron learnt, by mistakes, as you always do. You all learn by mistakes.

You sound like a figure you could turn to quite easily. But also someone who had a little bit of a temper.

34:30 Oh, yeah.

What was your reputation amongst the men do you think?

'Cresswell, the bastard', they used to call me. 'He's a tough bastard. You do things his way or not at all'. Which was partly right. You led by example. And most of my leaders did. Occasionally I would change the Flight Commanders. The establishment said, 'You can have two Flight Commanders. A and B'.

35:00 I said, 'That's not good enough. I want five'. So I put in five Flight Commanders. The Air Force said, 'You can't do that'. I said, 'I've done it. It stays this way'. 'Why?' 'Because we are not a full squadron'. We never operated as a full squadron. We operated in lots. So each one got to be a leader. Another thing I did, which I got roused about. I formed an airmen's club, ground crew club.

35:30 I already mentioned that. That was at Williamtown after the war. But I thought it was essential. The ground crew could have a beer where they could talk amongst themselves. That's corporal down. It was

run by officers. I put officers in charge of all these sort of, ventures I called them. Another thing was, aircrew. I didn't like the idea of having officer aircrew and NCO aircrew.

36:00 I thought it was bloody crazy. In fact, in Korea, I gave all the NCOs officers stripes, in case they were captured. They were better treated, by the enemy. So my aircrew clubs were all aircrew, and senior NCOs and all the officers, of the squadron. And that's how we got the squadron going in Pearce. Again, the Air Force objected, 'Oh, NCOs, they can go to the servicemen's mess'.

36:30 I said, 'I don't care. I've got flight sergeants, leading officers, in there. So I'm not going to change that sort of thing'. So I got the airmen's mess going, or helped to get the messes going. I was told I was the founder of the aircrew mess. But I don't think so. I think other people did the same thing. Again, it's teamwork. Getting a team working together. Getting a team working properly.

37:00 **What mistakes did you make in your early days of command?**

Ooh. Probably several. But I suppose, disobeying orders was the biggest mistake I ever made. But I always disobeyed orders. And I was known throughout the Air Force for doing that. If I thought something was right, I did it my way.

37:30 Nine times out of ten it was right, too.

How did that attitude give you trouble?

Oh, it got me into trouble. Not serious trouble. For instance, just before the Queen's visit in 1954, I was flying twenty four jets down to Sydney and back again, on a timing basis, so we would do the right thing when she arrived. Well, they'd been flying for about two or three weeks doing this,

38:00 and all the boys were tired as buggery, because I used to come back, I'd say, after a twelve squadron sweep down to Sydney, and back again, and 'No. Do it again', and the ground crew would say, 'Hey, Sir. It's half past three, four o'clock'. 'Fill the ruddy thing up. We'll do it again'. So we did it again. And one Friday, I said to myself, 'About time these guys had a break'. So I stood the station down at midday.

38:30 And said, 'Don't come back till Tuesday'. I'd already teed up trains to take them from Newcastle to Sydney. And the Air Force kicked up a hell of a stink about that. I said, 'They've worked bloody hard. So they're entitled to a bit of time off'. Because my OC always agreed with me, but the Chief of the Air Force never did. But he and I had a few fights later on.

But wasn't Scherger a Chief Air Marshall at that stage?

Oh, no. Then he was, we're talking about '46. Oh, he was Air Vice Marshall then. He wasn't in charge of the Air Force then. It was still Jones, I think.

Tape 4

00:30 **You mentioned in Darwin there was a fair bit of frustration at your role there. Can you tell us a bit more about that and how you dealt with it?**

The guys that run the area, that was Air Commodore Bladen, he was no fool, but some of his staff were, I thought, a bit weak. So when it came round to training the squadron, I did it,

01:00 without authority, except where the Fighter Sector was involved. It was a brand new fighter sector, and they were responsible for maintaining the squadron ability, training and so on and so forth. On occasion, I used to do it myself. I told the fighter sector, 'Look, I'll do it this way'. 'OK, fair enough, you're the boss'.

01:30 In fact, in the end, Dad Bladen said to all the COs, 'Look, it's your responsibility. You're trained as a CO, you're trained in the aircraft you're flying. Do it your way, but let us know what's happening'. But sometimes I didn't. Night flying for instance. When we realised that the Japs weren't coming over during the day, but at night, I said, 'God, I'm the Night Pilot, I love night flying, I'll have a crack at them'.

02:00 I put this scheme up to Fighter Sector and they said, 'Bloody marvellous'. Mainly because they didn't have to work overtime, or work through the night. The OC was quite happy about it, so that's how I got my night victories, and night flying. Then, of course, the other squadron commander was Bluey Truscott. Quite well known. Who had 76 squadron, and he wasn't a night fighter pilot, nor were his guys, but he wanted to fly at night. So I said, all right, well, if you want to do some night flying better go to the RAAF, Darwin.

02:30 The big airport at Darwin, where it's free of trees and so on. So I flew those guys a couple of nights, or a couple of months. Bluey actually went up later on. Must have been about Christmas time, '42, with three guys and they had a crack at a Japanese aircraft. Although two had never fired their guns, the aircraft was damaged.

03:00 He gave them a quarter each. That was Blue Truscott. Famous bloke.

Where was 76 Squadron at that time?

They came out of Milne Bay to Darwin, about two months after us. We went from Perth to Darwin, in August ’42. They came out of Milne Bay about October ’42. Because 75 and 76 Squadron had been in Milne Bay during that big show in September.

What did you hear about that Battle of Milne Bay?

03:30 Quite a lot. Although we had no direct contact, people that were coming through were telling us all about it. And since then I’ve learnt a hell of a lot because they had bloody bad time. 75 Squadron initially had a hard time in Moresby. Lost eighteen pilots, in five weeks, then at Milne Bay both squadrons lost pilots. But they saved the day. Caused the Japanese not to do a retreat, but to change their objective.

04:00 They pulled out of Milne Bay.

It’s become renowned as the battle that saved Australia, in a way.

Yeah.

With Kittyhawks flying not very far away from where you were in Darwin. How did that make your squadron feel?

We were on alert all the time. Night time operations were fairly straight forward, because they only sent three aircraft over at night, although the day I shot down the Betty [code for Mitsubishi G4M bomber], eighteen aircraft came across that night six lots of three.

04:30 But well, we always waited to have a daylight raid on Darwin, and whilst my squadron was there we never did. We missed out completely on daylight raids. It was a pity. Because they were a highly trained squadron.

But you did do night patrols then? Could you take us through one of them?

Oh, well, I take off from our strip, magnificent strip.

05:00 Fairly, always moonlight nights anyway, so they weren’t dark nights, not too dark. So I climb up to about twenty four, twenty five thousand feet, highest I could go in those models, the Kittyhawk E Model, and our patrol line, which was on the east side of Darwin. And of course the Japs came in from north west to north. So I’d be on the other side.

05:30 Now the guns were allowed to have a go. The 3.7 ack-ack guns, as long as they could, until I saw, or could identify enemy aircraft. Then I’d ring down to Fighter Sector and say, ‘No go’. But it took thirty seven seconds for the last round to reach the height I was at. So I had to avoid that sort of thirty of forty seconds. So I’d go in and try and chase these Japs, but I missed out several times.

06:00 Mainly because they dived and got away from me, or I was too far away at the start of the chase.

How much could your radar tell you about where they were and what you were going to see?

Radar would give you a direction, not the height, but we knew the height roughly because they came in at mid twenties, so they could maintain the operating height and also retained fuel. We always knew the direction they came in,

06:30 and then you had ground spotters giving you the direction, too. Or pass on the information to the Fighter Sector. The Fighter Sector passed the information to us. But I was, being on the east patrol line, I was generally too far away for the aircraft itself. Until the night I got one. I returned to my patrol line and right in front of me were three Bettys. In tight formation.

Let’s just take us up to that moment.

07:00 **What was happening on that night? What had you been doing?**

Well, there was eighteen Japanese came in, in six flights of three each, raiding Darwin, and one raid went down to, I think, Coomalie Creek down near Batchelor. And they dropped their bombs on shipping in the Darwin area. I caught the three guys still with their bombs in their racks.

07:30 So it was the general bombing of the Darwin area, all over a period of thirty five, forty minutes. And the guys I caught right in front of me.

Where were you, what were you doing at the time?

I got back to my patrol line on the east side, I’d been chasing something. Must have missed them. I got to my patrol line on the east side of Darwin.

08:00 which is north-south fly direction. And there were these three aircraft right in front of me, I said, ‘Right’..

What was your immediate reaction, to see these three Bettys?

About time. So I thought, 'Well, bloody good'. I was all ready to fly anyway. So I fired on the closest aircraft, and all six guns worked. The second time I fired, only four guns worked,

08:30 the third time I fired, only two of my guns worked. We had trouble with oils in those days. But anyway, according to the records, most of my bullets went into that first aircraft. But some must have flown into the other aircraft, which was also in my sights. I was only forty yards away, I was quite close. Which was an excellent position to be in to shoot down an aircraft. So, he got shot down. I followed him down, to make sure, and he started to break up,

09:00 about twelve, fourteen thousand feet. He landed in small bits all over the countryside. It was the first aircraft, Betty, we got hold of that we could examine properly. All the bits were available for examination. Blisters for instance. Side blisters. We didn't know the Bettys had them. They got a lot of information from that aircraft. Also, on board were nine Japanese, one was a colonel. Who'd been trained by the Royal Air Force in 1913.

09:30 And he had a lot of information on him. Maps he shouldn't have been carrying. Dyes he shouldn't have been carrying. So they got a lot of information from him.

Can you describe that sight of the three Bettys and them going down?

Well, they were all in fairly tight formation. I think they were turning onto their bombing run. Judging by the angle I shot down the left hand one.

10:00 He immediately peeled off downwards, as far as I remember. So I decided to follow him down to make sure I got him. Apparently I did, because, judging by the amount of my .5s in his belly, and so on. I got him fairly cleanly. Big fight there.

10:30 The Betty had a tail gun. I think it was, was it 20 mil. I think it was 20 mil. But it had incendiary tracer rounds in it, I could see it coming my way, too. As it turned out, it went over my head. Got a bit of a fright there. Some bugger shooting at me. Your first victory

11:00 is always a sensational victory, something, whether you're a Fighter Pilot or Tail Gunner or blister gunners or bombers, that sort of thing, your first victory's always a bit exciting I suppose. Because this was the first time I'd ever fired my guns against, in anger. It was that night.

That's why it would have bee interesting, it was so unusual that night, what happened in a way.

11:30 **You must have been sort of shocked and excited by what happened?**

Well, I was waiting for something like that to happen. I was waiting to sort of have a trace of that aircraft and shoot it down. Not to find three of them right in front of me. That was sheer luck. Yeah, it was exciting, I suppose, looking back. Although when you're in that position, you do the job that you're trained to do. And you concentrate on doing that job properly. That applies to any sort of offensive tactics.

12:00 Whether it's sort of air to air, or air to ground, or whatever. I suppose the worst jobs we had to do was in Korea.

Just sticking on that Darwin raid, that patrol for a moment, when you say you do what you're trained to do, what was your training dictating for encountering Japanese aircraft?

Well, I had the squadron in aerial combat tactics all the time.

12:30 Whenever I had spare moments. Not just flying around, you know, doing nothing, we were a fighter squadron. We were to intercept enemy raiders. In those days, especially from high level bombing raids. So that was our job. We were trained that way. I made sure they were.

What tactics came into play that night?

13:00 Well, accidentally, I did all the right things. I was in the right position, well inside the right distance, and I had some fairly active guns, and I just fired and got him. I wasn't chasing the bloody aircraft. He was there. So I was a bit lucky. You se normally, you chase an aircraft, you generally get in the rear quarter, of him, slightly below, and fly up into him. Get him below three hundred yards,

13:30 get him the distance between him and you, small as possible, because it will be more accurate. Well, it was sheer luck that night. Everything was there for me.

What happened to the other two aircraft?

Well. They must have dropped their bombs. Because mine still had bombs on. And flew away. Now they say, one aircraft crashed into the sea on its way home. And that's where he pulled

14:00 every now and again, and eventually someone wrote this book about Darwin, and gave me two aircraft, shot down. So I checked and, yeah, there was an aircraft shot down that night. Second one. So it had to

be me. I was the only guy firing guns.

Where was your support aircraft at the time?

I didn't have any. Just me. I did it by myself. Solo. I was the only night fighter pilot they had. In Darwin those days.

14:30 I knew how to fly at night. Again, I had a lot of that training at Wagga again. So I had two or three hundred hours of night flying already up my sleeve. All my squadron could fly at night, but they'd only five or ten hours total experience. I did that at Pearce, to make sure they weren't caught out. They got back, from a job, at nighttime.

15:00 But we weren't training pilots to fly at night, or to fight at night. Until later on. And that was the time we got transferred to Milne Bay. So I flew, as soon as I got to Milne Bay, I think I was up there flying at night. After a couple of Japanese. Missed them, got shot up by an American destroyer, on the way home.

What happened that occasion?

Well, we got to Milne Bay

15:30 and the Japs were coming in at night, so I said, 'Can I got up?' so I went up, under control of Fighter Sector. Coming back, through the full length of Milne Bay, under cloud, and an American destroyer was in, anchored. And fired at me. Missed me. But I could see the bloody guns firing and I thought, 'Christ'. Just before I was about to land at the Gooney airstrip.

16:00 So a couple of days later there was a sort of a conference going on, and the captain of the ship was complaining about guys coming in over his ship, and him not knowing about it. I said, 'That was me, and you should have known about it. You were told'. Of course, the fellows told everyone. If a bloke was flying at night, like myself. So anyway, we got through a bottle of whiskey that night, I think.

What was your relationship with the Americans like?

16:30 Good. I met the Americans in early February, 1942, at Williamtown. The 49 Fighter Group came out to Australia, with the three squadrons, the 7th, 8th and 9th, Pursuit Squadrons they called them then. Kittyhawks. Those guys were at Darwin. I was their instructor and staff pilot. Staff Liaison pilot. And I got to know them very well. In fact, the CO of the squadron,

17:00 oh god, Jim, ah, I met him years later at Seattle. He was the Director of Boeing. He knew I was coming, so he pulled me aside from the crowd, the mob that was sent over there, said, 'Come with me'. So he showed me right through the Boeing outfit. Because those days, they had the thousand passenger aircraft designed, partly mocked up. Yeah, they could build it, two or four engines,

17:30 no worry at all, says Boeing. No airport could handle it. A thousand passengers. And we'd still have problems handling a lot of passengers.

What about that night that you were shot up by a destroyer? What did you think of the Americans then?

Oh, wasn't very happy about them. Oh, apparently, fair enough, the guys on the guns, they saw the aircraft, didn't know what it was.

18:00 And they fired at it. I probably would have done the same thing. Except I was sitting in the bloody cockpit, I was a bit unhappy. I was only about five minutes from landing on my own airfield. Because I'd been up about an hour, hour and a half or two hours, chasing Japs. Or trying to. Well, every now and again you get a fright like that.

Was it more frightening to know that you're under the fire of your own side?

18:30 Oh, if the damage is done, yeah. But, on occasion, my squadron pilots got shot up, not shot up but hit, or shot up by friendly destroyers and so on. We had that trouble at New Guinea. In fact, sometimes the American destroyer would shoot down a bloody Australian aircraft.

Did that happen while you were there?

19:00 The Bofer that got shot down. I think I was there at the same time. They were doing a raid, or somewhere along the New Britain coast. I'm not quite sure what shot him down. Whether it was a patrol boat or a destroyer, American destroyer. But I know one Bofer got shot down. Oh, I know a couple of Kittyhawk pilots that got shot up too. In fact, one guy's still alive.

19:30 He got shot down by a PT [motor torpedo] boat off, off, oh god, up the New Guinea coast, north west of Lae. But he spent about four months escaping the Japanese. And he got out.

Were there instances of that happening the other way round

20:00 **of Australian guns firing?**

Oh, yes. We'd do the same thing. Mistakes are made quite often. Because of lack of communication, or lack of recent communication cause half the problem. And don't forget blokes are kind of trigger happy

in a situation where you could be hit, or bombed or strafed.

20:30 Korea, it happened a couple of times. We made some big mistakes. One big mistake was shooting up a hospital train. Not by me, but my squadron. I hadn't joined the squadron then. And Luke Spence tried three times by radio, 'Is this an enemy train?' 'Yes, yes, yes'. He said, 'Well, it's showing our panels'. 'It's not us. It's enemy'.

21:00 He shot the bloody train up, destroyed it. Killed a lot of Americans. Anyway the Yanks were so unhappy about this whole thing, because it was their fault. They gave them a great big bloody gong for it. And a month later he was killed. That's when I took over.

How was morale at that time, when you took over?

Good. Because we had three losses,

21:30 Graham Strout, Sergeant Harrop [shot down in North Korea, circa August 1950] and Wing Commander Luke Spence, no, it was down a bit. When you lose your leader you're a…also they realised they were in a lousy bloody war. But I had no trouble when I took over. Bloke called Flight Lieutenant I.A. "Bay" Adams [later Air Vice Marshal Adams], a bloke you should have interviewed. But you missed out. He's dead. He was quite a guy, he was one of the leading lights up in the New Guinea Occupational Force. He was the top fighter pilot up there,

22:00 according to the Americans, and he was bloody good. He should have been given a squadron up there. He never was, unfortunately. In fact, he should have had my job. So I arrived up there, he said, 'It's all yours'. I said, 'Oh, Jesus. OK, away we go'. So the first day we did about four missions. Within two or three days, I had control of the squadron.

22:30 And the pilots were all the old timers. They'd been there for quite a while in Japan, highly trained, very reliable. I had to send a few home, ooh, when they reached their hundredth mission, and I'd get replacements and the replacements were pretty weak. Some were pre-trained, pre-war, post-war. Oh, war time. Most of the guys were badly trained.

23:00 But generally speaking, if a guy could survive his first thirty missions, he was all right.

Were there significant differences in the way it operated in Korea and they way it had operated in New Guinea?

No, because we were using the basic platform. The Kittyhawk was the basic ground-type platform, so was the Mustang. We could fly high, shoot aircraft down, but we were doing the same sort of things. Supporting troops. Hitting everything we could find. Find the opportunity.

23:30 In New Guinea of course, it was generally patrol boats, that sort of thing. Or groups of Japanese on the shores off New Britain and New Ireland. In Korea it was troops on the ground, trucks, transport. One job we did in North Korea.

24:00 I'd taken twelve, sixteen, no twelve aircraft up across the twelve thousand foot snow-capped mountains up the Yalu River. This is from Yompo, Hamhung, on the way over I said, 'Christ, they're bloody cavalry'. And there's two companies of cavalry, Chinese, on beautiful horses, riding down a snow covered track going west, going east, our direction. I rang up the Air Defence Centre,

24:30 and said, 'Eh, what's going on?' They said, 'We don't know, but there are guns firing at us from up there somewhere. Big guns'. We found the big guns. I destroyed those. But these were all Chinese. And they were waving at us, thinking that we were their aircraft. That wasn't very nice, we shot up the cavalry and destroyed the guns, and did all that, but some things you don't like doing

25:00 when you're very close to the ground, but you do it because you have to.

We'll come back to Korea and that incident specifically. Because I've heard about that. It's a very interesting one. Ground attack in general. Before we talk about the Mustang, the Kittyhawk, was it a better ground attack aircraft than an interceptor fighter aircraft?

Both. The Kittyhawk was both an interceptor as well as a ground attack aircraft. We carried a big load on the Kittyhawk. My longest trip was eight and a quarter hours,

25:30 operating from Pierce Sound up into the Yalu River. Right across Korea.

In a Mustang or a Kittyhawk?

Kittyhawk. Very long time.

What were its strengths and weaknesses?

Well, the only weakness was, it wasn't a higher flying aircraft. It was a very rugged aircraft, could take a lot of punishment. Had good guns. 6.5s, could deal out a lot. It's weakness I suppose, being a glycol system.

26:00 Whereas one hole in the glycol system could eventually sort of seize the engine after an hour or so. That was the weakness of both the Mustang and the Kittyhawk. But apart from that . . .

What about in the guns, that you mentioned before?

The trouble with the .5s, initially, that's with the first model, E Model, they had a funny type of oil. Didn't like being up in the cold climate, like say, at twenty thousand feet plus.

26:30 Sort of seal up or freeze up a bit. Later on that was changed. And everything came good. Mustang, no trouble with the guns.

What was your relationship with your aircraft? Did you fly them indiscriminately? Did you have a particular aircraft? What was that?

Oh, when aircraft were allotted to the blokes, initially we allotted aircraft to the individual pilot.

27:00 And no one wanted 113. I said, 'I'll take it'. That's it there. 113. (Looks towards picture on wall) So I kept that aircraft all time.

How did you personalise that aircraft?

Oh, well. That was done by LAC Newton. What happened, I wouldn't let the squadron write the names of their girlfriends and wives on the plane.

27:30 No writing at all. Anything but names. They said, 'Oh, bugger that'. And they did all sorts of other things they put on the aircraft and LAC Newton was an ex-sign writer, I think he was an armourer. And this sign writer said, 'Well, I'll paint all these things on the aircraft for them'. Which he did. There's a book out somewhere. I haven't got it. On the various things on the squadron aircraft. He came to me and he said, 'What do you want?'

28:00 and I said, 'I haven't got a bloody clue'. He said, 'Well, you must want something'. I said, 'Oh, no.' He said, 'What about flags?' I said, 'OK'. So he designed the thing on the aircraft. The four flags.

Can you describe that for us? What did he design?

He designed an arrangement of four flags. The British, the Australian, the Air Force flag, what was the fourth one?

The US?

Could have been, must have been the US flag.

28:30 Interwoven together, on the left-hand side of the aircraft. It became quite a feature. Even Tokyo Rose knew about this, this particular design. And it was said, I've never heard it myself. 'Oh, that squadron commander has flags on the side of the aircraft. We'll get him'. That has been reported to me, but I never heard that. But they knew it. And it became quite a feature.

29:00 Even the, when they had the fiftieth anniversary of the squadron at Williamtown, they had a Kittyhawk there, and the F/A-18 Hornet, on the side of that bloody F/A-18 was the four flags, and it's still on the aircraft, too.

How does that tradition make you feel now?

Oh, pretty proud. Pretty proud. I've always been proud of the Air Force,

29:30 I've always been part of it, even now. They call me the Chief Fighter Pilot, because I'm so bloody old I suppose. When I go to Williamtown there's always a sort of reception for me. In fact, in the July stint this year, they had the end of the Korean War, the walk-off part of the parade was handed over to me. I was the reviewing officer.

30:00 So it was in my honour, they paraded the squadron. They've done that twice now. I was very proud when I came back to the squadron. And again, the airmen like it because they know my bloody history. And when I go down and talk to them, as I always do, they're pretty happy about that. When they see an oldie still walking around.

30:30 **How do you feel about your fame, especially that incident, shooting down a Betty in Darwin?**

Fame. Oh, I don't know. I only found out that I was the Australian that shot down the first enemy aircraft over Australia. But it's part of the job. We don't bull about our so-called activities, or victories, or so on.

31:00 Some blokes do, but I don't. that's part of the job we did. Even when I got a very good name in Korea from the American generals, both of them, the Commanding General of Fighter Air Forces, and the Commanding General of the 5th Air Force, specially when I didn't follow their squadrons down to the bloody escape route. I kept my squadrons back and we carried down right till the last bloody moment.

31:30 The Yanks got a raspberry for what they did, and the one star was removed from command back to the states. But no, the job has to be done and we did. One thing I always did, and many other squadrons and people have followed it. I always kept the whole squadron informed of what was going on. Especially in Korea, especially in North Korea. Every night, half a dozen of us would go around and talk to all the guys.

32:00 No matter where they were. This is what happened today, or what might happen tomorrow. In fact in North Korea, a lot of the Negro ack-ack gunners were coming across, and all of the Yanks were coming across, to listen to our briefings, because the Yanks weren't briefing their guys. And we did. All the time. Kept them informed. That was essential. And the guys appreciated it too, because it stopped rumours going around. We gave them what we knew to be the truth,

32:30 what might happen next day, and they were warned that we would probably have to evacuate. I game them about four days warning on that one. That's North Korea. So they knew what was going to happen.

Skipping back to something you said earlier. What was your objection to your squadron writing names on their aircraft?

I didn't think it was necessary.

33:00 I thought it was crazy. Crazy idea. Oh, just one of my silly ideas. Which was obeyed.

What about some of the other things that LAC Newton painted. Were there any that stick in your mind?

No. There was a pig arse. Oh, all sorts of funny things he dreamed up. PO Prune was one. We had a PO Prune in the squadron, a bloke called Hodgkinson, who came from Orange, by the way.

33:30 Hit the Secret Weapon, Tojo Secret Weapon, these funny things. And where is that bloody book. I have one that's got all those things in it.

I'm sure someone can find it if they want to look it up.

Oh, I'm still unpacking. There's things outside to be unpacked yet.

It will be a very interesting document, I'm sure

Yeah. Well, there's a document printed on that. Written by a bloke in Melbourne.

34:00 On the various things that the squadron had printed on the side of their aircraft. Blokes liked it in the end. They liked the idea.

In Milne Bay, a lot of the squadrons up there had names written on their aircraft, on the side.

Yeah, well, there's one Kittyhawk down in the War Memorial. That's Buster Brown's [Squadron Leader Bruce Edward Brown. He flew at Milne Bay with 75 Squadron in 1942 and took over 77 Squadron from Cresswell at Goodenough Island, circa September 1943].

Buster Brown's?

You did him last week. Or not you, but someone did.

Not personally. I would have loved to.

34:30 His aircraft is there. The one he flew at Milne Bay is still in the War Memorial now.

Where were you based in Milne Bay?

Gurney strip.

And what was your role out of there?

I was one of the two fighter squadrons.

And the Fighter Squadron was involved in ground support? Or what?

No, not in New Guinea. But only in New Britain. Opportunity. I did that up and down the coast. Used to do an hour and forty flight, over the water, to Gasmata, up the coast to Jacquinot Bay [New Britain],

35:00 to south of Rabaul and back home again. They were long trips. They were three and a half hour trips.

What were flying conditions like?

Sometimes bloody lousy. Coming back once we flew beside fourteen water spouts. Oh, boy, it was a bloody bad day. It was black down to a two or three hundred feet above the water. We came through dotting at these water spouts. And one of the blokes said, 'I'm going to have a crack at one of these. Try to shoot it down'.

35:30 I said, 'You do that. But I won't bury you'. So, he did anyway. He couldn't' do any damage to a water spout.

What does a water spout that look like?

Well, you see them on TV these days, the American hurricanes hit the coast there. Black as hats some of

them. The ones we saw that night, were only about three or four hundred feet in height, from the base of the cloud to the sea.

36:00 But very turbulent all round it. Of course, it was whirling round at a great rate. By the time we came back that day, from Jacquinot Bay, boy, it was a bloody terrible day. And the blokes hung on to me. 'He knows the way'. So they reckoned. But, oh, the weather sometimes was terrible, around that New Guinea/New Britain area.

36:30 **What other incidents stand out in your mind, from flying in that area?**

Well, in the latter days of World War II, I was Wing Leader of 81 Wing, based at Noemfoor. And we were doing raids up to the Halmahera Islands, which was a couple of air fields up there, Japanese air fields, we were bombing just about every day. And we'd land at Middleburg,

37:00 it was a small island off the north west coast of New Guinea. Which the Yanks had got hold of, and refuel, and carry on to Halmaheras. Drop on the way back, and back at Middleburg to refuel to get home to Noemfoor. And coming back once, I had a squadron, two squadrons I think, about thirty aircraft. Thirty, forty aircraft.

37:30 'Oh, it must be safe. The bastards smoking'. I'd unhinged the window slightly and I was smoking. I always smoked heavily then. And that came across, loud and clear across the air. Great giggles from the blokes.

Was the bastard . . .

I'm the bastard.

Was it a friendly term?

Oh, yeah. Christ, yeah. Always a friendly term.

What were other nicknames used around 77th Squadron.

38:00 Oh, Dick the Shit. The Bastard. That's about all.

I've got great images of fierce commanders. What were your impressions of flying in that area?

New Guinea?

Yeah. The landscape.

Oh, it was fascinating. Because I flew there after the war with Bobby Gibbs, flying Ju-52s [Junkers transport planes]. But it is a fascinating area to fly in, but you flew what they call a weather pattern.

38:30 There are two fronts operating, coming down towards New Guinea from the Equator, followed by another one. And you knew what time, roughly what time they'd hit the coast, and that was the time you'd avoid. You'd fly before or after. In your various jobs. Just a weather safety feature. But you had to get to know the weather in New Guinea. That was very important. I found it more so when I was flying the bloody transports later on.

39:00 For instance, in transport you'd take off, oh, I'd take off about six o'clock in the morning. Be in the New Guinea hinterland, doing the job I had to do, dropping stores off, that sort of thing, and back again before that front came in. Because you knew by two o'clock in the afternoon you'd really hit the rain. But you knew the weather pattern was pretty important.

39:30 We found that out pretty early in the flying days in New Guinea. Milne Bay for instance was, oh, half the time was covered in bloody low cloud, and storms and so on. And you'd try and avoid blokes coming back during a rainstorm, if you could. There was an alternative airfield you could land on, but it was a very small one, in case they got caught out.

40:00 But you made sure you understood your whether. You had to. But that applied to all, even the bombers from Darwin. The Lockheed Hudsons that took off from the huge strip next to ours. They got in trouble occasionally and they lost two or three aircraft. Because of weather.

Tape 5

00:30 **Dick, what did you love about night flying?**

I liked weather flying and night flying. I don't know. I just liked it. Also in those days, not many people were night flying. The blokes on the Empire [Air Training Scheme] only got five hours, if they got that, total, during their course, before they got their wings.

01:00 But I thought it was necessary to be able to fly in bad weather, or good weather, night or day.

But it sounds as if you had a particular love of it. You said you really liked it.

I did.

What was it about being up there after dark and flying around?

I don't know. It was quite good fun. Especially on a moonlight night. Especially that Darwin, when the Japs came in, the full moonlight. You could read a book, because the moon was so good. The light from the moon.

01:30 But I just liked it. I used to fly around the clouds at nighttime. Even when I got the Sabres down here at Williamtown, oh, bloody, the air controllers at Mascot, 'Oh, that bastard's up again'. It was me flying a Sabre at night, at fifty thousand feet, all over Sydney. Down towards Melbourne and so on and so forth. And I'd hear this and I'd say, 'Yes, it's me again. What are you going to do about it?' 'Nothing'.

02:00 I was under control of Williamtown, anyway. But I just liked night flying. It was quite fun flying the Sabre at high altitude at nighttime.

What was fun about that?

Well, you could see everything. You could see Melbourne, Sydney and, virtually, Brisbane. If you were high enough. Well, fifty thousand feet you see the three cities. You see the glow from the street lights and so on. But I did love night flying.

02:30 **What did you like about weather flying?**

Well, if you're a leader, you've got to know what to do in bad weather conditions. So you make sure you do it yourself. You know, you use all the aids available. That are available in those early days, there weren't that many. Make sure you're safe. But it's just a form, a briefing.

03:00 In briefing you say, "OK, there's bad weather coming up. I suggest we do so and so'. And the guys would say, 'Well, you know. You've done it'. Which I had. And that's pretty important for a leader to have done these things. To know what to do. Know how to brief your guys and so on. But I used to like weather flying. For instance, when they introduced GCA, Ground Control Approach, that's a radar system.

03:30 The first lot came up to Iwakuni in Japan. By the time I took over the squadron. And the CO of the outfit said, 'I'm not getting enough GCA practice'. I said, 'How many do you want?' He said, 'I want thirty a day'. I said, 'I'll give you a hundred'. He said, 'What!' I said, 'I'll give you a hundred landings a day.' So every pilot was told he had to get right back to Iwakuni to do a GCA approach and landing.

04:00 Under the control of the guys of the GCA fan. All the guys and they became bloody good at it. They could virtually touch you down. They're supposed to release you at two hundred feet, and you land yourself. But it's for bad weather conditions. You can land through all sorts of muck with GCA Safely. But it got those guys well trained on the ground. And again we had no trouble at all. The guys,

04:30 the pilots that did all the practice work, they thought it was bloody marvellous. They knew they were safe. They could come back in terrible bloody weather, and land safely. So all this is pretty important. What you've got to do as a leader. Make sure it's done properly.

Back in Darwin. What were the losses on 77 Squadron?

We had none. Because we had no aerial combat. We missed out. I lost a few aircraft. Didn't lose any blokes.

05:00 One bloke, Farmer Griffith. Do you ever remember the Pyjama Girl mystery?

I do.

Well, Farmer Griffith, he was a farmer, he found that bloody body. And then when the war broke out he joined the Air Force, and came to my squadron. So we called him Farmer Griffith. But his prop went ape at about twenty five thousand, twenty six thousand feet,

05:30 in a Kittyhawk, west of Darwin. And he had to bail out, which he did. That was the first aircraft we lost, I think. But I had no losses of pilots at all, because we had no bloody war.

What about up at Milne Bay?

No, we only lost Daryl Sproule. Oh, and a bloke called Jimmy Morrows. The last big raid on Milne Bay by the Japanese was in April '43.

06:00 We had two squadrons airborne, mine and 75 Squadron. We hit them first, because we'd been up there about an hour with our tanks on. We foresaw this happening so I said, 'Tanks on'. Where the other squadron didn't have any tanks on at all, we had plenty of time. So we hit the Japanese head on. I got shot down. But I got the lead bomber anyway. And we lost one pilot out of the two squadrons,

06:30 a bloke called, young sergeant Jimmy Morrows, one of my pilots. Don't know how. He was shot down probably. But one bullet hit me in the magneto, from a Zero [Mitsubishi A6M fighter]. So I got my lead bomber and then I had to angle down to the ground, and force landed back on the home strip. My

engine was only running very roughly with only half the magneto working.

07:00 **What's it like being chased by a Zero in a Kittyhawk? The Zero's a pretty high performance plane?**

Oh, a very high performance. Now the bloke that hit me, I was going up on the bomber, and he got me with a ninety degree reflection shot. My number two saw it happen.

It was almost a lucky shot, wasn't it?

Yes, it was a lucky shot. Especially the magneto. But somewhere amongst all this junk I've got the bullet. But god knows where it is. Or I had the bullet anyway. But I got the lead bomber, that's the main thing.

07:30 That's the leader, in formation.

How do you approach, this was a Betty was it?

Yes.

How do you approach that?

Fortunately, it was nearly a head on approach because we were up the bay, been circling waiting for these bombers to come in, and they were from the southeast. Oh, we got five or six bombers that day, plus three or four probables.

08:00 **Head on attack is quite difficult because . . .**

Close speeds, yeah.

Tell us how you actually . . .

Well, in my case I dove down a bit, got below twenty four thousand feet, and came up on the lead bomber, got about ten degrees off, and hit, head on. And I got him that way. I just shattered his cockpit.

What sort of range?

08:30 I started off firing from about four hundred yards in, kept on firing. I could see the bullets hitting the aircraft, anyway. But I was after that lead bomber. He was the important guy. That was a big raid, there was about a hundred and twenty odd aircraft came in that day. Bettys, Val D [Val was code for Japanese-made Aichi D3A dive bombers], Zeros. We got about twelve aircraft total, with the two squadrons, I think, that day.

09:00 That was the last big raid on New Guinea. April, '43.

How many planes did you shoot down?

Only three Bettys.

What's it like being in a dog fight, with a Zero?

I don't know. Never had one.

You got shot down by one, though.

Oh, yeah. But he was coming in. I was flying towards the bombers. He was coming in on the full deflection shot.

What did you see of him?

I didn't see him.

09:30 I just realised I'd been hit. Realised that. But, so I never had a dog fight with a fighter. Even though that bloody photograph up there says so. That print. No, the guys that did, and a few of my guys have, specially Buster Brown, who took over the squadron from me. He was in the September raids. In '42. At Milne Bay. And he got chased by Zeros. He thought he'd had it. A friend of his, he was a friend of mine, too, saw it happening,

10:00 and shot down the Zero, off his tail. Buster said, 'I was a very frightened boy. I thought I'd had it'. Because he was not getting away from the Zero, on ground level too. But the Zero was a very good combat aircraft. One advantage we had in the Kittyhawks, was that we could go down hill a damn sight faster, and we were stronger. Now the early Zeros had trouble with their tails. They were slightly weak.

10:30 It is known that a Zero tail had broken off on occasions, chasing a Kittyhawk downwards. I never saw it happen. But I heard it happened. But most of the guys that had combat with Zeros, did their best to get away from it. Normally, by breaking away downhill, going down.

11:00 We were taught to avoid the Zero if we could. Low down, ten thousand feet, roughly speaking, you could combat with a Zero. But up high you couldn't. Much more difficult. Same with the bloody MiG 15 in

Korea. I flew the American Sabres for a while, it was against the Americans, and you avoided a fight, trying to get into combat with a MiG 15. At height.

They were a better aircraft at altitude.

11:30 Well, the MiGs used to come in at fifty five thousand feet. These American Sabres are flying at thirty two thousand feet. That was about our maximum operating height. And in most cases the Americans in Korea were jumped out of sight by these MiG 15s.

We'll talk about Korea in a little while,

12:00 **but I'd like to stay on the operations in New Guinea. You said a friend, Donald Spare, was it? I noted the name he was shot down in flames you mentioned.**

Oh, Kinnemont? Or Sproule. S-P-R-O-U-L-E.

That's the one I think, yeah.

Daryl Sproule.

Daryl Sproule. What happened to him?

Well, he took over the squadron from me. It was my suggestion.

12:30 And we were doing a last run, me as the old CO, he as the new CO, and the Wing Leader was Wilfred "Wolf" Arthur and we had three flights of six aircraft each, about ten minutes apart. They were to go from Gasmata, up to back to Jacquinot Bay and back to Goodenough Island. He got shot up by ground fire, near Gasmata, and it crash landed on the beach there, captured by the Japanese, and later beheaded.

13:00 So he had about twenty four hours as CO of the squadron. It was a pity because he was a bloody good pilot. And only last year his cousin got hold of me, and he was also called Daryl Sproule. As the cousin said, 'We found that missing history book of the squadron's'. Which Daryl had taken south with him, down to be printed or something.

13:30 **What sort of bloke was he?**

Oh, a hell of a nice bloke. Excellent leader, excellent pilot. Hell of a nice bloke. Came from Sandy Bay in Tasmania.

Daryl Sproule. How well had you got to know him before?

Well, he came out of Singapore.

14:00 The old blokes I got from Singapore. When Singapore fell, they all came to me. Came down at the same time as John Gorton. So from that point, which was March, April, '42, and he was one of my senior, one of my flight commanders, and that's the time he was shot down. So it was a good eighteen months.

14:30 All these blokes I knew well. You get to know them. You avoid becoming too friendly with them, as a CO. But you still make friends.

Who was your best friend on the squadron?

Of the squadron?

Of the pilots?

I don't know. I suppose John Gorton was one of them. Because I knew him right throughout his career, especially when he was PM. I used to nick in for a drink now and again. Gotto would ring up, his secretary would ring up and say, Mr Cresswell.' I'd say, 'Yeah'. 'Will you call in on your way home?' I'd say, 'OK'. So I'd call in at the Lodge on the way home. As long as I didn't talk shop, or politics, we'd have a few whiskeys together.

Getting back to the incident of Daryl Sproule, how did you find out what happened to him?

15:30 Well, we were three squadrons, three formations, six aircraft each, ten minutes apart. I led the first squadron, the first flight, followed by the Wing Leader, a bloke called Wolf Arthur, followed by Daryl Sproule, leading the last six. And although we were low down, virtually on the water, going up the south coast of New Britain, towards Jacquinot Bay and Rabaul,

16:00 word came through that he'd been shot down, or he'd crash landed. I said, 'Oh, Christ'. So I told the guys to stand by, the other five guys were in formation, to see what was going on, while we went back to our own base, Goodenough. And they came back and they said, he'd crash landed and was captured by the Japanese. So we couldn't do anything about it.

16:30 Well, they assumed he'd been captured by the Japanese, because they saw footmarks from his crashed aircraft, on the beach, up to some bushes. Of course, later on we learnt he'd been captured by Japanese. And about ten days later, beheaded.

How did you learn of his execution?

After the war. We had several Air Force officers, and Army officers, ranging around that area,

17:00 looking for stories about crash victims and so on. A bloke called Dell found Daryl Sproule's story. The body had been buried. In fact, he's buried at Lae cemetery now. Didn't like losing Daryl because he was a hell of a fine bloke. And a fellow Tasmanian.

17:30 It's funny, his cousin now, also called Daryl, getting in contact with me. In fact, I will probably go to Tasmania later on this year, or early next year, and have a bit of a wander and see a few people down there I know. Although, I was down there last weekend, but I couldn't do very much last weekend, because of the Battle of Britain celebrations.

18:00 **What did you do after finding that one of your squadron had been killed?**

Well, I took over the squadron again, automatically. Until they found another CO. But I quizzed the guys about Daryl Sproule. They'd made a mistake,

18:30 and then I realised I hadn't got many senior guys flying in that particular formation. They should have got onto the air-sea rescue organisation, straight away by RT [radio transmitter]. Even by sort of climbing up and getting their voice through to Goodenough. They didn't, for half an hour. Not that it would have saved Daryl Sproule, because by that time we found out that the Japanese already had him. I was a bit annoyed about that. No, you lay on the best air-sea rescue organisation available to you.

19:00 In my case, only had the old Albatross flying boat, but you don't like losing people, especially a CO. Only been CO a few hours. That day. It's the same thing in Korea. I lost my 2IC there, he was going to be the CO of the squadron. Gordon Harvey.

19:30 He spent thirty two months as guest of the Chinese. POW [Prisoner of War].

As CO, what were you required to do, or what did you do, after you lost one of your men?

You normally had radio contact with your base, in this case, the Fighter Sector. They lay on to the rescue system straight away. It would be automatic. Procedures laid down for this sort of thing.

20:00 **I'm thinking personally.**

Personally?

What would you do, perhaps writing to the relatives?

Oh, you mean after the event. No, you write that horrible letter, to the relatives, mother or wife, as the case may be. And you had to write it yourself, and sign it yourself. There was a formula, but it was just there as a guide to what to say.

20:30 I've written a few letters over the time, to parents and so on. Oh, you commiserate with them. The usual sort of, say what a good guy he was, etc, etc. It's the hardest thing to do, is writing a letter about a bloke you've lost. Whether it be ground crew or aircrew. Well, in Korea we lost forty two pilots,

21:00 all told. Not in my time. About a dozen in my time. And they were always hard. In fact, a couple of years ago, I had a luncheon in Canberra, and one lass came up to me and said, 'I'm Jimmy Gray's wife'. I thought, 'Oh, god'. 'I'd like to talk to you'. And she'd married again. Jimmy Gray was a flying officer, whom I liked, and he was burnt in a tent fire in Korea. Simple accident like that. Burnt to death in a tent fire. And that's when I said to Scherger, who was Deputy of the Air Staff in those days, over the phone, we had one line to Australia. I said, 'I'm buying American equipment.' He said, 'Go ahead, Dick. Do what you bloody well like'.

21:30 So I got rid of all our tentage. All our electrical systems, and got American equipment. I just signed everything. Because the Yanks would give you, give Australia anything at all. So we finished up with proper tentage, and proper sleeping bags. And proper mess equipment, and so on. Because the stuff we had was old Indian Army tents. Dangerous.

22:00 **Back in New Guinea, out of Milne Bay and all those operations in the islands, what was probably the most memorable operation you went on?**

Apart from shooting those bloody aircraft down, I think our flights along the coast of New Britain, from Gasmata up to Rebaul. Or Jacquinot Bay, just out of Rabaul.

22:30 They were target opportunities, sure, but they had barges there, the Japanese had taken over some of the settlers houses, and so on. So we'd hit all those and blow them up. Any wharf we saw. Any boats we saw. Any transport we saw. Just keeping the Japanese pinned down. So that trip there, that was the Gasmata trip.

23:00 **Can you tell us about that, the Gasmata trip?**

Well, that was from Goodenough. There was about twelve of my aircraft, Kittyhawks. Some Bostons, about six or eight Bostons. About six or eight Beaufighters. And about the same amount of Beaufort

bombers. And the idea was hit Gasmata. And the shoreline was fairly accurate, because I got hold of the American target maps.

23:30 **Perhaps, because we haven't got that on film, if you could describe the scene without referring to that photo for us.**

Well, Gasmata was the nearest Japanese air field north of us. Milne Bay, Goodenough. It was used fairly regularly by the Japanese, especially by the blokes at night, and we kept a constant bombardment of it. To keep the strip unusable. This particular event,

24:00 why we had such a large crowd, I don't know, but we all carried weapon loads. We carried bombs, and the Bostons were bombers, the Beaufighters of course were all fighters. We saw no opposition, we just hit the air field. Pretty badly. No losses on our side, and this painter, Randall Kent, decided he wanted to paint something.

24:30 Some event, in my life. I said, 'what about this one? I'll give you all the information you need.' And he painted that picture. Which is a bloody good picture, actually. It just shows my Kittyhawk, followed by a second Kittyhawk, and in the background, it shows Gasmata aircraft under fire, or being bombed. And it finished up a bloody good painting actually. It's a painting paid for and bought by the squadron.

25:00 **Where's the original of that painting now?**

At the squadron. Williamtown. So the squadron gave me that one. Yes, some of those drawings are quite interesting. But we rarely saw Japanese. In fact, we never did.

26:00 **What, sorry, you didn't see them from the cockpit, on the ground?**

No. In the air, against us. I seemed to fly on safe days.

What was the situation, the balance of power, between the Air Forces at that time?

Good. Always been good.

I mean, who had air supremacy?

Oh, we did. We did from late '42, right through.

26:30 Even in the last big raid on Milne Bay in April, '43. We still had air supremacy. The Japs lost out when they lost their transport ability, getting stuff down. By ship, to New Guinea. So roughly, '42 was their last days in New Guinea.

How effective were your ground support operations?

27:00 We were OK. The squadrons were OK. But the Army ground support was pretty good. Our Army.

No, I mean your support to the Army?

Oh. Whenever, yeah, no worries at all. Most of our support was in the Nadzab area, up the coast. At the end of the Japanese Occupation you might say. Our worst job was after the Bismarck Sea battle,

27:30 and we had a team of Japanese coming down from Rabaul. And we finished up destroying quite a few barges and rafts with Japanese on them. Which wasn't liked by two of my pilots who refused to do it. I said, 'Fair enough'. Young pilots who have not experienced war, their first jobs,

28:00 if they're strafing jobs against people, are not very happy. I struck this in Korea too. I said, 'Fair enough. I'm not complaining. You'll eventually get used to it'.

Can you talk about how you co-ordinated those operations with the Beaufighters against those survivors?

No worries. The commander of the Beaufighter squadron was a great friend of mine. We had no worries at all, operating the Beaufighters.

28:30 They would have liked to pinch some of our targets, especially against the odd ship. And with their cannons, they were probably the better attack aircraft. Compared to us.

Can you tell us about those operations, those strafing operations, on those barges?

Well, we weren't involved in the initial ones. We came in towards the end. Did the mopping up sessions,

29:00 in case there were barges with Japanese on them. But the initial ones were carried our very well, by Beaufighters, and B17s [Boeing Flying Fortress bombers], and the Liberators. It was well organised. Bull Garing [Group Captain W.H. Garing, 9 Operational Group] a bloke in the Air Force, takes credit for all this. Actually it was the Yanks themselves. They arranged the whole thing. All Bull did was make sure our blokes were properly trained.

29:30 In the B24s and the Beaufighters and so on. But the Bismarck Sea Battle was a bloody good one.

Can you tell us, I mean, there was a lot or aircraft involved from many places. Can you talk us

through the day that you went off to do that?

Well, we weren't involved in the initial strikes. We were mopping up. But initially, there were eleven ships sunk, couple of destroyers,

30:00 but it was very well co-ordinated, I gather. But the Beaufighters had a great day. They did most of the damage to the superstructure of the ship, whether it be a transport, or a ship carrying troops. They'd aim for the decks on the captain's bridge and so on, and that would generally keep the Japanese down. And stop them firing.

30:30 But the bombers, I think most ships were sunk by bombers, from high flying, or medium flying aircraft. Like B17s and Liberators. I don't know how many ships the Beaufighters sunk, probably a couple. That's all written up in history anyway. But we came in towards the end, the mopping up job, after the main battle was over.

What was the mopping up job you had to do?

31:00 Well, some of, there were still two or three thousand Japanese on rafts, and god knows what, and some were pulling in towards the Goodenough Islands, and they were frightened that the Japanese would re-form. On the shores of Goodenough or on the northern shores of New Guinea itself. So they had to be destroyed. Not very nice.

Can you tell us what it's like strafing those troop barges?

Not very nice, but the sharks had a good meal. The sea was red with bloody blood,

31:30 and you could see the sharks diving up and down. But that's one of the worst things that happened during a war. The mopping up. We had the same trouble in Korea.

They were subject to controversy in the press at least, those mopping up operations.

It had to happen. Had to be done.

32:00 You can't have the enemy loose at sea, even though they might be on rowing boats and rafts and so forth. You have to complete the job. That was the way we thought and operated in those days.

Was there any consideration that they might be shipwrecked, or survivors from a sinking boat?

Well, there was talk about that that they could survive. Especially on Goodenough Island. About two or three hundred Japanese got onto Goodenough.

32:30 **Are you all right. You're hearing aids a bit, I'll speak a bit louder if you like?**

No, it's all right now. I've turned you up.

33:00 **Under whose orders were they, that you went in and strafed those survivors?**

Would be from Brisbane in those days, [US General Douglas] MacArthur's Headquarters. Through our system. I was controlled by Bostock [Air Vice Marshal W.D. Bostock], also in Brisbane. The general order came out, Operational Order came out, probably a blanket order. In this case the Bismarck Sea was a definite operation. We just obeyed the order. Destroy it.

33:30 **What was the order?**

I don't know. I never read it. But probably, destroy the enemy, would be the reason.

You mentioned yourself though, that you were someone who often disobeyed orders . . .

Oh, yeah. But in this case . . .

So there was no question the order . . .

No, no. Not this one. This was the biggest defusing operation

34:00 in World War II in the Pacific. The first biggest one. As far as New Guinea and Australia was concerned. So it was a reinforcement of Lae and Madang areas by the Japanese, operating from Rabaul. There were about eleven or twelve transports involved, plus a few destroyers. The air effort by Rabaul was pretty poor I gather. That's when the American [P-38] Lightnings got stuck into them.

34:30 We knew the thing was on, and we knew we'd be involved, but I thought earlier than it was, but they kept us back as sort of their defence element. So we came in with the mopping up exercise.

Why did you give your men an option as to whether they should do this operation or not?

A couple of guys refused, they just wouldn't shoot people, and so I could see what was happening. So when we got back to base

35:00 I quizzed them, and said, 'OK. Fair enough'. I could charge them, did all sorts of nasty things to them,

but you didn't. You understood their problem and that was it. And they were new chums anyway.

What particularly was their problem?

Oh, just scared of shooting up people. And didn't want to shoot up people. Some of the guys, these two guys in question, were brand new to the squadron. And I don't think they'd done any of our operations across in New Britain.

35:30 So they hadn't fired a gun in anger before. They disobeyed orders, but I wouldn't worry about that.

I can imagine that must, suddenly it's not such a removed situation. I can imagine that you are now seeing your human target there.

It's not nice. Never has been.

36:00 And especially in Korea. It was worse there. But, oh, no one wants to shoot up another guy, when they can see their bloody face. Having a crack at the Chinese in Korea, the cavalry and so on, that wasn't very nice.

Was there any talk of LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre], at that time, up in Milne Bay?

Oh, yeah.

36:30 Yeah, but normally I'd find out during the early days, when they arrived in the squadron. If we were going to have a problem with people, and I'd send them home. Not many, but there were some. In Korea, I had quite a lot of trouble. I sent eleven blokes home from Korea. Badly trained. They were badly trained for the Korean operation.

37:00 **Up in the islands, though. What were some of the symptoms of LMF up there?**

Well, could be family letter, could be that they were getting tired, fed up. Could be they came up fresh from down south, again badly trained. And not knowing what they're going into. My doctor's job, always had a senior doctor, bloody good doctor in the squadron. He was very cautious, not cautious,

37:30 very aware of LMF, and he watched it all the time. And kept me informed. Because it was a medical problem in the main. A lot of squadrons had LMF troubles. But the Fighter Squadron was more obvious, because it was individual. If it was a pilot, you could pick it up straight away.

38:00 **It's quite a delicate matter, because if you wash out because of that . . .**

Oh, of course it is.

It never leaves you, the stigma, I imagine.

You see, the eleven guys I sent home, one killed himself, an aircraft accident. The other then were kicked out of the Air Force. When I got back from Korea, I said, 'That's wrong. We should have looked at those guys more closely'. Because it wasn't their bloody fault. It was the lack of training we had in those days, before the Korean War.

What about in the Second World War?

38:30 Well, most of the guys that went back home were put into another aviation field, like Instructing, possible. I suppose some were kicked out of the Air Force, I don't know. A real LMF case, you normally discharged them. But in most cases, mine were not caused by them, it was caused by a lack of training.

Yet the label of LMF was applied? Or was something else?

39:00 Well, it was all you could apply to them. Under Air Force regulations and so on. But if I found a guy was LMF, possibly so, OK, because it's easy to solve. But if there was a lot of contributing factors, I'd probably write a personal letter to the airmen personnel or to the AOC of the area. And say, In this case, not his fault, or words to that effect.

39:30 You didn't write them off. You understood their problem, and tried to help. Or most of them you did, anyway. But see, LMF in the ground troops, not our ground troops, the Army troops, phtt. Written off. Our ground troops were pretty good.

40:00 Our ground troops were always on a fairly safe area. They got bombed in Darwin, they got strafed in New Guinea, but generally speaking, they were in safe areas for them.

Tape 6

00:30 **OK. You were working in Point Cook, I believe, when the Korean War broke out. Is that right?**

Laverton. CO of 21 Squadron, based at Laverton.

What were your views on the Korean War breaking out?

I thought at the time it was unnecessary. We were not well informed in those days.

01:00 We knew there was a Communist threat, but I thought we were, I never realised we'd have another bloody war so soon after World War II. So it was a bit of a surprise to all of us. A bit of a shock to all of us. But we, being way down at Laverton, away from it, not being well informed, we just felt a bit miffed about it. It wasn't until I got there, that I realised there was a bloody war on.

01:30 **77 Squadron was in Japan, and they were the last squadron to be involved . . .**

We were the last squadron of the [British Commonwealth] Occupation Force left in Japan. We were actually packed up to come home.

You must have been following their fortunes a little bit, having been CO on a previous occasion?

Formed the squadron, yeah. So when the war broke out, Lou Spence had it, Wing Commander Spence, hell of a nice bloke, and he got shot up, shot down. One Sunday morning,

02:00 at AMP, Personnel, Dad Bladen rang me up and said, 'Cres, we just lost Lou Spence this morning. Pack your bags and hand your squadron over to Flight Lieutenant Ware, and your off on Monday'. Three months later I was told I'd volunteered.

What happened that Monday?

Well, by the time I had the medicals done, that sort of thing, I didn't until about Wednesday, with Qantas, and I took the squadron over on the Thursday of that week. Lou was killed on the 19th,

02:30 no, the 9th September, and I took the squadron over officially on the 17th September.

What was the situation with 77 when you arrived with them? Lou Spence had just been killed . . .

Well, we lost two others. A bloke called Graham Strout and a sergeant pilot. Morale was pretty high still, they were still doing a bloody good job. They were flying every day. The fact that we lost a CO

03:00 didn't stop flying or stop the effort. 77 Squadron was one of the few Mustang squadrons. It was the only Mustang squadron originally, which was excellent aircraft for ground attack work, carries a good load to support the Army. And the American Air Force had to transfer five of their F80 [Shooting Stars] squadrons back to Mustangs, so we finished up with six Mustang squadrons operating. And the South Africans came in some time later on. Also with Mustangs. But the Mustang was

03:30 the right sort of aircraft up there, for the job up there.

What was the job up there at the time you arrived?

Ground support of the Army. And to stop the hordes of North Koreans coming down. You've heard of the Pusan perimeter, just a little, tight little pocket in the south-east of Korea. And we had to protect that. Otherwise, if we'd lost that, we would have lost the war right from the start.

How did you feel about how the war was going?

04:00 **It was a pretty dire situation at that point.**

It was when I arrived there, we were in trouble. That's why we flew all day, the maximum number of aircraft, all day, every day. Until things settled down a bit. Also, the American Air Force wasn't geared up for war. It had Boeing B-29s bombers. It had B-26s, which is the old Boston aircraft. And B-25 Mitchell bombers.

04:30 Based in Japan. But they weren't geared up to war. So it took some time for the Americans to settle down. And the Mustang became the best aircraft initially. So we could attack anything. Good endurance, we carried bloody good loads. So in a close support sortie, we'd carry two bombs, six rockets and machine guns.

Can you tell us a bit more about the B51 Mustang?

05:00 It was designed by the Brits, built in America, for escort duties over Europe. End of World War II. And we decided to build it around about '44. I think the first aircraft came off the line end of '45, the end of the war. We equipped all our fighter squadrons with the Mustang at the end of the war, and sent three fighter squadrons, Mustangs, to Korea occupational forces. It was a very rugged aircraft,

05:30 very good escort. Long range, endurance, and good fire power. Just one of those aircraft. A very good aircraft. I flew about a thousand hours in the bloody thing. Same as the Kittyhawk. Got a thousand hours in the Kittyhawk.

What were its advantages over the F80s and the . . .

Well, the F80 was a jet, early jets. Underpowered, couldn't carry much load. Had very short endurance.

06:00 So the F80 finished up carrying oh, about, four to six rockets, or two bombs, or drop tanks. It had six guns, too. But it couldn't do what the Mustang could do. The Yanks realised that.

What was coming at you from the other side? When you first arrived in Korea flying Mustangs?

The aircraft. Hell of a lot of ground fire. Mainly 40 mil. .5 or 40 mil.

06:30 Which the North Koreans had a lot of. And so did the Chinese when they came in. Or 20 mil or 40 mil. Most of my blokes were shot down, or most of the aircraft were shot down because they got a bullet in their glycol system. Some got shot up pretty badly. Some crashed doing a forced landing. We lost about thirteen pilots in Mustangs.

07:00 In my time about seven. No, in Lou's three, in my time about ten.

What sort of targets would you be hitting?

Convoys of trucks, tanks, a lot of tanks, concentrations of troops, or troop stores or troop movements. They'd be our main target.

07:30 One of the worst targets was hundreds of civilians. South Korean civilians. Who were forced by the North Koreans, to march ahead. All of them carried a bomb or a belt of ammunition or something. I refused a couple of those.

Who were you getting orders from?

Oh, 5th Air Force. We came under the control of 5th Air Force.

08:00 Part of the United States Air Force. The 5th Air Force controlled the whole area. So really, I was my own boss. I just obeyed instructions. They issued an Operational Order every day. To give you an idea what targets were up for tomorrow, sort of thing. What time. Where they were. But . . .

What methods were used for marking targets, and identifying targets?

08:30 They eventually used iridescent strips. Coloured yellow, red, green, orange. This indicated the safe areas where our troops would be. And often our troops were Australians, Americans, you name it. You see there was twenty one nations involved in the Korean War. Korean Police Action. Of which about seven or eight were actually physically in the action itself.

09:00 But we made mistakes, and my previous squadron commander shot up an American Hospital train. It wasn't his fault. Three times he'd called up the Tactical Air Defence Commander to verify that this was the target. And they said, 'Yeah'. It had to be the last American train coming out of Seoul. Hospital train.

09:30 We shot up a couple of our own people, by accident. Incorrect marking of target. Our Army got hit pretty badly by the Americans on occasions. Mistakes were made, but in total war, rapid movement, you have to make mistakes.

What was the relationship between the 5th Air Force hierarchy and your squadron?

10:00 Bloody good. They thought the world of us. We were the most efficient squadron, at that time, and our record was pretty good, too. We were held in high regard by the Americans. Later on, in the Meteor days, things went haywire a bit. Mainly because I wanted to used the Meteor in a combat role, in company with the American Sabre squadrons. We tried that.

10:30 The only guy who had been in combat before that had been me. All the other guys hadn't seen combat before, air combat. And the Meteor was no good above, say, twenty five thousand feet. Very good fifteen, twenty five thousand feet. Above that, its performance fell off, very bad. So the Meteor was relegated to ground support and things like that. Escort of bombers, like B29s, and ground tack work,

11:00 which they did, from then, this must have been about August '43, until the end of the war. '43? What am I talking about, '53. Sorry, '51 until '53.

Just on the Mustangs to begin with, what sort of weaponry were you using on these aeroplanes?

We were using 6.5 guns, they were always fully loaded. With rockets.

11:30 Up to six rockets. And/or two two-fifty-pound bombs, or two five-hundred-pound bombs. Always a mixed load. Our guns were always full. And long-range stuff, we carried two drop tanks on our wings, and no other armour except the .5 gun. And we could have, normal sortie's about two and a half to three hours.

12:00 Long range ones were, as I did once, was four and a quarter hours. And that's a long time, sitting in a bloody Mustang. But most of our targets then were hitting convoys of trucks and people, and troops and so on. Occasional ammunition dump. In winter time when it was snowing, they hid everything under trees, and covered it with broken branches and so on.

12:30 One of my pilots was colour blind. And he could see that the new camouflage had been cut, they were hiding tanks and troops and so on. And I said, 'Oh, come on'. He said, 'I can'. So I said, 'In you go and disturb the area'. Which he did. And of course, when he broke the foliage, there they were, odd tank, odd truck, an odd gun. And I said, 'Do you know of any other colour blind blokes in the Air Force?'

13:00 And he said, 'Yes, I know a couple of guys. They're both Fighter Pilots'. I said, 'Give me their names'. He said, 'What are you going to do with them'. I said, 'Get them up here'. And I wrote down south, and I said I need these two blokes because they're colour blind. And they said, 'There's no such thing as colour blind pilots in the Air Force'. I said, 'Yes, there are. So and so and so and so. And I want them now'. I got them. A lot of blokes, when they did their colour blind tests, would remember the Ichihara test, which was Japanese, a way of checking for colour blindness. And they could name them straight off,

13:30 whether they could see the thing or not. And they got away with it.

What was the damage in that situation of being colour blind?

Reds and browns and greens, look different, that's all. You can misread in some lights. It started off in World War II, and after the war when we were using the Aldis lamp for say, night flying, which was green or red, and it became physical.

14:00 I don't' think they worry about colour blindness now, in fact, I'm not sure. We certainly didn't in the Korean War. Lou Spence was colour blind. In the desert, on his third or fourth mission he said he saw some camouflage over some guns, gun positions, told the leader, I don't know who the leader was then. Oh, yes I do. And he was told to nick down and have a crack at the camouflage, and he blew the camouflage away, and there the guns were.

14:30 But he wasn't supposed to be colour blind.

Lou Spence was quite a respected commander.

Very.

What happens when a commander like that is killed?

Oh, you bury him. Well, it's a disappointment when you lose a good leader. Especially in Lou Spence's case. He had a good future lined up for him. His wife and kids were living up there at Iwakuni the time.

15:00 In fact, I see his kids quite often. Or they're grown adults now. They're in their fifties. But no one likes losing any one, let alone a good commander.

Your squadron was in Iwakuni when you arrived?

Yes.

Tell us of the situation they were in there. The base you were on.

We were based on the main strip of Iwakuni,

15:30 and living in quarters on the base of course. We operated from there, from dawn till dusk. From August, September, October we cross the Pohang, so I had about two months operating the squadron from Iwakuni. And they were long days. We would load up at night, depending on the operation, we were loaded up by the Erks, bombs, rockets, guns, long range tanks if they were needed,

16:00 and take off at dawn the following morning. Straight to on operation, a job, land back at Taegu, it was an American strip on the east coast, re-fuel, re-arm, do another job. Maybe two more jobs. And the last job, make sure I had enough fuel to get back to Iwakuni after the last sortie. And sometimes we didn't land back there until half past six at night. Tired, cold. A bit fed up. So after every day,

16:30 and most guys did. When you got off, you were tired at the end of it.

How many aircraft would fly in a sortie?

Two, to four, to six, to eight. Generally two to four. But I'd take across maybe a whole squadron of aircraft, but they'd go in different directions. There were multiple pairs. You always flew as a pair or four. That was considered pretty safe, and operationally

17:00 you could do things with four aircraft that you couldn't do with many more than one box.

What sort of boxes and formations would you use?

Well, we used a finger four, which was four aircraft pretty well up front. But in the case of four aircraft, there would be two there, and maybe another two would be a couple of hundred yards away, and you tried never to block each other's vision. And you were always aware of the sun of course,

17:30 because any attack might come from the sun. But we didn't change tactics at all. The RAAF thought we had. When they came out to visit us after, after I got back in late '52, they had a great big RAAF visit.

Telling us about how we fought in Korea. I said, 'No, we didn't'. So I took over the interview then.

18:00 Especially in Sabres. The RAAF thought we were flying the Sabres in sixes. But it was still in the finger four. Basic formation.

What dangers would, apart from ground fire, what other dangers would you encounter on those sorties?

Only from ground fire in those days. The so-called enemy air was non-existent when I arrived there.

Were there other trucks set up for low-flying aircraft?

18:30 Oh, the odd wire across the valley. Flak guns stuck on top of a hill. But we knew that. The Yanks had a very good internal organisation based in North Korea. And a lot of information got through to them, and we were briefed on where the main guns were, what type of gun,

19:00 and to look out for the odd wire across a valley. But some of my guys flew through those bloody wires.

Could you describe what they would be made of? How they would be set up?

The wires. They'd be heavy, probably 11/16 strand steel cables. Probably used for getting stuff across the valleys. But they were everywhere.

19:30 But our main problem was ack-ack, ground ack-ack, concentrated ack-ack. .5, 20 mil.

What protection did the Mustang have against that?

None. If you're hit, you're hit. Especially with the glycol system, which we had, the same as the old Kittyhawk, if you got hit in your glycol system, you might have thirty minutes to get back to base or make a forced landing somewhere.

20:00 A few of the guys got hit in the glycol system. It happened. And most of those guys got back to a safe area.

Were you using napalm?

Yeah.

What was that like?

It was a horrible bloody weapon. You filled up your fifty gallon tanks, or prop tanks, with napalm, made up of phosphorous and grenade,

20:30 and when it hit, we used that against tanks mainly. And if we dropped it properly, it would hit just in front of the tank and spray the whole tank with napalm. Now, for maybe a split second or so, the temperature would be over a thousand degrees centigrade. Enough to ignite petrol drums or heat up the inside of a tank.

21:00 One of the first jobs I did, was hit a five T34 tanks, Russian tanks, on a hill near Pohang. This is before we took over Pohang. And we arranged it on that aircraft, two of us to stop the first aircraft, and two to stop the top of the tank. and so all the other tanks were trapped. We had a field day then.

21:30 And now and again of course, in some of our de-briefings the boys called self-propelled guns tanks, too. But we stopped all that.

What do you mean by that?

Well, they had a sort of, didn't recognise their targets properly. At one stage of the game one commander, an American commander said, 'You've destroyed more bloody tanks than the Russians have built so far'. So I said, 'Oh'. So we used our cinefilm cameras all the time.

22:00 On any attack, we used our cameras. Just to identify the targets properly.

How would that work?

It worked well.

I mean how the cinefilm took photos of the situation?

Well, it's 24 mil, a 16 mil camera stuck in the nose of the aircraft. And when you pulled you trigger to drop anything, to fire your guns, it automatically worked. So it took photos automatically of the target area.

22:30 And they were pretty accurate, too.

Can you describe what it's like to be using what you see, of your attack, when you're in one of these, perhaps using napalm, for example.

Well, you know you're going to do some damage. Probably destroy the target area. Normally, we used napalm against tanks. Never against troops, or concentrations of transport.

23:00 Oh, once we did, in a transport yard, we used napalm. A quick way of burning the whole system up. But we didn't like using napalm. It's just one of those nasty weapons. Now, I've seen people, enemy, captured, that were hit by napalm, and it doesn't burn very well, the skin.

23:30 I suppose that was the worst weapon we used in Korea, the napalm.

You refused some operations, missions, for moral purposes?

I did. I did against civilians being forced south by North Korean guns. A hundred miles, or a hundred and forty miles, north of the bomb line. And I said, 'Oh, no.' They were targets. They should have been hit.

24:00 And if they were hit, they normally blew up, because they were carrying ammunition and mortar bombs, that sort of thing. And that's the way the North Koreans got their stuff down south. But sometimes you just couldn't do it.

What happened on those occasions?

Oh, I just said, 'No go', and the boys understood, and when I got back to base, I was still based in Korea, I nicked across to Japan and went and saw the commander,

24:30 Commander General. Said I refused a couple of targets. He said, 'I know, Cresswell'. I said, 'That's it. I refused'. He said, 'OK. That's fair enough'. It didn't worry them at all. It worried me sometimes when I refused a target. Sometimes Operational Orders were badly described. The targets were badly described.

25:00 And some of those targets I refused to do. Lack of information about the ack-ack guns, or the protection of the target. Where the target actually was, in relation to the number of tanks, number of transport, number people. What they were doing. We always had a secondary target anyway, in our Operational Orders. But that's the only time I refused, you might say, a direct instruction,

25:30 via an Operational Order. But that was up to us, as leaders. To use our discretion.

Were you, as a leader, having trouble with men of the same views?

Yes, some.

What would that situation be?

All the pilots always obeyed my instructions, or my briefings. Some commented,

26:00 or quizzed me about a certain instruction. And I'd describe it, properly, for them. Ground crew, no worries at all. But sometimes aircrew got a bit concerned. We were lucky, because we had a daily courier, a C47 Dakota, flying from Iwakuni to us at our airstrip, and I could send blokes back for a rest quick smart. And quite often I did.

26:30 One bloke got a gun, a bullet through his windscreen. Scared stiff. Didn't touch him. Frightened him, yeah, and the doc came to me and said, 'This bloke's shit scared'. And I said, 'Well, doc, OK. Send him back'. So we gave him a week's break at Iwakuni. That often happened, ground crew and aircrew. Ground crew were lucky. They'd get back whenever they wanted. My ground crew never stayed more than three or four months in Korea.

27:00 Because we had so many of them we could turn them over all the time. Some stayed the full time, some wanted to, some didn't. And by having our main base in Japan, our guys were very lucky.

Would that solve the problem, usually, a period of leave?

Solved many problems. Sending blokes back for a rest. And we had Qantas flights from Iwakuni to Tokyo. Free.

27:30 And we had Australian Hotel up there in Ito, where we paid two and six a day, per day, total. And we could stay there and enjoy ourselves on their two eighteen-hole golf courses. A lot of my blokes did that. And we had, in many ways, a restful war, compared to the other people.

28:00 **Restful in that you could get rest.**

We had a good base to operate from, to go back to. We went on leave. We went on leave and saw Japan, best we could, all free. A few holes of good now and again helped a bit. Some good liquor. Good food. So we were a bit lucky.

Despite that, though, you were under intense of pressure to begin with. The amount of sorties you were called on to do was incredible.

Oh, yes.

How did you deal with that fatigue on a day to day basis, did you find?

28:30 Just did, as a leader you had to. You never showed weakness as a leader. You might get frightened now

and again, which I was. You might not sort of want to get up again in the morning, and get in a bloody aircraft and go north again, but you did. See, as a leader, you're on show all the time. You really are. The night before, in our briefings with our Operational Staff and so on, we worked out the following day's program.

29:00 That was all lined up, so we knew what we were supposed to do next day. Not necessarily the actual operation, but at least how many flights would be available, how many aircraft would be available. And what area we would operate in. Not the actual target. Sometimes we never got the target information until early the following day. The day we were operating. But all my leaders, I always had four to five extra leaders in the squadron, Flight Commanders,

29:30 they all knew the score. They knew how I operated. We worked as a team all the time, or tried to. And that's why I had such a successful squadron. It's all team work.

You mentioned you were frightened at times. What frightened you? What sort of things frightened you?

Fighting a bloody war, I suppose. You never knew when you might be shot down. You never knew how lucky you were going to be that day. You always had a sense of fear.

30:00 OK, do the best we can, do our job properly, and get out of it as fast as we can. For instance, I found that some of my blokes were going back for a second crack at a target. And I said, 'Never. In my time, don't you ever go back and have a second crack at a target. Once is enough. And make sure that first one is accurately and properly'. That lowered our accident rate a bit,

30:30 because blokes going back a second time, there would be sure to be some bloke down on the ground ready to have a crack at him.

What were the most difficult, most dangerous targets to attack?

Anything with ground fire. I suppose, concentrations of troops, transport, stores areas, enemy stores areas, flying in valleys, that was always a bit of a hazard.

31:00 Because we knew very well there would always be enemy there, on both sides of the valley, with guns and so forth. May be down the bottom of the valley, on the road. Could be a tank, transport, troops, guns, big guns. And that, we always, examined that target pretty thoroughly. On occasion, I wouldn't go straight in. I'd circle the target area and have a bloody good look at it.

31:30 We might change the way we went in, the direction we went in. Did that a couple of times, because we could see the ack-ack on the ground.

Was fear a positive thing, as well as a negative thing?

Oh, yeah, yeah.

How was that the case?

Very positive. I don't' know anyone who's been in an operation who hasn't been frightened. Or has a sense of fear before an actual target is attacked. I'm talking about fighter pilots.

32:00 On ground attack work. Up top, escort work, different thing altogether. Or being a bit lower. But the fighter pilot, and you're attacking. Every time you went out you're attacking something, whether it's with your guns, whatever you're attacking. Yeah. You got frightened. You had to. Most of use who were leaders had too much to do to be too frightened.

32:30 But some of the guys I spoke to after a job said, 'Well, that wasn't very nice was it?' 'What do you mean?' He said, 'I was shit scared'. I said, 'OK. You should be'.

How did it act as a positive thing as well as a negative thing?

It made you more aware of the equipment you were using. Made you more aware to make sure that equipment is functioning properly. All the switches on, you're ready to go and do the job.

33:00 Made you more aware that you must help your fellow man, too. I might be a leader, but I've four or six or a dozen blokes behind me. Relying on my leadership. So you've got to be aware of their position in an attack. Make sure that you're leading safety, safe as you possibly can. You don't think of yourself all the time, you're thinking of other blokes.

33:30 **That's incredibly difficult to do all the time. How does that wear on you after a while?**

Oh, you wear out after a while. As long as you've got a good bottle of whiskey of a nighttime, everything's fine. Oh, we got a bit disjointed you might say. Weren't thinking clearly, that sort of thing. And sometimes a good night on the booze would fix things.

34:00 Not every night, a good sleep, and you'd be right for the next day. Luckily, when I was with the Americans in Korea, of course, we had bloody good food. We used the American kitchens all the time, and we always had good food. The Yanks made sure of that. They made sure everyone had good food.

What kind of food would the Yanks provide?

You name it, we had it. They, a lot of the stuff was tinned. Double sealed tin.

34:30 You'd break open the outer tin, and it would heat itself up inside the second tin. But good breakfast foods. Always fresh milk, lots of eggs and bacon. We were well fed by the Yanks. Overfed, I reckon. In fact, Christmas, no, November 4th, 1942. Where were we? Up in Pohang. No, Panhung,

35:00 Yompo, North Korea. And the Yanks stuck on a special luncheon. Everything laid on. And we couldn't' eat it. There was too much of it. It was their sort of Remembrance Day, November 4th, so. That often happened. We were overfed by the Yanks.

Was the American Air Force decadent in other ways?

35:30 Not really. It was a good Air Force. Half of it was World War II experience, anyway. But a few failures. When we were pushed out of North Korea, on a retreat basis, there were one or two American Squadrons, Mustang days, They went bush. They went down the coast to get aboard a ship and leave their aircraft behind. And I didn't. I kept my squadron,

36:00 going all the time. In fact, our last job, was to fly down to Pusan. Which was quite a distance away. Because we kept the blokes informed as to what was going on. We briefed them every night. Six of us, seven of us. And we tell them what was going on, well, all I knew anyway, from the American Air Force. And all the troops, no matter where the troops were,

36:30 whether they were asleep, midnight, we made sure they knew, we had even Americans come in to listen to some of our briefings, because they weren't being told. Especially the Negros, who manned most of the transport and the ack-ack guns.

Today you call it a friendly fire incident. The American hospital train, before you arrived. Was there a certain amount of distrust that remained from that incident? How did that affect the relationship?

37:00 Well, none at all as it turned out. First of all the American general came down from Tokyo to see Lou Spence, he was in charge then. Down to Iwakuni. And apologised, humbly, on behalf of the American government, and the American Air Force. And which Lou accepted. He told all the troops too. The American General briefed all the troops, all our troops. Just a terrible mistake was made, and it shouldn't have been made.

37:30 That probably caused a better appreciation of how to control the system. It probably did. Provided better information. Different intelligence. See, when the thing broke out, Macarthur was there in an Administrative capacity. Most of his senior guys might had been wartime people, but weren't up to date. So to go from a static situation like that,

38:00 to looking after a nation, to war, was a big gap.

Were there occasions where you were given bad intelligence by the Americans?

Yeah.

What happened?

I refused to listen to some of it.

How did you know it was bad?

Because I'd been there. That often happened too. I nicked across to Japan quite often for debriefing. By the 5th Air Force, before they moved into Korea. I'd say, 'Whoa, hold it. I was there'.

38:30 Oh. Wrong information. About the target. About the type of attack. About who did the attacks. The Yanks had six hundred and forty aircraft available to them, and that's another incident of interest. The Yanks would call on us. I lost my Number Two [Second in Command], a bloke called Gordon Harvey, he spent thirty two months as a guest of the Chinese, a POW. And we were doing a big raid on Pyongyang, in their so-called headquarters.

39:00 Gordon was shot up, and force landed on an ice-bound strip. Strip, no. Island in the middle of the Taedong River. And he was captured. But the Yanks said, 'If you can find him next morning, you can have control of my whole Air Force'. They laid on a carrier,

40:00 they sent a carrier up the west coast, loaded with two or three helicopters, and the operation, that day they gave me a special call sign, and if my call sign went out that I needed help to get Gordon Harvey out, the whole Air Force would turn in and help out. The Yanks did that. They were bloody amazing. Help their friends.

40:30 We never got Gordon out of course. We found photographs. He'd been captured. And sent north.

Tape 7

00:30 **How different was your first encounter in Korea compared with your experience in the Second World War in Kittyhawks?**

Korea was a total war compared to World War II and Kittyhawks. It was a nasty bloody war, too. Cruel. Dangerous. The weapons we were using, like Napalm, the type of targets we were hitting. Trains, tunnels, troops. Concentrations. Tanks.

01:00 It was a closer war than World War II as far as I'm concerned. Like I think I said before. World War II, strikes by Kittyhawks, up and down the coast of New Britain, south coast of New Britain, targets of opportunity. Whereas in Korea, we were really flighting a bloody war. You could see it happening too. Troop concentrations. For instance, in North Korea,

01:30 where we were based at Hamhung, we were coming back from a job, and the whole field, it was the middle of winter, and the whole field we were crossing over was moving. And they were Chinese troops in their white gear. And this is when the poor old first marine division were in trouble in the Chosen Reservoir. But the Chinese didn't seem to worry about

02:00 how many troops they used, or lost. The Korean War was said that they lost about two million troops. Mainly by disease. I could believe that. Once, down near Seoul, the only bridge they had across the river there at Seoul, now they've got about twenty two. The whole surface of the water

02:30 was covered with bodies, been floating down the river. Chinese bodies. Bodies. You saw some terrible sights during that bloody war. Things you won't forget in a hurry. Mass murder as we call it. We really got stuck into the Chinese in North Korea. No quarters given by us.

03:00 We destroyed everything we possibly could. The mud house, troops or stores or whatever. To stop the Chinese, North Korean advance into South Korea. I've been back there a couple of times since, and it's a funny setup now. You stand on the thirtieth parallel and you're across from the Chinese. And they're looking at you anyway. And North Koreans.

03:30 I hope it doesn't start again. It's a bit ticklish right now. The Meteor days for the squadron was pretty hectic, lost a lot of troops, lot of pilots. Twenty six pilots lost in Meteors. All from ground fire. Because the Meteors

04:00 really gave it to a second type target. Which I was against initially. Well, I couldn't do much about it. I'd left anyway. And because they had two engines, the guys felt they were pretty safe, but they got shot up fairly badly sometimes. Or shot down.

What made them vulnerable?

Well. Being so bloody low. Hitting a supply route from

04:30 North Korea down to South Korea, or nearly down to South Korea, which was straddled with bloody ack-ack guns. You had to be hit. A lot of blokes came back in Meteors with one engine out, or shot up wing, or severe damage to the aircraft. But they got back.

05:00 Lots of our recent Chiefs of Staff came out of the Korean Battle. Quite a few. Korea was a good training ground for us. We changed our ideas. When I got back in '52, I eventually got hold of the Operational Training Unit at Williamtown. In '53. I changed quite a few of the ideas the Air Force had.

05:30 And formed a thing called the Combat FCI Course, Combat Fighter Instructors Course. My idea was to do all our combat training in Australia. Not go overseas for it, or other parts of Australia. And train blokes to become leaders. And these small courses we had about maybe once or twice a year, initially. Now it's once a year. There would be about six blokes on it, but they would become the future fighter leaders. And that went though, and that was adopted by the Americans in the end.

06:00 And it's still going. But apparently I'm pretty famous for that. What they called the CFI Course. The thing was to train leaders properly. You see, our Air Force were still sending Senior Squadron Leaders and Junior Wing Commanders to command squadrons, with no fighting experience. This is peace time, sure, but that wasn't good enough for me. I wanted blokes properly trained, who knew how to lead properly. So we got that one through. Changed quite a few things. After Korea.

06:30 The rank of the CO, the type of pilots who go to Korea. The re-forming of a proper Operational Training Unit, which is still going. The training of some of our NCO pilots. It's all Officer Pilots now.

What was the single thing that,

07:00 **in your mind, in practical terms, in action, that fermented these changes?**

Because what we were doing in Korea, I was learning a lot from the Americans, changed their style a bit, since World War II. I listened to a lot of blokes. My own blokes, the Americans. You see, I've been attached twice to American squadrons. The first to fly the F80s, Shooting Star, and they trained me on jets, the Americans. Then a guest

07:30 of the Americans to fly Sabres. I learnt a hell of a lot from them. I realised we had to change our ways, our policies in Australia.

Can you tell us about your support of the Ichon landings?

Well, we were in Mustangs. We were based at on the old Kimpo airstrip. Which is the main airstrip in North Korea. Near Seoul. Bloody bitterly cold, too. Had eight aircraft, I think. Could have been a dozen.

08:00 Eight or twelve aircraft. To escort the C47s dropping troops. Inchon landing them. And that was quite an experience, because Inchon itself is just a bloody great big waste. And the troops are coming ashore, and there's hundreds, thousands, and the various LSTs [Landing Ship Tanks] and so on. Plus the parachute drop in.

08:30 It was amazing to see the number of parachutes in the air, the number of people. Landing on the beaches there. From the American Naval ships off the coast. Sometimes you'd get rather amazed at how many people they used in a landing. And you were just a part of it.

What were you doing? How were you supporting this landing?

Only by escorting the C47s in case they were shot up by enemy aircraft, which didn't exist. Oh, some of the MiG 15s came in occasionally.

09:00 Not with the Inchon landings, but other jobs. But the Inchon landing was rather a surprise to the enemy. They certainly cut them off completely. Though if you go back to Inchon now, you'll find a bloody great big airfield now, a new airport, international airport. That's about an hour and a quarter, no, it's nearly an hour from town. It was fun going back to Korea.

09:30 First time, as a guest of the American marines. I was a member of their Marine Organisation. That was in '99. Whereas you saw fields of mud, now there were hundreds of bloody high rise buildings, filled with people.

What are some of the specific memories that that visit brought back?

A hell of a lot. I realised the growth of Korea, South Korea, in the fifty years since I left it.

10:00 **What memories did it bring back?**

Well, the main memory, of course, was in the United Nations Cemetery in Pusan, It's the only one owned by the United Nations, where most of my guys are buried. We've still got fourteen guys missing, fourteen pilots missing, somewhere in North Korea. Don't know where they are. Well, we do. We know where they crashed. But that's it. That brought back a lot of memories. Walking the rows of our war dead.

10:30 See, I buried the first three blokes that were killed. Including Lou Spence. And in those days it was just a muddy field. With holes in the ground. Now it's a beautiful cemetery. Ah, you always remember the blokes you've lost, the blokes you knew well. And sometimes we kept in touch with them. When you got back to Australia. I still get enquiries from

11:00 children of people who were shot down in Korea. What really did happen to my dad? Well, you can't go beyond what the official explanation was.

What is beyond the official explanation?

None. Generally nothing at all. But they measure things. Did he suffer? How the hell do I know? He went straight in, as far as I'm concerned. You don't say that in your letter of condolence.

11:30 While, for instance, we still have fourteen blokes missing in North Korea somewhere. And where still getting letters, the Air Force is, and I get the occasional one, from families. Where is he? What happened to him? We know he went in. This is in the Meteor days. And his aircraft was destroyed. Probably he was too. But we had no real contact with the North Koreans.

12:00 To find out where our people are. The yanks had the same problem too. They have about six hundred blokes missing in North Korea. From all services.

This must be a particularly common thing for airmen. Because you do fly often, and it's difficult to know what happened.

Well, you either go in and kill yourself. You rarely get injured. It's generally total, when you go in. So.

12:30 **Can you tell us the story of the transition from the Mustang to the Meteor?**

Meteor? No worry. Well, I was OK, because I had flown with the Americans in the F80, the Shooting Star. A couple of months before. I had ten missions on the Shooting Star too. No, it was a very easy aircraft to convert to. And the RAAF sent us out two very good instructors. And so we had no trouble. We had two dual jets. We had no trouble converting to the Meteor. None at all.

13:00 It was a very easy aircraft to fly. We called it the 'Gentlemen's aircraft'. Having two engines didn't make any difference. Being a jet didn't make much difference. To blokes with experience. Some of the early

guys had a bit of trouble. I had to form what I called an Orientation Flight at Iwakuni, and that flight was generally commanded by a retiring pilot

13:30 from the squadron, going south. And I said, 'Well, spend a fortnight there and teach some of these guys what goes on'. That helped a whole lot and meant that the blokes coming from Australia, with no Meteor experience, but had jet experience on Vampires, could get about up twenty hours in the Meteor before they went into operations. That worked pretty well. Even so, I had some funny incidents.

14:00 One young pilot was airborne with cloud base about two thousand feet, and he got inside the cloud. He knew what to do. And GCA was working, Ground Control Approach, and I could hear him talking, and I said, 'For Christ sake, throttle back'. Or words to that effect. 'Get your speed down, stop using so much fuel, and do a proper even circuit, under control of GCA,

14:30 and come in and land'. Anyway, he came in and landed all right, but he fell short by about two hundred yards. He crashed into the water, out of fuel, and never got his bloody self wet, stepped from that into a row boat, because the aircraft was out of fuel, so it floated pretty well. That was our first loss. Another guy, Tom Stoney, was doing some rapid takeoffs,

15:00 climbed up to about fifteen, sixteen thousand feet, and suddenly found himself out of the aircraft. The jump seat had gone off. The ejection seat. And there he was, with no aircraft. And he got rather a surprise. And everyone blamed him. He pulled the cord. Which he hadn't of course. The sere, that held the cartridge in safety, had broken. Phtt. Up she went.

15:30 So we had a few experience with blokes like that. Kittys in trouble. The Meteor was a very good aircraft. Very rugged aircraft. Very strong aircraft. But it wasn't good enough for combat against the MiG 15. Although we shot down five MiG 15s, with the Meteor.

With the Meteor, the jet engine, does it have, in certain configurations, you can stall the engine and flame it out?

16:00 Oh, you could with the Australian Sabre. I did it a couple of times. Not the Meteor. Not to my knowledge. I never heard of a stalled Meteor engine. Must have had one or two. But a single-engined jet, occasionally, you could stall out the engine quite easily. I got caught once in Australian Sabres, out at Williamtown. About twenty four, twenty five thousand,

16:30 no, it was about forty thousand feet. Firing my guns. And the gases from these guns, two 30 mil guns, crept around and come to the intake of the Sabre and stopped the engine. She stalled on me. I was about three hundred miles east of Australia. And boy, I only just got back. I eventually got the aircraft lighted up again at about ten or twelve thousand feet. And went into Williamtown and landed.

17:00 But I got a big fright that day. I couldn't get the engine to relight. You had to go down to a certain level, below twenty thousand feet, anyway, to get a relight. Mine wasn't going to relight. So every now and again you got small frights. As we all did.

Can you tell us about your first encounter with the infamous MiG?

MiG 15? I did ten missions with the American Sabres.

17:30 As guest of the American government. And we took off, about sixteen aircraft. Two squadrons of sixteen, going north, and the Interfed [International Federation] centre would say fifty five leaving station. Fifty five MiGs were leaving their bloody base to have a crack at us, and they got to about thirty five, forty, up to fifty thousand feet, some of those MiGs.

18:00 The operating height of a Sabre was about thirty two thousand feet. Above that, you're stalling out a bit, even slow. And every time, we were jumped by the MiGs. I did ten missions. I was in six fights. I finished up with a damaged MiG. That was the closest I got to shooting one down. But you knew the MiGs were up there somewhere, in the sun, coming down on you.

18:30 And your first tactic was to turn into them. And later on, if you were really caught out, go down hill as fast as you can. Of course, a MiG couldn't follow you down. It didn't like flying at low level. But, whereas the Sabre was a fairly rugged, well-built aircraft, the MiG wasn't. But the MiG fights were quite interesting. The ones I had.

19:00 **Can you tell us about one of those?**

Well, you're moving all the time, and you're looking for him behind you, in your mirror, or with your neck screwed round. And the worst thing you wanted to feel, or see, was a MiG on your tail. Because you knew you'd be in trouble. I got a MiG on the tail once, went down hill fast, got rid of him, but the thing I had trouble with,

19:30 the MiG 15 and the Sabre looked very much alike. And you had to be very careful that you were hitting at a MiG and not a bloody Sabre. A lot of blokes were shot down, or shot up, by their own people. The Yanks ratio of kills, eight MiGs to one Sabre. Which wasn't bad. But again, all those American pilots, in the 4th Fighter Wing, later NorWing,

20:00 were ex World War II pilots too, so they were trained. They knew what they were doing. And the new

pilots that came in from America were very highly trained, at Johnson Air Force base, outside of Tokyo. Where the first squadron was. And that was a training station. Before they went into combat.

What about encountering a MiG in a Meteor?

I never did. I know a couple of blokes that did.

20:30 As I say, we shot down five MiGs with Meteors. But Bill Simmonds, have you contacted Bill Simmonds yet? You've probably got him on your list. He shot down a MiG. At long range, too. Les Reading. I wonder if you've struck him yet. I hope you get to see him. He got two damaged MiGs I think.

You got a damaged MiG as well.

21:00 Yes. I got a damaged MiG.

Can you tell us what you can see? How close you are to the aircraft?

I was on a steep turn, going upwards. So my bullets weren't sort of in one straight direction, and I saw a couple of hits on the side of his fuselage. From my guns. And that was all. But I wasn't in a good position to get the MiG itself. Normally, you don't try to shoot aircraft down whilst you're turning,

21:30 heavily, as I was. But there he was, so I had a crack at him. But that was the only chance I ever had of getting a MiG, was that one burst. We were in other fights, but not good enough to get behind a MiG and shoot him down.

It seemed a lot. I heard was that it was up to pilot skill in the MiG and that varied fairly widely.

22:00 Well, most of the MiG boys were being led by a Russian pilot anyway. Jones was the nickname for one of the Russian pilots, whom I've met, by the way. Years ago. At a dinner. But you knew if the MiGs were being led by Chinese or Russians, just by the type of formation.

How did you tell that?

Just by the way they flew.

22:30 The Russian leadership was very good. And eventually the Chinese leadership became very good too. But initially it was the Russian leadership and they trained the pilots properly. As good as the Yanks trained their pilots.

Could you identify the planes differently, or how could you really tell?

Just knew by the type of formation.

And who did you fear the most?

Any bloody pilot in a MiG 15. You never knew.

23:00 I mean, the most immature, untrained pilot could shoot down aircraft. It's happened.

What did you prefer ground attack, or air-to-air combat?

I would have liked air-to-air combat. As that made me a fighter pilot, I wanted air-to-air combat. I never really got it. I missed out in Darwin, five months there. No day raids, that was during World War II. In Korea,

23:30 I only got a little chance, because the MiG 15s were with the American Sabres. I would have liked to stay with the Sabres longer, but I was only given ten missions. Approved for ten missions, and by that time I was bloody tired, anyway. I was buggered.

What's the appeal of air-to-air combat compared to ground attack?

24:00 Well, you're against probably experienced pilots. It's fighter to fighter, rather than fighter to bomber. Fairly straight forward. In my position, if you shoot down bombers, you shoot them down. But fighter to fighter, you know, you're one man against another. And if the aircraft are roughly the same capability, OK, you've got a fight on your hands. The best man wins. The most highly trained bloke wins.

24:30 I could have done without all that ground attack work. I think most of us in ground attack operations would feel the same way. It had to be done, sure. But it's not nice, it's nasty bloody work. There was one occasion where, on the east part of Korea, a long tunnel. A lot of long tunnels.

25:00 This one was a pretty long tunnel. So one day I said to the Group Commander, 'I'm going to have a crack at one of those tunnels'. 'Away you go'. Took eight aircraft up with bombs, thousand pound bombs. And we closed both ends of the tunnel. And so the train that was inside overnight, or of a daytime, couldn't get out. We found out there were nine thousand people in that bloody tunnel, later on.

25:30 There were two or three trains in there, full of people and troops and so on. We closed the tunnel so they couldn't get out. Nor could the air get in. Oxygen get in. We never thought we'd get that many

people. We thought we might get two or three trains. We thought the trains would be loaded with ammo or supplies, mainly people. So there was a few nasty jobs like that in Korea.

26:00 Nine thousand. Occasionally our Navy ships also were able to have a crack at some of the trains.

Can you tell us about MiG Alley?

MiG Alley was an area from the Yalu River, which was a division between China and North Korea, down towards Kimpo.

26:30 That's just the alley where the MiGs and the Sabres got into combat area. That was all. Just called MiG alley.

Why was it called MiG Alley?

Only because the MiGs were always in that position. As we were. Fired against them.

How did you feel flying into MiG Alley?

Just another name. a bit of air space in North Korea.

Quite a notorious bit of air space.

Well, yeah, yeah. It became so, thanks to the Meteor, I think.

Why was that?

27:00 Well, the Meteor had a great habit of getting onto something and riding it up. And sometimes it was all bull shit. But naturally when the Sabres got involved with the MiGs, it was first class American news. Especially if we were victorious.

Was it more of an American invention?

Yes, it was. You see, I was the only Australian who flew Sabres, American Sabres. In action.

27:30 A lot of our guys wanted to, but the Yanks said no. Mine was a special case anyway by the Yanks. I'd asked for twenty five missions, on Sabres, and the Commander of the 5th Air Force said, 'OK you're on'. And eventually the American government gave me licence to fly ten missions only.

28:00 But they paid for everything. All my training and so on and so forth. I was their guest. Genuine gesture of thank you, for what you'd done.

Before we get to the Sabre. The Meteor was the primary jet for the Australian RAAF there.

It was, it first flew in 1942. There was a twin-engine Meteor in 1944. It was built for the RAAF as a defensive fighter against attacking bombers.

28:30 And it would be ideal for that too. In Europe. But it wasn't any good for us out here.

What was the role of the Meteor, the initial role of the Meteor, when you first deployed it?

In the squadron?

Yes.

Well, I made it a combat aircraft. I said, 'This is going to be a combat aircraft'. We'll fly in company with the American F86s against the MiG 15'. and my idea was pretty sound. The Yanks liked the idea because it gave them good support too.

29:00 So, there would be two squadrons of sixteen aircraft of American Sabres, and twelve to sixteen Meteors behind them. Now, our rate of climb was better than the American Sabre. And we also had four good guns. Four cannons. But unfortunately I'd left. I was posted, oh, about three weeks after we'd introduced the Meteor.

29:30 And the leadership that took over from me wasn't that good. So that fell through as a combat operation. It was a pity, because I think the Meteor could have done a bloody lot of good, in company with the American Sabre. It was a total fleet. Opposition. But it never happened. Anyway the squadron was relegated to ground attack. When I was with the Americans, and I came back to the same field where the Meteors were,

30:00 I got a gang of about a dozen pilots came across to see me. I was then flying with the American Sabres. 'We've got a problem, Sir'. I said, 'Oh, God. What's that?'. 'So and so and so and so and so and so'. I said, 'OK. I understand that'.

Sorry.

Oh, it was a leadership problem.

Specifically, what was wrong?

The bloke that took over from me. He was not doing his job properly. He's not flying the aircraft in combat. And we're not doing the job that you sort of trained us to do. Combat Operations with the Americans'.

30:30 I said, 'I can't do a bloody thing, mate. I don't belong to you any more. I belong to the Americans'. 'Yeah, but you were the CO of the squadron. You've got some influence down south'. I said, 'Yep, but I can't do anything about this'. When I got back I had that squadron commander removed from his job. And another one set up. But it was too late. The squadron had been relegated to ground attack work.

Why were you replaced in the squadron?

31:00 My time was up. I'd had, god, fourteen months with that squadron.

And most of that was on Mustangs?

Oh, half was. Yeah. And then I trained the squadron on to the Meteors, of course. That took three months. Bit of a problem there, because we didn't have a navigational aid in the Meteor. And I wanted a radio compass which was the ideal aid for that type of aircraft, in Korea.

31:30 The Deputy Chief of the Air Force, Scherger, said, 'No, they're no bloody good. They were failures during World War II'. I said, 'There the only thing we've got up here, and they're ideal for Korea'. He said, 'OK'. That took quite a while to fit radio compasses to the Meteors. And even then the Commanding General was General [H.C.H.] Robinson, Red Robby. He said, 'Not all the aircraft are fitted'. I said, 'Well, as long as the leader's got one, that's good enough for me'.

32:00 He said, 'OK. You can go back on operations'. It was going to take six to eight months to get these bloody things fitted. Three months was long enough for me. So we got back into operations with the Meteor. And it was a good navigational aid. Because not only did we use it, so did the Chinese. For both services. The Radio compass is a very simple thing.

What was the problem with navigation in Korea?

32:30 Well, lack of aids. Korea itself as a country is a lousy place to fly over. We had a big weather factor. I suppose half the time we were in cloud or above cloud. Mustang days, we were generally in cloud, or just above it, low cloud. The Meteor days you were always above cloud, going to and from target areas, people could get lost quite easily. Without aids.

33:00 And we had no aids at Iwakuni apart from the tower aids feature, and I liked it because of the radio compass. But it was lack of aids. Navigational aids. Even the Sabres had trouble. We all had trouble in Korea. The aids we used were planted outside, in South Korea, or in islands off Korea, or in Japan.

33:30 A lot of blokes got lost. A hell of a lot.

How would you deal with getting lost?

Well, on one occasion I took four Meteors across to Korea to show the Yanks what a Meteor looked like, so they wouldn't shoot it down as an enemy. Before I took the squadron across, and getting out of Kimpo one day, oh, it was bloody terrible weather,

34:00 the guy gave me the wrong direction. I was flying to North Korea. I said, 'Eh, eh, check, check'. 'No, you're on the right route'. I said, 'Check, check. Realising we were on a reciprocal course. We should have been going that way, not that way. That poor bugger got four years hard labour, the controller, by the Yanks. He did it accidentally. He made a mistake. You see, blokes make mistakes.

34:30 He gave me a reciprocal course, instead of the true course to fly. And we lost a few aircraft in North Korea. Not we, but the Yanks did.

Can you tell me about the losses that occurred on the squadron when you were there?

Mainly shot down by ground fire, all shot down by ground fire, damaged glycol systems. Couldn't make it back to base, forced landed and killed themselves in a forced landing.

35:00 Landing in a rice field, paddy field. Hitting ditches. Some blokes, a bloke called Sly, got back to within twenty miles of base, bailed out, and the Yank helicopters came in, and all the fighter guys that were available were up, sort of having a crack at the North Koreans on the ground to try and save this pilot,

35:30 whilst we get the helicopter in and save this fighter. And the first helicopter got so badly shot out, the second helicopter picked him up. And his story is that he was really scared. With all these aircraft buzzing around trying to save his life, and trying to make sure the chopper got out. Picked him up and got out. No, there were some scary times for quite a few guys that got out. But not many did. They were generally shot up or shot down, by ground fire.

36:00 **What was the scariest time for you?**

Which one?

What sticks in your mind?

I don’t know. There were two or three scary ones. But the Mustangs, they seemed to be OK. The Sabre. I got scared flying the Sabres, mainly because I was still untrained. I only had about thirty odd hours in the Sabre,

36:30 before I went into combat. I didn’t have enough hours on type to understand the aircraft properly. This often happens to people. I got a couple of frights there. I didn’t like the idea of being shot down by a bloody MiG anyway.

What were those frights that you got?

Oh, they were just flights like that. A bit scared. Not knowing your aircraft properly.

37:00 That’s a must for any fighter boys. Any pilot. You must know your aircraft. And know how to fly it properly. Oh, a couple of scares in World War II. In the Kittyhawk. But it all worked out pretty well. As I said before, there was always a sense of fear anyway, every time you go into operations,

37:30 even though you might have been fully briefed and understood the problem. Understood the target area. But even now a few of us oldies discuss those days, we all agree that there was a sense of fear. You were scared that something might go wrong.

When you get together with your old buddies, do you talk the reality of it?

Sometimes.

38:00 War has always been a good conversation piece.

Are those conversations glossing over the actuality of it, or do they come to the truth of it?

Oh, a lot of guys don’t tell the truth about their war experiences. Or the periods where they were frightened. Some gloss over it. Most of us do. Let’s face it, it was a long time ago.

38:30 I spoke to some of the guys, some of the pilots who were in that recent show in Iraq. We had about fourteen aircraft and about twenty pilots. And those pilots came from 76, 77, and 3 Squadron. They were the top pilots we had in F18s. I spoke to a couple of guys from 77, the other day when I was a Williamtown. Last July and they said, ‘It was a bit scary. We weren’t sure what was going to happen’.

39:00 We soon realised that the Iraqis weren’t going to fly their MiG 29s. So they knew they sort of didn’t worry about that. But they were worried about SAMs, Surface to Air Missiles. Well, they saw a couple, not necessarily fired at them. But it was their first experience in sort of semi-combat conditions. And they were scared. You don’t blame them.

39:30 It’s probably a good idea to be scared. You’re more alert. Because I remember on occasions, we’d come down, in Korea especially, we’d have a heavy day, and we’d be absolutely buggered. And we’d land and we’d say, ‘Thank god that’s over’. Up to our sort of mobile bars. But often I could see some of my airmen,

40:00 aircrew, absolutely shattered. They had a hell of a day and they didn’t like it. Some would relieve themselves with drink. Some didn’t drink, too, and that always worried me a bit. You just don’t drink for the sake of it. You drink to relieve some of the pressure that builds up inside you. Like a good meal. It was on those occasions I used to send blokes back to Japan, for a rest.

40:30 But it happens. You see, in the Korean War, we were so short of pilots we had to get the RAAF in, the Royal Air Force. We finished up with thirty seven Royal Air Force pilots flying Meteors.

Were they under you?

Not me personally, but the next CO, yeah. But it was my idea to bring them in. Because we didn’t have the trained people. Personnel.

They were flying RAAF aircraft?

41:00 Yeah. They came in on secondment for six months or a hundred missions. We lost one to POW. And we lost six RAAF pilots. Killed in that awful ground attack work they did. So the RAAF actually got some experience about modern flying, even though they were flying a bloody odd aircraft, like the Meteor.

Taught by the Australians?

41:30 Yeah. They were pretty thankful, too. Because one of their pilots became Chief of the Royal Air Force.

Tape 8

00:30 **Tell us about your being seconded to the US Air Force.**

To get jet experience, because we were getting the Meteor. So my 2IC, Gordon Harvey, missed out of

course. He was shot down, and Des Murphy, another Flight Commander and myself, to train on the F80s for ten missions.

01:00 **You weren't in the same squadron. Why was that?**

It's the way you do things. Let's face it. We were foreigners, flying with Americans, and I flew in one squadron, and Des Murphy flew in another squadron. Did the same job.

Which squadron did you end up with?

Well, the 4th Fighter Wing was the, oh god. 36th?

01:30 **Probably 36th. Or 35. Doesn't really matter. The squadron that Murphy was in. did you have much to do with him during your time there?**

Well, not while flying with the F80s. But he was my 2IC, after Gordon Harvey was shot down.

What rivalry existed between the two US squadrons, with the Australians?

Not much really.

02:00 They were pleased to have an Australian with them. Because Des Murphy and I were pretty experienced pilots in those days. And we'd been through World War II. Oh, no. We all spoke the same language, the Yanks and ourselves. Always did. Still do. So, that was it.

Des Murphy's written, or spoken about there being a competition between the two squadrons to get the first Australians on operational flights.

Oh, the first operational. He made it. I missed out. He made it by one day.

What was the competition all about?

Well, by the Americans. To try and get us operational as fast as they could. Why Des made it first, I don't know. He told me later on, or someone told me. 'He had an operational mission yesterday'. I said, 'Oh, well. Mine's today'.

03:00 **You mentioned before you weren't completely confident during that time.**

Well, we had a pretty torrid time with the Mustangs, up till the time we retreated from North Korea. Back to Pusan. Before we went to the Americans. I suppose we were, we were all tired, anyway.

03:30 Oh, I suppose one loses a bit of confidence, in war. Mainly through fatigue. Or squadron problems.

Where was the period that you were having the most squadron problems?

I suppose,

04:00 the North Korean, three and a half weeks we had up there. The most dangerous time we had. But minus 3oC, most days. Snowing. Cold as buggery. The ground crew, working on the aircraft, had to wear some heavy bloody gloves, because if they touched metal with their hands, they'd lose their skin. The aircraft were so cold. And our living conditions were pretty poor, too.

04:30 I think we were all glad to get out of North Korea, and back to Pusan. Where we operated from. Better conditions.

What were the conditions at Yompo?

Anywhere. I lived in the old Japanese Commander's house. Still riddled with bloody bullets. And the glass was out, and so on. All the houses that were given to us, they were in shocking conditions. Covered the holes with tarpaulins, and canvas and so on.

05:00 And it was cold. Any fire system that existed, we really got going, in all those bloody huts. Some of the airmen lived in shocking conditions. Burnt out hangar, one of them. Odd blown up or burnt out buildings. Wherever they could find a place to shelter from the snow and the cold. And we were badly clothed too. Didn't have good clothing.

05:30 The Yanks again came to the party. They sort of gave us stuff. Keep my own health. I didn't take a full squadron up with me. I took about a hundred and twenty blokes up with me. Pusan was OK. All our living conditions, apart from North Korea, were good. Pusan was good. Iwakuni was excellent. Po Hang was good until we had the fires. I had to throw out all my canvas, tents and stuff and buy American stuff. Or sign for American stuff.

06:00 **What happened there with the fires?**

We were given old Indian Army tents, camouflaged with paint. The old World War I, World War II tents. And we were given 5kva [electrical cable] plus ordinary wires, the old twisted wire, power wires. And we were living in high wind conditions, and one night one tent,

06:30 where my ops [operations] officer was, and two pilots, both killed, the pilots, the wires crossed and

started to leak tar, and set alight some clothing hanging across a centre rail. The whole thing went up in flames. So, it was after that I had all the gear changed to American gear. Years later,

07:00 from Treasury, 'Please explain why you signed for all this American gear in Korea'. I just tore the bloody file up.

What was the difference between the American gear and the old Indian gear?

Oh, the American stuff was much better. Modernised, excellent equipment. The old Indian tentage was pretty lousy. It was all the BCOF, British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, had available, for us.

07:30 Even winter clothing, we didn't have. And we got most of our stuff from the Yanks. Sometimes on the barter system. I had a long barrelled .45 that one of the pilots had given me before he went home. And I got a beautiful set of winter clothing for that. Which I've still got.

What was a good tool or goods for bartering in those days?

08:00 With the Americans, things like guns mainly. With the Japanese of course, soap, and powder. And wool. My room girl in Japan, who couldn't speak of word of bloody English, I couldn't speak a word of Japanese, I gave her for years, pounds of wool, which I sent up with needles. And for years later,

08:30 her mother wrote to me and thanked me in Japanese, the Japanese Embassy read the letter out to me. Because I'd been supporting this girl, for oh, ten or twelve years, with knitting needles and wool and so on, the Japanese loved that.

What was she? Can you explain the system of room girls, or house girls?

Well, in Japan, in the occupational days, the senior officer had one or two room girls,

09:00 and the rest of the guys had one between four, sort of thing. And they did all your washing and mending and so on, and made your beds. The Occupational Force was well looked after. Which carried on into the war. I remember once throwing out an old khaki shirt that the bloody shoulder was torn out. It was worn out to buggery and I threw it in the corner. I got it back the following week, mended completely. I didn't know what to say, because I didn't want it. But the room girls were really good.

09:30 **How much other contact did you have with the Japanese population?**

Oh, I had quite a lot, because my father was in Japan about 1909. He helped design some of the Japanese railways. He being a railway engineer and designer, and he maintained contact. Until the time he died. But one of his best friends was old Mikimoto, the old man. Now, his son's still alive, and his son and I still correspond.

10:00 And also, there was a Japanese down near Kure, which is near Iwakuni, who was a baron, in the old Japanese language, and he got in touch with me too, when I arrived up there. And I was treated as the son of my father, and I was invited to Tokyo, I visited a couple of times up there as their guests, and Mikimoto I saw a lot of, the old man. And this guy near Kure,

10:30 I think he was trying to marry off one of his elder daughters, with me. She was quite nice, actually. So I had contacts already, because of my father's association with Japan. Which made it very interesting for me. And, of course, being CO you're the boss, so the fire chief, the police chief, and every other chief that might exist in the local village, puts on shows for you. That was quite fun some of them.

11:00 **A lot of people who had fought the Japanese in New Guinea, had certain reservations about making too much contact with them. What wereyour feelings?**

In New Guinea, yes.

But even later on, there was still bad feeling there. What about in your case?

Well, you had to accept what was happening in the present day. You couldn't go back ten years, twelve years. To something that had happened before. No, I was one of the first squadrons to use Japanese to work on the aircraft.

11:30 Against the American advice, and against the Australian advice, I said, 'For christ sake, they're technicians'. Iwakuni was a big training station for the kamikaze boys, Navy boys. So I used them to repair aircraft. They did a bloody marvellous job. Sure, under supervision of one of my own people. Corporal and LAC [leading aircraftsman], airmen. But I trusted them. That was their job. They liked doing it. Whether the Japanese had been in the war. It didn't make any difference.

12:00 **How did you feel about the Chinese and the North Koreans?**

Well, they were part of the enemy, as far as I was concerned. I still don't trust the Chinese. I think one day they could become the most powerful nation in the world. They're clever.

12:30 They copy, like the Japanese did. Their production rates are very good indeed. But you accept these things. Then, no, not necessarily. But now, you accept all this.

What were they like as an enemy?

Pretty ruthless. No quarter given. They looked after my POWs, not very well.

13:00 Oh, they were ruthless. You see, they didn't worry too much about their lives. They were in a bloody war. Even they must have felt, 'Will I get back from this war or not?' Most didn't. And we gave no quarter. I think I mentioned earlier about the cavalry. We were flying across to the Yalu River.

13:30 Twelve, sixteen aircraft I had. And we were about twelve thousand feet above the snow hills, and there we saw cavalry, Chinese cavalry coming down the track. I said, 'Christ'. And very well dressed. They were waving, they were all waving at us. They thought we were their friends, their own Air Force. That wasn't a very good job, shooting up those. At the same time we found out that

14:00 three large guns were firing towards Hamhung. From somewhere up in the hills. We found that lot, and we used napalm on them. But we were quite surprised by the Chinese coming into the war. In that fashion. A cavalry for Christ sake. About two or three hundred of them.

Why were they waving at you?

They thought we were Chinese. They had been told, as I found out later on, any aircraft you see flying in that area will be our aircraft. They weren't. They were us.

14:30 **How much could you see of what they were actually doing on their horse, waving? How close were you?**

We were bloody close. Of course, I was skimming across the top of the mountain on the way to my target area on the Yalu River, which we never did. And there they were. Then we were searching around for these three guns that were firing towards Hamhung, and we found those. Destroyed those.

15:00 But that was one of the nasty things you had to do. Shooting friendly people you might say. Why they were on horseback. Why the cavalry was coming, I don't know. Because that was twelve, thirteen thousand feet above sea level. And our base was only three or four hundred feet above sea level. About sixty, seventy miles away. So we assume they had been told to come into our area,

15:30 Hamhung area, from that position. God, all those hills were covered with heavy snow. That's when I saw my first snow leopard. A nice animal.

From the air?

16:00 Oh, the Mustang's a pretty slow aircraft. You can still see things going on.

What were the impressions of the landscape you were in?

Pretty rugged. It's an area where you sort of made sure you weren't going to force land in it. You made sure you were going to stay afloat, stay up in the air. But all that territory, all that area, between Hamhung, across the mountain range, which is about twenty or thirty miles,

16:30 into the Yalu River, was very rugged area. Terribly rugged.

Is there one operation in Korea, maybe one you've mentioned already, that stands out quite clearly?

Well, the last one I mentioned, the cavalry, is one that I remember quite clearly.

17:00 **And another one, other than that?**

Well, there's several. The long flight from Pusan to Yalu River, near the Chinese air base, eight and a quarter hours. And we were only carrying drop tanks and guns. And that was a long bloody flight.

Can you take us through that from the beginning. From when you took off. What was going on before that operation, and how you led up to it and what happened when you took off?

There was a strike on,

17:30 called on by the 5th Air Force, through operational order, to strike a certain target. And the Wing said, 'God struth, that's a terrible long way away'. I said, 'That's OK. I'll do it'. I knew it would be an eight hour job. Although we could land on the way back at various places and refuel and that sort of thing. And it was guns only, because you couldn't carry anything else but guns. They're full of drop tanks.

18:00 So I briefed the boys and took them out about half past six in the morning. Flew up this target area. Shot it up. There was a few at headquarters, I don't know what it was now. We shot it up. Spent about three or four minutes over the target. And came back. Didn't waste any time. And we had enough fuel, there was four of us, to get back to Pusan. And I said, 'You're sure you've got enough fuel, otherwise we'll land here, here, or there'.

18:30 They said, 'We're all right'. Normally the leader has the most fuel, because he's leading and less throttle movement. But we were all fairly right. And we all got back after eight and a quarter hours flight. That was a long bloody flight that one. For three minutes over target. And that happened quite often in Mustang days. Not those long flights, but maybe three, three and a half hour flights. And we'd drop a

load of maybe rockets and/or bombs,

19:00 carrying one drop tank. Or napalm tank. But I never went in and stayed on target. It was in, out. Otherwise you'd lose someone. You'd lose yourself sometimes. Occasionally, the odd guy wanted to go back and have another crack, because he'd missed his target. I'd say, 'Nope'. Some did, early days until I stopped it. Because then you lost people, going back a second time to the target area.

19:30 Most of our jobs in the Korean Campaign were against trains, against tolls, against bridges. Transport. Coming down the field tracks. Troop concentrations, supply dumps. They were our main targets.

Were there also attacks on villages?

Not unless we knew there was something inside it,

20:00 like a tank hidden inside. No. We avoided that. Except when we knew that there was a tank, or ammo or something, stored inside the villages themselves. And we were told that by Intelligence people.

Just getting back to those long flights. When you're on your way there or back, how much concentration is involved. What are you doing in the cockpit all that time?

Well, I'm flat out navigating making sure the blokes are still with me and we're going in the right direction.

20:30 Identifying from the map I've got where we are, and making sure that we get to the target and hit it properly. So the leader's always flat out.

How was that navigation done?

What we called Cat's Eye navigation. You've got the map of Korea, anyway. A ground map. You draw your flight line on that map, before briefing, or during briefing. And you follow that right through to the target area. There's no worry about that.

21:00 Some guys are poor navigators. I was good. I liked navigating. But I never got lost. I was leading. I wasn't supposed to get lost anyway. But some guys did, sometimes.

After a very short period over a target area, what about the way back? How much concentration was involved there?

Oh, you're fairly conscious. You know the direction you're flying anyway. When you're going to the target area. And you know the direction to go back,

21:30 because that's all in the debriefing, or in the briefing. So you get back on that course as fast as you can. Avoiding any flak that might be in the area, of course. But most target information gave you exit routes out of a target area. To avoid flak and that sort of thing, and the quickest way back to base. We normally climbed to height. When I say height, maybe five or six or seven thousand feet above ground level, at least.

22:00 Away from the low ground fire.

How do you manage things like eating, or bodily functions, in a small cockpit on a flight that long?

Well, you don't eat. And you've got a pee bottle. You've got a pee tube. It's a long tube and it's built inside the aircraft. And you use that to pee. That sort of thing. But that's all you can do. Eating? Well, some might carry chocolate bars, that sort of thing.

22:30 But on a long flight, I suppose we carried a bit of lunch. I've forgotten now.

What was the comfort like inside that cockpit?

OK. Except if you were sitting on top of what they called a CO2 [carbon dioxide] bottle, that's the dinghy bottle. That sometimes got in the wrong position on your back end. And you finished up with a sort arse. But generally speaking, you sort of settled down, comfortably. Inside a cockpit. You had your own parachute anyway.

23:00 You kept that, and you made sure that was fitting properly, before you got into the aircraft. I used an American parachute most of the time, which the Yanks had given me. In Darwin. Which was very comfortable, compared to our parachutes. Oh, no. You put up with these sorts of things. You're young enough and strong enough.

23:30 **On the subject of parachutes. We talked a little bit before about parachute drill and parachute training. Can you tell us about that?**

We were well trained, in my course, at Point Cook in '38 and '39. But in the Mustang days in Korea, there were four of us, two pairs out on a job. Over, oh god, on the east coast, up north, towards the 38th parallel. And one bloke bailed out.

24:00 The other pair, we were there, these two were doing something over there. And I said, 'Hey, he's left his

parachute behind'. The parachute left the body. He'd pulled the wrong cord. So he got killed. I don't know why. I think he got shot up, by ground fire. And pulled up, got as high as he could, and bailed out. Then I found out he hadn't been parachute trained, by two or three other guys that came up with him on that course.

24:30 I hit the bloody roof then. Oh, god, did I what. Well, I wrote to the CAF, Chief of the Air Force, direct. I said, 'If this is how you're training my boys in Korea. What's wrong with you?' I was very rude. And very direct, too. So that caused a complete change in training, naturally. But quite a few mistakes were made in those post-war days,

25:00 post World War II. In the Korean days. Untrained people. Badly trained people. Selecting the wrong guy for a pilot. Which we had to correct on the spot. Which I told you, I sent eleven people home, LMF. It wasn't their fault, just lack of bloody training. And unfortunately, ten of them were discharged from the Air Force, which, when I got back,

25:30 I thought was bloody wrong. They should have been retrained properly.

Can you tell about the incidents that precipitated you sending those men home?

Well, if they couldn't do the job properly. One bloke got married the week before he came up. I sent him home the next day. They just weren't trained properly. I said, 'Can you do this?' 'No.' 'Have you done that?' 'No.' So we did the best we could with the few aircraft we had available in the Mustang days, this is early '51.

26:00 At Iwakuni. But if I couldn't retrain the boys, I sent them home. But I had to send them back on the LMF policy basis. That was the only excuse I had, even though I said it wasn't their fault. But the Air Force said, 'Out'.

26:30 **What effect did that have on your output as a squadron, and how you were looked at?**

A lot. I was down to thirteen pilots at one stage. Mustang pilots. And we were flat out doing our job. We were flying two or three times a day. Each of us. And I eventually got a bunch of pilots, some were Mustang trained, some were ex-World War II people come back into the service. And they were OK. But we were very low for a little while.

27:00 It happens. Especially in the Meteor days. I had to get an RAAF pilot in to fill the gaps that I had. Well, by that time I was down south as the Director of Operations. In brackets, fighter ops. responsible for all this fighter training business and making sure they got the right people in the squadron.

27:30 A long time ago.

After conversion to Meteors, what was your first operation?

I took sixteen aircraft up, we flew up and down the bloody, this side of the Yalu River. And the Chinese were doing the same thing on the other side. We were pacing each other. At about twenty five, thirty thousand feet. The Yanks were up there, too. It was purely a look/see mission.

28:00 They were looking at us, we were looking at them. So we did all that, and spent about an hour doing that, and came back to Koepang, our base. The first two or three missions in the Meteors were virtually pacing missions. Hoping the MiGs would come in. And of course, the Yanks hoped so too, because they were behind me. At a higher height. Could have a crack at them. And a couple of bomber escort missions.

28:30 I only did fourteen missions in Meteors. Before I went to the Yanks.

What were the politics of choosing the Meteor?

Meaning what? Why did we get it?

Well, when everybody knew that the F86 [Sabre] was perhaps the best plane?

Well, we couldn't get F86. They weren't available. They weren't coming off the production line fast enough. Although the Commanding General in Tokyo said, 'I'll give you Cresswell worn out Sabres for a month, if you like'.

29:00 That's when the RAAF heard about it, and we finished up getting Meteors. But the Yanks had no other aircraft available. No other type. The F84 was useless. The F80 I didn't want. The F86 was the only aircraft that had any chance of combat with a MiG 15. The South Africans came into it with a Mustang squadron,

29:30 and they changed over to Sabres about a year after we did. Went to Meteors. They lost quite a few Sabres, too. But I wanted Sabres. But I had no chance of getting them.

Knowing that the Meteor wouldn't match up to a MiG, was there a great sense of vulnerability when you flew that aircraft?

No. but by flying with the American Sabre,

30:00 we could finish up with a fairly good defensive force. And as I say, the Yanks thought the same thing. Because we had four good guns, and it was a highly manoeuvrable aircraft, the Meteor. It wasn't to be. The commanders that took over from me were the wrong people. Or the one commander that took over from me was the wrong bloke.

Were there other accidents in those early days of flying Meteors?

30:30 Well, rarely. Just those two I spoke about. Not really, because the Meteor's a fairly rugged aircraft, and they take a lot of punishment. Very easy to fly. No, there were only two I lost in the early Meteor days. The bloke coming in to land bit short of fuel, and landed in the water, and the bloke that suddenly found himself in the air with no aircraft. Little seer had broken that held the firing pin in, on the ejection seat.

31:00 No, no others to my knowledge, in those early days. No aircraft were lost when I had the Meteor squadron in Korea. But I was only there for fourteen missions. It was after that, they started to lose aircraft.

That was a crucial moment in aircraft history, and Air Force history. The changeover from piston driven to jet aircraft. How much of a change was that at the time, and what differences did it make.

31:30 No differences really. None of us found the aircraft awkward to fly. Just the opposite. Very straight forward aircraft to fly. A very comfortable aircraft to fly. Flying jets from piston engines. All the guys that came up from down south, had blown Vampires anyway, for about sixty of seventy hours. So they were jet experienced. Sure, single engine aircraft,

32:00 but they had no trouble transferring to the Meteor at Iwakuni. No, there was no real trouble. The thing that annoyed us, of course, was the lack of visibility, at height. It was an inferior aircraft against the MiG 15.

In a more general sense, looking back at your entire Air Force career, how did that change the nature of air war?

Oh, a hell of a lot.

32:30 I was the first jet commander ever, in the Air Force, in force history. Because when I got back to Australia, I really changed things. I was the boss as far as I was concerned. But the Air Force was the same. 'You know what you're doing, Cresswell. You do it. You've had experience in American aircraft. Whatever you want, we'll agree, in principle, until you give us details. So I changed the whole Operational Training Structure. In the Air Force. And when the

33:00 Australian Sabre was introduced I said, 'I'll take that bloody Sabre, and I'll form a Sabre Trials Flight, in the Operational Training Unit they already had at Williamtown'. So, I put eight pilots out, ex jet pilots, and we wrote the syllabus of training for the Australian Sabre at Williamtown on the spot. We spent about six months doing that. So the entry of the Air Force into fast aircraft, like the Sabre Plus,

33:30 was done by my blokes and myself. By pretty rugged training, and also writing the syllabus of training, which is virtually still used.

On a broad perspective, what did that mean for the role of the RAAF?

Oh, we changed the role a bit from piston engines to jets. We already had the Canberra in service, and that was a bloody good aircraft.

34:00 And the Australian Sabre, was one of the best aircraft in the world for about nine months. Because we changed the design a bit.

Did that technology influence how the Air Force was to be used and what its role was?

Oh, yes. The more jet experienced people got into staff jobs, the more conscious they became of the need for a change, in the role, and in training, and in operation.

34:30 Yeah, it worked out pretty well. Korea was good for us. Made us wake up. We had to sort of, rebuild our Air Force from its collapse after World War II. And don't forget, we had no Commonwealth Government policy on the future of the Air Force. From the fourth biggest aircraft in the world,

35:00 in '45, down to bugger all in '50, '53, '54. We survived.

Compared to the time you joined up before the war?

Well, that was a pretty small operation too, those days, three thousand six hundred odd people, total, in the Air Force. And to expand to the fourth biggest Air Force, is quite something, for Australia.

You mentioned to begin with, you thought the Korean War was unnecessary perhaps.

Yeah, I did.

What were your views?

I was down south in those days. I thought 'Here we go again. Somebody's made a mistake'. And the

question of the 38th Parallel kept [the dividing line between North and South Korea] coming up, and so on and so forth. And I couldn't understand I suppose why the Yanks and the Brits couldn't get together and sort of talk this whole thing out.

36:00 Prevent any future wars. But not to be. I think most of us down south were pretty unhappy about the Korean War. We thought it shouldn't have happened. And then we got involved in the bloody thing, in a big way.

Did you still think it shouldn't have happened, when you got involved in it?

Oh, yeah. There was no doubt about it, there was a communist thrust, south, through Korea.

36:30 It could have gone to other places after that. Could have gone to Malaysia again. It could have influenced the Australian situation. Something had to happen to stop the influx of North Koreans, pushed by the Chinese. With Russians pushing the Chinese of course. We didn't worry too much about world domination.

37:00 We thought, after World War II, phtt, finished. But it didn't happen, of course. Even the American Cold War with Russia, used to amaze me sometimes. How two sensible countries acted like they were. In a Cold War situation. But seems to apply now, too. We still make some silly mistakes. Now we have an American police force, world police force.

37:30 **Towards the end of the interview, I want to ask you about the current world situation. Just getting back to the last few years of the Korean War, it devolved into a stalemate. It was a war that no one was winning. How did you feel about that at the time?**

We thought bloody crazy. But we weren't prepared to use the atomic bomb. That would have been the answer. Who on? Chinese or the Russians?

38:00 It was pretty obvious no one was going to win that bloody war, and the Chinese were pushing in hundreds and thousands of people. So there was no worry about man power as far as the Chinese were concerned. I was quite pleased when the war had finished in Korea. It finished a year late, it was decided a year before it actually finished, that we would stalemate the 38th Parallel. Which it did in '53.

38:30 **How would you categorise its effect on your own career?**

Oh, it gave me all the jet experience I wanted. Or could obtain anyway. And made me a pretty important peg in the future Air Force. No doubt about that. And, by being given the right to do anything I thought was correct,

39:00 I had no worry about getting approval from Air Board, or from the ministers. Even Menzies said, 'Without you, we wouldn't have had an efficient Air Force, after Korea'. And I had a good team to back me up all the time, Again, teamwork. Some of the guys that came out of Korea, about my time, like Des Murphy and Olorenshaw, were on my side all the time.

39:30 And on occasion we used to get together and have a few drinks and say, 'What about doing this or that or the other?' And we'd all agree and go ahead and do it. Or get it approved. Forming a Sabre Trials Flight, at the OTU, which I commanded at Williamtown, introduction of the Australian Sabre in the Air Force, was frowned upon initially by the senior guys. And they said, 'Why can't our experienced pilots do this?' I said, 'What experienced pilots have we got?'

40:00 None had flown jets they were talking about. 'Oh, away you go'. So we wrote out a list of instructions, operational instructions, and went ahead did our job. Six months or so at Williamtown.

Tape 9

00:30 **Just one story that I'm personally fascinated by is failing out of an aircraft. You actually did that?**

Bailed out, yeah.

Bailing out of a Kittyhawk. How do you do that?

You go for the centre of the left wing. Throw the canopy off, and quickly stand up, and go for the left wing. Dive towards the left wing.

01:00 That'll take you onto the tail of the aircraft, and after that, it's quite straight forward.

Any particular manoeuvre? Are you turning it upside down? Are you giving it negative G?

Oh, my case, mine was a straight jump. But guys that get shot up badly, they might have to turn upside down and fall out of the aircraft. Or in a spin. You might damage yourself on the tail. But you're told all these things. The best way, in a spin, is to try and get it to flat spin,

01:30 so you can get out.

What were the circumstances of you having to bail out?

Got shot up. By the Australian Army. But don't you say that.

Pardon?

I got shot up by the Australian Army. A mistake was made.

How did the happen to come about?

It happened. The poor guys that did the damage weren't very happy when they found out who they shot up, of course. An Australian pilot.

02:00 So I lost an engine, and I bailed out.

Were you flying too close to some artillery positions?

No. I was in my right area, but they mistook me for something else. This was during the crucial days of New Guinea, '43.

What happened to your aeroplane?

Well, it went into ground.

You were just flying along and unexpectedly . . .

I got shot up, yeah. Pretty straight forward.

02:30 **The only time you were shot down?**

Yeah. Oh, I got shot down in Milne Bay. By a Japanese Zero. One bullet hit me. In the magneto.

Sorry, that's right, yeah. Back in Korea, how was the moral of the squadron with those heavy losses?

Good and bad. Because we were working so bloody hard, every day, you might say, you had no time to sort of think too much,

03:00 Got back, got stuck into the grog, got into bloody bed. Had a good meal, went to bed. And up next day, of course, and had another bloody flight. Morale was bloody good, in spite of our losses. I queried this when I went back there a couple of times to check on the Meteors, because we were losing quite a few blokes on our aircraft. The morale was pretty good then. Which riled me a bit, because we were working up to large losses on the Meteor pilots.

03:30 **You were on a very fine line between low morale and LMF. People must have to put on a brave face.**

Yes. The LMF only happened in the Mustang days. Not in the Meteor days. It is a fine line. Well, first of all, as a CO, you keep in contact with your two senior Flight Commanders and you doctor. Your intelligence officer. And probably Operations Officer as well. So there's about five or six of you will discuss this. If it ever crops up. You don't make the decision personally, yourself. You try to get the views of other

04:00 responsible squadron members as well. So that's what happens. In the case of sending those eleven blokes home, they were badly trained. They should never have been posted to Korea.

You had to pass your squadron over to someone that you had, not so much confidence in.

I had a lot of confidence in him, initially, before he came up.

04:30 He was the right guy. Scherger said, 'We're sending up so and so'. You've probably already interviewed him anyway. I said, 'Oh, that's good'. He was a Wing Commander. He was World War II, highly decorated man. He'll do a good job here. And he was willing to come up. But he had already sent up, or had posted, a squadron leader flying bloke, in addition to himself. So W Dick Wilson came up. And I said, 'What are you doing up here?' He said, 'I'm doing my flying'.

05:00 I said, 'Are you now?' So, the new CO came up, and I was a bit annoyed about that. He told me on the spot when he arrived. 'I wasn't going to fly very much'. I said, 'You won't be here too long, mate, if that's your attitude'. So I had him posted out when I got back to Australia.

How much did it effect you when you were CO, that you were one of Australia's leading aces?

05:30 Oh, well, I wasn't an ace, but I was one of Australia's leading pilots, and commanders. I didn't mind that. That's all right. It happens. The more flying you do, the more experience you get. In my case, I'd been leading since day one. Since April, 1942. When we formed the squadron.

You you put a large emphasis on training.

Oh, hell of a lot.

You took over as a very young person.

06:00 **How would you categorise your own training when you took command.**

Well, don't forget I had nineteen months as instructor at Wagga, flying Wirraways, with Commander Scherger.

But that's quite different from leading men.

Then I had six or seven weeks with the Americans flying the Kittyhawks.

But is that not different, no doubt you were a very good pilot, but leading, what is necessary, on top of being a good pilot, to lead men of a combat fighter squadron?

06:30 Well, the ability to lead is not with everyone. I've found that out, over the years. If you're going to be a leader, you've got to be a bloody good one, and know the job properly. You've got to know your groups, know your pilots, know your aircraft, know the systems. Know what's ahead of you, know what the policy plan is. And I was given all this, all this, of course.

Did you find it lonely as a commanding officer?

Yes, you do. You find it very hard to make friends.

07:00 Well, I did. I was only twenty one when I took over my first command. And the blokes I got to know, the older blokes like John Gorton and Bill Meecham, and a few others like that. We used to sort of party up in town sometimes. In fact, we bought a bloody nightclub in Perth. With some of our pilots.

When was that?

In 1942. It was run by two girls. And we used to always drink there,

07:30 because it was open after hours. We used to get in by the back door. And someone said, 'We'd better buy this'. And the girls said, 'OK. You can buy it'. So we bought the bloody nightclub. God knows how much we paid for it. So we had a drinking den, private drinking den in town, in Perth. I think we sold it back to the girls when we left to go to Darwin.

08:00 **The loneliness of command, was that still the case when you were in Korea?**

Oh, yes. I like command any way. I liked leading. In fact, I was trained as a leader, by Scherger again. Having had World War II experience, and apart from senior jobs, in the Air Force, in Australia, in World War II, like Chief Flying Instructor of the Fighter OTU, and so on.

08:30 **You obviously really emphasise training?**

It's essential.

What made you a good trainer?

Probably survival. I don't know. I liked training. I liked the challenge of training a good person. Especially at Wagga during those Wirraway days, you'd get a bloke who'd never flown a bigger aircraft than a Tiger Moth,

09:00 and he get him into a Wirraways, and say, 'Away you go', so you'd teach him to fly. I suppose I was responsible for being involved in about a couple of hundred blokes going through Wagga. Day and night. Armoured training. And I just liked doing it. It was always a good challenge. And all my commands, and I've had several, in the short time I was in the Air Force, were interesting jobs.

09:30 Bloody interesting.

How did you feel once you got posted back to Australia, you left the war behind in Korea.

I'd lost a wife. Because I was away about fifteen months, back in that first marriage. I felt it was still a challenge because I knew bloody well that the guys weren't being trained properly.

10:00 So when they posted me to become what they called Fighter Ops, in charge of all the OTUs in the fighter squads and that sort or thing, that was the ideal job for me.

How did you settle back to being comfortable life back in Australia, after all that?

Look you settle back to anything. Honestly you do. I knew I was up for a posting, so I went to the Yanks for a couple of months. And I knew when I finished up I'd be back in Australia,

10:30 I knew very well I'd get a responsible job in the fighter world, which I got, and became boss of the system, you might say.

I'm thinking more emotionally, that must have been a very difficult journey for you. You said it was a total war.

Oh, it was.

And now you're coming out of this.

The Korean Campaign. A total bloody war.

11:00 It was a nasty war, too. You see, our main job, right through, was attacking things on the ground. People and vehicles, you name it. And that's not a very nice thing. And all the hard jobs, I did. Again you have to, as leader. You pick the hard jobs. The difficult jobs. So you probably saw the worst of it. And as a leader, you're inclined not to give the bad jobs to people who can't do it properly.

11:30 **How did that affect you, personally or emotionally, when you came back to Australia?**

I suppose I was greatly relieved to be back in Australia and away from it all. I still had a sense of responsibility to the blokes I left behind. Blokes that carried on. And that's why the jobs I got when I got back to Australia were all towards maintaining a …

You don't have to discuss it if you don't wish,

12:00 **but it's one of the characteristics of service life that people do have personal problems, because you're away from your partners. Can you tell us in some detail what happened?**

Oh, my first wife had lost one or two husbands before in the war. We got on pretty well together. But she found someone else. Or someone else found her, while I was away. And is still married to him. He became an RAAF senior officer in the end. They're back in Australia. Been involved for some years. We had no children, by the first marriage.

12:30 **Were you aware of that situation before you came back?**

No. But as soon as I got back, one of my friends told me. Within about twenty four hours. I said, 'Oh, Christ'. Anyway, it happened.

So you've found solace in your life, by keeping very busy with your hands. In those quiet moments, inevitably, at the end of the day when the lights go down.

13:00 **How difficult was it to come back to that?**

Well, I stayed in the Air Force until 1957. So I had a long time in the Air Force.

I'm thinking about demobilisation or removal from active duty. It's a real phenomenon of service life that that happens. And in your case, you'd seen a lot of action.

I think you're thankful to be out of that bloody war, or war situation. You're thankful to get back. In Australia, for a start. See some of your old mates.

13:30 I think I told you I was given good jobs, responsible jobs, in all my Air Force life. Which kept me busy.

Did you continue drinking or smoking?

No, I was a pretty heavy smoker, maybe thirty or forty a day. As a result now, I've got emphysema. In a mild sort of way, but I've got it. That's caused by smoking. Drinking. I wasn't a beer drinker, but I was a good whiskey drinker.

14:00 I could drink a bottle a night, quite easily. With lots of water, that kept me healthy. No, I left, when I resigned from the service, like a bloody fool. I don't know why I did it. In '57, I had a very good job then. I was Director of Air Staff Policy. It was a bloody good job. About to be promoted to Group Captain. I knew this the day I wrote my resignation. I said, 'I couldn't care less. I'm stirred.

14:30 I want to go up to New Guinea to do some salvage work.

What had stirred you?

Another challenge, I suppose. Between marriages. This guy said, 'There's a challenge up there, with this salvage work. It's all yours if you want it'. I said, 'OK'. So I saw the owner of the business in Melbourne. He said, 'Yeah, love to have you up there'. So I stayed in New Guinea about two years, doing salvage work. Sending Japanese stuff back to Japan.

15:00 **What sort of Japanese stuff?**

All sorts of things. Wrecked aircraft. At Noemfoor, the old base I was there with, they had a great big, what they called Alley Pot, it was a furnace, using the old fuels from crashed aircraft and so on, and this thing was going flat out. Producing ninety seven percent aluminium alloys. So they were sold in Singapore,

15:30 Germany and New York. But the old rubbish, like old Japanese wrecks, trains and things, were sent back to Japan. Aboard KPM ships, they were Indonesian ships. I was filling about three ships a year, a month.

Were you familiar with the areas? How familiar were you with the areas you were working in?

Oh, I'd been there. I was there for two years..

During the war, were you familiar with those areas?

Those areas? Very much so. Because Noemfoor was my main base, for my wing, anyway,

16:00 towards the end of the war. And the areas we had been operating over, were areas I knew fairly well. So I had no trouble. In fact, I enjoyed it.

What was it like being back there, in an area that you knew as a battle ground from the air?

Well, KLM built a bloody good hotel at Biak and one of the KLM pilots had a wife who was a bloody good secretary,

16:30 so I used her a lot doing my secretarial work. And I moved a lot of stuff from New Guinea back to Japan, and the aluminium alloys, back to other parts of the world. And we had ships. I had three thousand blokes working for me, from Hollandia [now Jayapura, Indonesia] up to Biak to Sarong, natives. Under command of their own chiefs, the village chiefs. So I gave the village chiefs instructions, and away they'd go and get the stuff for me.

17:00 **You'd already had a life full of adventure. Why the need to go and do something like that?**

From there, I got, what did I do? When did I get hepatitis? That was with Bobby Gibbs, I flew with Bobby Gibbs for a while. I was his chief pilot. Flying Junkers Ju-52 transport planes. I got hepatitis very badly.

17:30 **What were you looking for back then?**

Oh, hang on. Menzies had given me the opportunity to grab some land on the north coast of New Guinea, near Madang, for a coffee plantation. He'd given me the right to request it, which I did. A whole fifty acres. They started to train the village chief, who was in that area,

18:00 who I was, what I wanted to do and so forth. He was a hell of a nice bloke. Native. I never went ahead with it. That's right, I got hepatitis from there, and came back to Australia. And the Air Force said, 'Come back'. And I said, 'Yes. No.' So I did two trips in the Antarctic.

Why did you not stay on with the Air Force?

I made a mistake. I was between marriages and a bit unhappy. Although I had a bloody good job, I sort of had itchy feet.

18:30 I wanted to do something. So I left probably the best Group Captain job, which I had as a Wing Commander, in the Air Force. All the people were bloody jealous I had that job. But Scherger made sure I got it. He had hoped I would stay in the Air Force. Scherger. Anyway, I didn't. And went down to the Antarctic a couple of times. And that was quite interesting too. And flew with the Navy for a while.

19:00 **This is a momentous decision. You were a highly decorated pilot, from two wars, and you decide to leave the Air Force. This was quite a historic moment.**

Had I had a wife and family I wouldn't have of course. But I didn't have a wife and family.

The Air Force offers security.

Oh, yes.

And you were leaving this behind?

Bloody good pay. Give you everything.

19:30 **You were going into great uncertainty.**

I was still adventurous. There was a challenge somewhere, so I grabbed it. The salvage work was good. The flight with Bobby Gibbs was OK. Eventually going down the Antarctic was good too, so I went down twice. Flying again. I like flying.

What did you miss of the service? The RAAF?

20:00 Comradeship. People. I was a fool. I should never have left the service. I know that now. Because the job I was in would lead to greater things. It led to early promotion to Group Captain which I was about to get, a week after I left the Air Force. It would have led to other things that would have occurred at other times. Vietnam. I would have been involved in that, or course. As a senior man.

20:30 I don't know. And I was sure between marriages. I had a lass, but not to marry. I wanted a family. But by leaving the service, I wasn't going to get one. In fact, I didn't get my next family until 1959. And from that, two girls. Which are still alive. And that marriage broke up. My fault, probably.

21:00 So I went and spent ten years at Tamborine Mountain, just west of the Gold Coast. And got married again there. Married a very young lass who was already divorced, and had four children. Grown up children. But she died. That buggered that marriage. So I suppose I'm still looking for some sort of inner comfort.

That's a natural thing.

21:30 I've still got good friends in Sydney. Ex nurses. That I see quite a lot. Stay with. The present nurse, she was an Air Force nurse in Japan. When I went back there in '53, on inspection. So she and I get together again now. Her husband died about ten years ago. We're still trying to work out why we didn't get married then.

22:00 I said, 'We were both too bloody young'. Which we probably were.

Over the course of your career, Dick, you saw a lot of things, for someone like myself I could never imagine seeing. Horrific images. Things that only happen in times of war. How much do these images come back to you in your life, since the wars you took part in?

22:30 If I meet some member from that period, yeah, quite often. Sometimes things come back. My Air Force career comes back now and again. A bloke like Buster Brown and I talk about those days. My trips overseas, particularly with the Hawker Siddley Group. Travelling the bloody world. Flying all the aircraft they were building, all over the world. Including Beechcraft.

23:00 Because Hawker de Havilland in Sydney was the Australian agent for Beechcraft. So I saw a lot of Beechcraft people. And flying all sorts of aircraft, belonging to the group. And flying some aircraft the Air Force eventually bought before they'd even thought about buying them. Oh, no. I've got good memories, and a lot of good contacts.

23:30 And at Williamtown, the fighter boys up there, quiz me occasionally, a bit like you've been doing. What happened in World War II, and how did the Air Force operate, and so on and so forth. And what I did afterwards. Flying with the Navy. They said, 'What did you want to fly with the Navy for?' I said, 'Because of the challenge'. But, oh no, it's mainly. Because I'm eighty three now, so it's mainly memory of what happened in the old days.

24:00 **Have you ever dreamt about the war?**

Yeah, occasionally.

What would come out in those dreams?

Lousy dreams, some of them. Blokes that have been lost. Events that happened. The old memories are pretty lousy sometimes. You can remember things you want to forget. A lot of us say that.

24:30 A lot of blokes like me say that. Mainly wartime events.

Is there any one event or image that you might want to forget, that you remember above all else.

Not really. There's probably quite a few. No one event, to my knowledge.

What do you think of the idea of post traumatic stress, or trauma, associated with war?

25:00 I know it's there. I've seen it in people. I don't think I ever got it. I was able to cope with it. But I have seen it in people, and especially now, the younger people. We learnt to live with that sort of thing, in my day. It wasn't known to any great extent. It just happened.

25:30 **How do you think you dealt with it?**

Very well.

What methods did you use to deal with it?

Being a busy man. And I always was busy. Doing something or other. Which is pretty important. You see, even now, at my present age, I'm still on the Trust of the War Memorial, I go there quite often to answer questions. I'm still on two committees with the Department of Veteran Affairs.

26:00 Although, they're nearly finished. But they're mainly on Korea. And I keep in contact with people. Tomorrow for instance, I'm having lunch, we do it about two or three times a year, with the ACT members of the 1995 trip to New Guinea. Around about one hundred and twelve of us went up to New Guinea.

26:30 Remembering the New Guinea war, fifty years on. So we get together and talk about things.

You went back to New Guinea. You also went back to Korea.

I went back to Korea three times. And New Guinea a couple of times.

What effect did those trips back, so long after, have on you?

I was surprised by the last, or by the three New Guinea trips, the amazing restructure of South Korea. That's the South Korean trips.

27:00 The New Guinea trips didn't worry me so much. What worried me about New Guinea, was the attitude of the local populace. Who were now called 'rascols' [gang members], you might say. They're not obeying the laws, such as they are. New Guinea's badly run. Very badly run. It's a pity, because it had a great future. But Korea, boy, that's a change. Fifty years on, been rebuilt.

27:30 But everything goes up that way [points upwards]. Korea had twenty five million people, when the war broke out. The Korean War. Fifteen million in the north, and ten million in the south. Now, I think it's forty seven million, with over half in South Korea. It's a big country. It's forging ahead.

28:00 **Are you proud of what you did in the Korean War, to help the South Koreans?**

Yeah, I am.

How did they respond to seeing you as veterans, when you went over there?

One general, this is in 1999, when I first went up there. There was with the American First Marine Division, he said, 'I remember you'. He said, 'You were my boss. I was a bloody Army corporal. I used to work for you in Pusan'. I said, 'I'll be buggered'. Now he's a three star general.

28:30 **What do you miss about being in the Air Force, these days?**

I miss the comradeship. We that are left still have it. You know, we get together quite often, we oldies. But we're dying off fairly rapidly. For instance, my course, the one I was on, there are only four of us, five of us left of that course of thirty four.

29:00 **How would you define that comradeship, formed in an institution like that, in a situation like those you encountered?**

Well, we were all talk the same language, whether we're old or young. Especially Williamtown. The young guys talk to me about all sorts of things, like the old days and so on and so forth. I just pass on information. They all recognise what I did. In the case of the squadrons or the wings. I formed a squadron up there, plus a wing.

29:30 Plus the OTU. Round about seven years in Williamtown, when I was nineteen. The Air Force is a good area to know, to have been in. Whether young or old. The modern Air Force is very efficient. There's no doubt about that. They've got good equipment. They're getting better.

30:00 Unfortunately, we're very small, so they're flat out doing everything all the time.

How would you like to be remembered? What is your legacy of your Air Force career, and your life in general?

Oh, it's all in the history books, leave it like that. Alan Steele wrote me up pretty well, in the history books, going solo.

30:30 And that's it.

We mentioned fame briefly, as something you don't have a lot of thoughts about. Your position in those history books. Is that something you're comfortable with?

Oh, lord yeah. Even being court martialled for shooting a bloke in the mess in 1942 at Port Pirie. And fourteen months later, after I'd finished my little war in New Guinea, they court martialled me.

31:00 That's Jones, of the ex CAS. Chief of Air Staff. Whom I didn't like. He didn't like me. It took fourteen months to grab me. After I'd finished my little war, I came back and court martialled me. I lost three months seniority. So I decided to resign from the Air Force, this is in 1953. Forty three. So I went across to see the air base for personnel, who was my boss at Point Cook, when I joined the Air Force. He said, 'Don't you worry, Dick, you're right.

31:30 Now you're back to Wing Commander'. I said, 'I wasn't Wing Commander before'. He said, 'Yes, you were'. He said, 'You were a Squadron Leader'. I said, 'That's right'. He said, 'Now you're a Wing Commander'. So he said, 'Forget about what happened at the court martial. A lot of us were very unhappy with the Chief of the Air Force court martialling you fourteen months after what happened in the mess'.

32:00 I had good senior friends in the Air Force, those that were operational people. And of course, we respected each other.

The Second World War didn't end anything. The Korean War didn't end anything. After that, the Vietnam War came shortly after as far as wars go. I mean, war hasn't stopped.

It never will stop unfortunately.

How do you feel about that?

I would like to see a peaceful world. Especially now, because it's not a very peaceful war now. We're lucky in this country,

32:30 not being in the northern hemisphere. But I feel sorry for a lot of those people, because they're not going to live a very satisfactory life, being in a sort of war situation all the time. The Iraq business was badly planned. I agree we were removing a leader, the Iraq leader, But I don't agree with the mess they made with trying to get Iraq back on its feet. That should have been well planned.

33:00 But it wasn't. It'll come good.

You mentioned before the US has taken a role you would see as the US police, world police.

World Police. Which they are, really.

What do you think about that?

I'd rather see more responsibility given to the United Nations. So far they haven't got it. America seems to dictate to them.

33:30 Also I would also like to see more responsibility by the United Nations countries. Which we haven't got yet. Individual countries supporting the United Nations. They seem to dodge the issue. Quite a few issues.

How do you feel about Australia, and its place in the world at this end of your life?

I think it's doing a bloody good job, small country as we are. But we are a food bowl,

34:00 we are wealthy, and our potential is good too. I think we'll go places. I'd love to see some of our young people be more disciplined. I'd love to see National Service be introduced, so our young people, apart from being disciplined, could learn a trade. Because most don't. We had National Service in '46, '47. I thought I worked well. But the Government said no, cut it out.

34:30 But then at Williamtown, and the guys there are coming in, and we'd teach them all sorts of things about the Air Force. About sport. About discipline. And they seem to like ti. But I'd like to see it now.

How do you feel about the future? Are you optimistic or pessimistic?

Probably pessimistic.

35:00 I don't know what's going to happen in Asia. If Asia sorts itself out, fair enough. But whatever happens, we're going to be affected somehow, even though we're independent as a nation. We have our own wealth potential. How our neighbours are going to operate, look at the trouble we have now in Indonesia,

35:30 and our various religious groups. I don't like the way people take it upon themselves to run a country. I've seen all of that in South Africa. We don't seem to be responsible. The old days of Empire, they must have been bloody good. But now, all countries are individual countries, with their own parliaments and so on, and they're not doing a very good job.

36:00 Or most of them are not.

How do yo see the role of the armed forces in Australia, and particularly the Air Force, in that future?

I think they will be very responsible, both Army, Navy and Air Force. I think Australia will be very responsible. We're going to be a police force, you might say. We are now, to a certain extent. But I think we're being well trained. Most of the forces have good equipment. Not necessarily the right equipment.

36:30 The Army missed out, but they're getting better. But I think the Australian services will have a bloody responsible job in the future. We've proved that anyhow, with Timor and so on. This little operation in Iraq was well done. Well carried out. Some of our Navy divers did a bloody marvellous job.

37:00 The Air Force did a fairly straightforward job. But the Army did a hell of a job. And we've still got eight hundred people there, doing various things. Oh, no. We'll, as Australians, we have always proved ourselves. No matter where we've been. And I think we always will.

That's a bit of optimism. Not completely pessimistic in that respect.

37:30 Mmmm.

Last question that we ask everybody. This archive's being kept for fifty years, a hundred years. If someone was watching this in a hundred years time, is there anything on a personal level, that you could say to them from your own personal experience. Something you've learnt.

Well, from my own life experience, obviously. Be always busy, whatever you do. Keep yourself occupied.

38:00 Learn about the other guy. Be a good team man. That's probably the basis. Be a good team man. I think I always was. I've been told I was. And I always liked being a member of a team. And leader of a team. I know one thing about the Australian. If a job has to be done, he'll do it.

38:30 Which is quite interesting in many ways. Oh, no. We were an adventurous country. Adventurous people.

Let’s hope we continue to be. Thank you very much for talking to us today, Dick. It’s been a real pleasure.