Australians at War Film Archive

Lionel King (Kingie or Wallaby) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **So Lionel, as we were saying before, maybe first up, we'll just get like a life, an overview of your experiences pre-war, war and just after the war.**

You sort of want a bit of an idea of what I did before the war?

Yeah. That would be great.

Well, that's fair enough. OK. Are we going?

We're going.

01:00 Well, I lived in Hamilton in Victoria. I was born actually in Croydon, out of Melbourne. But my father was a saw miller and he ran out of timber up in the Dandenong's, where he had a sawmill and he moved to Hamilton. I was only very young when I moved to Hamilton. I did my schooling at Hamilton State School. And then onto Hamilton High School. I finished my schooling there and went to work as a clerk

01:30 for an auctioneer's office in Hamilton, and from there I developed an interest in aircraft, because that was in the early days when Ansett [Airlines] first started their bus service and air service from Hamilton. And I was very, very interested in aircraft at the stage of the game and I think this is what probably prompted me to want to join the air force.

02:00 My father was very well known to Reg Ansett. They were very good friends of ours, and I grew up and knew him. I had my first flight in an aircraft with Reg Ansett in a little, not a Tiger Moth [De Havilland training aircraft], it was one earlier than that, it was a, I think they called it a Gypsy Moth, and that was my first experience in the air in an aircraft. Probably, we can talk about a little more detail later on, but that's where I started getting an interest in aircraft.

02:30 Which, as I said, prompted me to join the air force.

Don't worry about the camera. Just look at me.

No, I'm not going to worry about that. And when the war broke out, and I was about nineteen, I think, when I finally enlisted. All my mates I knocked around with were a little bit older than me. They went into the services, so I thought that was what everybody wanted to do in those days,

03:00 so I joined up with the air force, did my training at Ascot Vale, in Melbourne. From there I was posted to Darwin. I did about eighteen months in Darwin. Do you want any more details?

We'll go back a little later. Just get the general . . . .

From there I went, from Darwin, I was up there I think about, roughly, eighteen months to two years, and then I came south.

03:30 We were then sent to, the idea was to get the ones that had been up in the danger area, back as near as to their home people as they could, so I was lucky enough to be posted back to a unit that was in Hamilton. The Air Armament and Gas School, it was known as. And I spent about, oh, about eight or nine months in Hamilton, then that unit moved to Nhill.

04:00 I was up there for about roughly twelve months, and I got a posting to the Philippines. And at that stage of the game, I wasn't very keen about going over there, because it was a very bad part of the world, during the war, and just about two days before I was due to go to Melbourne to report, I had a ring from the headquarters, the Commanding Officer, and he told me my posting had been cancelled,

04:30 and I had to report to an Air Vice Marshall Cole, at Air Headquarters. That I'd been posted to go to Ceylon., as it was known then. It is now known of course, as Sri Lanka. I went there, went down there, from there we went across by air to Perth. Spent a couple of days in Perth. Then we embarked on what was known as the Elevated Order of the Longest Hop, which was the flight across the Indian Ocean to Ceylon.

05:00 Took us nineteen and three quarter hours. In an old converted Liberator. And from there when we landed at Columbia we then up to Candi, and I spent approximately nine or ten months at Candi, which was Mountbatten's headquarters. That was my actual basic overview of my war service. I was demobilised in Melbourne, and then went back to civil life.

05:30 I didn't go back to auctioneering. I got a job straight away with Ansett Motors in Hamilton, because of my previous connection with the Ansett organisation. And from there on, I just assimilated back into civilian life. And that's about it.

Fair enough. Well, do you mind maybe just telling us a little bit more about your family. Your parents, siblings, and life as a child.

06:00 It's a bit difficult to go right back over it. It's a long while ago, and you know, I'm just trying to think what you could be interested in. I did, as I said, I did my schooling in Hamilton. My parents were quite a bit older than me, actually. I think I must have been born fairly late in their life. I know my father was a good bit older.

06:30 He did get me taught to play the trumpet, or the cornet, at that particular time. Then I joined a brass band in Hamilton, which I spent a lot of time with in my younger days. Played for competitions, and I learnt the cornet there, which helped influence me later on when I went in the dance band side.

How old were you when you first picked up the instrument?

I would have been, when I first started playing the cornet,

07:00 I probably would have been about ten, I think. And, I'm just trying to think what you could be interested in, really.

Oh, it's all interesting. We just want to get an idea of your background, and the sort of person you were, you know, leading up to the war, and how it may have affected you.

When I was at school, I actually studied what we called the Commercial Course in those days, which was typing and shorthand and bookkeeping. I did reasonably well in that, and it was from that, of course,

07:30 that actually helped me get into the clerical side of auctioneering firm that I worked for. We used to get up of a morning, when I was with the auctioneering firm, we used to get up real early in the morning, and go out to the sale yards, and draught sheep, and put them through the races. And then I used to help what they called pencilling for the auctioneers. Write down the buyers and the sellers of the stock,

08:00 keep records of that, and after the sale was all over we'd have to turn round and load up the sheep or whatever we were selling, into trucks and get rid of them. It'd be a long day. We'd probably start at six or seven o'clock in the morning and finish about seven o'clock at night, and I think I was getting about seven and six a week for that job. But that was, that was my job, actually.

How old were you when you started doing that job?

08:30 Oh, when I left school, I would have been probably about fifteen when I started on that. And I worked with him for about four years until I went into the services.

This is during the thirties, obviously. How did the Depression affect your family?

Well, I think we might have been a bit fortunate, really, when I think back on it. I remember we always had a late model motor car, and not too many people did have cars in those days.

09:00 I know being a young fellow kicking around with girl friends, all the various ones in the town. Luckily everyone had girl friends, but I was one of the few who was able to take my father's car and pick up the girlfriend and take her to the movies, or wherever we were going. So I think our family must have been reasonably well set. As I said, not many people had cars in those days, and we always had a good car, and we always ate well, and we always lived in a reasonably nice house.

09:30 So my family was reasonably well set for those days. So the Depression didn't affect us very much. Personally, I can just remember it, where some of the, I know a couple of members of our brass band, were fellows that had come from Ballarat, and they didn't have any jobs. Couldn't get jobs. And they were camped in a tent, down beside the creek, and would do what little bit of work they could around the town,

10:00 to get a few dollars in the kit so they could buy a bit of food. I know we used to have a lot of people coming to the door, asking if they could do jobs, like chop a bit of wood, or do a bit of gardening or something, just to get enough to keep them going. There was a lot of people looking for handouts, during the Depression. I can just remember that.

Now did anyone in your family, your father, uncles, have any involvement in World War I?

10:30 No. No. They weren't. No my father was, had been all his life, had been engaged in saw milling, and I think probably that would have been a protected industry in World War I, anyway, because I think they would have been looking for that for essential services. For the products from the mill. He did, I don't

know, he did clear all, he was involved in the clearing of all the timber off the Maroondah Dam site, you know, the Maroondah Dam, up from, up in Healesville.

11:00 Well, he had a mill up there, that cleared all the timber from that, that site. So that's going back a fair way.

When would that have been?

Oh, that would have been early twenties.

And did you ever have much involvement in your father's business?

Not at all. No, other than just go out and watch what used to go on. They had horses that used to cart the timber on wagons,

11:30 from the mill to the railhead. They also had horse-drawn vehicles, or horse-drawn 'jinkers', they used to call them. Used to bring the logs in from the forests. He had a team of horses. Occasionally I used to go out and throw a leg over one of the old draughts, and have a bit of a walk around the paddock where they had them. But other than that I didn't have any actual involvement in his milling work at all.

And did you have brothers or sisters?

No. I was an only child.

12:00 **Now, during that period, you said you were fifteen when you left school and you went into auctioneering?**

Uhuh.

At that time, was there any sense that war, that there was trouble overseas?

Well, war was declared in Europe. I think that was 1939. I would have been probably round about seventeen, I would say, then. Because it was 1941 was when I enlisted,

12:30 and I was round about nineteen then, so we knew that the war had started in Europe, of course. And there was general apprehension amongst all the community, obviously, because we were all involved in it, and everybody knew that sooner or later there'd be somebody in their family would probably have to be involved in it.

And did you know, obviously when you joined, you were too young at that point I take it to . . . .

Well, when the European war broke out I was only about seventeen, you see. So I was too young,

13:00 and some of my friends, who were a little bit older than myself, joined up, and a couple of them went to, I think it was to Canada, with the Empire Air Training Scheme. And from there, of course, they went to Europe, and were involved in the war over there. But as soon as I was old enough I put my name down and was enlisted in about 1941.

Now you were saying earlier. Yes. Lionel. Let's talk about those bush fires, in 1939.

13:30 Yeah, well, this was back in 1939 I think it was, they were known as, what was it called? Black Friday, yes, that's it. Black Friday. Some very bright person had put out a heap of ashes from the fire, at a place called Bochara which is between Hamilton and Coleraine, this morning, and it was a howling north wind,

14:00 and the fire just got away. Went straight through, cleaned up hundreds and hundreds or acres, or thousands of acres of grassland. And I can remember vividly taking the car and going up to my girlfriend's place, she lived just on the outskirts of Hamilton. And I can still, I think this has probably been one of the most impressive, most impression that was ever made on me from a lad, I know it's lasted with me.

14:30 I've still got a most inveterate fear of bushfires. I'm paranoid by it actually. And all our house here has got fire protection. It's got sprinklers on the roof. Fire pump out there on the swimming pool. And I think this all sprung from this awful experience of watching that fire in 1939. And from where I was with my girlfriend, we'd loaded most of the valuables from the house into the car, because we thought we'd have to evacuate them.

15:00 And we were watching across, down a valley and across a creek, and there was a view into Hamilton from the other side, and you could see people in buggies, whipping the horses, and the fire was rolling behind them. And they were just keeping ahead of it. There was cattle and sheep getting engulfed in the flames, as they just rolled along and engulfed them. And that's a scene that's stuck in my mind all my life. I've never forgotten it. Various people have said many times, you know, it must have been a terrible experience, the bombing of Darwin.

15:30 It didn't have anywhere near the effect on me that that bushfire did, back in 1939, and that was an absolute horror. It burnt right round to the edge of Hamilton. It took, oh, I can't remember how many houses went, but it was a horror. Because they had virtually no bushfire protection in those days, either. I mean, now with the CFA [Country Fire Authority]. Like, we've got good fire protection. In those days,

people had wet bags and that sort of thing which was absolutely useless.

16:00 **How was the fire eventually overcome?**

Well, I think it eventually burnt itself out when the wind changed, but it went through, nearly half of southern Victoria went up in that. It was a shocker. It really was.

And were you involved in fighting the fire in any way?

No. Not really. Because there was no organised bushfire fighting setups in those days.

16:30 **(Interruption) What was it about, you said that the raids in Darwin didn't compare?**

Well, it didn't have the same traumatic effect on me as what the bushfire did. I don't know why, but that fire has sort of stuck in my mind, and I've had a fear of fire ever since. But the bombing didn't have the same effect. When I think back now, I think it should have, but it didn't. I don't know why.

17:00 The other thing I was going to tell you about, was the connection with Reg Ansett. As I said, we were, my father, being a saw miller, he used to have to travel around the countryside to get orders for the timber that he used to produce from his mill, and a lot of his customers were in Ballarat. Well, in those days a trip from Hamilton to Ballarat in a car was a major effort. It's not like it is nowadays, where you can hop in a car and do a hundred Ks in an hour. In those days a trip from Hamilton to Ballarat,

17:30 it was a day trip just to get there and back. So what my father did, he used to go down on Ansett's bus, which left Hamilton early in the morning. He'd go and see his customers in Ballarat and get his orders, and return at night in Reg Ansett's bus. Which I think it was a Studebaker car in those days. This is in the very early days when Reg Ansett first started. And I remember one night, we were waiting and waiting. My father was very late getting home and we were very concerned about it.

18:00 There was a knock at the door. And would you believe, it was Reg Ansett. He was going around personally to all the various people that he knew of on that bus, to tell them there'd been a breakdown, that my father would be late, but he would be home. So, that is a story that's definitely, probably not too many people would know about that, but Reg was personally going around, letting the people know that the bus had broken down.

Excellent service.

Yes, it was good service.

18:30 It all started in Hamilton. And, as I said I had my first flight in a little Moth Minor. Not a Moth Minor, a Gypsy Moth, with Reg. Us kids used to go up to the aerodrome, and we used to haunt them, because Reg had the plane up there, and the kids used to like to go up. And they'd be all up there, yelling and screaming, "Give me a flight, Mr Ansett, give me a flight." I remember I was up there, with the rest of them. And he said, "Righto, young King. You're next." Because he knew me, you see, because of the connection with my Dad.

19:00 And that's how I had my first flight was with Reg Ansett. He got, his first aircraft he had there was an old Fokker Universal. Which is still, or a replica of it is in the Ansett Museum in Hamilton. That was replaced with an Airspeed Envoy, which was about a six-passenger aircraft. And this service used to run between Hamilton and Melbourne, daily.

19:30 The Airspeed Envoy eventually gave way to a state-of-the-art aircraft in those days were, he bought three Lockheed Electras. They were an amazing aircraft. They were much, much faster than anything else that were flying at the time. He had three of them and they were called Anceres, and Ansyrius and Aslanta. They were named after the three stars in the galaxy. That's why they called them Electras,

20:00 and they were named after the star constellations with those names. Us kids used to go up there and watch these aircraft, and take photographs of them, and connected with that, sort of going ahead a little bit, but for many years we used to… I know we used to love this aircraft taking off. They used to have her in fine pitch, and they'd howl down the Bochara road, just overhead, because the aerodrome was just on the edge of the town, and I loved that, and I loved that Lockheed.

20:30 Anyway, to go ahead a bit, about, oh roughly ten years ago, I was reading in an aircraft magazine, where this Lockheed Electra was being restored. It's registered number was VHUZO. And I thought, 'That's a familiar sounding number'. Anyway I went and rifled through some of my black and white photographs, and sure enough, I found a photograph of that plane sitting on the tarmac at Hamilton,

21:00 when it was being used by Ansett's. So, I got in touch with the man that was restoring it. It was a bloke called Laurie Ogle, in Sydney. I told him I had this photograph and sent it, and oh, he was on the phone. He couldn't get onto it quick enough to get some details. So we got to know Laurie, got to see the aircraft again. It came back to Hamilton on a fiftieth anniversary of Ansett's reunion, flew back to Hamilton. And, oh, there was some teary eyes there that day,

21:30 with all the people that used to see that aircraft fly over. It was absolutely magnificently restored. I think it took him ten years to restore it. And then again, when we went back, I mean this is sort of going to be a little bit jumbled up, because of the way it turns out. A few years, a couple of years later, we went back to Darwin, for a reunion, that was for the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing. That aircraft

had been used to evacuate people from the original bombing of Darwin.

22:00 Or course, the army, or the American Army, I think, took over those aircraft during the war, but they actually used that plane to evacuate people from Darwin, it was there fifty years later, they found some of the people that had been evacuated in it originally, that had gone back, and they took them for flights in that aircraft. And we've kept in touch with the person that owned that aircraft ever since. It is in the museum, Nowra Museum,

22:30 I think they call it the, anyway, it's a navy museum at Nowra, and that's where that plane finished up. But it was a beautiful aircraft.

So unbeknownst to you, it actually followed you up to Darwin. That was . . . .

I knew they were going. Because we'd caught up with them in Hamilton. As I say, we'd met the bloke who restored it, and got to know him, and we've kept in touch ever since. But that was just a little bit of what started as a small thing in the early days, finished up as a good project

23:00 to follow through in later years. Because we were personally connected with it. I've got a very good video of it, too, which we made, and sent that to the owner of the aircraft and he was really rapt in it.

Now, you were saying, the first time you went up was in a Gypsy . . . .

A Gypsy Moth.

That was one of Reg Ansett's?

That was Reg Ansett had that, yes.

Can you take us through that experience? It must have been quite a thrill for you.

23:30 Oh, it was. It really was. I know that, for a young kid, it was quite an experience, because aircraft were in their infancy in those days, and I can still remember…the most impressive thing, oh I shouldn't say it was impressive…but the thing I can remember most about it, we were flying around and did a bank and I looked around and I could see these, it was the reservoirs. At the aerodrome, there were two or three town reservoirs there, and I remember they just looked like two shilling pieces,

24:00 these three little silver, round silver things were the reservoirs down below. Oh, yes, it was quite impressive. I liked it, enjoyed it, and I think that started my love of flying.

I was going to say, that would . . . .

That was the start of it all. Yep.

Did you badger him some more to get up there again?

No, I only ever had the one flight. Only ever had the one.

And what was he like as a man? What can you recall of Reg Ansett?

24:30 Oh, he was a very, well obviously, he was only young in those days, but what I remember, he was renowned that he knew everybody on his staff by their personal name. And even years and years later, when he came, he used to come back to visit the garage there, because they took their main headquarters, shifted from Hamilton to Melbourne, as they grew, and the company got bigger. But he still knew everybody that was in his employ by their personal name.

25:00 But I remember Reg. He was a very, very ordinary, down-to-earth sort of a person. He may have changed as he got older and got bigger, but he started out in a very small way. I believe he even hocked, had to hock his overcoat, to fill up that first tank of fuel in his old Studebaker, on his first run.

After that, after you had that first flight in the Gypsy Moth, it sounds like you had a desire to get up there again, to be involved more.

25:30 **Were there any opportunities to do that at all?**

I never ever got another chance. No. I only ever had the one flight.

Was it at that point that you may have thought that the air force was something that appealed to you?

Well, you know, I think we were just young people and we were, I think, intrigued by the aircraft that were flying into the town. In those days, if a plane arrived, if you saw a plane flying over and it looked like it was going to land, all the kids would be on their pushbikes and they'd scamper out to the aerodrome to watch it.

26:00 You know, it was a big thing, to see an aeroplane. Of course, now they're commonplace, but that's the way things develop. It's like the early days, I suppose, when people first saw motor cars running around. It was a big thrill. Something different. And that's what it was like with the aeroplane. To see a plane flying around, it was quite a big thing.

Can you tell us a little bit about some of the friendships you had from that era?

26:30 Well, I had, oh, I had, just trying to think who would be. Oh, we had our usual gang of kids that used to knock around together. One of them was the son of a builder. That was Kevin Williams. I had another friend who taught me a little bit about radio and electronics. A man called Les Membrey.

27:00 Another lad that finished up in the navy was Ian Ray. Another friend down there, who's still alive in Hamilton, is Bob Henderson. And we used to all sort of knock around together. That was our gang. There was about four of us. And the three of us in the services. Ian Ray finished up in the navy. Kevin Williams finished up in the air force. And Bob Henderson is still,

27:30 he didn't make it into the services, because he had, has rather bad eyesight. And an amazing thing about it, just come to think back over these things, he even had white feathers sent to him, because he was still a young chap in the town, that hadn't gone into the services. But he tried everything. He tried the army, the air force, the navy, he even tried the merchant navy, but he couldn't make it because he had faulty vision.

28:00 Yet the stigma of not joining up, caused people to send him letters and that sort of thing. They didn't know, of course, but that sort of thing, it's hard to believe, but it did happen.

How did that affect him?

Not very well. He was very upset about it. He finished up he got a job, a clerk in an essential industry down there. There was a flax mill in Hamilton, which was producing flax, which was needed to make canvas for tents and that sort of thing. He finished up, he got a job with them, which was an essential industry.

28:30 But it did affect him, it affected him a lot, because all his mates had gone away. And he didn't. He tried but he couldn't.

So, can I just, before we just sort of move on to war time, with your mates, do you remember the sort of pranks and mischief you used to get up to. What was a regular sort of night out for you guys?

Well, I was, I spent a lot of my time, as I said, with the brass band,

29:00 and we used to go to various contests around the area. I'm just trying to think what sort of things we did get up to. We didn't do very much like the kids do these days, I know. Mmmm. That's a good question. I know we, what we did do, we spent a lot of time riding around the area on pushbikes. We used to go out to what they called the Wallen Falls and out to Negrita Falls,

29:30 we used to go out on the bikes, and we'd go out fishing. Another place we used to go to, we used to explore the caves out at Mt Napier, which used to cause our parents some undue trauma no doubt, because us kids used to go out there and explore these caves, which went all through the mountain, and they were rather dangerous. But, apart from that, I don't think we got up to any terrible tricks.

And you were telling us about picking up the cornet at the age of ten.

30:00 Mmmm.

So you were playing in bands?

Yes, I played in the brass band all my, practically all my life down there, I've been playing in the brass band. We did start a small dance band group. Just before I went in the services. Bob Henderson, I mentioned, and another friend of mine.

30:30 We formed a little group, and we used to play for a few dances around the little local halls, and that led into the swing, into the dance band side.

So who were your musical heroes at that time?

Oh, those days, Glenn Miller, Arty Shaw, Tommy Dorsey, they were all the big swing bands in those days. We loved that. That's the sort of stuff I used to like to listen to. It's a bit like, nowadays, when you hear the modern music, doesn't turn me on very much, because I remember my parents used to say,

31:00 when I used to listen to these Miller tunes on the radio, because we didn't have a record player. I used to listen to them on the radio, and my mother used to say, "Oh, turn that off, That's awful. That's terrible stuff." I have the same feeling now when I hear some of the modern groups that I don't think are music. They don't sound like the sort of music I like. And I suppose that affected my mother the same way.

31:30 She used to hate the sound of Glenn Miller. And I loved it.

And when you left school, and you were auctioneering, were you still playing music in that period?

Oh, yes.

So was that a regular thing?

I regularly played with the brass band. I did competitions all over the place. I played, did two or three solo competitions. My music teacher, a man called Jack Tachaso, was a very accomplished musician.

32:00 He had a motorbike. And we used to go from, he used to take me to various competitions on the back of his motorbike. The cornet on my knee, and we'd trundle off to Ballarat, or wherever it was, and I'd play in the competition and we'd come home, and that was how we travelled. On the motorbike. Oh, another thing too, with John and his motorbike,

32:30 we used to occasionally go out rabbiting. He had a sidecar on it, sometimes he'd have a sidecar on it, and we'd come home with the sidecar packed with rabbits, and they'd keep you warm of a night time, coming home of a night time, and you'd have all these rabbits packed all around your feet. But, little things like that, just come back to memory.

With those competitions, did you manage to win a few?

Yes, I won a couple. I can't remember just where they were.

33:00 I think one was at Warrnambool. I think I won another one at Ballarat. But they were solo competitions.

When you were doing solo, was it still the same sort of music?

Oh, no. It was sort of semi-classical stuff I used to do for that. I'd occasionally play for a, they used to have concerts in the town hall, which would be put on. Local talent, like singers and whatnot,

33:30 I'd be occasionally get called on to provide an item there.

So did you get to meet any other sort of local musical legends, that sort of thing?

Oh, not in Hamilton. No, I didn't strike very many people there. Other than, as I said, this Jack Tachasa. He went on to become quite a well-known brass band conductor in the country. After the war, that was, but other than that I didn't, no.

34:00 **So it sounds like you had a very broad range of pastimes, I guess. From your music, be it semi-classical, jazz, to rabbiting, to**

Oh, yes, as I said, I had quite a various range of amusements that we used to have when we were kids. I can't think of anything else much that sort of comes to mind. Probably should have given this a bit more thought before you came here.

No, no, no. Things will just pop up as we talk I'm sure.

34:30 **Can you tell us a bit about the move, leaving school and going into auctioneering. Why that choice, and what that involved?**

Well, I think it was a case of, you sort of took the job that offered at the time. I know I had an idea, at one stage of the game that I would have liked to have been a chemist. But that meant a university degree, and I don't think we would have been able to run to that, even though we were reasonably well off, I don't they could have afforded to send me to university.

35:00 There wasn't all the facilities available to help people go through tertiary education then, like there is now. But that was one of things I did want to do. I felt I would have liked to have been a chemist, but when this job become available at the auctioneering firm, I took that instead, and I started there as a clerk. You know, just a short of a pen pusher,

35:30 and from there I graduated to the outside work, and as I said, I used to go pencilling for the auctioneers. My friend Bob Henderson, that's the person I mentioned before, he was also working there, and we used to have to… The people, T H Laidlaw, that owned the estate agency I worked for, they had several properties in the area, rural properties, and we used to, every year, I know it was a thing we used to look forward to,

36:00 we'd take one of the utilities and load them up with all the stores, and take them out to the shearing sheds on the properties. And that'd be a day out. We loved that. That was a good chance to get out. That was a highlight of our work with the auctioneering firm. But I mentioned T. H. Laidlaw here, because that will come up later on. When I went back to do my service with the Armament and Gas School in Hamilton. Because we finished up back in T. H. Laidlaw's private house,

36:30 which was where our office was. In the air force.

Can you perhaps describe to us in a little more detail. You said pencilling, what did the jobs entail?

Well, I should have probably been a little bit more explicit about that. No, pencilling is, when the auctioneer is selling the sheep, or whatever he happens to be selling,

37:00 there's always a clerk writes down the details of the lot, who it belonged to in the case of the sheep, what price they brought, and who bought them. And that goes on right through the sale. If you can follow what I'm getting at with that. He keeps a record of the sale. In a case like a house auction, of course, there's no need for that, because you've only got the one lot that you're selling. At an auction,

where the house is being auctioned,

37:30 and all the effects are being sold, it's still the one vendor, so you're just writing down whatever the amount was for the particular item and who brought it. But with a stock sale, you have to keep a record of, because probably you might have three or four thousand sheep in, probably could be fifty or sixty different lots, and they could each belong to a different owner. You have to keep a record of the owner, the price that it brought, and who bought it.

38:00 **And is that pretty much they same system that's used today?**

Well, I imagine it would be. I haven't been to an auction sale for a long, long time. But I imagine it would have to be worked on the same system. But that's how it was done in those days.

And was that the job you were doing throughout that period?

Well, as I said, it was that, it was clerical work in the office, and various jobs we used to... At various times

38:30 we used to have to go out round the various properties, and help a little bit sometimes with handling the sheep, or probably marking lambs, or putting rings in bulls' noses. We had a little bit of experience on the properties as well.

Was that something you enjoyed?

But I never ever took to being a farmer.

You said just before that there was an interest for a while there in being a chemist. What experiences had you had that had sort of led to that?

39:00 I don't really know. Other than the fact that I think, this all seems rather trivial at the moment, but I think what did start an interest there. We had one of those, like a little chemistry kit, that kids used to get. A sort of toy to play with, and make up, do various little do experiments with it, and make up gases. All this sort of thing. I had one of those,

39:30 but I don't know why, I just had a feeling I'd like to be a chemist, but it never ever developed into anything.

So how many years were you at the auctioneering? That was about four years?

I would say, probably I started with them when I was about fifteen. I would have been there probably nearly four years.

And during that time, was there still this ambition to get into the air force, or be involved with planes somehow?

Well, I had visions, of course, when I went into the auctioneering firm.

40:00 When I started there was no war of course, and I thought, well, the career could be that I could be auctioneering, and selling, as an auctioneer. That's what I thought I would like to be. But of course when the war intervened, and that changed all that. That changed everybody's life. Everybody had an idea, an aspiration that they'd like to be a certain, or have a certain career, but the war interrupted it.

40:30 **Well, maybe, I guess it's time we talked about that. Do you remember . . . .**

Tape 2

00:30 **Did you manage to get close to being an auctioneer yourself?**

I was about to do that when war broke out. But I never really had a chance to try and do a bit of selling. I never really had the opportunity.

Oh, so they didn't give you a little shot, little practice run, or . . . .

No, I think I might have had a bit of a practice run once, but it was nothing very serious, no.

So you were working as a clerk basically, with the auctioneers, when war broke out.

When war broke out. Yes. I was.

01:00 **What memories do you have of that?**

What, from what I can remember of it, it was rather scary. Because war broke out in Europe and I think everybody sort of realised that sooner or later we were going to get dragged into it, because we were part of the Commonwealth, and in those days whatever happened to Britain happened to Australia. I think all of us young people realised that sooner or later, we'd probably get dragged into it. It wasn't, wasn't very nice to know it,

01:30 but it's hard to remember now just what the effect was, But I know, from my own point of view, I thought, well, sooner or later I'm going to have to join one of the services. And of course, my natural aspiration was to try and get into the air force and be a pilot. Having had that little bit of flying experience I had. Well I think every bloke that joined the air force wanted to be a pilot, in those days. But to get in too we had to,

02:00 when we first applied, you had to do an aptitude test. When I found I couldn't get in as a pilot, I thought well, I would like to get into radio. Or be like a radar operator, because I knew radar was in it's infancy, and television was in it's infancy, and I thought well, if I could get in as a radar operator, I could learn a trade, and probably have a background for television after the war.

02:30 But also that fell in a hole, when they found I was a clerk, and they found they wanted clerks more than radar operators. That was the end of that. But, getting back to when I joined up, I know my father was particularly upset about me going because I suppose he thought that might be the last he'd see of me. That was what happened, I think to nearly all the young people's parents.

03:00 They were very worried because you never knew where you were going to finish up, or what might happen, and naturally it tore the families apart. But I think from my own point of view I was excited about getting into it. I did my training, after I was accepted, I did my training at Ascot Vale, where we first went into camp down there.

03:30 We lived in, I'm trying to think… We lived in one of the sheep pavilions, was our dormitory. The dormitory of about a hundred odd blokes in there, and we did our training there. Which was reasonably, only fairly basic. We didn't learn very much. We certainly didn't learn anything in the way of fighting.

04:00 We were taught how to behave on the parade ground, how to march, how to use our rifles from a ceremonial point of view. That was all. All they taught us, I think there, was how to present arms and rest on your arms, reversed and slope arms was about all they taught us. We certainly didn't get any instruction on how to use them defensively. Which we'll come back to later when we get up to Darwin.

04:30 But we just had a very, very basic course in parade ground drill. That's about all you could call it. From there I went to Darwin. That was for a unit that was formed, called North Western Area Headquarters. It was a brand new unit and it was formed at Ascot Vale,

05:00 and we were all transhipped by train across to Adelaide, and then by the Ghan, we went on the old Ghan from Adelaide up to Alice Springs. From Alice Springs, we went overland in flat bed trucks, open trucks, all the way to, I think it was Birdum, from memory, where the railhead was. I think it took about three days. There was virtually no road.

05:30 We were dodging through spinifex grass and sand hills, and dust. We had red dust stuck to us for days afterwards, because it was so thick. That's about twenty or thirty trucks in the convoy, and if you were in one of the back trucks you copped all the dust from the front ones, and it was a sticky stuff that stuck to you. You couldn't get rid of it, couldn't wash it out. I know my shirts were red for months afterwards.

06:00 And then we got in the rail trucks at Birdum and they were cattle trucks, not carriages. We went in cattle trucks from, they hadn't even cleaned out some of the either, and we went from there to Darwin in the cattle trucks. And that was our trip up. But I know the old Ghan was so slow that the lads used to, some of us used to pile off the trucks when it was going up a hill, get out

06:30 and hurl a few rocks and things up onto the trucks, onto the carriages that we were in, and then see if we could hit the telegraph poles going past. That was our pastime. We stopped at one hotel on the way up. I've just forgotten where it was. Somewhere up in the northern portion of South Australia. And the train had to stop for water, and all the bods piled out of the train, across to the pub, get a few drinks,

07:00 no sign of shifting until the train had to, you know, gave a couple of blasts on the whistle, and started to move off. And they had to do some hard exodus and catch it, but it was quite easy to catch the train, it was that slow. We were able to catch it.

We're covering a fair bit of ground here, Lionel. Can I just take you back to leaving home and heading off to Melbourne for training.

Mmmm.

What was that like, saying farewell to friends and someone special?

Oh, fairly difficult. Yeah, fairly difficult.

07:30 I know, as I said, my parents were pretty upset. Apart from that, myself, I can't really feel that I was terribly worried about it. I think I was more excited at the prospect, because at that stage of the game, I personally had never been away from home for any length of time before, on my own. To me it was an exciting prospect.

You were twenty . . . .

I would have been nineteen then. Yep, nineteen.

08:00 **So this is 1941.**

Would have been ’41. I would say that would have been about, I would say round about September. September, October 1941.

So the war’s been going . . . .

Been going a couple of years by then, in Europe. And then it had, of course, the Japanese were starting to be a threat, at that stage. But Pearl Harbour hadn’t happened. I think Pearl Harbour happened in December, ’41,

08:30 if I remember correctly. That’s when America came in. But up to that point, it was all Europe. But we knew that Japan looked like going, well they had gone with the ‘axis’, which was Germany and Italy at that stage of the game. And they had gone with them, and I know America was frightened that they would do something in the Pacific, which they did when they bombed Pearl Harbour.

09:00 **So when you enlisted, where did you think you’d end up? You obviously, I imagine that your imagination must have been running wild.**

What when I went into the air force?

Yeah.

Well, I didn’t know where I’d finish up. I mean, like any of us, when you went in there you were in the lap of the gods where you were going to be sent. Of course, the air force was a bit different to the army. The army, you went into a unit,

09:30 and I know a lot of the guys that went into the army from around this area, finished up in the 6th Division. Well, they all went overseas. When you went into the air force, as I say, you didn’t know what unit you were going to finish up with, so you didn’t have any clue as to where you were going to go. I know I had no earthly idea where I was going to finish up. It was just a, a big unknown.

So when was it that they decided that they would grab you for your clerical skills?

10:00 Ah, at the initial training stage at Ascot Vale. We were all assessed down there, you know, given aptitude tests, various things, and as I said, I hoped when I went in that I would be a radar technician, but they found that the clerks were needed more than what radar technicians were. As it happened, it was just as well I had been picked for that. Because I certainly wouldn’t have got the job in Sri Lanka

10:30 if I hadn’t been on the clerical side. I mean, radar operators finished up dotted around little outposts all around Australia. And they just didn’t get anywhere, you know. They were just stuck in the one spot for the whole war.

So that, you’re talking about that training period at Ascot Vale. How was it dealing with, obviously there’s discipline and regimen and all of that. How was it dealing with all of that?

Well, I know we were mortally terrified of the corporal who was in charge of the drill squad.

11:00 They kept us pretty much under. It was good discipline. For some of the more, what should I say, hard to control young fellows, it brought them into line very smartly. Because they really, really kept you under. The discipline was tough. It was good. They made men of us, there was no doubt about that.

11:30 But you weren’t kids any more. You realised that. You had to knuckle down and do what you were told. But the corporal that we had, he really had us worried.

What was it specifically about him?

Mmmm?

What was it about him?

Oh, he used to… his control over his squad that he… to make raw rookies into reasonable parade ground members, into a reasonable team.

12:00 But I know all of us sort of regarded the corporal like he was God. I know I often thought, when I got two stripes I wonder if anyone would look up to me in that way. It never happened that way. But he was the big boss when we first went in. The corporal, he was the guy you looked up to and he was the one that called the shots and made you jump.

So when you were told you were moving up to Darwin,

12:30 **what was going through your mind at that stage?**

I was a little bit concerned about going to Darwin. Because I didn’t know very much about the place. We knew the Japs [Japanese] had got into, no, before we went to Darwin, yes, I think before we went there. Pearl Harbour couldn’t have happened. No, it must have happened. I went to Darwin in, I think it was December,

13:00 from memory I think it was about December, 1941. I think possibly it must have been round about the time that Pearl Harbour had happened. So we knew then that the Japs were in it, and we knew that possibly we would be in a war zone, because northern Australia was obviously going to be vulnerable. Because the Japs were starting to make that move down through the islands.

13:30 Down through Borneo, heading over the north of Australia. They were starting to come down, and I think Singapore had fallen. But all that happened in a matter of a few months. It was a very, very sudden move south by the Japanese forces.

And did that change, as you said before, you left home with a sense of adventure.

Well, a sense of adventure, and that sense of adventure turned into a sense of, probably a realisation that we probably could be going into a combat zone.

14:00 And that was, you know, it pulls you up with a bit of a jolt. But there again, you join the services to serve, you expect to, sooner or later, probably have to see action.

Moving north, what did you pack? Were you allowed to take items from home, or were you only allowed to . . . .

Oh no, you couldn't take very much. You had a kit bag that all your stuff had to go in.

14:30 And I know, all of us obviously didn't realise what the climate was like in Darwin, because I know in those days in the services, you had your winter outfit and you had your summer outfit. And we what, in the air force, we called our blues, which was you know, our blue uniform and then you had the lightweight khaki or drab uniform for summer, and that sort of thing. And I know we all packed our blue uniforms and took them up there,

15:00 but with the heat they were sent back south very smartly when we got there, because we found we never needed them up there. But we took, well you just had a limited amount of stuff that you could take. You know, you had your usual underwear, and toilet facilities that you took, toilet things that you took with you. Probably a couple of outfits of your summer uniforms.

15:30 Couple of pairs of boots, and that was about it.

Before you were talking about your girlfriend, or girlfriends, at that point, was there a particular, was there a sweetheart at the time when you left home?

Yes I had a fairly steady girlfriend at the time. That's the one who I said we evacuated all the stuff out of the house when that bushfire was on, and she was naturally a bit upset to see me going, but it had to be.

16:00 **And once you hit training, Ascot Vale and again further up north, were you able to keep in touch? Were you writing?**

Oh, yes. We could write letters, yeah. We corresponded all the time. I remember writing letters on the way up and describing the trip up, and the traumas and tribulations of the overland trek up there, up to Darwin, because it was a shocking trip.

16:30 The old rough old trucks, and virtually no road. Every day was a grind. I think it took us nearly a week to get from Adelaide to Darwin, what with the overland, the old Ghan, and the trucks, and the cattle trucks from Birdum up.

And you were receiving letters from home as well?

Oh, not until we got to Darwin. We didn't have any correspondence from home,

17:00 until we got up there. And letters in those days took quite a long while. You had to, as I said, they'd have to go through a post office in Melbourne, and then the air force postal section had to get them from there up to our unit in Darwin, so we certainly getting any mail on the way up. But we started getting it once we settled in Darwin.

Did you bring your trumpet, or your cornet?

17:30 No. I didn't. I did not have that in Darwin. I missed that. Because I didn't play at all while I was there.

Was there anything else that you can recall? You said that week was quite a torrid ride up there on the flatbeds.

On the trucks? Yeah, they were shocking.

Anything else that comes to mind?

Not really. No, just that it was a long grind.

18:00 It was the dust, the rough, the road was so rough. I do remember one thing with the old Ghan, that's the old original Ghan that went up through, not the track it takes now, this is when it went up through Tarcowie, Peterborough, Uluru. Up that way. It doesn't go, it goes in a different direction now. I know

that, in a couple of places, the poor old loco couldn't make it up the bit of an incline,

18:30 and they had to uncouple half the train, leave it at the siding. Took the first half of it up, probably another forty or fifty miles up the track, and leave it there, and come back and pick up the rest of it. And I know that a couple of times we were marooned for nearly half a day, on one little siding while the other half of the train went off, and then he had to come and pick us up.

Is it fair to say, on that trip, and also at training, you were starting to develop friendships, I guess, with . . . .

19:00 Yep. I did. On this trip up I palled up with a chap called Leo Wright, he came from Eloura, which is a town only about twenty miles south of here. I teamed up with Leo. He sort of became the only close friend I made on that run. We stayed together for quite a while after we got to Darwin. I'll tell you a bit more about that, probably later on, as we move into it,

19:30 but he was a friend that I met on that train.

So, can you tell us about arriving in Darwin, and that experience?

When we got to Darwin, oh, that's right, when we arrived in Darwin we were sent to a camp at a place they called Civil Aerodrome. That's the,

20:00 where they used to have the civil airlines used to come in there, as opposed to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] drome. They had a camp there that we settled into for a while after we arrived in Darwin. We were there for probably two or three weeks. We used to camp there, and then we'd be taken by tender,

20:30 or trucks, across to the air force station where our headquarters were set up. The North Western Area Headquarters started their operations on the RAAF aerodrome. The RAAF aerodrome was a big installation. You know, they had a couple of squadrons operated out of there. They had squadron hangars. It was the main air force base up there. Well, actually, the only air force base up there, so we were sent,

21:00 our unit took up residence, as I said, we lived at the Civil Aerodrome, but the Headquarters' offices were on that RAAF aerodrome. Our offices, we had taken over two married officers' quarters, because the married officers' wives had been evacuated, because they realised that it was going to be, that invasion could happen, and they sent, the wives had been evacuated,

21:30 and the married officers had gone off to other quarters, and they had these, there were two, actually I suppose they'd call them villas. They were houses and of course, being Darwin, they were built up on stilts. Most of the Darwin houses are built like that. And our Headquarters took over two of these to form our offices actually, and we set our offices up in there.

22:00 My friend Leo, and myself, we got very, a little bit sneaky here. We suddenly thought, well this is not much fun, travelling backwards and forwards to this Civil Aerodrome every day, and wondered if we could get organised. There was a nice area down below the office block, where there was the laundry part of the married officers' quarters, and we thought well, if we could get organised to stay down here,

22:30 it would be better than travelling backwards and forwards, so I don't know just how we managed to do it, but we put the proposition to the powers that be, that if we cleaned out the office block every morning, cleaned out the waste paper bins and smartened everything up, and kept the place tidy, could we live down below. Amazingly enough, the powers that be agreed to it, so we set ourselves up in what you, I suppose you would call a little flat downstairs.

23:00 We managed to scrounge a bit of carpet from somewhere, and a refrigerator that was up in the house upstairs. We carted that down below. We had our own refrigerator. So we set up our own little house, underneath the Headquarters block and that's where my friend Leo and I spent our time in Darwin.

And how did your mates back at the Civil Aerodrome feel about that?

Oh, well, I don't know. We didn't ask them about it. But we did pretty well,

23:30 because we had our nice little set up there, and we had, virtually had our own home there. But that didn't last for very long. But I know Leo at different times has said, I don't know how, you're a pretty good organiser. You always seem to be able to getting organised, and apparently that was one of the things that we got that was a little bit different from the others. As I said, the others were travelling backwards and forwards and we had our own little setup under the Headquarters block.

24:00 **You were saying a second ago about the powers that be. Who were they and . . . .**

Oh they were, when I say the powers that be, that would be the Commanding Officer of the unit obviously.

Who was that?

Well, my immediate superior was a man called Flight Lieutenant Faviell. He had been an accountant, or he'd had an accountancy firm in Sydney. He was quite a lot older than I was.

He was many years my senior, and he was, his section of the Headquarters was called Organisation Section, and that was, I worked as his clerk.

And, so, just sort of backtracking slightly. When you arrived in Darwin, obviously a very different sort of environment to what you're used to down here, how did the place strike you?

Well, it was ruddy hot, I can vouch for that. Very humid. Very hot.

Totally different to anything we'd seen down south. Darwin was a very cosmopolitan town at that time. There was a lot of Chinese there. Of course, there still are. But there was a big proportion of Chinese. A few, but not many, Aboriginals. We didn't get the opportunity to get into Darwin from the RAAF station that often.

Only got in occasionally. Well for a start off, we didn't have transport. It was too far to walk.

How far was it?

Oh, the air force station would be, I'd say, would be probably round about four miles. Well out of Darwin itself. Of course, Darwin now is much bigger. It's just swallowed up the aerodrome as part of one of Darwin's suburbs now. But in those days, it was completely apart from the town itself.

The town was small. We used to get in, occasionally we'd get in to see a movie at the old open air theatre. The Star Theatre they called it at Darwin. It was open air.

Can you tell us about that?

Mmmm?

Can you tell us about that, that experience? What it was like?

Well, open air theatres are rather unusual. We used to get, get most of the movies we got up there were fairly old hat.

I think we'd seen half of them down south before we went up there, but that was the only entertainment that they actually had in Darwin, as far as entertainment for the public was concerned, was the Star Theatre. But being in the services, we didn't get an opportunity to get to Darwin very much. We didn't get very much time off. We were working nearly seven days a week. There was a lot to be done up there. As I said, we had a new headquarters just starting up,

and it was, the area was starting to get opened up, and there was a lot of work being done from the service point of view in the area. Getting aerodromes organised and that sort of thing.

So before you arrived, there was nothing there? The organisation wasn't there at all.

Well, there was virtually, there was an air force station there, but only at Darwin. There wasn't much anywhere else, and obviously, they were like the army,

they were going to, they could see there was a necessity up there for defence, and more aerodromes and more opportunities for deploying aircraft in the area, so they were thinking about, at that stage of the game, they were thinking about putting more facilities in. More, probably more units would have to go up there, so North Western Area Headquarters sort of went up there, and we were to get things organised for the increased inflow of units

that would be coming into the area. But it all sort of was, they were just sort of rolling along, until the big scare came when we got the big raid. That started things really moving, but before that it was just a matter of, sort of ground work and preparation for increased influx of personnel into the area.

What did that mean for you? What work did you need to do?

Well, I was doing clerical work. Even now, I can't remember exactly what that entailed at that stage of the game but I know we were mainly concerned with keeping track of what was going on in the area, and sort of planning for future expansion. And my boss, my immediate superior was, of course, the one who was doing most of it.

I was just keeping the clerical records.

So who was heading the air force up there at the time?

At the time, I think it was Air Commodore Wilson, I think. I'm not sure. I know later, the man in charge was Air Commodore Bladen. Our Senior Air Staff Officer for North Western Area was Group Captain Scherger.

Interesting point about Group Captain Scherger, he was born at Rimley, about four or five miles out the road. A little town out of Ararat, called Rimley, and even now out there, there's a sign out there on the road, Rimley, oh, Cathcart, not Rimley. Cathcart. That's the name of the place. I've got it. Rimley's close to it, but Cathcart's where he was born. And on the side of the road, out there, there's quite a big sign, 'Cathcart. Birthplace of Air Chief Marshall Sir Frederick Scherger'.

30:00 He came from just out the road. Now, he was our Senior Air Staff Officer. I didn't know him of course, because I came from Hamilton. I came to Ararat since. But had I been an Ararat person I probably would have made myself personally known to him, but at that stage of the game it didn't mean very much. But he was born just out of Ararat. And he was what we called our Senior Air Staff Officer.

So were there plans at that time to build more strips?

Well they were planning to expand the air force involvement in the area.

30:30 Obviously, that's what it would have been.

And before the air raids, I mean, was there, we're talking end of '41, early '42.

Yes, we're talking round about December, January now. We had heard about the raid on Pearl Harbour, of course. Everybody knew about that and we realised then that, you know, Darwin could be a potential target.

31:00 We were engaged in, we had a couple of, couple of false alarms, air raid warnings. One came later December, I think it was, or early January. But it turned out to be nothing. We had to dig trenches. We dug our own little slit trench just outside our little apartment that we had, Leo and myself dug a trench there.

31:30 It was about, oh, I think the trench probably would have been, oh, six feet long. Goes on an L-shape. You don't just make one trench. You have one going that way, and one going that way. Obviously, the idea of that is, if you're attacked and strafed, bullets can go in that side, but they can't go in that side. So, you just watch, and one goes to there or there, depending on where you're being attacked. But the idea of a slit trench being shaped in an 'L' like that.

32:00 We had some sandbags around the top of it, and that was our, hopefully, we'd never need it, but we had a trench. We had to build a trench.

So during those false alarms, you were using the trenches I take it?

Oh, my word. Definitely, in the trench that night. Yes. We went in, because you didn't know whether it was a false alarm or not. But it turned out to be, they were false alarms.

Do you remember the very first one, and what was going through your head when that happened?

32:30 I remember, quite vividly, that it was full of water and there were some frogs in the bottom, and we were thinking twice about having to hop in it. I can remember that quite well.

You were saying earlier that Darwin was, and obviously still is, a very cosmopolitan town. Chinese and Aborigines. Were there Japanese there as well?

There could have been, because there were a lot of pearlers there. There were pearl fleets operating out of Darwin, around towards Broome. Up north.

33:00 There could be Japanese there, but, I don't think we ever saw any. But we did see a lot of Chinese. I know there were a lot of shops owned by Chinese at the time.

What were relations like?

All right. Quite OK. Everybody seemed friendly. There was no animosity between the Chinese and the locals and us.

Now, so we're talking December, January. You had a few false alarms there.

33:30 Mmmm.

The Japanese are coming down, Malaya and Singapore.

Malaya and Singapore, through there.

Before those raids, you'd obviously had a few false alarms. Was there a sense of, was there a complacency about the place that maybe it wasn't going to happen?

I think they, it was to a certain degree, I think there was a certain complacency. I think people didn't seem to realise that we could be bombed.

34:00 I mean, we knew there was a possibility of a service personnel, which is probably different to the civilians. I don't think the civilian population never realised just how serious the situation was. I mean, us in the services, we knew that there was a pretty fair chance that something serious could happen. But we had, from the point of view of defence, this was a thing that was very, very poor as far as the service was concerned.

34:30 We had no rifles. Now, that's hard to believe. We had a tin hat, and a gas mask, but our unit had no rifles at all. I believe some of the army units up there, they had, what, sixty or seventy rifles, but for a whole battalion. The ammunition they had for the anti-aircraft guns was World War I ammunition. They

were told to use the World War I ammunition first.

35:00 That was some of the ammunition they had was from the First World War. For the anti-aircraft guns. There was virtually no defence there at all. That was the awful part about Darwin. It was just, they were caught completely unawares. The government had not done, or couldn't, probably couldn't, do anything much in the way of defending in at that stage. I don't think they realised how serious the situation was,

35:30 and of course, everything happened so fast. The Japanese advance down through Singapore and Malaya and down through Borneo was so rapid. They just couldn't, you know, couldn't get anything organised in time.

So in your duties, were you involved in making sure that equipment was arriving and it was being prepared?

Well, we would have had a bit to do with that. But not very much. That would probably have been taken care of by what they called the Equipment Section. They had different sections in the unit that,

36:00 you know, looked after different things.

What was your section called?

Our section was called Organisation, and we had mostly to do with getting things organised for new air strips and new units coming in. I said the details are hard to remember. It was a long time ago. But that was the section I was with.

So preparations were being made but just not . . . .

They hadn't got very far. Preparations were being made, but they hadn't really got established, at that stage of the game. I'm talking now prior to the first raid.

36:30 It was, just a sort of, from our Headquarters point of view, just consolidating. We'd only been there a matter of weeks and we hadn't got very organised. Just sort of still, virtually still settling in when it all happened.

So there wasn't really a chance, by the sound of it, to actually contemplate the chance of attack or invasion?

Well, not to do anything about it, real defence against it. As I said, we didn't even have a rifle.

37:00 That will give you an idea of how unprepared it was. Did not have a rifle. So, you know, we were vulnerable. The only actual proper defence of Darwin, before that raid, was the ant-aircraft batteries. Virtually, that was all we had. We had no aircraft. I think there were about, probably about ten Wirraways in the area, most of those were down at Batchelor. We had no actual fighter aircraft on the aerodrome. I'm talking about the RAAF now.

37:30 I'm not talking about American forces. I'm talking about the RAAF. We had virtually no effective fighter aircraft in the area at all. I mean, the Wirraway wasn't a fighter anyway. It was absolutely no match for the Japanese.

So the Americans were there?

What?

The Americans were, there was already an American presence there?

Not really. No, there weren't any actual American units there as such, or certainly their presence was very small.

38:00 The only signs we were seeing of the Americans. Occasionally there were American aircraft transiting Australia, heading north for Timor. They had, occasionally you'd see a squadron of American aircraft come in overnight at the aerodrome, refuel, and then be gone the next day. But there was no actual American presence, as such, in the area.

38:30 **But they were, were they prepared to come to Darwin's defence in case of . . . .**

Well, as it happened, they did. Yes, it all happened. I mean, everything happened after the first raid. That's what got things rolling, but up till that point, there was no actual American defence presence in the area, that you could call a defence presence. As I said, they were transiting aircraft, but they were not permanently stationed there.

39:00 **Well, I guess it's time to talk about that first raid.**

First raid. Well, I suppose we're just about to that stage anyway, because that was something we were sort of half expecting, but really hoped it wouldn't happen. Every now and again we'd see, our planes used to go up and do a bit of, our Wirraways would go up and do a bit of a dog fight up there. You know, put on a bit of an act. But it never ever meant any more than that.

39:30 There was a few planes having a mock dogfight, and this 19th of February, that was the morning that it

all, you know, everything broke loose up there. Darwin was likened, at that stage of the game, Darwin was likened to Pearl Harbour. Because we had had a warning, but nothing was done about it. Apparently, that morning there was a squadron of American P40 Kittyhawkes

40:00 were transiting from Darwin to Timor. I think there was ten aircraft. They'd left early in the morning to head out to go to Timor, and apparently they'd run into bad weather and turned around and came back. Now, you must remember in those days the radio communications and that sort of thing weren't of the standard they are today,

40:30 and you know, messages got a bit mixed up. But anyway, this flight of American Kittyhawkes [fighter aircraft] turned around to come back. I'm just sort of going to try and fill you in on the exact story. A message came through for... there was a Mission out on Bathurst Island. Where they had an Aboriginal Mission run by Father McGrath, a Catholic priest out there. And they had a sort of observer station out there.

41:00 And they spotted this flight of aircraft heading towards Darwin, and Father McGrath apparently raced in, got onto the little pedal radio, and sent a message to Darwin, that there was a big flight of aircraft heading for Darwin. The message was passed to the RAAF Headquarters Control, and this is where the mess up started. They got the message that these aircraft were coming towards Darwin.

41:30 They presumed it was this squadron of American Kittyhawkes that had turned around. It wasn't. As it transpired, and was found out later, they were coming from a totally different direction to what the Kittyhawkes would have been. But the mix up was that they presumed it was the American Kittyhawkes coming back. So there was no alarm given. The first we knew about it, we'd had our break for morning..

Tape 3

00:34 Well you got up to the stage where we were about to, we'd broken for our morning tea break, or smoko, and I remember we were looking up and we saw these aircraft wheeling around in the sky. Now remember up to this point there's been no air raid warning at all. Nobody had any clues what was happening.

01:00 Two or three of our mates were out there and we're looking up and saying, "Gosh, they're putting on a good old turn this morning", you know, "Doing their mock dogfight" and the next thing we heard was the sound of machinegun fire from up in the air and then we saw a plane coming down in flames and we're saying, "Gosh, this is it" and then from all directions we saw these squadrons of nine aircraft in

01:30 formation. We suddenly realised then that it was on, so we naturally all made a dive for our little trench that we'd dug, that was my mate Leo and myself, dived into our personal trench cause everybody had dug a trench to suit for themselves and then all hell broke loose. There was planes peeled off. They were strafing, shooting up,

02:00 dropping bombs. We could actually see the bombs leaving, the single bombs leaving. They were dive bombers these were. I think the aircraft they used from memory were, had Mitsubishi Zeros of course. They were the fighter planes. They had Val dive bombers they were called. Val was the name that we gave them. I think they were Kawasakis I think they were built by and we could actually

02:30 see the bombs leaving the aircraft and coming down and they were bombing. They were dive bombing the hangars on the air force station and they started to strafe any buildings that they could and I know my mate was in one side of the L shaped slit trench and I was in the other and if he saw a plane coming towards him, you could actually see the plane, he'd, cause they were strafing. They were shooting machinegun fire and they were strafing the trenches.

03:00 He'd slide around here and of course he'd be safe because you can see what I'm getting at. Bullets couldn't hit into that trench coming that way. They could go in there but not this side, so he's slip around there and if I saw one coming towards me I'd dive around that side and I remember he made the comment at one stage, he said, "Joe" he used to call me Joe. That was my nickname. He said "Joe". He said, "I think I've been hit" and he was really panicking and what had happened, a bullet

03:30 had hit the sandbag behind him and the hot sand was running down his back. Now poor old Leo was very traumatised by all this. He never, ever went back to Darwin. He was apparently absolutely terrified but he got a fright that day. Anyway that's by the way. The bombing and strafing went on on our unit there for probably, this was about ten o'clock this happened, was when it started.

04:00 I've got a little bit ahead of myself. Actually when we first saw those planes start to strafe us that's when the air raid warning sounded. Now we, had they taken notice of that Father McGrath's warning, we would have had a good twenty minutes to half an hour warning. It would have given everybody a chance to do something about taking cover. Anyway it didn't really matter because nobody there got hurt

04:30 in this at all believe it or not. The main damage was done on the harbour. They really made a mess

there. I think they got, the Neptunia was a ship tied up at the wharf. That was hit, was a direct hit, was about twenty or thirty wharf workers on the wharf got killed in that first attack on that ship. There was an American

05:00 war cruiser I think it was or it might have been a destroyer, called the Pirie. That was sunk. There was about seventy or eighty went down with that. They absolutely, they wiped out the post office and all the post office staff. That took a direct hit. Of course we didn't know about this. I mean we're out at the air force station. Naturally we didn't know what had happened but the damage that they did on the

05:30 harbour was unbelievable. That first lot of aircraft I think that came over, they were all carrier borne aircraft. They'd come from three or four aircraft carriers that were in the Timor Sea. Interesting enough too it was the same Japanese taskforce that attacked Pearl Harbour that attacked Darwin, was the same aircraft, the same aircraft carriers, the same planners

06:00 that organised this raid on Darwin. Its often been referred to as Australia's Pearl Harbour because see Pearl Harbour had a warning, they didn't act on it. We had a warning, didn't act on it and it was the same taskforce that attacked both places. That raid lasted on the town and on the air force station, lasted for approximately three quarters of an hour to an hour.

06:30 Then it stopped but through all that we were huddled in a trench. The thing that was most terrifying of all of that was when the raid stopped we could hear machinegun fire. The first thing we thought of, "They've landed paratroops and they've got machineguns firing on the ground" because

07:00 we could hear, it was ground machinegun fire we could hear. The feeling is really hard to describe. We had a tin hat and nothing else and we're in the trench. We thought paratroops had landed. Now you can imagine the feeling, "We're helpless. What are you going to do? If the Japs have landed, we've got nothing to defend ourselves with". That was the worst part of Darwin from my point of view was the fear that the Japs had landed

07:30 and we had nothing to defend ourselves with. Fortunately when we finally were game to put our heads over the top of the trench to see what had happened it was complete chaos. Everything was just, the hangars were aflame. There was a few aircraft on the runways. They were burning. Buildings had rooves off them, bullet holes in our little unit that we had, shrapnel marks all over it

08:00 but the noise, the machinegun fire that we heard, or we thought was machinegun fire, really what it was, it was ammunition in the ammunition belts in the aircraft that were in the hangars and that was exploding but we thought it was Japanese paratroopers but that's what it was. Anyway we got out of our trenches, surveyed the damage, went up and saw what a mess they'd made of everything

08:30 and while we were standing out recovering from all this, there was this most enormous explosion from the harbour and it was, I've never seen another result of an explosion that looked so much like an atomic bomb explosion, was this great shaft of smoke and a great mushroom cloud and you could see all these bits and pieces of stuff flying out of this cloud like pieces of what appeared to be timber or metal and

09:00 this Neptunia, the ship that they'd bombed, had hit it and it had caught fire and it was loaded with depth charges and bombs and the whole thing had exploded. The shock, we felt the shockwave a matter of seconds after we saw the thing go up. We felt the shockwave four miles away out at the RAAF station. It was an amazing explosion and that's what it was. The Neptunia had exploded cause it was full of all this

09:30 ammunition and depth charges. That was a really big explosion. Then there was relative quiet. As I said, everybody was sort of in a state of shock at this stage of the game because nobody had expected it and it was the first baptism of fire. I think the fact that we were fortunate that we were young. You're not so impressionable then, you know, you're invulnerable

10:00 at that stage of life and, you know, we were a bit concerned naturally. As I said, the main thing we were scared about was the fact that we had nothing to defend ourselves with. That was frightful. Then there was a lull for about roughly an hour and in the meantime earlier that morning there'd been a couple of Hudson aircraft loaded with refugees from, I think they came from Kopang,

10:30 and they'd landed and these chaps had been attacked by the Japanese over there before they got out and a couple of them dived into our trench and I can remember vividly one of the, we had another air raid warning. That's right, we got an air raid warning and we dived into the trench and I can remember one of these guys, one of the pilots of one of these Hudson's, he looked up and he's counting and away, way up in the blue we could see these aircraft. They were just like silver

11:00 mosquitos way up in the sky. They almost looked translucent and you could hear them and we were counting. There was twenty seven in one flight, twenty seven in groups of three. They were all bunched together and this person that got in the trench with me, he was counting. He said "Two, four, six, eight". He said, "Crikey, we're for it". Now there were two squadrons of those aircraft. There was two lots

11:30 of twenty seven and they sort of crisscrossed above the aerodrome and they pattern bombed the air force station. They dropped a whole load of their bombs on us and I can remember you could hear the bombs coming down. You can hear them whistling, the noise of them coming and even at one stage you

could see a sort of a shadow came across the ground and it was actually the bombs going through the sunlight, like you could see the sort of a flash of a shadow and then they started droming, so just, “Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang” and each

12:00 one was getting closer. There were more bombs dropped, more than twice as many bombs dropped on Darwin as there were on Pearl Harbour, not too many people in Australia realise that because what had happened, the first raid that they carried out were carrier borne aircraft. The second raid that attacked the RAAF station were land based bombers that had come from Ambon and in the

12:30 Celebes and there were fifty four of them and they unleashed the whole of their bombload on the RAAF station. It was recognised as one of the most intensive dropping of bombs in any part of the war up until that point. We found that out later. That’s how Darwin copped more bombs. Admittedly it didn’t do as much damage as they did in Pearl Harbour because there wasn’t as much there to damage. I mean a whole American fleet was in Pearl Harbour or

13:00 all their Pacific fleet, I’ve said the wrong thing there, but what they did do in Darwin, they got nearly every, damaged or sank nearly every ship that was in the harbour and they really wiped out most of the air force station. Amazing about that again, I think there were only seven casualties on the air force station even with all that bombing and that was one trench that had a direct hit. Providing you were in a trench you were pretty safe. I remember afterwards getting out of the trench

13:30 I had skin was taken off both arms. The concussion, the trench tends to go like that, the concussion from the bombs and we were sort of getting shaken about in it like that and I had the skin taken right off both arms but luckily the bomb didn’t hit us, so we were right.

So in between the first raid and the second raid, what, you came out of the trench?

Yes, we got out of our trenches yeh.

I’m just, I’m curious about who was taking

14:00 **control or?**

Well this is, there was no, at that stage there was sort of no control there because I think everybody was, I think I could almost use the word shell shocked there. Nobody sort of realised what had happened. I mean it’s just out of the blue. You suddenly have an attack like that. Nobody expected it. Everybody was just sort of wandering around in a daze, “What’s happened? What do we do now?” and then there’s another air raid siren goes. We had about roughly an hour to sort of

14:30 try and collect our wits but at that stage of the game nobody knew much about what had happened except we saw this devastation all around us. It was rather, you know, a bit of a shock to the system.

And how spread out were the trenches?

Well I’d say there’d be, wherever there was a, like we had our headquarters unit. There probably would have been twenty or thirty people working in that

15:00 particular installation. There’d probably be about six trenches of, six or eight trenches round that, which were easily accessible to the ones that were in the building and they had trenches. Wherever there was a building or personnel, they’d have their trenches dug fairly close to where they were working and that’s what saved us, the fact that we had the trenches prepared and we were able to get into them. Providing you were in a trench you were pretty safe. It seems

15:30 hard to believe but it is right. I mean unless you’re unlucky enough to cop a direct hit. Well I think there was a bomb, a five hundred pounder, landed probably from say, what, thirty or forty metres away from our trench and that was the one that caused all the concussion. It was noisy.

Yeh, I can image, those big bombs. Were you able to speak to each other, were you able to

16:00 **hear each other in the trenches?**

Yes, in the first raid we did, when they were strafing and dive bombing. Yes, we were able to converse but in the second one, no. The noise was just unbelievable and I mean you can imagine what fifty four bombers have dropped their bombs all in one hit. It’s, well actually I’m still a bit deaf from that. I’ve still got a problem with this left ear and that I would say was caused by that concussion.

16:30 **And how much damage was done to the RAAF station?**

RAAF station, well it took both the hangars out. I think the cinema, big cinema copped a direct hit. There was shrapnel damage. I think there was hardly a building on the station that didn’t have some shrapnel damage. I don’t know, our building, we went back up to have a look at it. There just papers and things all over the place. It’d been pretty badly knocked about

17:00 but nearly all the buildings got it, nearly all of them got it.

So at the end of the first raid with the strafing, did you kind of assume that was it, it was over and start to?

Well after the first one, yes. We had thought possibly it was over but, as I said, it was difficult really because nobody sort of collected their wits at that stage of the game. We didn't know what had really happened or what had hit us. We just knew that we'd been raided and we knew that the

17:30 Japanese were there but the thing was there was no organisation. There was nobody, virtually no-one there to tell us what to do. They weren't expecting it and they weren't prepared for it. After the second raid, I mean I don't know whether there's any more you want to talk about that first part of it or not but after the second raid finished, that was when the pandemonium started.

18:00 Nobody knew really what to do. It was pretty obvious that we were under attack. My mate and myself decided that, "Well the safest thing to do with any valuable records we had in the office was to get them off the target area", cause obviously the RAAF station was the target area as far as we were concerned cause we didn't know how bad the damage was in the town at that particular time, so we grabbed some of the most valuable documents and we took them. Of all places we took them out

18:30 into the bush, found a shack out in the bush and put them in for what we thought was safekeeping in this shack in the bush. Now whether we did the right thing or not I don't know but we did this because we thought that was the safest thing to do. Now we're two young guys. I mean I was nineteen. I think my mate was only eighteen at that time but there was senior NCOs running around there panicking, people that should have been giving us inspiration, telling us what to do. I can remember one flight sergeant.

19:00 He had his pack on his back. He was absolutely going crazy just saying, "Get south, get south". Well that's not much encouragement to the younger juniors below him and this was the general trend that permeated right through Darwin was, "Get out" and this created the crazy exodus from Darwin. All the civilians fled. Everything that was on four wheels that

19:30 could be moved, people were climbing on and getting south. It should never have happened but they weren't prepared for it. There was no coordination, nobody to tell us what to do. Eventually somebody said, "Get off the target area". Well that made a bit of sense because you're not going to stay there if it's going to be bombed again obviously but you don't get off the target area and stay away. I mean what my mate and I did, we

20:00 got those what we thought were valuable documents, put them into a shack in the bush. We grabbed our mosquito nets and bedroll and we went that night and spent the night at what they called Sand Fly Flat, was a little place out in the bush about a half a mile away from the aerodrome. We stayed there for the night and we went back next morning, found there was a bit more organisation there then. There'd been a few of the officers had taken charge and

20:30 we went back, got our documents, took them back to the unit to our headquarters and that was that but there was complete and utter chaos after that first, after that raid.

So you didn't consult with anyone about going out to the shack?

No, we just did it. Well we thought, "We've been attacked. There's valuable documents there that might be of use to them. We'd better get them out and put them in what we thought was a safe place". It probably, as it transpired, it was probably the silliest thing to do because

21:00 we took them out and put them in a shack in the bush but anyhow we thought we were doing the right thing.

Do you recall what the documents were?

I can't remember what they were. They were just documents that we'd been working on. They probably weren't that terribly valuable but we thought that we'd done the right thing. I remember doing that but the thing that surprised us, was so hard about it, was the fact that we had no defence and this is what I think caused a lot of the panic, was we had nothing to defend

21:30 ourselves with, so a lot of them just run away. The order went out, I think from what I can remember, we were told to, "Get a few kilometres south down the road and assemble and we'd be fed". Now some got that message. Some only got the message, "Get south". One person would you believe finished up in Melbourne, a lot finished up at Adelaide River,

22:00 which is about seventy miles down the track but there was civilians. There were army personnel, air force personnel aboard anything that had four wheels, trying to get down the road off away from Darwin. It was called the Adelaide River stakes. There was just a complete exodus. Next morning most of the air force personnel had gone back, a lot hadn't. I

22:30 hate to admit it, a lot didn't and I've often felt a lot awful about that because there's been a lot said about the panic and the poor discipline in the air force but you must remember they were mostly young. They'd had no training, had nothing to defend themselves with and they're looking at probably an invasion. Now what are they going to do? Are they going to stay there? They

23:00 didn't really run away. They just got away from the target area and, as I said, there was not any proper control until about midday next day. Group Captain Sherger got back. He got some of the officers together. We started to get proper orders from proper, sensible officers to what to do but, as I said, the

thing that surprised me was that flight sergeant. Now he, as a senior

23:30 NCO, he should have not been running around like that. Now he was only one that I saw. There could have been many others but I think, I must say I think it's excusable to a certain extent when you think that there's, they had, we had no defences, not a rifle.

So earlier on when you'd had these false alarms, these false air raid alarms, did it

24:00 **not, did you ever concern then about not being prepared, like if those raids actually were real?**

Well I don't think we had. I think we'd have liked to have had rifles, obviously. We'd have liked to have had them but we just didn't have them. I don't think the government was in a position at that stage to supply them. See, this was the problem. I think, we were just unprepared.

But did you question your

24:30 **senior officers about this?**

Well you wouldn't do, I mean senior officer is a senior officer. Us younger people, only LACs and AC-1s, the lowest ranks in the service, you don't query your senior officers. I don't know that it was the senior officers' fault either. I mean a lot of it could have been the government's fault because the government's the one that provides the defence materials. I mean the service personnel can only work with what they've got or what the government's given them

25:00 and they just didn't have it.

So the following day after the bombing when you returned back to the station?

Yes, we went back.

Can you tell me in as much detail as you can think of just what occurred, you came back in the morning presumably?

We went back, yeh, first thing in the morning we went back. From what I can remember, the mess, they were getting themselves back to a sort of some semblance of order so they could

25:30 give us some meals. Some of the units were better than others. The transport section I must make comment, they were possibly the best disciplined of all on the air force station at that time. They were, I believe when they had roll call next morning there was a hundred percent attendance. Most of our group were there and we were more or less the rookies and we were only clerical, you know, we're not the fighting side of it at all. What happened in the squadrons well,

26:00 as I said, all their facilities had been completely wiped out. The aircraft that were burning on the ground after that first raid, they were, some of the American Kittyhawks that had returned, I didn't mention that in the earlier part of it. I can probably mention it now. When that raid started these ten American Kittyhawks that were returning, run right into it and of course

26:30 some of them landed and some of the other ones stayed up to try and do a bit of defence against the Japanese. Of course they just got shot out of the sky and the ones that had landed suddenly realised what had happened. They tried to take off again to put up some resistance against the Japanese. They just got shot out before they even got off the ground. I think there were about four or five of them actually got shot up on the actual

27:00 aerodrome itself before they even got off. Most of those pilots were killed but that was what happened to the American squadron. They just got wiped out.

So they attempted to?

They attempted to do it, yes, they definitely did. They did engage the Japanese. The ones that were still airborne engaged the Japanese. I think there was five of them. I think the man, from what I can remember, his name was Lieutenant Austereiker I think was the squadron commander of that flight,

27:30 American.

You mentioned that one of the Japanese planes, the first thing that you saw was a burning plane falling from the sky, is that correct?

It would probably have been one of our aircraft I would say. It could have been one of these American aircraft that had come back and run into them, into the melee when they came back. We didn't realise what aircraft they were. We just thought it was probably some of our Wirraways that used to go up there and have their bit of a mock dogfight but actually what it was, was the American,

28:00 the portion of the American flight that stayed airborne, ran into the Japs up there and of course they engaged them and that's what the machinegun fire was and the Japs shot them out of the sky.

Did you know that the Kittyhawks were up there earlier in the morning, that they'd?

We knew they'd left, yes. We knew they'd left but we didn't know what had happened to them. We didn't

know that they were returning and most of this we found out later when they had the enquiries and it all came out but we didn't know

28:30 that the Kittyhawks were returning. At least I didn't know. Our section of the air force didn't know. The air traffic controller and that, they would have known that they'd turned back but we didn't.

So when you saw the planes in the sky, what did you think they were?

Well, as I said, what we thought they were originally, we thought it was our own guys doing their mock dogfight that they used

29:00 to have every now and again but as it turned out, it wasn't. It was the Americans that had returned and ran into it.

Can you tell me about the mock dogfights, like with the Wirraways, what?

They used to just get up and just practise. Well I s'pose you'd call it mock dogfight. That's what we used to say it was but they just used to get up and practise aerobatics and whatnot, just manoeuvring and whatnot. It wouldn't have done them much good cause the Wirraways weren't even a

29:30 slight match for the Zeros but they were all we had and what ones they did have, most, I think the only airworthy ones that they had were down at Bachelor, which was about eighty or ninety miles down south at the aerodrome down there south of Darwin. I don't think there were any more than about two or three of them on the aerodrome at Darwin anyway and they didn't get airborne and they were the Americans

30:00 but they had what they called their mock dogfights. Every now and again they'd get up and do a bit of a buzz around and make like they were fighting.

So post, you know, the days after the bombing, how did the true facts come to light, like how did you manage to piece the story together?

Well I've found out more long since the war was over. It's all,

30:30 the full facts of it. I mean what we knew at the time was minimal. As I said, we didn't know, apart from the fact that we'd been bombed, what had happened. We didn't know how badly the damage was on the wharf area and in the town until days afterwards but I've found out all about the details from later information that I've been able to glean. A lot of it's through the Darwin defenders, plus what I knew about myself experiencing

31:00 up there but it took two or three days to sort of realise what had actually happened, for a bit of order to be established, and then our unit moved off the RAAF aerodrome to a place called Berrima Hospital. Now our authorities, being good Geneva Convention observers, decided the best thing to do was to paint out the

31:30 red cross that was on the hospital roof because it was going to be used as a military establishment, so if that wasn't an invitation to the Japs I don't know what was but we moved to the Berrima Hospital for our headquarters for a while. The hospital had been evacuated or there was nobody in it. I think it was a new hospital had just been built but whatever had been in there, we just went in there and took over.

So what was the feeling amongst the guys in your unit just

32:00 **after the bombing, like were they worried, were they, did they want to get out of there?**

Well we were all concerned about what had happened. We were mainly concerned about what our next move was going to be and what we were going to do. I mean, as I said, you go into a war zone, you don't run away. You're obviously, you're there for a purpose. You've got to stay and do something about it. I mean we had a job to do there. We realised then that there'd be a lot more would have to be done because we had no

32:30 defence in Darwin and it was obvious that the defences would have to be improved drastically, very quickly and they were but we were largely governed by what the government could give us but I mean I'm not in a position to be able to sort of voice an opinion on the strategic side of it because I wasn't in a position to know much about that. I was only just a clerk working in an office.

So what was happening in Darwin

33:00 **town those few days after?**

Well, as I said, most of the population just fled. There was a lot of looting went on. That was a bad thing that happened there after the bombing. I mean there was, looting was widespread, people were just, members of some of the services were involved in it and they were just grabbing whatever they could from shops and

33:30 from houses but people just packed up and left. They didn't take anything with them. They just fled. They just went south. It was mainly, there weren't many women and children up there at that stage because I think the government must have realised there was something seriously, there was a serious

possibility that Darwin would be attacked because I think it was early December they evacuated most of the women and children from Darwin

34:00 They gave them a matter of twenty four hours notice or something. They just had to pack up with what they could put in one suitcase and they were just sent south. They were real refugees those people. They didn't know where they were going. They had no specific place to go to but they just had to be evacuated from Darwin. The ones that had relatives and friends that they could go and stay with down south went to them but the others they just, they were virtual refugees. They were just evacuated.

34:30 **Was there any kind of policing of the town or did the army?**

There was still, the army police did what they could but they couldn't control it all. As I said, there was a lot of looting went on. We weren't involved in it fortunately but there was quite a lot of looting but there were mainly, after that big raid, there were not very many civilian population

35:00 left there. They were nearly all army and army, navy and air force that were in the town. It was virtually a military town then.

I'd also like to know more about what you actually did, I mean I understand you had a clerical job but what are the specifics of that job that you did?

Well when we shifted down to our, when we got off the

35:30 RAAF drome and got sort of settled into a proper routine, our job as organisation section was mainly to sort of, the logistics side of getting aerodromes organised. I mean there was constructions, aircraft construction squadrons had to come in. They had to build airstrips. We had to organise getting, the units that were going

36:00 to come onto the airstrips, had to get them there. That was our main task was just, we were called the organisation section. We just had to organise things and that was our main job. My main job was to do with the clerical side of it, do all the typing and that that was required of a clerk in that type of job.

So did you, were you privy to important information?

Yes I would have been because

36:30 most of the stuff we were doing was top secret stuff and I would know naturally what was going on but you had to keep it to yourself. Now that's another thing, why the people down here didn't know much about what happened in Darwin. There was strict censorship was imposed immediately. We weren't able to mention anything about what had happened, not allowed anything to be said about it in our letters down south. The government put a strict censorship

37:00 limit on everything up there. There was an order went out that all the details had to be kept secret for fifty years and that's why it's only now starting to come out what really happened in Darwin, the real true story of it. They reckon that the initial information given down south was I think there were about seven or eight people killed or not that many injured in the raid.

37:30 Finally though I think they admitted to about two hundred and fifty killed but I'd very much doubt that and anybody that was up there at the time will also doubt it because we reckoned, and various ones that you speak to since, they reckon that it could have been nearer a thousand. Nobody really knew what the death toll was because there was, nobody actually knew how many people were on those ships in the

38:00 harbour. They said there were seventy or eighty American sailors on one ship that went down, so there'd have to be a lot more.

Were you involved at all in any of the clean up or helping with evacuating?

Well we were involved a bit in retrieving bodies from the harbour. I know that was a rather unpleasant experience.

What did you do?

We had

38:30 to, this is the sort of thing, as I said, it was, from young people suddenly developed into adults fairly quickly up there because of that. There was a lot of people that had been badly burnt and knocked about and been washed up on beaches. Those bodies had to be retrieved. I know we did a little bit of that, which wasn't very nice. Fortunately I wasn't involved very much in that and I know some of our mates

39:00 were but there was a lot of that to be cleaned up, as you can imagine. Bodies had to be taken to cemeteries and they weren't identified. They were just sort of buried in mass graves a lot of them. They probably thought they found them out and sorted them out and identified them later but at the early stages it was just, they had to be buried wherever they could but I didn't have very much to do with that.

But that's what was going on

39:30 **around you?**

That's what was going on around us, yes. I know there was a cemetery at the Berrima Hospital where we had our headquarters. There was a cemetery just near there and there were quite a lot of people buried there but I don't think they were left there. I think they were probably taken down and buried at Adelaide River, the main war cemetery, later on but that was sort of just an emergency. People had to be buried cause I mean you can't leave dead bodies around in the tropics like that. I mean you just imagine what happens.

40:00 They have to be buried very quickly.

Did any of your, or does, is there any senior officer of your unit that stands out as taking sort of a leadership role during that time?

Yes, Group Captain Sherger. He was the one that really took charge. I mean he was the one that got things organised, took charge and he was a real leader.

40:30 He was the one I can remember mainly from that.

So how did he go about doing that, can you remember, how did he go about doing it, like what did he do?

Tape 4

00:30 **Those relationships between the other services. That would be good to just explore for a little bit.**

Yeah.

You know, before the bombing and after.

Well before the bombing, well we had…actually Leo, that was my mate, his brother was up there, and his brother was in the army. I think he was a sergeant in the army, in an army unit. And he had a couple of his friends used to come down to our little apartment, as we might as well call it. The little place we had

01:00 under the Headquarters block at Darwin aerodrome. We'd have our, have a bit of what we'd call a little bit of a party, or a get together, and we'd have some of our comforts funds parcels, and parcels we used to get from down south with some goodies in it, and we'd have bit of a meal there, and a bit of a get together of an evening in our own little unit. And there was quite a bit of interaction between my friend Leo,

01:30 and myself, and the army, because of that. Our unit at the air force station, we had quite a big cinema there, and they used to get, army units used to come into various picture shows that we'd run there. This was before the bombing, obviously. There was nothing left afterwards.

So, did you talk about the way things were being managed in Darwin for the services at all?

02:00 **Were there conversations amongst you guys? You know. You would have been observing what the officers were doing, and what there was and what there wasn't.**

No, I think we were mainly concerned about what was happening around us, and what was likely to transpire. It's hard to remember back just what you did talk about. I mean, it's going back sixty odd years now. It's a long way.

But with the fall of Singapore, for example, which had just happened.

Yes.

Around the time that you went to Darwin, that would have been . . . .

02:30 Well, that would have been a fairly big topic of conversation obviously, because of the fact that it looked like Australia could be invaded. We really, I think we really did feel, we would, that at some stage of the game, we would come under attack. And that turned out to be correct, because we did. But as it turned out the Japanese never, ever apparently, intended to attack Australia.

03:00 They only wanted to neutralise Darwin as a base for sending aircraft and whatnot to attack them, would have been in New Guinea. They never, ever apparently, had a plan to attack Australia. Their whole idea was to neutralise Darwin. And I think one of the Japanese commanders said later, it was like using a sledge hammer to crack an egg.

03:30 It was overkill, what they did to Darwin. There was no need to send such a terrifically strong force against us, as they did. But that was the whole idea, was to neutralise Darwin, as a port, like a jumping off point, for a counter attack.

So, moving onto the Berrimah Hospital, because the RAAF station was completely wrecked.

04:00 Well, it was evacuated as far as our unit was concerned. The RAAF station still kept going. There were units stayed there, but our particular unit shifted to Berrimah.

So when you shifted to Berrimah, were you, in the work that you did, did you become aware of some sort of strategy and planning for how to deal with this unexpected attack, and now . . . .

04:30 Well, the thing that we had to do then, obviously, was something had to be done about the defence of Darwin. It was realised then that we were in a vulnerable position with no defences. So the number one thing was to organise things, obviously the higher echelons of government and army strategists knew that Darwin was vulnerable, so we had to get some better form of defences there.

05:00 The first thing I think we got was that we were issued with rifles and bayonets. And that was really something. I remember, I've got photographs somewhere, of standing on the Berrimah Hospital veranda with a rifle and bayonet. I can remember quite clearly that we got those, you know, hurray, we've got something to defend ourselves with at long last. That didn't take, that was only a matter of weeks when we had them.

05:30 Then, as I said, our Organisation Section, our job was to sort of get things organised in the way of airstrips built for fighter squadrons to come in. Obviously, the government had plans down south. They'd made their plans to get some defences up there, and of course fighter aircraft were the number one thing that we needed. That was on the move then to get some defence into the area.

06:00 They started building fighter strips at Strauss, Livingstone, Sattler. They were three strips that were built along the main north-south road. The strips that they could have fighter aircraft in. We had three squadrons of American Kittyhawkes were brought in. And I could never say enough about those fellows.

06:30 If it hadn't been for them, I don't we'd be sitting talking to each other now. They really saved Australia. Because the Japanese, at the stage we were at then, they could have walked in. We wouldn't have been able to stop them. But these three squadrons of American fighter pilots from, I think they called themselves, the 49th Pursuit Group, I think they were, and they put up a terrific defence against the Japanese.

07:00 And they were stationed on the three airstrips along the main highway, south of Darwin. But they were our main saviours at that stage, definitely.

So what defence activities did they do, after the bombing? The Kittyhawkes.

Well, they were fighter planes. They would attack the Japanese bombers that came over.

07:30 See, Darwin suffered another, I think there were another sixty seven raids. In the next twelve months, after that first raid. It wasn't just the first raid. They'd be over, every two or three days there'd be a raid.

So were you there when there was another raid?

Oh, yes. I mean, we went through quite a few, but actually we weren't the direct target. We were in the area when the raids were there, but they, you know, were mainly after the targets,

08:00 we weren't the target of their attack. In that area, when they were over. But that went on for nearly twelve months. They'd have sporadic attacks with only two or three planes, or sometimes it would be up to twenty or thirty. But they were so decimated by the American Kittyhawkes that they just weren't effective any more. They never ever did any damage like they did in that first raid. They did localised damage, but not very much.

08:30 **OK. So, at Berrimah, this was about, you know, the construction of the aircraft station . . . .**

Mainly construction of aircraft runways and facilities for, you know, the units that are coming in. There was not only American units, there was RAAF units, there was a bombing unit at Hughes Airfield,

09:00 was one that we had to get organised. They had Mitchells [B25 Mitchell bombers] there, I think they were. Batchelor was improved. They had another big bomber station, was formed at Fenton. This happened over a period of about twelve months. They gradually built up the defences.

09:30 But it all started from that first raid. That's when things really started to move.

And how long were you at Berrimah for?

Oh, only a matter of months. From Berrimah, we were still involved in the same sort of work, if you understand. But Berrimah was only just a sort of a stepping stone. From Berrimah we went down to a place called Coomalie Creek. Which was about, oh, would have been about fifty miles south of Darwin. And we had our headquarters,

10:00 it was a tented camp there. We lived in tents and worked in tents. And there was also an airstrip right alongside us there, No 31 Beaufighter squadron was stationed at. That was another strip that was built.

But all these, all these were built, gradually built up over about twelve months. When the personnel and the aircraft came in, but after a few months there were

10:30 literally thousands of army and air force personnel in that area. A lot of Americans were there. But they just sort of came in, we don't know where they came from, but they arrived, you know. Obviously the government realised that Darwin was a vulnerable port and had to be defended, so they just started rolling troops in.

Were you aware of any media coverage of what was going on?

11:00 We didn't get very much media coverage. As I mentioned in that censor thing, the media didn't get much of a go up there at all. And we weren't allowed to say anything about it.

So you weren't hearing anything on the news or . . . .

Oh, we weren't hearing much. We had, we got radio, but there was nothing much, nothing ever mentioned about Darwin. It didn't exist as far as down south was concerned. They just wanted to keep it quiet.

11:30 I really think the reason that they put the blanket ban on it, and the censorship on it, was the fact that is was embarrassing for the government. Had people known how really poorly defended we were… I mean, I think there's two reasons. I think one could have been that it could have caused a panic. Had the general population known how serious the situation was, and number two, it was a bit of an embarrassment that our defences were so poor.

12:00 Well, imagine what would happen if the same thing happened now. If suddenly Darwin was attacked and just about wiped out. How would we be? You know, put us in the same situation today. I mean, we have got a threat up north. I mean, there's no doubt about that. There's a threat from elements north of Australia at the moment.

12:30 Now, if suddenly Darwin was virtually wiped out, and hundreds and hundreds of people wiped out, imagine what the reaction would be down south. I think this is the reason that the government kept a blanket censorship ban on any information being released. To me, that makes sense.

So Coomalie you were?

13:00 Yes. Coomalie Creek. I lost touch with Leo by this time, my friend. He was younger than me, and I think anybody that was under the age of nineteen, had to be repatriated south. They considered them too young to be there, and I think Leo got sent south. So I sort of lost track of Leo after we left Berrimah Hospital. He sort of disappeared from my life at that point.

13:30 Later on, sixty years later, I caught up with him. But that, when Leo left there, we went to Coomalie and . . . .

Why did you and Leo become friends? What was it about Leo?

Oh, just one of those things, you know. Just a sort of a spontaneous thing. I think possibly the fact that he came from so close an area near home. See he lived at Eloura, and I lived at Hamilton which is not very far away. And I think that sort of brought us together. But it was just a sort of a friendship that sprung up. We had similar interests and that was it.

14:00 But Coomalie was quite a comfortable camp. We had tents. Tropical rainfall up there was unbelievable. It's hard to describe it. How it can rain in Darwin when it rains, and the wet season. The grass is non-existent one day, and three or four inches high the next. It's amazing. I know we had our own little cinema at Berrimah.

14:30 Oh, not at Berrimah, at Coomalie. And it was set up amongst the trees. I think the two projectors we had might have been purloined from the Star Cinema, but I'm not sure. But I know there was such a lot of scrounging went on up there, but we had our own little theatre, and we set up a screen in between a couple, strung up between a couple of trees, and a few rough seats for us to sit on,

15:00 and we used to go to movies every now and again, and we'd have all our guys and the military guys that used to come in to watch our movies on one side of the screen. And on the other side, the Aboriginals used to come in to watch it. So they'd see the pictures back to front. They used to be on the other side of the screen. Because you can see right through it, almost transparent.

15:30 But we quite often, we'd go to the movie at night time and we'd walk across this little creek, take our ground sheets to put over us to keep the rain off. We'd have downpour of rain while we were watching the movie. You couldn't get across the creek on the way to come home. Within the two hours. It would be absolutely flooded. That's how heavy the rain. It would be all gone in the morning. Used to really, really rain. We had, oh, I know what I was going to tell you.

16:00 I've got a little bit ahead of the story. You asked me earlier about interaction with the services. We did have, I hope this is all right to go this way? We had, when we were in, I think I might have been at Berrimah Hospital. Some of us at the camp there made some friends with some navy personnel. At that stage in Darwin, beer or any form of alcohol was virtually impossible to get.

16:30 It just wasn't available. It might have been, later in the piece we were able to get a bottle of beer a week, was our allowance. But we used to occasionally go to this navy unit for an evening. And they had all the grog you could think of. Whiskey, gin, brandy, rum. You name it. They had it. All in unlabelled bottles. And none of us could ever work out where they got it from.

17:00 But it was unlimited. And you know, we really loved this. This was marvellous. And one night, apparently, they'd run out. And I remember one of the guys said to one of the officers, "Do you think we can get some?" "No, I don't think that would be wise. No, too risky." You know what had happened? These were navy divers and they'd discovered, down at the bottom of the harbour, one of the American supply ships, with all the liquor for the American mess.

17:30 That's why they were getting all this stuff without any labels on it. The water, the labels had come off the bottles. And they had this case of literally, at the bottom of the harbour. They used to go down and bring up a few crates. That's about the only funny little story I know that came out of Darwin.

So was that one of, when was that ship sunk?

I guess it was one of the ones sunk in the first raid. Be one of the supply ships.

18:00 They'd found this grog down there, and they used to just go down and bring a bit up when they wanted it. Yeah. Amazing, isn't it.

Yes. Spoils of war.

But, Coomalie, we didn't have very much happen down there. We had an odd raid or two, but we were getting a bit far away for them to worry us down there. Of course, that was the idea. Ours was the headquarters. They had to try and keep it away from the target area.

18:30 They didn't want the headquarters wiped out.

That was something I meant to ask? You were at North-East Area Headquarters. Why was it called North-East Area?

North-West. North Western area, it was called. North-Western Area Headquarters. Well, it's North-Western part of Australia, you see. They had it broken up into various areas. That was called the North-Western area. See, it's north and it's to the West. And I think Eastern area was probably across towards Queensland.

19:00 They had another area. That was the area that our headquarters covered.

So, Coomalie Creek was a tented camp, you said. So very different conditions to what you were used to.

Oh, well. They were fairly basic. But our tents were comfortable. We had four people in a tent. The tents were made, we had them built up above the ground,

19:30 oh, about six to eight inches. And we put logs round, round the perimeter of the size of the tent. Ant hills made a beautiful tent base. We used to knock the ant hills down. And pat them, bed them down, in this base that we made. It was like, as I said, it was about an eight inch deep base. Bed them down with a bit of water, and they'd set like cement. And it made a nice firm floor,

20:00 and then you had the tent built above the top of that, and they were quite comfortable, actually. They had natural open air showers. We were limited to, I think, about two or three gallons of water per head per day for ablutions and clothes washing. But it was liveable. You didn't have very much to wash anyway. All you wore was a pair of shorts up there.

Where was the water coming from?

20:30 We used to get it from, actually I used to cart it in tankers from the creek. From Coomalie Creek. And then they put it up into overhead tanks. Pumped it up into overhead tanks. But it was carted by tankers. That's where we used to get it from. I think they purified it.

So, how long were you at Coomalie Creek for?

I spent the rest of my Darwin time at Coomalie. I think I left Darwin, oh,

21:00 February was the raid. I think about March of '43. I could check it if I looked back through my original records, but I would have been at Coomalie probably, oh, eight or nine months I would think.

So did you get to know the local community very much?

Well, there was no local community.

What about the Aboriginal community?

Didn't see very much. There was just odd one, you know, here and there. Not many.

21:30 But we didn't get to know any of them. We were just our little camp in the bush and that was it.

So what happened to you after Coomalie?

Well, after Coomalie I was posted south. I don't know that there's any other, sort of, pertinent information about our time at Coomalie Creek. Only just the camp that we stayed at and did our work at.

22:00 I do know one little interesting bit that you might want to know about, is the way the grass grows up there. That, I think they called it, I think it's spinifex. And it grows anything up to six or eight feet high. I know it grew that much that we had to have our own sort of little tracks through it from one tent to the other. Because you'd get lost, it was like a jungle. And it will grow in a matter of weeks. And then at the end of the dry season it all falls down.

22:30 The Aboriginals calls them the 'knock 'em down' season. The grass all gets knocked down. But it grows up to six feet high. But the grass that grows up there, and it comes up in the wet season. Fascinating place, in the tropics. You know, you have to really be there to appreciate it.

There's a lot of frog life up there.

Yes. Yes.

So you got posted down south. Back down to Melbourne.

23:00 Back to, got posted down south, and I think I might have mentioned earlier, that the policy of the air force in those days was that, if you served in a combat area, they would try and repatriate you for your next posting to get you as close as they could to your own home. Well, naturally I came back from Darwin and had a bit of leave. I naturally went back to Hamilton. There was an air force station at Hamilton.

23:30 It had popped up since I'd left there. And that was the Air Armament and Gas School, it was called. And I was fortunate enough to be posted to that unit, so instead of having to live in a camp, I lived at home. Went to work every morning, came home for lunch, and went to work in the afternoon, just like a civilian job. So that was very handy. And, our headquarters was in T. H. Laidlaw's, my former civilian boss's house.

24:00 So I was still connected to T H Laidlaw, even during the war. We had our headquarters in his house, in Hamilton.

How did that come about?

Well, it was just one of... You see, during the war, it might be hard for you to understand these days, but they acquired, you know, if they saw a place they wanted, if the military establishment decided that they wanted that house for their headquarters, they could acquire it. It was the same with cars, before the war. They called it commandeering, or,

24:30 I think they called it commandeering. There was a law out that they could take certain things, they'd compensate you for it, sure. But I know my father was dreading losing his car. He would have because he had a very late model Chevrolet, a '39 Chev, when the war broke out in 1939. So he had a model car. But he was lucky. It was a two-door. A two-door coupe.

25:00 It wasn't any good for a staff car. They needed four doors for a staff car. So my Dad's car wasn't commandeered. But anybody who had a car like that could have quite easily had it commandeered by army, or the navy, or the air force, for a staff car. The same with his house, T. H. Laidlaw's house. Now, whether he was living in it at the time I don't know, but that was one of the better homes in Hamilton, so it was commandeered, or acquired, or taken over for the air force headquarters to operate from.

25:30 That's where it was. And they had various other buildings around the town. I know most of the operational portion of the Air Armament and Gas School was on the showground. They occupied the showground. They just took over the lot. All the buildings were all taken over by the air force. And there were a couple of garages in the town that they took over and used to store equipment in. That's the way it worked in those days.

26:00 Anything they could get hold of, by law, they could come and take it. But they had to compensate you for it.

So it would have been good to be back at home . . . .

Oh, it was.

With your family . . . .

Yeah.

How were your parents about your return?

Oh, they were, you know, they were rapt, the fact that I was back home, and living at home. It was just like back to the old pre-war days again. But that lasted for about six months. And then it was, oh,

26:30 the unit was scattered all over the town. You know, it wasn't good. Not a really workable set up to have an air force unit in, and they moved to a station at Nhill, because there was a big aerodrome up there,

and they had all the facilities they needed. So we went up there. The whole unit just moved up.

And what sort of planes were at the aerodrome at Nhill?

At Nhill? They had mainly, they had Vulture engines,

27:00 was one of the aircraft I can remember. They had a Fairy Battle [fighter/bomber] up there they used to use as a target tug. They had two or three Avro Ansons [fighters]. They were the aircraft they had at Nhill. I had a couple of flights between Hamilton and Nhill in Avro Ansons. They were a funny old aircraft those things, but, that was Nhill. But they had up there…that was called an Air Armament and Gas School. They used to train armourers

27:30 on to how to arm, what we called 'arm the aircraft'. Like put the ammunition in the guns. Had to load the bombs, and all that type of thing. Bombing was another thing. They used to teach bombers, Aircraft Bombardiers how to do their target, find their targets and bomb them. It was a bombing and gunnery school,

28:00 and they used to teach the gunners how to use, shoot from aircraft. That's why they used to have the target towing aircraft so they could go up and try and shoot the target down.

So did you get very many opportunities to fly in the planes?

Not very many. Occasionally, but not much. As I said, I had a few flights from Nhill to Hamilton in the Ansons, but I never had much opportunity in the air force to fly at all. Much to my disgust. I would have loved to, but I didn't.

28:30 **It must have been frustrating.**

Mmm. It was.

You knew a lot about them?

I knew a fair bit about aircraft yes, but it was just one those things. I was interested in aircraft, and you know, when you're interested in things you just find out about them. I'd always maintained an interest in aircraft.

So, I'm curious about being around town, like, being back around Hamilton for that six months.

29:00 Mmm.

Still working for the defence services. Were there, did you have mates that, who were also stationed back there, or were you catching up with mates?

Oh, I caught up with a few of my mates from home but, see, most of them had gone. Most of the people my age had gone into the services. One mate that I had there, I was in contact with him constantly, of course. My friend Bob Henderson. He was the one that tried but couldn't get into the services.

29:30 He was there. We used to knock around together in our spare time, go out. I think, at that stage of the game, I was sort of getting back to trying to play the trumpet again, because I hadn't played it the whole time I was in Darwin. So we sort of got together and we formed this group to play at a few odd dances around the place. So I was getting back to playing my trumpet again then.

30:00 And that was the main thing we did in our spare time, or in my spare time, was get out and play for a dance here and there. Met up with the old girlfriend and that sort of thing.

So that must have been great, coming back home and meeting up with her again, and picking up where you left off.

It was, it was good. Yeah. It was good. As I said, it was just like being back in a normal civil job again. But that didn't last for very long.

30:30 It was only about six months, and then we went to Nhill.

Yes, so, and how long were you in Nhill?

Nhill would have probably been best part of twelve months I was up there. I was Orderly Room Sergeant at Nhill. By that time I'd got to be Sergeant. I got Corporal when I was in Darwin, and I got Sergeant when I was in Hamilton, so I was in charge of an Orderly Room in Darwin, at least, in Nhill.

31:00 I had about, I think about fifteen or twenty staff there to look after, and was just the Orderly Room and I run everything that has to be run in the Orderly Room of an air force station. There was all the routine orders to tap into, there was payrolls to be looked after, there was personnel records to be looked after and all that sort of thing. Oh, one thing I forgot to mention in Darwin,

31:30 going back over it again. The Organisation Section at Darwin also was responsible for keeping track of all the personnel movements and everything that happened in the office near our headquarters. And we used to have to type up a report every day on what had happened. All the various officers that came in and went out and that was a daily job.

32:00 Now, I'll come back to that later because I just thought I would mention it now. If you can remind me to come back on that, that was an interesting one I found about that came up later on after the war. About what we did there.

You can tell me now.

Pardon?

You can tell me now if you like.

Can I? Yeah well, a few years back we were going through things at Canberra, and we found this place that have got records of all the old army and air force, navy units, and I said to Isobel it would be interesting if I can go up and find out what's in there.

32:30 So we went to this particular unit that's got all these records. They're all on microfiche. They said, "What unit would you like to check up on?" I said, "North-Western Area Darwin." I didn't know what would be there. I just thought I'd like to have a look. Anyway, comes up on the microfiche, and I'm reading through this and I'm reading through that, and I can see this little signature at the bottom of each page, and I said, "Would you believe it," I said, "I'm reading what I wrote about fifty years ago." It was our records, the unit records written,

33:00 back in Darwin, it's on microfiche in Canberra. And the little signature on the bottom was the Flight Lieutenant's signature. He used to initial each page to say that it was ok. It's in the records in Canberra, preserved for posterity.

So that must have taken you back a bit.

It did, it did. But I just thought I'd mention that.

Yes, that's really interesting.

Yes, it's there. It's still there.

So, can you tell me about something that you read there?

33:30 That was it, that was what I said. I was reading, in those records, what I'd written in Darwin fifty years ago previously. It was my typewriting and my own records.

About what?

About, well, about what had happened in the unit, about all the different things that we were doing. I just can't remember what they were now, but you know, it was a daily record of what North-Western Area Headquarters was doing. And that's what I typed about fifty years or more ago.

34:00 I've got more about Sri Lanka out there too. A lot of that's in the War Memorial as well.

So, Sri Lanka sounds fascinating.

Mmm. It was.

How did that come about?

I stayed, Nhill was good. I enjoyed it at Nhill. I was there for about seven or eight, no, about twelve months. I had a little dance band there. Formed with members of the unit,

34:30 and we used to play for the odd dances around the country from there. And that was my pastime up there. But it was basically just an air training unit I was at, and I got the, got a posting from there, after I'd been there about twelve months, I got a posting to the Philippines. I wasn't very pleased about that, I can tell you, because I liked Nhill. It was like a home away from home.

35:00 I had a girlfriend at Nhill at the time, and I happened to be staying at her house in Nhill, for about a couple or three days. What they called pre-embarkation leave. I got a phone call one morning from the commanding officer of the air force station out at Nhill to say that the posting to the Philippines had been cancelled, and I had to report to Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne to an Air Vice Marshall Cole. I'd been sent to Sri Lanka, or Ceylon. I didn't even know where Ceylon was.

35:30 I was completely in the dark about it, so that came out of the blue, and when I went down and met Air Vice Marshall Cole and his Personal Assistant, Flight Lieutenant Hastwell, and I was informed that we were going to form the Australian Liaison and Observer Commission to South East Asia Command. There was only three of us. And that just came out of the blue. Now why would they cancel a posting that had already been set up?

36:00 I'd been posted to the Philippines and it was cancelled.

Do you have any idea why they chose you?

Yes, I do. I found out after the war. It's not a case of what you know, it's who you know. And it's a rather unusual situation, because I found, it was after the war I found out how it happened. A mate that I knew, an air force mate I knew, worked in Personnel branch in Melbourne. They're the ones that do all the

postings and organising who goes where and when.

36:30 And there was a Flight Lieutenant Palfreyman in the Personnel Section in Darwin who was in the next tent to where we operated. There was, our Organisation Tent was there, and Personnel tent was there, and Flight Lieutenant, he was a Pilot Officer then, Pilot Officer Palfreyman was the Personnel Officer in Darwin, and he was a good friend of Flight Lieutenant Fogle, who was my boss. And we used to all be commuting backwards and forwards and talking amongst ourselves. And he knew what I was doing and he I knew what he was doing,

37:00 and apparently, as I said, we were quite well known to each other, and apparently the request came up to the Personnel Records section in Melbourne to find somebody to go over to Sri Lanka to be a personal assistant or personal clerk to Air Vice Marshall Cole. They wanted somebody who was good at typing and shorthand, knew a fair bit about aeroplanes, could drive a car and, you know, had a few requirements. And apparently, this is what I found out later, there were about six names put forward to this Fight Lieutenant Palfreyman,

37:30 he was the Personnel Officer who had the final selection, were given to him. And he rifled through them and he said, "Where's Lionel King's name?" And the chap went away and came back and he said, "Oh, he's been posted to the Philippines." He said, "He's the guy for that job. Get him." It was as simple as that. Just like that. That's how that happened. I was just picked because he knew that I was able to do the job that they wanted, and that's how I got the job.

38:00 **So were you excited?**

Oh, I was excited all right. And my folks at home, oh, they were absolutely horrified. I mean, it was bad enough being in Darwin, at least I was still in Australia, but I'd been sent to Sri Lanka. The other side of the world, you know. "Oh, I'll never see you again." They were really upset and really worried about that one. But I was really thrilled. I thought this is going to be good, you know. To go overseas. It will be really something. I was tickled pink about that one. Because I knew by then that there wasn't much problems.

38:30 Because Sri Lanka was pretty safe, there was no war there. Well, that was in 1940, early '40, '45. When did the war finish? '45 didn't it. About late '44, early '45 when I went over there. So it was getting, you know, getting towards, running down. They had the Japs on the run, so I wasn't worried about that.

39:00 **So what was it like, meeting Cole, was it?**

Air Vice Marshall Cole, yeah.

Yeah. What was it like meeting him?

Oh, that was a bit of a thrill for me because I was only a sergeant at the time. And Air Vice Marshall Cole, at that time, he was one of the highest ranks in the Australian Air Force. And I think the reason he got the job over there, he was a personal friend of Lord Mountbatten. He'd known Mountbatten, he was involved in a big operation called the Dieppe Raid,

39:30 you probably wouldn't know it, but it was an operation in the European war, well prior to the Japanese getting involved in it. And Cole had been in, he was in the First World War, in the RAAF in the First World War. As well as in the second one, he was quite an old man. And Cole was known to Mountbatten and a good personal friend, and I think that was why he was over there, because he was at a high enough level of rank, and personally known to Mountbatten,

40:00 so he would have been able to carry out his duties probably better than anyone else they could have sent from here. As I said, he was a personal friend. He was personally known to him. And the RAAF wanted somebody over there that could get right in amongst what was going on. Our job that we had to do over there was to sort of liaise with the RAF [Royal Air Force], or the South East Asia Command, and send back all the information we could from there to Australia for our Intelligence to work on and for our air force to work on any improvements

40:30 to our aircraft and our fighting techniques. But that was the main reason, we were a liaison mission between the two governments.

Air Vice Marshall Cole was a bit of a legend. He was known to you and . . . .

Oh, he was known to everyone. They all called him 'Old King Cole' he was known as. The happy old soul. He was a fantastic man. Couldn't speak enough of him. He was a real right guy. Even though he was the top echelon. And it was thrill to meet him.

41:00 **Were you nervous about it?**

I was rather awe struck and nervous, I can tell you. Sort of, a sergeant having to be clerk to an Air Vice Marshall. He was the top dog really, and you know, I was a bit awe inspired about it all, but when I met him and found out what a nice guy he was, that soon vanished. We became quite a good little team.

Tape 5

00:30 **All right. Before lunch, Lionel, we'd got to that point where you'd met your boss to be.**

Yeah.

AVM [Air Vice Marshall] Cole. Before we pick up on that, because that sounds really interesting as well. I was just hoping we could go back to Darwin and discuss a couple of things there. Just because I think it is such an interesting and important time in Australia's history. You were speaking before, you said that, obviously there was a lot of censorship going on at that time,

01:00 **and there were differing reports, well the official death toll being seven at that first raid, and then later on people saying there was two hundred. But you said yourself that it might have been as high as a thousand or something.**

Well, that was the general opinion of the ones that were there. I mean, nobody really knows. But this has happened since. When this group, the Darwin Defenders were formed, a lot of the ones that were actually there are members of the Darwin Defenders, and they've, all the ones that were there,

01:30 have the opinion that the actual death toll would have been far higher than the official report was. The official report was brought out, they had, a Commission of Inquiry was conducted just after, within about a month of the actual bombing, and they had, oh, some judge went up there and headed this inquiry, and that was when they released the official figures of, oh, I think it was something like two hundred and thirty, or two hundred and forty, were killed.

02:00 And we, the general feeling amongst actual personnel that was there was that the death toll would have been much higher. There's no proof of that, but there's just the general feeling. Because of the size of the attack and the number of unknown people that were in the area at the time, you see. Nobody would have known how many civilians were there, or how many were on those ships that were in the harbour. So there's no, I mean, they obviously recovered a certain number of people,

02:30 and they obviously based it on that, but I mean, there's a hell of a lot probably been taken by sharks in the harbour, or anything could have happened to them. But that is the general opinion of the people that were actually there during the actual bombing.

So, it's more an anecdotal thing, a collection of stories . . . .

Yes, there's no proof. It's just a feeling that there were a lot more. Even the mayor of Darwin has made the comment that it could have been up to a thousand.

Now, all the, you were talking about there was some looting and people just

03:00 **hightailing it out of Darwin after the bombs had come down. Again, that was something that was censored at the time?**

Oh, yes. I mean, we couldn't even tell people, couldn't take photographs. That's why I've got no photographs of Darwin at all, because we couldn't take any. Cameras were banned, any mention of the attack was banned. I couldn't talk about it at all. All our letters were censored.

03:30 So, you know, the general public down here knew very little of it. I don't think where were, I don't think there were many press reporters up there. The best book that I've read about is Dennis Lockwood. It's called 'Australia's Pearl Harbour'. That's a very good publication in very good detail, and it's pretty accurate. I mean, comparing it with my own experience, I'd say it is spot on.

04:00 **Obviously, you held your ground. You stashed those documents away in that bush shack, you were telling us that great story. I also take it there were men in the armed forces there who, who did a runner. I think you might have mentioned. Was there a lot of that? Was there desertion going on?**

Oh, there wasn't actually desertion. You couldn't really call it desertion. I think it was more or less a case of panic, because they, well none of them were virtually trained. They weren't expecting it.

04:30 Most of them were young blokes. I mean, as I explained earlier, the fact that we had no training, had no defensive weapons to protect ourselves with. I think that it's quite understandable, and the fact that some senior NCOs [Non Commissioned Officer] weren't very helpful in inspiring us to stay and do the right thing, it was just a sort of a panic that just sort of generally overwhelmed a whole group of people, and they just went south.

05:00 I mean, it was, an obvious move was to get off the target area, but that didn't mean to run away. I mean, you just don't do that when you're under attack. But it happened and it was a debacle. And there's been a couple of documentaries brought out called 'Australia's Greatest Shame'. Because of the fact that such a lot just ran away. They came back, but they shouldn't have run away in the first place.

Were there men in your unit?

No, not many of ours, fortunately.

05:30 There were some but they were back within the next couple of days. But there was some of them. Army fellows went, some navy. They just, you know, just panicked and went south. Most of them went about as far as the Adelaide River and turned around and came back in a few days time. But, myself and my mate we stayed, we stayed within a few Ks [kilometres] of the aerodrome and went back the next morning.

So, there was kind of like a grace period, I guess,

06:00 **where if people came back in a short period of time it wasn't . . . .**

Oh, there was no action taken against them. I mean, they couldn't very well, under the circumstances. I mean, because it wasn't only the other ranks that did it. There were some senior NCOs that did a runner at the time, and that was bad. But it's not the sort of thing that you reflect on and think it was one of the better times of the air force. You know, it's a little bit embarrassing to have been involved in it.

06:30 But as I said, I definitely, and my mate, definitely didn't clear off. We got off the target area for that night, and that was all. We were back next day.

And you were saying, you said, I can't remember if it was at the Berrimah Hospital or later on, you set up your own theatre there with some equipment that was scrounged, maybe from various places. Was there, in that period of sort of mayhem, chaos,

07:00 **you talked about looting. I mean, was that happening in the ranks, as well?**

Look, it was a sort of, they called it, what did they call it up there, they called it acquiring things. For want of a better word. It wasn't looting. They were acquiring things. That's what they said, the ones that had been doing it. But it was happening all over Darwin. People were going into houses that had been abandoned, and helping themselves to furniture, pianos.

07:30 Matter of fact, I think we might have had a piano in our, where we had a little sort of a concert stage. There was a piano there. Nobody really knew where it came from, but it was obviously from one of the houses in Darwin. It was happening all over the place, I mean, people were just, at that stage there was sort of no restriction, or law and order, there for a few days,

08:00 and people were just taking what they wanted. People were taking cars and using them. Because the owners had just cleared off and left them.

Now, earlier you also told us about, obviously after the air raids, the defences had to be beefed up, and that had to be done quick smart, and that the Americans got more involved in assisting there. What were the Yanks like and how did they get along with you and . . . .

08:30 Oh, fine. They were a great crew, great crew. The main body of the Yanks was the three squadrons of Pursuit Group, the Kittyhawkes, and they were on the three air strips down the highway. There were other Americans in a bomber unit, they were Liberators, and an Australian unit there as well. They were stationed at Fenton Field, which is further inland.

09:00 But they came later in the piece, probably. At the end of 1942. It took, you know you can understand. It took a while for these units to build up and get the equipment to them. The Americans were replaced, later in '42, they were replaced by three Spitfire squadrons. Group Captain Caldwell. He came in, and they were Australian. There were two Australian squadrons and an English squadron there. They replaced the Kittyhawkes.

09:30 But the Kittyhawkes did the initial defence and then the Spitfire squadrons took over.

And personally, you got along, did you get to meet many of the Yanks, or the Poms?

No, not really. I didn't, I didn't meet any of the Americans there at the time. I did meet one later. I went to a Fiftieth Anniversary of the bombing of Darwin, back in 1992,

10:00 went back for that. And I caught up with a John Roth. He was a member of the 49th Pursuit Group. We got to know each other, and I actually did a video of one of the ceremonies up there, and I was doing a video. Like you're sitting there now. I had the camera set up at the back of this big auditorium, and I was doing a video of it all.

10:30 And he came up to me and said, "Would you mind very much if I got a copy of that video?" I said, "No." I remember he said to me, "I'll pay you for it." I said, "Gosh," I said, "You talk about paying me for it. After what you guys did for us." And we became quite good friends over that, and I corresponded with him for a while. But that was the only actual one of that group that I met, but that was fifty years after the war. But it was interesting to meet him. He was one of the pilots up there.

11:00 **Well, speaking of pilots, you obviously had more to do with the Aussie air crew and ground crew. How were relations there?**

Well I did, as I say, really it's a little bit difficult to explain how this works with the air force, because the

air force squadrons are sort of a little entity of their own. A bit like army units. They stay as their own entity. We were a headquarters, which is sort of separate from those units,

11:30 so we sort of never ever had an opportunity to mix with them, or meet them in our normal day-to-day work. This sort of thing, it's a little bit hard to explain the difference between the air force and the army. Being in the headquarters, you don't get to meet people in another squadron. Now, one of the squadrons would be in their own unit, probably four or five miles up the road, and we wouldn't have contact with them at all. Our group was sort of in their own little area.

12:00 But I know that there was a good rapport between the Americans and the Australians. There was no animosity or anything. So, I mean, we were all very thankful to see them there. We wanted them. We needed them. They were the only defence that we could put up against the Japs.

Now, you said before that you had, you always had a keen interest in the planes themselves, and the workings of them. Now, obviously you're very busy doing your tasks.

12:30 **Did you ever get a chance to pursue that interest and get your hands . . . .**

No not up there, I didn't. One little anecdote I can remember quite vividly, which might be of interest was, the Japs had a habit of strafing down the main road. If they could find transports or trucks or anything that they could have a shot at, I happened to be going up from our Coomalie headquarters one day in one of our unit's vehicles.

13:00 There was another mate and myself, we were driving up the road, and we saw, of course, I don't know if you've been to Darwin or not, but they're long straight roads, just tree-lined either side, and the road's like a sort of a tunnel between the trees, and I saw a bloke, a (UNCLEAR) a sort of despatch rider on a motor bike, sort of disappear into the bush on one side, and then sort of another couple of cars and trucks sort of went that way, and the mate and I saw these puffs of bullets hitting the road.

13:30 The plane that was coming down the road, wasn't one of ours. It was a Jap Zero [fighter], strafing the road, so we had to bail out very smartly and get off the road, but they used to do that. They'd come down at tree top height and shoot up the road and hope they'd get somebody. It was the closest experience I got to one of their aircraft.

Did you get used to that after a while. You were obviously there for quite a few raids.

Oh, we didn't have that. That's the only experience I ever had like that.

14:00 Apart from the big bombing, but we were so far down south that they didn't very often get near us.

When did it become apparent that, or, if indeed it did, that the Japanese would not invade?

Well, it didn't become apparent for about, I'd say couple or three months. Because we were all expecting it at any time, and I know, whenever we had to do a guard duty,

14:30 which used to pop up every now and again on a roster system, we always had to have our faces blackened, if we were out on guard duty at night, we carried our rifles at the ready, and we expected an invasion at any time.

So what was the mood like in Darwin for that couple of months, would you say?

Very tense. Very tense. We were expecting an invasion, for sure. Yes.

But after what had happened after the main raid, where there was a bit of chaos for a few days, ...

15:00 Sure, there was never any panic after that. No, everything was well organised. You know, there was a lot more army arrived in the area, we had better ack ack [anti aircraft] defences. Then the Americans turned up with the aircraft, we felt, I wouldn't say we felt safe, but we were fairly confident, that, apart from the raids, there wasn't going to be any invasion.

So when it became apparent, when you started to feel that there wouldn't be an invasion, did the raids eventually stop?

15:30 Yeah.

Were you still at Coomalie Creek when . . . .

Actually, there were still raids being made when, I did forget to mention one thing, too. As I think I told you. We got our rifles when we went to Berrimah. Before we went to Coomalie. Had then an army drill instructor came in. I think his name was Sergeant Higgins, from memory.

16:00 And he trained, he gave all of us air force chaps, in the unit I was in anyway, we got commando training and learnt unarmed combat. We had a proper, we were then trained in a proper defence course. Like the soldiers would have been trained. Because the air force never expected to, well especially headquarters people, you wouldn't expect to run into a combat situation. But when they realised there was a possibility of an invasion, then everybody had to be prepared and trained to cope with it,

16:30 so we went through a commando course. It was pretty tough, because this guy was an army guy, and there wasn't a great deal of love lost between army and air force, in those days. The old air force was always referred to as the Blue Orchids by the army. And I think this guy decided he'd take it out on us air force blokes. But I tell you, he taught us well. We learnt how to use our weapons properly. We were trained not only with the 303s.

17:00 We were also trained with Tommy guns, and when we used to do guard duty at night, we used to carry a Tommy gun.

So, sorry. They called you . . . .

They called the air force Blue Orchids. That's what the army used to call the air force in those days. It was, well, it wasn't a derogatory term, but it was, the air force were always looked upon as the Blue Orchids.

So to say, a bit soft, or . . . .

Yes, that's right. They looked upon us, you know, we weren't soldiers. That's what they thought.

17:30 **But, after that training period, you guys proved yourselves, and . . . .**

Well, we never, luckily, it never ever arose where we had to use what we'd been taught, but at least we felt then that we had a chance. I mean, we knew what to do if we were attacked.

And do you feel you got a bit more respect from the army guys . . . .

I think we did, yes.

Now, in Darwin you were corporal, is that correct?

18:00 I was an, what they called an LAC [Leading Air Craftman], Leading Aircraftman, when I first went there. That's second up the ladder, and I got my corporal stripes when I was in Darwin. That's right, yeah.

And then when you came down to Melbourne?

I was in Hamilton, I think it was Hamilton or Nhill, when I got my sergeant's stripes. Either Hamilton or Nhill when I got that.

So it sounds like you were promoted quite rapidly.

Well, reasonably, yeah.

Why do you think that was?

18:30 I don't know. I probably must have deserved it, otherwise I wouldn't have got it.

I mean, what I mean to say, what do you think their perception of you was? What attributes did you have, do you think, that they saw as making you worthy of rising in the ranks?

Oh, I think possibly because I was reasonably competent at shorthand and typing and, you know, was able to communicate and help the officer that worked with me. Because you had to be recommended by your senior officer for, you know, for an upgrade in your ranking.

19:00 So I would say it would have come from my superior officer. He must have said, well, this person deserves to be promoted, and that was it. A bit like promotion in a job. If you earned it, you get it.

So, let's go back to Melbourne. You've been told you're going to the Philippines.

Mmm.

And then, you've told us that story. How it was a matter of who you know . . . .

Mmm. that's right.

They put in a word for you there. And you met AVM Cole.

Yep.

19:30 **How long was it before you were out of Melbourne and on your way . . . .**

Oh, it was only a matter of, I went down and met him, had a talk to him for a little while at Air Force Headquarters, and had a discussion on what was to be done, and when we were going to leave and I had a couple of days, I took three or four days, on what they call pre-embarkation leave. I was able to go back to Hamilton, say my farewells, and also went back to Nhill and said farewell to the girlfriend. Well, actually, she was my fiancé. I was engaged to the lass up at Nhill, while I was there.

20:00 And then I went back to Melbourne, and we flew from Melbourne to Perth, on an old DC3. I think that was a civil airliner, too. It wasn't an air force plane. Probably one of ANAs [Australian National Airline], I would say. And we flew over to Perth. And we had two or three days. We waited in Perth for the flight to go to Colombo. Just an interesting point at that stage of the game.

20:30 They were flying, just before this. This trip to Colombo was rather unique at that time, because all the contact that Australia had with England was in the old days, it had been run by, what they called, what was it, the English, the precursor of British Airways was Imperial Airways.

21:00 That's right, they used to fly from London to Singapore, and then I think an Australian airline, I think it would have been Qantas, used to meet up with them there and carry on from Singapore back to Australia. Of course, when the Japanese controlled all that area there, through to Singapore, there was no direct air connection between Australia and England. So Qantas pioneered this route from Perth to Colombo, initially with Catalinas.

21:30 Now, the old Catalinas had a maximum speed of round about a hundred mile an hour, I think. That's if they didn't have a head wind, and they used to take up to thirty six hours to get from Perth to Colombo. And that was known as the, that flight was known as the Order of the Double Sunrise. Anybody who was on that flight got a certificate to say that they'd flown the Double Sunrise, because you'd see two sun ups. You'd get two dawns on that flight.

22:00 That's how long they took. Complete with a radio blackout. It was all dead reckoning navigation. Because they had the idea that the Japs might have had Cocos. That's Cocos Island, about half way across between Perth and Colombo, in the middle of the Indian Ocean, and the thoughts were that the Japs probably controlled Cocos and that they didn't want to let them know they were flying over by having radio contact, so they had this dead silence. But it was a thirty six hour trip over in those old Catalinas [flying boats]. Thank goodness, we didn't go on one of those.

22:30 Ours was a Liberator [B24 Liberator bomber], which was quite a bit faster. And we picked up our Lib [Liberator] at Perth. There was about, from memory, about eight or ten people on it. That was about all they had. Most of the conversion was for extra fuel tanks. Long range fuel tanks in the aircraft to make that trip. Because it was, it was the longest over-water hop at that stage.

23:00 We flew from Perth up to Exmouth Gulf. And they had a refuelling strip there, and they loaded the aircraft, topped up fuel, as much as they could put on it. Because Exmouth was actually the closest point between Australia and Colombo. So we didn't actually fly direct from Perth. The old Catalinas did. But the Liberator didn't. They flew to Exmouth and they refuelled. And we took off, which was a hairy takeoff. We took every little bit of the runway and then almost then some, to get the thing airborne, but finally it did.

23:30 It was a noisy brute of a thing, because they've four great big thumping Cyclones out on the wings, and we were in the belly of the aircraft, which was a bomber. You'd get all the noise, it was terribly, terribly noisy, and cold. I remember a strange thing about that. I've often laughed about this. To get the maximum efficiency out of the aircraft, they had the engines leaned off as fine as they could, to get maximum fuel consumption.

24:00 Of course when you do that, they tend to get hotter, run hotter. They've got the aircraft blacked out, because we're flying at night time. Get out, around about where Cocos is, round about the middle of the Indian Ocean. And they got…you could look out and out under the nasals of the engines, you could see the cylinders are glowing. You could just see a very, very pale red. The exhaust collector rings are bright red, and they've got about three foot blue flames coming out of the exhaust pipes. You could have seen the thing for forty miles away.

24:30 And yet they've got the aircraft blacked out. It seemed so ludicrous to me. But that's the way it was. And we didn't, we weren't allowed any radio contact all the way. They had to fly dead reckoning and no radio.

So, how long had it been since they were doing the flight from Perth on the Catalinas?

On the Catalinas?

When did they stop doing that?

They stopped the Catalinas, would have been about early in 1944, and then they started on the Liberators.

25:00 Now that was to start, I have a little thing, what they call the Rare and Elevated Order of the Longest Top, and it shows a little kangaroo jumping up from Perth to Colombo. Now that kangaroo that they had, that was on the nose of the aircraft. Now that kangaroo is now the same one that they use right through for the Qantas flying kangaroo. It started on that trip.

25:30 **Was that on the Liberators as well?**

That was on the Liberators, not on the Catalinas. It was the Liberators they started to put that on. As far as I know, it wasn't on the Cats [Catalinas].

Right, now, how many hours was it then?

Nineteen and three quarters. Nineteen and three quarters.

And you said there were eight or ten of you?

About ten of us. The idea of the flight was just for VIPs [Very Important Person] and mail. That was all it was for. Just between Australia and England.

26:00 And they used to just drop off at Colombo and then the Imperial Airways would take over from there and fly to England. It was our only connection, only air connection, between Australia and England at that time.

Was there every any threat, now just out of curiosity, you said the Japanese might have had . . . .

We thought they might have had Cocos. We thought they might have, but they didn't they didn't have it, but we didn't know that.

What protection id the plane have? Were there guns?

Nothing. No, it was a converted bomber. There was no armament whatever.

26:30 No oxygen. We were flying about ten thousand feet. It was freezing.

Can't imagine . . . .

You couldn't move around too much, because you were suffering from what they call 'oxygen lack'. You know, if you moved about too much you'd start to puff and pant because of the altitude.

So what did you do, you just sat there.

Just sat there, and didn't move at all. Sat as long as you could. And we had a little box of sandwiches or something for a meal on the way over,

27:00 but it was a long noisy trip. I wouldn't have missed it for the world, though.

So it was, three of you from Melbourne. A team of three.

Yes, there was Cole, Flight Lieutenant Hastwell, and myself. We were the only Australian air force on that aircraft. There was a couple of civilians as far as I can remember, and probably some other navy personnel, but they were all fairly high ranking people, because that was only used for VIP flights.

27:30 **So can you talk us through the, was it night or day when you landed?**

It was morning when we got to Colombo. That was a bit of an experience, or a bit of a surprise. To look out, and after being used to Australia, what last we saw of Australia was all the dry dead, you know, Dead Centre and up the coast of Western Australia, and then see all this lush green tropical vegetation.

28:00 All the palm trees and popping up at various intervals amongst the palm trees, we could see these little white 'dagapas', or some people call them pagodas. But they call the 'dagapas' in Sri Lanka. Little domed temples they had dotted all through the jungle. I know that my first impression of Sri Lanka was seeing that when we looked out of the aircraft. And we landed at a place called Ratmalana, which is used now as a military air base.

28:30 Katunayake is the main airport now, but we landed there, and we spent about, I think a day, in Colombo. That was a bit of an experience, to land in amongst all the totally different civilisation to here. All dressed differently. All the cars that were there were old, really old. What we'd call bombs, back here.

29:00 Another thing that was very impressive, was to walk around the shops and see the number of jewellers shops. Jewellery shops, because Sri Lanka is the home of gems, as you probably know. And they'd have all these little dishes full of rubies and sapphires in the windows of these little shops. I remember, that's one of the things that impressed me. Things that you'd never ever see back here. Different dress. Different smells around the place. Smelt different. There was very few service personnel in Colombo that we saw.

29:30 They were no doubt there, but we didn't see many. We walked around Colombo for the day, and then we went by train from Colombo up to Candi. Which is up in the hills. The whole idea of that headquarters being set up there, was because the English units that were in India found it was miles too hot, so they wanted a place that was reasonably cool, because the English aren't so used to the hot climate. They picked Candi which is a hill place,

30:00 is a reasonably mild climate and they set up the headquarters there. So we had to travel up by train from Colombo to Candi. I was in a carriage full of English people. English service personnel, some of them were Scotch, some of them were cockney. They had all these different English and Scotch accents, and I didn't know what they were talking about.

30:30 I hadn't got used to the accents, but that was quite different.

Could they understand you?

Oh, yes, I think they could understand me, or they seemed to. But as I said, I had a lot of trouble over there in the early days, understanding their accent. They were so totally different.

So was the base, or the headquarters, over there pretty well established when you arrived?

Oh, yes, that was the English base. They'd been there for quite some time. When we arrived in Candi, I was, Flight Lieutenant Hastwell and myself

31:00 went to C Camp, where this English Air Force, they called it Air Command South East Asia, was where we were billeted. Air vice Marshall Cole, I think, had a room in the Suisse Hotel, right in Candi. Candi's a beautiful place. Absolute magnificent hill country town. Lovely lake in the middle of it,

31:30 and beautiful scenery. And famous Temple of the Tooth, Buddhist temple there. It was all totally different to us. But we went, we were taken out to our unit at C Camp, where we had to live. And that was our arrival in Sri Lanka. The thing that impressed me most when I got up next morning, and walked out of the hut to go down to the shower for my morning shower,

32:00 there was about three elephants wandering around in amongst the palm trees. On their own. Nobody with them. They were just loose elephants. Probably belonged to Mahouts. Because they were all tame ones, but it was rather a shock to the system to wake up and find wild elephants wandering around amongst your billets.

So there was a bit of, this is your first time outside of Australia, isn't it, the first time you'd been overseas, so a bit of a culture shock.

It was a real culture shock, yes it was, I can tell you.

32:30 **But not in a bad way?**

Mmmm?

In a good way.

Oh, in a good way, yes, you know, something totally different. You never expect to see. I'd never ever seen an elephant outside a circus before that. To see them wandering around on the loose, like we'd have cows or horses wandering around here.

Once you'd set up there, what was your role, or the role of your team? It was called the Observation . . . .

The official name was the

33:00 RAAF Liaison and Observer Mission to Supreme Allied Command South East Asia. It's a jaw breaker, but that was our title, but that's our official title. We were a Liaison and Observer Mission. Our role there was to liaise between RAAF here, and RAF over there, to observe how the English were fighting the war in Burma, report back on any new developments in technology,

33:30 like aircraft modifications. Tactics, engagement of the enemy in fighting. You know, in the air. Also Air Vice Marshall Cole was Australia's representative in that area. He represented Australia at that headquarters. In other words any decisions that were made for Australia, he had to make them, and pass them on. So we were, our title explained it very well. We were Liaison and Observer Mission, and that was it.

34:00 **So in Candi, was AVM Cole answerable to anyone else, or was it a sort of autonomous . . . .**

No, he was not answerable to anyone over there. He was answerable to headquarters back in Australia. But, we were under the command of Mountbatten obviously, because we were on his staff. What we would call 'seconded'. We were still RAAF, but we were in an English unit.

34:30 See, Mountbatten was basically navy, but we were air force. They had quite a, there were three or four different headquarters there. They had Air Command South East Asia, which was obviously the air force side of it. BAFSEA [Base Air Force of South East Asia], it was known as, Base Air Force of South East Asia.

35:00 ACSEA, sorry, ALFSEA, Allied Land Forces South East Asia. All the units were suffixed with this 'SEA', S E A. Now Mountbatten had himself a little jeep over there, and he had written across the front of it, just underneath the windscreen, BUMSEA. That's what he called that. BUMSEA. Get it? That was what was on his little jeep.

35:30 **Is that, I'm trying to picture it. Is that in the film 'Bridge over the River Kwai'? Have you seen that film?**

Yes.

That, I think is set in Ceylon.

I've seen where they made it.

They made it in the same spot?

No, not in the same spot. It's in a place near there. Where they actually made 'The Bridge on the River

Kwai' wasn't at Candi. It was… I'm just trying to think of the place. They've made quite a few films in Sri Lanka. Quite a lot. I tell you what was made in Candi was 'Elephant Walk'.

36:00 That was made at Candi. Actually I think they used part of our old headquarters for that. That was a setting for that. But the 'Bridge of the River Kwai' was made on the, I think it was the Mahaweli River, I think was where they made it, and of course there's remains of the old bridge that they made. When you go over there on tours, they take you where they actually made it. But it wasn't at Candi. It was between Candi and Colombo.

36:30 **Right. So, how long did it take. I suppose facilities were there waiting for you?**

Yes.

Was it just a matter of moving in and . . . .

Yeah well, we just moved in and I shared a hut with an English sergeant. We had our own little room. A little room boy that used to come around in the morning with a cup of chai, as we called it. Wake you up of a morning, and from there we used to commute between…

37:00 Where we lived in our little huts, we used to go to the headquarters block, which was a big building overlooking the rest of the camp, and that's where our offices were situated. We operated there for quite a while. I think General Slim, I mentioned earlier General Slim was in one of the offices there, and also Sir Keith Park. He was one of the air commanders over there. He was in one of the offices a couple of doors along from where we had ours.

37:30 And that's where we spent most of our time. Operated from there.

You were talking earlier about Mountbatten. Did you have anything to do with him? Come across him personally?

Oh, yes, yes. We didn't strike him very much at what we called C Camp, but after we'd been there for a few months we transferred our office, our Australian Liaison and Observer Mission office,

38:00 we transferred to his headquarters in the Peradeniya Gardens. Now, the Peradeniya Gardens, they're called the Royal Peradeniya Gardens because it's one of the better known botanical gardens of the world. Beautiful botanic gardens, lovely. You know everything in it that you'd find in a top line botanical gardens, and Mountbatten had set up his headquarters in that spot. He would have naturally picked the best. And we transferred over there and we had an office not very far from where he had his office,

38:30 and I used to see him occasionally. He used to come in and see my boss, and they'd have a talk and I'd see him occasionally. I have spoken to him, quite a few times. When he used to come in. Very nice, very unofficious. I know in the old days it was normal, when a senior officer came into the room, you'd stand up and he used to always say when he came in, he'd say, "No need for that." Quite a down to earth person, and he had, on many occasions he'd been known to pick up personnel,

39:00 if they'd been walking from one place to another. Probably between headquarters, he'd pick them up and give them a lift in his jeep. He went everywhere in his jeep.

And how were relations between AVM Cole and Mountbatten?

Oh, they were very friendly. They were good friends. They had known each other from a previous experience. Oh, yes. They were very good friends. Very well known to each other.

39:30 **So it's the beginning of '45, if I'm not mistaken. Is that when you arrived?**

Mmm?

You arrived in Sri Lanka, or Ceylon, at the beginning of '45?

Ah, would have been late '44, early '45. Round about, I think it might have been early '45. I'm just trying to think whether we spent Christmas there or not. I think we got there, would have been round about January '45 when we went there.

40:00 **And at that point, I mean, I guess the war, it would have seem I take it, that the allies were . . . .**

Oh, we were winning. There's not doubt about that. They were still fighting a fairly, had quite a battle with the Japanese in Burma, but they kept, they were pushing south through Burma towards Singapore, and I know we were very interested in the build up that they were getting there. There was navy and ground force build up to invade Singapore.

40:30 I mean, Mountbatten, that was his, he was in control of all of that. And they were gradually building up a big naval and army force to go and retake Singapore. But they finally pushed the Japs out of Burma, down as far as Rangoon. And then, between when they captured Rangoon and the fall of Singapore, of course,

41:00 the atomic bomb was dropped in, on Hiroshima, and that was the beginning of the end for them. And it

transpired they didn't have to invade Singapore, because the Japs had capitulated before then, but there was a terrific amount of armaments. Navy and military build up which was getting ready to attack Singapore if they had to.

So does that mean that you were actually privy to some of these plans.

I was privy to all the plans.

Well before?

41:30 Well before. I mean, I knew hours before anyone else that that bomb had been dropped. That morning my boss had been over to Mountbatten's for their morning conference that they had every morning. All the Chief Commanders had this conference. I remember he came back, and Len Hastwell, that was the Flight Lieutenant, and myself, were in the office, and he said, he said, "Don't say a word." He said, "Mum's the word." He said, "It's all over. They've dropped an atomic bomb." And we couldn't even say anything.

Tape 6

00:30 **Lionel, we were talking about, basically it sounds like you had a position of some privilege and responsibility. I mean you were hearing of plans, major strategies.**

Strategies, yes.

Well ahead of everybody else. Just recap that story you told us of the dropping of the bomb.

At Hiroshima? Yes, well. My boss, Air Vice Marshall Cole,

01:00 had been to this meeting with Mountbatten that morning, and we knew what things were just about over. I mean, Japan had been getting pushed back all through South East Asia, and we realised it wasn't going to be very long before they would fold up, and this morning when Cole came back from his conference with Mountbatten, he said to Len Hastwell and myself, he said,

01:30 "Look," he said, "Not a word." He said, "Keep it quiet. Don't say anything. It's all over. They've dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima." And we couldn't say anything about it. We had to keep it quiet. We couldn't even share it with the other ones. Nobody else in the headquarters, other than the top echelon knew anything about it, so I probably knew about that a couple of hours before it was actually released.

Right, when you say released. That's . . . .

Oh, it would have been officially released. An official press release.

So what, for those few hours you must have just been, like . . . .

02:00 No, we had to keep it, we were exhilarated and had to keep it pent up and couldn't let it go. Everybody wanted to get out and cheer and yell, but we couldn't do it.

Were there other occasions like that?

No, I don't think there were. But I was privy to a lot of the information about the build up of all the naval equipment and all the armaments that were building up for a possible invasion.

02:30 I was privy to all of that, and had to keep pretty quiet. I mean, it was a job that you had to respect the secrecy of it really. Secrecy was a big thing in those days. It was national security, really.

So, were you helping file reports, putting reports together that would come back to . . . .

I was at that stage. My main job was to compile, well with Cole's and Hastwell's help,

03:00 to compile all these reports and send them back. I was mainly clerical work.

So in a way you were the link, you were explaining what was going on in South East Asia . . . .

Asia. And sending it back to Australia. That was it. We were sort of a link between the way they fought the war, and sending it back to Australia. There was one interesting thing about that, while we're on it. They were looking for…

03:30 apparently in the Burma campaign they didn't have, believe it or not, the English didn't have very many maps, of Burma. And we were able to find out that in Australia, at the Cartographic Company in Australia, had detailed topographical maps of Burma and right down the Peninsula. And we had to get maps from Australia, made and printed, and sent over there for them to use.

04:00 And an interesting aside to that, the lass I married after the war, a Hamilton girl, I married her, she had worked at Cartographic Company as a draughtswoman, making the maps, and she can vividly remember the urgent request of these maps of Burma and how they stayed up, night after night after

night, and they were cursing us because they had to spend all this time drawing these maps. So it was rather an interesting coincidence. That after all that time, I married her, and she was one of the ones that made all the maps that were sent over there.

04:30 **That's amazing. And those maps are used to plan . . . .**

Well, they used the maps for navigation, for aircraft navigation, that sort of thing, and for planning.

That's incredible.

Yeah.

So it comes back to a young lady in Hamilton.

Yeah. Went right back, and I finished up, I married her. It's amazing isn't it? That was my first wife.

Was she the girlfriend from . . . .

From Nhill? No. No, I don't know what happened to her. Something happened and that engagement that

05:00 I had with the girl from Nhill broke up, and when I came back I married this lass in Hamilton. Was a girl I'd known from years back when I was at school. It was an old schoolgirl friend that I married. But that's, you know, that's getting ahead of things a bit.

Well, no. We're allowed to jump all over the place. Because you did tell us earlier that you were engaged, before you went off to . . . .

Yes, I was engaged to the girl in Nhill, yes.

So, were you in touch when you were in Ceylon?

Oh, yes. We wrote, consistently wrote and corresponded but we sort of drifted apart

05:30 when I got back. I don't know really how it happened. We sort of drifted apart. Maybe I was playing in too many dance bands.

So you were in Ceylon the best part of year?

Yes, nearly twelve months. We went over there in, would have been either late December or early January. I know we did the report on the Singapore surrender in October, I would have come back about November. So I would have been there eleven months altogether.

06:00 **I'm just trying to get a picture. Ok we'll talk about, I think we'll talk about the Singapore thing a bit later. That's fairly important. Maybe we'll just talk about recreation in Ceylon.**

In Sri Lanka, yes. Well, it was Ceylon then, yeah. Well, my main recreation, as soon as I got there I found they had a reasonable little dance band playing. They called themselves the Air Commanders,

06:30 and I somehow or other must have talked myself into it, and somebody managed to produce a trumpet from the NAAFI [Navy Army Air Force Institute] and it looked terrific. And turned out to be absolutely hopeless. It was one of the worst instruments I've ever had the misfortune to ever have to try and play, but I got into a job with the, what we called the Air Commanders, we had a little group, and we used to play for various shows at the Sergeants Mess. And on about two nights a week we played for the Officers Mess in Candi,

07:00 which meant a really nice meal, because the officers lived a lot better than other ranks did in the English air force. There was a lot of big, very definite pecking order there. I mean, the other ranks and the officers didn't mingle very much at all. But anyway, we had the dance band, and we used to get a dinner there, and play for their dances, and that was great. That was my main recreation. We used to go, have weekends off. On a Sunday they'd have trips up to a place called Nuwara Eliya.

07:30 Which is the hill resort in Candi, up through where all the beautiful tea gardens are, and right up into the hills it can get even frosty and cold. And we'd might have a picnic lunch. There'd be a whole lot of people from the camps. Girls and blokes, and we had a marvellous time, really. Actually, Sir Lanka made up for all the tribulations of Darwin.

08:00 I think Sri Lanka made up for it. Really, a good time away. I thoroughly enjoyed it.

I was just thinking, now that the ladies are out of the room. Did you meet some girls in Sri Lanka?

Yes, yes. I met two or three very nice lasses over there. One of them, I think her name was Sheila, from memory. She was one of the nicer lasses in the camp. And we used to just go out as friends. That's all it was. Because I was engaged to a girl back home,

08:30 and I used to do the right thing, but we were just friends. I didn't get any chances to take her to dances because I was always playing. That's always been my problem with girls. I'm always up on the stage playing, no dancing. They were good company.

The girls there were with . . . .

They were WAAFs. They were RAF girls. WAAFs. They always said,

09:00 we were told that they were nearly all surplus to establishment. They were there just for morale as much as anything else. Yes, they all did work. They all worked in the offices and that, but I think it was a morale boost for the troops.

Is that how they saw themselves?

They saw themselves as that, yes. They did. And I think some of them had been used a bit. That's probably one of the reasons I was able to get on so well with this very nice lass I was telling you about. Because, you know,

09:30 I just treated her as a friend and that was it, but a lot of them weren't treated that way.

You were saying that you were drifting apart from the girl back in Nhill.

Yes.

Do you think that anything to do with it at the time?

Oh, I don't think so. No, no. It drifted apart after I came back. I don't know really why, I can't really explain it. Just drifted apart. Maybe because I'd met the other girl down in Hamilton. That might have been it. It's hard to say.

But no regrets with your experiences in Ceylon with this lass, Sheila?

10:00 Oh, no, no. it was a good experience. I mean, we were good friends. It was the same with all the fellows I met over there. They were all good guys, and from a different part of the world, different outlook, different stories to tell. It was a new experience for me. I mean I was meeting totally different people.

And all the accents after a while?

I caught up with that fairly quickly, yeah.

Tell me about, you were telling me about the big dos you went to for the officers, the dance, the . . . .

10:30 Yes.

Just tell me what that setup was like there, the atmosphere there, and the way people treated each other.

Well, there was a fairly noticeable difference between the other ranks and the officers in the English air force, in the English services, I'd say. Something that they could never work out was how it could be

11:00 that we could have a Flight Sergeant, at least, a Flight Lieutenant, and an Air Vice Marshall in the same office. Now, we only had one little office, the three of us, and there was a Vice Marshall, a Flight Lieut and a Sergeant, we were all in together, just like a happy family. They English couldn't work that out. They couldn't understand how that could be, that a sergeant could be there with them in the same office. They just didn't, couldn't understand it.

11:30 That's the difference between the discipline, well, not to say the discipline, but probably the protocol, between the English and the Australian air force.

So, when you say you shared an office, was it an open space . . . .

Oh, it was an office in a big building and we had our own office. And then the other ones would probably be, there might have been another half a dozen other offices further down along that building. The senior officer would have an office to himself.

12:00 And his personal assistant and clerk would be in another office. They wouldn't be in together. We were. That's what they could never work out. But we used to share each other's cakes and newspapers, when we used to get parcels from home. I'd get a parcel and the other two would be on it. "What have you got this time, Kingy?" You know. They'd be into it to see what the latest Women's Weekly magazine had been sent over, and if I'd got a cake, we'd hop into that. But we were like a happy little family.

12:30 There wasn't that feeling of differentiation in rank that you get in the English Air Force, if you can understand what I'm getting at.

It was like the Australian . . . .

It's the Australian way. I mean, you know it's the Aussie way. I still respected him for what he was. I mean, I would have done anything for that man. I really would have. I thought the world of him. And I respected his position. But there wasn't that rank differentiation that you get. That was in the English services. I don't know whether it exists now, but it certainly did then.

13:00 **It sounds like your roles were fairly clear cut. It also sounds like there would have been some overlap if the three of you were sharing that space.**

Well, not really. Away we go again.

We were talking about the three of you . . . .

Oh, the three of us in the one office together. No, we didn't overlap.

13:30 We had our own little jobs that we did. My main job, really, was taking down notes from Air Vice Marshall Cole and typing them up, and taking shorthand notes. They used to go away, the two of them, probably go off up into India. They had their own little, we had a plane called a Beechcraft Expediter, which was a twin-engined aircraft, not unlike the Lockheed Electra, and that was provided by the RAF,

14:00 provided that for him. Hastwell would fly him, and go up into India and survey what was going on in the various units through India. Get the information. And they'd be away probably for two or three days, and we'd type up the reports to send back to Australia. As I said, we were mainly finding out how the war was being run over there, and if there was anything they wanted from us we would get for them. Like the maps I was telling you about.

14:30 **That was really interesting that story. Was there any other examples where you found your team could have some input in another direction?**

Well, that was the main one. After the war, of course, when the war finished, that was a different story. We had quite a bit of input there with organising the airlift of the POWs [Prisoners of War] out of Changi back to Australia. We did quite a bit on that. That was actually, that was our, what I'd say was the most constructive thing we did while we were over there, really,

15:00 was to organise the airlifting. Getting aircraft from Australia over there to get the POWs out as quick as they could. Get them repatriated.

While we're there, please feel free to tell us about that.

Beg pardon?

Yes, tell us about that. That sounds really interesting.

Actually, as I said, that was one of the things that we did. We organised aircraft from Australia to go over there. Of course, through contact with the air force back in Australia.

15:30 To get them to go over, and where they had to pick the POWs up and get them back to Australia as quick as they could. A lot of the POWs came back by sea, but a lot came back by air as well. The more deserving ones.

So you were involved in the logistics?

In the logistics of that, yeah. Cole did most of it, and as I say, I did all the typing up. But getting back to the recreation part of it in Sri Lanka,

16:00 the playing in the dance band was probably one of the better, or more enjoyable things I did over there. I liked that because two or three of the guys I played with were quite good musicians and played with fairly well known bands in England. And I liked it. I learnt a lot from that.

You improved as a player?

Improved as a player quite a bit. Yep.

So what sort of stuff. What was the standard set for you guys? What sort of music were you playing in those days?

16:30 Oh, we were playing orchestrations. You know, reading from dots. We did a little bit of ad lib stuff. Did a bit of jazz. But it was mainly orchestrated stuff. I think the big thrill of that lot was when the final surrender came

17:00 and we had a big night at, we used to play at the Queen's Hotel nearly every week, too. And that's the big, one of the, that's the biggest hotel in Candi. They used to have dances there every Saturday night. And, oh, it's a beautiful big mirrored ballroom. It's still there incidentally. I've been back and seen it. But we used to play there every Saturday night. On the VJ [Victory over Japan] night they had a very, very big ball there, and the band over there,

17:30 known as the Yankee Rhythm Aces, they were an American service band, hand-picked musicians from all through the area, and we combined with them and formed about a twenty five piece band, I think, for that night. Played up on the stage at Queen's. I think that was probably one of my biggest lifts in playing music was playing that night. Fantastic band. We played with them.

And it was mainly the old swing?

18:00 Mainly swing stuff, yeah. Yeah, it was all the old Glenn Miller stuff and . . . .

How did you get along with those guys?

Mmm?

How did you get along with, what was it, the Yankee . . . .

Oh, they called themselves the 'Yankee Rhythm Aces' they were known as. Oh, we got along fine with them. Of course, we, musicians, you know, all speak the same language.

So would you, would you find yourself hanging out socially with the 'musos' [musicians]?

18:30 No, not really. I mean, I did on the nights we went out. We all got together of course, but no actually, socially, I spent more time with my room mate, as I said, Sergeant Smith. We used to, you know, there was two or three of the girls we used to go out with there. Go away weekends, up to the hill country for the day out, go up on a bus. A big old open bus, and have a bit of a walk around and look at the sights over there. We used to occasionally go to some of archaeological sites,

19:00 at places like Anuradapura and Polonnaruwa. Sigiriya Rocks and other amazing, what would you call it, it's a bit like our Ayers Rock. Same significance. It's a rock about eight hundred feet high. Stands out in the middle of the jungle, and at one stage of the game, there was a palace on top of it, at three and a half acres on the top of it, the whole area at the top was covered with a palace. The ruins of it there, and I went up and had a look at it.

19:30 But there's ruins all over Sri Lanka. We used to go and have a look at weekends. It was interesting to see.

Sounds like you had an interest in the culture there, as well.

Oh, the culture, that's what intrigued me with Sri Lanka, I loved the culture. It goes back, you know, two thousand years back, and they were an advanced civilisation in their day. I found out all about this while I was over there, or course. That's why I wanted to go back and I took Isobel back. I went back about forty or fifty years later, we went back and had a look at it.

So when you were there, you were saying before,

20:00 **you didn't have that much to do with the local . . . .**

Not very much. There were a few local burgher girls. They called them burghers. They were the result of a marriage between the Dutch and Portuguese. The Dutch and Portuguese colonised them before the British, and a few of these families they called burghers. They're sort of, what's the word,

20:30 they're interbred between the Ceylonese and the Dutch. And there were quite a few of those girls used to work on our headquarters. They were civilians, but they still had jobs. They'd have to be, no doubt, very well vetted for their ability to keep secrets, because some of them were dealing with very highly secret information. We used to find, we used to meet them. They were interesting people to meet.

21:00 **Were you able to pick up any of the language when you were there?**

Not when I was there. This is something rather strange, because all the language that we were talking, amongst ourselves and the services, were actually Urdu, because all these English air force blokes had been in India for two or three years, and they'd picked up all the natural jargon in Urdu from when they were in India,

21:30 and they retained it when they came into Sri Lanka. So what they were talking and what I was learning there was really Urdu, not Sinhalese. I never learnt Sinhalese until I went back fifty years later, and then I learnt a lot of it, but when I was over there I could not speak one word of Sinhalese.

Now you're saying that, fifty years later when you went back and picked up some of the language.

Yeah.

When you did that, were you able to cast your mind back and realise what might have been said to you at any time. Like words that might have been used commonly?

22:00 Well, no I didn't recognise any of the words because we didn't have that much to do with the native population anyway, and what bit of language we were speaking, other than English, was this Urdu that all these blokes had been talking about for years and they still used it. All the words they used, like 'dhobie' for the washerman, and 'derzi' was the tailor and the 'parniwa' was the man who brought the water around of a morning. The 'charola' was the man that brought the tea around. All this sort of thing. It was all Urdu.

22:30 I didn't learn any Sinhalese while I was there. I wished I had of, but I didn't.

So a lot of, so you were obviously at an English base. Were there any other Aussies there?

No. There was only the three of us. I didn't know of any other Aussies on that base.

And how do you think the three of you were perceived, were seen there?

We were received very well. I was known as Wallaby, that was my nickname. They called me Wallaby.

23:00 I don't know why, but they did. And, oh, I was received very well. I got on very well with them. I was quite popular actually. At least, I think I was.

Especially when you were in the band.

Yes, yes. I think that helped.

So did, were any of the musos people, like musos of note? Were they people that would actually make a living from that at home, do you think?

Well, I don't know if they made a living,

23:30 but I do know that two of them played with Geraldo. That was a well known English band at the time. Probably wouldn't be well known now, but two of the blokes did play with Geraldo. That was Tony Dunning, and Art Howell, were two of the blokes that I know of that did play with that band in England before they went. I think our pianist, his name was 'Chick' Fowler, they called him, every Fowler gets called Chick or Chook. He was known as Chick Fowler, he had played with Harry Parry's Rhythm Group in England.

24:00 They're also bands I had heard of. They're not of great repute, but they were fairly well known bands. Geraldo certainly was.

You were saying earlier there was a bit of a dust up one night. When you were playing with the Yankee Rhythm Aces. You said there was a bit of a blue. Bit of a fight. No?

No.

No, I thought I heard you say that earlier.

No, no. no. We got along famously.

OK. So was there any tension at all between you? It sounds like . . . .

No.

24:30 **Things were just hunky dory the whole time.**

Oh, no. there was not tension at all. Never had any problems like that. No. Not with musicians.

Going back to that story of the map. The maps of Burma and so on. I can't remember if I asked. Were there times when AVM Cole for example was fairly well esteemed, and a good friend of Mountbatten,

Yeah.

25:00 **Times when he may have had some influence with Mountbatten. Did you think that he had some sort of advisory role in . . . .**

In the planning? In the planning.

Yeah.

He could have. He could have. There again, I wouldn't really know because I was never ever privy, I was never in on any of those high level conferences that he went to. I mean, he would attend them but I didn't.

25:30 I would get the feedback. When he came back he would write the report, but I was never actually involved in his discussions with Mountbatten about that sort of thing. But no doubt he was involved in quite a number of ways. You see, there were Australian air force personnel in the area. There were air force squadrons in Burma. Quite a few air force squadrons over there. I think some of them were flying, what were they flying? Thunderbolts. I think in Burma, there was a squadron of those.

26:00 There were quite a few Australians in English air force squadrons that were over there in that area. I mean, there was a lot of Australians in the area. Actually down in Ceylon. They were in the operational area. A lot of Australians over there. So we still had an interest in that area because of the number of Australians that were there. There were many. No doubt there would be many come forward for this type of interview. That would have been serving in that Burma area.

26:30 **Can you tell us, you arrived there, January, February, '45. The war finished August, September.**

About September, yes.

How did the mood change in that period? Did you arrive there and there was there already a sense that the war was nearly over, or . . . .

Yes, the general sense amongst the British personnel was a sense of wanting to get home. Because

they'd been in India probably,

27:00 some of them, for two or three years. They hadn't been back home, and all they wanted to see was it finished so they could get back home to their loved ones. They could see that it was just about, you know, the Japs were on their last legs. They were definitely being pushed back. And the result, especially after America came into the war, the result was pretty well a foregone conclusion, because

27:30 Europe capitulated long before the surrender in the Pacific area. Europe finished probably twelve months before the Japanese did. So all these guys, they're more interested in what was happening back in Europe, and they wanted to get back. Because the war had finished over there and they were still stuck in the Pacific away from their loved ones. And the main theme, or the main feeling, that was going through the troops over there,

28:00 well, look it's nearly over, let's get it over and done with and get home. That was their feeling. I felt that, talking to them.

Now you told us before about hearing about the news of the A-bombs [atomic bombs] being dropped.

Mmm.

Before you heard that news could you already put a timeframe on the end of the war, or did it seem that it would just go on and on.

Well, we had heard that it wasn't going to last that long. Because we knew of the build up that Mountbatten was getting organised to take Singapore. It was only a matter of months away. I think, I really think he was a bit disappointed he didn't get a chance to have a go. I really do. Because he'd worked for months and months and months, to build up this great strike force. I've just forgotten. It had a code name. I think it might have been 'Myofist', I think was the code name for it.

28:30 That was to retake Singapore, and he wanted to do that, because the Japs had taken it off us, or taken it off the British, and that was an awful blow to the British to lose Singapore. And I think he wanted to blast in there, and really make them pay for what they did. Four or five years earlier. But he didn't get the opportunity to do it. They surrendered before that happened. But, oh, we knew it wasn't going to take long, because the build up of equipment and forces was just phenomenal.

29:00 He had an armada of ships in Trincomalee Harbour ready to go. He didn't get a chance to use them.

So it was the job of your unit to pretty much communicate his plans back . . . .

Back to Australia. And keep them informed of what was going on. Yeah. It was all highly secret.

I mean, basically, I know we said before, but you knew about this stuff before Curtin or . . . .

Probably yes. because we were getting the info there

30:00 and sending it back here, back to Australia. We were privy to it as soon as it happened. But we knew all about what was going on. But we were sworn to secrecy with everything we saw, obviously.

Were you getting requests, from the government of Australia, saying could you find out this information or . . . .

Actually, no. We were more or less on our own to sort out what information we thought would be of interest to them. This was Coles job to decide what he should be sending back.

30:30 And that's why he was a senior officer. He had to work out what was going to be useful to Australia, to the Australian government and to Australian forces.

Just before, you were telling us about Mountbatten's plan was. Myofist?

I think it was called Myofist. I wouldn't be held to that, but I've got a feeling, I don't know why, but I've got an idea that was the code name for the big invasion.

What was the plan, the overall strategy there, with that?

31:00 Well, they were going to be naval and air attack of course, and they were going to attack Singapore. Actually, it was the peninsular at the bottom end of Burma, well, Malaysia actually. The bottom end of Malaysia where they would have had to go in to retake all that. Because the Japs were in control of it. They were gradually being pushed back by ground troops and from Burma down. Down towards Singapore.

31:30 And eventually, we hoped, I think he hoped to get them bottled up down there, and go in and wipe them out. But as I said, they capitulated and they didn't have to launch the attack.

Did you see any signs? You suggested he was probably a little disappointed that he didn't get that chance. Did you see any physical evidence?

Well, I didn't physically see it, but I think, and most of the people would agree, that he was hoping, well, he'd built up all this attack.

32:00 I think he was hoping he could use it, but he didn't get the opportunity. But there's no doubt about it, if the Japs hadn't capitulated, there would have been a terrific assault there. It would have been a bit like the Normandy, yes, the Normandy invasion. It was going to be, it was an invasion force, ready to go.

So when you're drafting these reports and so on, I imagine that must have given you some sense, I mean, you were saying what a privileged position you were in to do that.

32:30 **And it gave you, obviously a great insight into where the war was perhaps heading, as well?**

Yes, well, we did, we knew exactly where it was going. Yeah. We knew all about it all the time.

And how did that make you feel?

Oh, well. I felt lucky to be in that sort of situation. I mean not too many people get to be in that situation. I felt quite privileged. But, that's what I went over there to do, and what I enjoyed doing it. But I spent most of my time typing.

33:00 **And, sorry, with the repatriation of the POWs, you were still based in . . . .**

Still in Candi, yes.

And AVM Cole was, had he moved on to Singapore?

No, he went. Actually they had two horrendous, what they called the Plenary Meeting was held at Rangoon, about a month, nearly two or three weeks prior to the Singapore one.

33:30 They went over and the Japs had surrendered by now. But they went to Rangoon. They were interviewed there. It was a Japanese delegation. They were met by a delegation from South East Asia Command. Cole went over and was involved in that. Then, three weeks later, I think it was about three weeks later, they had the big surrender ceremony at Singapore. That was on the twelfth of December.

34:00 Well, Cole and Hastwell went to that. I didn't. I wasn't lucky enough to get to that. But they were away for a few days and when they come back we wrote that big long report on it. And got all that to send back to the Australian government.

So you were still, I mean, you stayed in Candi but you were in a way involved in that, what was happening.

I knew all that was happening, yes. I was doing all the typing work that was involved in it.

34:30 **How difficult an operation was that, the repatriation of the POWs?**

It's difficult to remember the exact details of that. I mean, I know that we organised aircraft to fly them out. Just what happened prior to them getting to the aircraft I don't know. I think they were probably handled by the local army, navy and air force personnel on the ground, at Singapore.

35:00 And then our part of organising was sort of to arrange from back in Australia, the aircraft to go over and airlift them out.

Now, you were saying that your unit was, in a way, seconded to the British unit there.

Yep. To the RAF.

Did you then, ever get roped into doing any of their work, or were you always acting . . . .

No, always acting, we were completely independent. We did all our own work. It was only for Australia.

35:30 I didn't have to do anything for them. It was all Aussie work.

And in terms of, you were also talking of your dealings with, well, minimal dealings with local people, and the culture there, but what about food and that sort of thing. Were you eating local cuisine?

Oh, food was not one of the better, not one of the better parts of Sri Lanka. Our mess was a sergeants mess, but the cooks weren't particularly good.

36:00 I know I remember vividly seeing one time this great open truck, wending its way up to the mess, with all these great sides of beef on it, and about half a dozen bare foot Sri Lankan labourers, sitting on top of, sitting on the raw meat that was going into our mess. That's the sort of, oh oh. And I'm afraid our cooks were not good.

36:30 We reckoned we were being served buffalo nearly all the time we were there. That was why we loved to get to the officers mess for our dinners on the nights we played at the officers club. Their food was a hundred percent better than ours. And I think the other ranks were probably a lot worse than ours was. But their's must have been shocking. I don't know why it was, but the food over there was anything but good.

So your last days in Candi. Obviously the Singapore thing was taken care of. Once that was . . .

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37:00 Once that was over we were gradually winding down to come back. We, I think, I just can't remember. I know we did the surrender report, the Singapore was on the 12th December. I know that on the report out there, it was dated October that we did the report on it. It would have been, I'd say within about two or three weeks of that, that we then came back home.

37:30 **And how was that? You'd been away for quite a while. How was that? You came straight back. Were you discharged?**

Oh, no. No. I wasn't discharged. We all came back together. I can tell you a little rather funny anecdote here. It won't hurt, it's not going to hurt anybody now. We were due to fly back with a British Air Transport command.

38:00 They were going to fly us back to Australia. And we were lined up on the runway at Ratmalana airport. Ready to go this morning really early. And Flight Lieutenant Hastwell was there, with me. We'd come down from Candi. Cole had been out having a celebration with Mountbatten and his crew the night before. And he's not, no sign of him. He's missing. Anyway, the loadmaster at the aircraft and the crew, they're getting a bit anxious.

38:30 Due time was supposed to take off. But they've got to wait for him, because he was the VIP. He was the only one there. But that was probably known only to the aircraft captain. Anyway, finally, he arrived. He was far the worse for wear, because he'd obviously had a heavy night beforehand. And he climbed aboard. He come out. This staff car raced out onto the tarmac.

39:00 Cole staggers out and climbed aboard this big DC4, a four-engined DC4. He climbed aboard. He's got no badges of rank on, at all. Now this sort of thing. It can only come out now. He climbed aboard the aircraft, plonked himself down beside us. And he used to love his pipe. Loved his pipe. So as soon as he sits down, he produces the old pipe and starts to stoke it up, you see. This bloomin'

39:30 RAF Sergeant Loadmaster came down the aircraft and he blew hell out of him. "You so and so, you should know better than to smoke on an aircraft about to take off!" Gave him the works. He was right of course. Nothing was said from Air Vice Marshall Cole. I remember Hastwell said to me, "This is going to be funny."

40:00 Anyway he had this great big bag with all his gear. And a Samurai sword that he'd purloined from somewhere was strapped to the top of his kit bag, and when we get airborne, he's rummaging around in there and Hastwell said to me. "This is going to be funny." He used never wear his decorations, ever. He had, you know, his chest was full of First World War and Second World War. He had DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross], DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal], DSO [Distinguished Service Order] and Bar, and all this sort of thing.

40:30 He had all his campaign ribbons. He sat up, he put his two inch, two and a half inch band on each shoulder, all the ribbons on his chest. We'd never seen him do this before. And just sat there. And not a word, until that English sergeant came back. You should have seen the look on his face. Poetic justice. Not a word was said. No word was needed to be said. That bloke must have felt about that big.

What did he actually call him? You said a so and so. Do you remember the words?

41:00 A few invectives.

He got to smoke his pipe?

No, he didn't smoke his pipe. Not when he was on the aircraft, because he knew that the bloke was right. But if he'd known who he was, he certainly wouldn't have spoken to him like that. But that's the way he got back at him. It was rather unusual. He had a good sense of humour.

Tape 7

00:30 **Did you, would you have had discussions with Cole about what was happening? For example, the build up?**

Oh, probably. You know, I would be getting it from him because he would be giving me the information to type. I mean, we probably wouldn't discuss it. He would just tell me and I would type it up. Or take it down in shorthand and then type it up. That's what I did. But, as I said, I knew about everything that was going on.

01:00 **So let's say you knew about, let's say, a particular secret operation, or something to do with the information of the air squadron to invade Singapore and beat back the Japanese. Would you discuss that with anybody, or was that just information you had to keep to yourself?**

Oh, I had to keep quiet. Oh, I couldn't discuss it, no. That was secret information. You could not talk about that. Even amongst the other people in the unit

01:30 because they probably wouldn't know as much as I'd know. You see, they're probably just clerks working for other officers and whatnot. In amongst the top echelon stuff. The fact that Cole was privy to all of Mountbatten's plans, I used to have to type the reports. Well, I'd be one of the few that knew what was going on. They'd probably know there was a build up going on, but they probably wouldn't know the details of it.

Was that hard to keep quiet?

02:00 Oh, not really. Not really. I mean, It's your job. It's just part of your job. Like working for a firm. If you're working with a firm, you don't discuss the private workings of a firm you're working for with outsiders. It's a similar thing. You just keep it to yourself. I was going to tell you that one about, that other little story about Air Vice Marshall Cole and how he.

02:30 I was going to tell you another one, a little anecdote about Air Vice Marshall Cole. Every now and again. Incidentally we had our own car provided over there, too. We had our own car and a driver was provided, because he was a fairly high-ranking officer so he was entitled to a car and a driver. And our driver used to take us down to Colombo every now and again to go for a swim in De Gaulle (UNCLEAR) Hotel swimming pool.

03:00 Now that's one of the top hotels in Colombo. But being English, they had one day for the other ranks, and another day for the officers. And the other ranks couldn't go in when the officers were there, and the officers weren't supposed to go in with the other ranks. The typical pecking order. Differentiation between ranks in the English air force. Anyway, we trundled down to Colombo this day to go for our swim.

03:30 We arrive at De Gaulle (UNCLEAR) Hotel pool. It's an 'other ranks' day. That meant I was a sergeant, I could go in. The other two couldn't. So do you know what they did. Both of them just pulled their stripes off. Cole said, "Righto, King, you're in charge today," and away they went. Both went in as LACs. Now that's the sort of thing he used to do. He was a typical Aussie. Now, if one of the English officers had found out about that,

04:00 oh, they would have had a heart attack, I think.

Did you ever get the feeling he had difficulty dealing with the British?

I run up against one officer over there one day that got me a bit narked. Because you're always supposed to salute an officer when you go past them. Well, I was walking to work this morning and this officer came along. He was only a little, only a pilot officer, first rung of the ladder as an officer.

04:30 I threw him the good old Aussie salute as I went past, and next thing I heard, "Airman!" I wasn't going to answer that because I was a sergeant. And finally he came over to me and he said, "Sergeant!" And I turned around and said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Don't you know how to salute an officer?" He said, "Didn't you learn on your recruit course that you're supposed to start your salute three paces before you reach an officer, and continue it until three paces past?" I don't know what made me think of this so quickly. I said, "Sir, when I was doing my recruit course we were too busy learning to use a rifle and bayonet to worry about saluting."

05:00 And walked off and left him. That was the only run in I had with an English officer. But he was only a little pilot officer, and he didn't mean much anyway.

So you had no problem being a little bit insolent? In that situation?

No, but that miffed me a bit. He got his salute, what more do you want?

So, just harking back, I don't know what more you can say about this, but I'll ask the question anyway,

05:30 **which is to do with your inside knowledge, I suppose, about the build up in the final stages of the war in the Pacific when the Japanese were in Singapore. You talked about the air squadrons and the naval build up. Can you recall, I mean, what type of planes and where they were being based and what bases and . . . .**

All I know is, they had a big naval force.

06:00 Probably would have been cruisers, destroyers. A lot of landing craft, which the soldiers obviously would have been in. If they're going to have an invasion, they have to have what they call landing craft. Air cover would have been provided by, mainly fighter aircraft, and probably aircraft from, I think they would have launched that from airfields they had further up the Peninsula. Because they had gained ground coming down through Burma.

06:30 They'd captured air fields and whatnot, so they'd probably have, the longer range ones would probably have flown from Sri Lanka and gone across. If they'd have had it. But as I said, the fact that it fell in a hole, we just didn't worry much about it. There was this build up and I haven't, in my own mind, I can't remember that much detail about it, except that it was a very, very big invasion force building up there to retake Singapore.

07:00 **So were you aware, certainly AVM Cole was sent to Burma to give advice to the Australian**

government and the Australian military, I guess, were you aware of, you know, their advice coming the other way?

Like coming from Australia?

Instructions coming from Australia?

Well, there wouldn't have been much coming from Australia, because it was all being organised from that side. You see, Australia didn't have much to do with that.

07:30 The only Australian involvement in that would have been the Australian personnel that were in the air force units over there. And they were mostly in English air force units anyway. See, a lot of Australians served with the English air force. A lot of them. And there were quite a few in that area. In the Burma area, in Northern India. So they would have been involved. But they weren't getting any instructions from Australia. It wasn't Australia's job. It was the British were going to retake Singapore.

08:00 **And what sort of communication system was it? Radio communication? Telephone?**

Oh, well it probably wouldn't have been, most of it was by radio. Signals. Most of it was done by radio. Secret, of course, it was encoded. It was sent through those cipher machines. You feed it through one end, it codes it, and it comes out the other end, and it's decoded.

08:30 It would have all been done by code. Because there were signals flying back and forth all over the place all the time, so they were obviously encoded messages.

So were you dealing with any of the decoded messages?

No. No. That's all handled by what they called the Signals Section. So the RAF Signals Section would handle all of that. We'd give them a message to Australia. They would encode it, transmit it, and if there was one came from Australia, they'd decode it,

09:00 type it up, and pass it on to us. That all is done through what is called a Signals Section.

Was there a Signals Section based there in Candi?

Oh, yes. A big one. Because they were handling stuff coming from all over the world coming in there.

So that base was very central?

Oh, it was a big base, essential one. The whole of the war over there was run from that base. I mean, there were the commanders in the field, various units that were in the field,

09:30 but all of the main strategy and co-ordination was all done at his headquarters. It was a big place. A big base. A lot of people.

Can you remember, or estimate, how many people were working there?

Oh, look, I wouldn't have a clue. Because I know there were army, navy and air force there. Lots of them, of either of the three services. They were all tangled up in it.

10:00 **OK. Another thing I'm curious about is what your contact with home, whether you had any contact with home.**

Yes, letters, yes, we used to get letters frequently. The mail service was quite good actually. I think they used to come over on that run from Perth to Colombo. That was running about two or three times a week.

10:30 I did have letters, sent from Australia on the weekend, and I'd have that letter and a reply, back to them by the next weekend. In other words, it would only take about three days to get to me. In other words, it'd take about a week. If I wrote a letter and posted it there, it would have time it got over there for the lass in Nhill that I was engaged to, to write a letter, and I'd get it back within seven days. So it wasn't a bad service. It's no better than now.

11:00 But I think, you see, that aircraft was carrying mail. That was one of the reasons it was there, was communications.

So mail just for Sri Lanka, or was it . . . .

Oh, that probably would have carried other mail as well. It would have probably gone on to England, but, I mean, that was, if you can understand, that was the connection between Australia and Europe. That was the only mail run that was on at that time. Well, there was no other air craft flying.

11:30 Where would they have gone? They couldn't go to Singapore. I mean, they didn't have any long-range aircraft in those days to go anywhere else. That trip across the Indian Ocean was the longest non-stop hop in the world at that time. It was about three thousand odd miles, I think. Well, there was no aircraft flying other than those old long-range Liberators that could go that far. And anyway, even if they could, there was no way other than up the Singapore Peninsula that they could have gone. It was too far to go to America.

12:00 There was no planes, no regular over-water flights to America in those days. See, it was well after the war that Qantas started running their flights over to America and to England. But this was all we had. That was the only connection we had. That's why that Kangaroo service was so essential. You know, they never lost an aircraft on it. With all those months, and the hundreds and thousands of miles they flew.

12:30 With that dead reckoning, no radio navigation or anything, they never lost an aircraft. Amazing performance.

Were they ever at risk?

Hmmm?

Do you know if that flight was ever at risk?

Oh, well, it would only have been at risk of an engine failure or something like that, but they never ever got attacked, they were never hit. The Japanese never had a go at them. But they never ever lost an aircraft. They always managed to get through.

13:00 **So it was an extremely important air service in that case, wasn't it?**

It was. It was a vital link, that kangaroo service. It was a vital link between Australia and, there's a big write up about it, there's a book out about Qantas's [Airlines'] life story. There's quite a big article about it. About how it was all researched, and how an original pilot flew a Catalina over the route to see if it could be feasible to do it. It was very interesting. A very interesting article.

13:30 **And how frequently did it fly?**

I think it was about twice a week they used to fly. They used to have, well, it took, as I said, it took nearly a day to get over. It was twice a week, I think that was about what they did. Well, it was a twenty hour trip over, and be another twenty hours back. There's two days for a start off.

14:00 And I think they had two aircraft on it. So they could have been, you know, shuttling backwards and forwards.

So what other planes were there, like supply planes, operating? Were, there, I'm just imagining say, for example, the Red Cross, sending parcels to people in POW camps and stuff. Were there other supply planes that were . . . .

There could have been.

14:30 But not that many. The only other planes operating would have been some of the American transport planes. They used to run the old DC3s [Douglas Dakota bomber] all over the place. They would have, wherever they could get in, that wasn't held by the Japs, they would have gone in with their old DC3s and carted, you know, Comfort Fund parcels and Red Cross supplies, and that. But we used to get, you know, get parcels occasionally, on that run from Australia.

15:00 **And the other thing about the mail was, I guess you would have been very careful about what you wrote in your letters back home.**

You had to be very careful. It was all censored. There again, I couldn't say too much about what went on over there. Not in the job. I could tell people everything they wanted to know about Sri Lanka, because that wasn't, the war had passed by there.

15:30 Sri Lanka was attacked a couple of times. They had air raids there, but no, nothing like Darwin. And then, of course, it sort of by-passed them when it went down the Burma Peninsula. So Sri Lanka was sort of off the map, as far as a war area was concerned. So we were free to write anything we wanted to about what we did over there, but not our work. I mean, I could tell them I had been down to Colombo, and been swimming, and doing this and doing that, or been up to a tea plantation, and played in the band. Whatever I wanted to I could tell them.

16:00 But not any details of the actual work that I was carrying out.

So, another tangent here. A typical day for you, over there in Candi? You would be working during the day in the office, or did you do night shift as well?

No. No. Never ever did night shift. No, we didn't do night shift. Just worked in the daytime. Go to work in the morning. We used to leave our little camp at C Camp, and we'd travel across by car,

16:30 Len Hastwell would have the driver. He'd pick me up, and then we'd go into Candi and pick up Cole at the Suisse Hotel, and we'd drive out and spend all our day at the Peradeniya Gardens in our little office there, and do all our typing and talking, and meeting with people and then we'd come back home at five o'clock and have our lunch in the mess, get cleaned up. And if it was a night out with the band, I'd pick up the trumpet and go with the boys, and we'd go and play at a dance at the officer's club

17:00 and have a good dinner at night. That was a typical day.

Did you rehearse with the band?

Yeah, we did the occasional rehearsal. Not many, but occasional. We played mainly by, you know, just get together and played. Musicians are like that. Unless it's a really big outfit, you don't have to rehearse very much.

Do you recall there ever being, sort of, some very high level officials that were there, and visiting the base, and they might have gone for entertainment?

17:30 I think we didn't have much there in the way of entertainment. Like NAAFI entertainment people. No, there weren't. I can't remember anybody being there. As I said, the VIPs that were there were mainly, I was connected to them, basically. As I said, there was Mountbatten, there was General Slim, there was Air Chief Marshall Park.

18:00 They were all top ranking VIPs, and they were in our headquarters. I was in contact with them all the time.

OK. So the surrender, of Singapore.

Singapore, yes.

Yeah. So, tell me what happened at your base around at that time. What was the lead up to it? What was the process?

Well, I think I mentioned

18:30 that they had the initial meeting at Rangoon, the details were discussed there. There was a delegation from Mountbatten's headquarters, which included Air Vice Marshall Cole, met a delegation of Japanese. And they worked out the agenda for the Singapore surrender. And the Singapore came a few weeks later. I mean, the war was over. But this was the official handing over of power from the Japanese to Mountbatten.

19:00 And that's what that Singapore, that surrender document I've got out there lists. They had to meet and they had to draw up certain plans as to when they had to be there, how they had to get there, times, that was all organised at the Rangoon meeting. They had the big one at Singapore which was the really big, their big official handing over of power.

19:30 Similarly, MacArthur took the surrender from the Japanese Admiral, I think it was on one of the American war ships, and MacArthur took the surrender of Japan, like the Japan mainland, he accepted that while Mountbatten accepted the ones of all the south-east Asian ones. He was the one that was responsible for taking the power off the Japanese.

20:00 That was the official handing over of power, really.

So, you're in the office on the base. What preparations did you have to do? Or were you . . . .

We didn't have to do much with that at all. See, it was all done by the two committees that went over there and had it all organised beforehand. As I said, I didn't have very much to do with that. I knew all about it after Cole came back, and we wrote the big long report. Because he'd been there. He represented Australia. He was Australia's official representative at the signing, and he then wrote that long report,

20:30 to send back to the Australian government. Which I typed up. Took it all down in shorthand and then typed it up.

Right. So . . . .

Hmm?

Right. So he wrote . . . .

He wrote it and I typed it, yep. Or he dictated it to me. But I didn't get to the ceremony itself. But you read the report there. It's all in it. About what happened.

21:00 **How was he when he got back from there? Was he elated?**

Oh, he was always happy. He was a happy soul. Yeah, he was always happy. But, again, he was very proud to go there and represent Australia, too, because he was the senior Australian officer in the area. So that was his job. And after that, we were more or less, apart from that bit of work with the POWs, that was more or less, our task was finished over there.

21:30 **With the work, with the POWs in Changi. I mean, that was pretty horrendous circumstances for those guys.**

They suffered terribly. We didn't have very much to do with the actual POWs, or the evacuation of them, but we knew that they were there, we knew they'd been released, and we knew that they'd have to be repatriated to Australia as quickly as possible. So that was the idea, to get them out quickly.

It seems that you had been pretty protected from, you know, the real sort of hard core stuff of the war.

22:00 I was. This is it. Apart from Darwin, I was.

So you would have heard reports about what the state of those prisoners of war were in? I mean, I'm just wondering how it affected you. Or were you affected?

Well, everybody that knew what those people had gone through was affected. I mean, it was a horrendous thing to go through, those poor devils. They were, that was a shocking setup.

22:30 Actually the ones in Changi probably weren't as bad as the ones in the Sandakan Death March. They were worse. But, the ones in Changi had suffered. They were, a lot of them, on the Burma Railway. You know, they were just walking skeletons, a lot of them. It was shocking, they way they were. And we know how bad they were because of the stories that were coming out after they were released. Before that, we didn't know very much about them of course, we just knew they were there, but we didn't know the conditions that they were living under.

23:00 When that, or course, as soon as they were liberated, as soon as Singapore fell, that all came out, and everybody knew about it, and there was a big panic, of course, to get them out and home as quick as possible. But we were, not being in the combat zone, you sort of don't get into contact, or know terribly much about it personally.

So your involvement in the evacuation was in organising aircraft . . . .

Only organising. Only organising aircraft. That was all.

23:30 **And what sort of aircraft did they use?**

I think DC3s, and I think they had one or two, I think we got some of the English Transport Command DC4s, but I think they were mainly DC3s. Probably RAAF ones. I'm not even sure of that now. What they were. I don't think, I didn't take that much notice really. You know, these things happened. You just went along, and did it,

24:00 and that was part of the job. Didn't, hasn't sort of stuck in my mind to any great extent, really.

So by then were you thinking about your discharge?

Oh, I was wanting to get home. I think everybody was. I know Air Vice Marshall Cole wanted to see if he could come home via Japan and have a look at the damage that the bomb had done. But they wouldn't let him. They said he had to come straight back. I know he wanted to do that. He tried and tried and tried. Tried hard to see if he could come back via Japan. I think it was the only place in the world he hadn't been to.

24:30 But no, they made us come back direct, and we flew back, as I told you. The RAF Air Transport Command flew back, and finally landed at Sydney and then back to Melbourne, and then I had a week's disembarkation leave after that. Got to see the old friends again.

You would have been saying goodbye to old friends in Sri Lanka.

Oh, what?

Saying goodbye.

Oh, yes. Had to say goodbye to all our mates, all the mates over there, and make sure I got names and addresses,

25:00 to write and keep in touch. Which I did. But it was good to get home again, because there's only one home. I think everybody likes to get back there, after you've been away for a while. And I went, I was home for about a week, then I went back to Air Force Headquarters, I think I spent another month or two there, and I was finally demobbed in early 1946.

25:30 That's when I got out. I spent a bit of time at Air Force Headquarters, but that was only clerical work there too. They put me on recording court martials at one stage of the game, in the legal section. Doing court reporting. I didn't like that. Wasn't much fun. But that's all I did down there.

26:00 That was for about a month or two, but I didn't do very much. But then we got demobbed and I went back home to Hamilton.

What were people being court martialled for?

Oh. Being naughty boys.

Like what?

Well, doing all sort of things they shouldn't do. Like going AWOL [Absent Without Leave], and probably stealing things, and bashing people up. You know whatever happens that people do wrong that they have to have a court martial for. You know, being tried for being naughty boys.

26:30 **Were there incidents occurred towards the end of the war, or would it have been a backlog?**

Oh, they were probably incidents that occurred in Melbourne. Again, I wasn't terribly interested. These

were things that were happening in Melbourne, and around the area, there, and these ones that had done the wrong thing, they had to come before the court, and be duly punished for whatever they'd done. I know they used to, they used to always have two reporters doing the court reporting.

27:00 And quite often the old, the barrister that would be doing the prosecuting, he'd get wound up and really get into his case, and start going flat out, so we used to put our hand up and stop him in the middle of it. Because we'd get a bit sympathetic towards the poor accused, you see, so we used to really make it hard for the prosecuting attorney. We'd keep stopping him all the time, so he'd lose their, what's the word, their prosecution attack on the poor accused,

27:30 you see. We'd always let the defending lawyer have a good go, but we'd stop the prosecuting attorney if we felt a bit sympathetic towards the poor guy, if we reckoned the poor guy had been hard done by.

What would you say? That you'd missed a word?

Oh, you'd just put your hand up and say you couldn't keep up. We could keep up all right, but we didn't let them know that.

That's great.

Oh, yes. We do some funny things. And from there,

28:00 as I say, I went back. All I wanted to do, once I got back, when the war was over, all you wanted to do was get back to civvy street, get back and get your life in order again.

So what did you imagine for yourself on being discharged and demobbed [demobilised], and going back into civilian life. What did you want to do?

Well, all I wanted to do was get a job. Naturally, that's the first thing you want to do when you get out of the services. I mean, a lot of fellows just didn't have anywhere to go to. But I was lucky again. Ansett's were still running in Hamilton,

28:30 and I just walked straight into a job there, in the office at Ansett's. I think I got a job as office manager or something there, which was quite easy, because they knew me. Reg Ansett knew me. He was still around, not there, but he knew of my connections pre-war, and I just walked straight into a job. And that was great. Got back playing in the dance band with my mates that I had a few years before.

29:00 And that's what I was going to tell you. A little anecdote about that dance band. We used to play at dances at various places around the area. One of them was at Portland, and we used to play for a dance down there, about every Christmas. We used to go and play down there, this little group we had, called the Frank Thomas Rhythm Group, about a four or five piece band. Quite a good little group. Anyway, we were playing this night at this dance at Portland,

29:30 and there was a ship in from overseas and a lot of Laska sailors had come to the dance. And there was this group of them, and you know the men in the old days would hang around the doors, and the girls would be at one end, and the men would be at the other. And there was one of the chaps detached himself from this band of seamen, and he was down the front of the stand, and he kept looking up at me. Gosh, I started to feel embarrassed, you know. He was a dark person. Gosh, what's going on here. And he kept on looking at me. As I said, I was getting embarrassed.

30:00 And when we finished our number, he came up, looked at me, and in halting English, he said, "Excuse me, you come from Ceylon? You be Ceylon?" I said, "Yes." And his eyes started to light up. He said, "Candi?" I said, "Yes." "Air Commanders! I know it. You play Queen's Hotel. Saturday nights. I see you there!" Now isn't that amazing. Of all that to have happened,

30:30 he'd seen me playing at the Queen's Hotel, and of course, a face like mine, he'd probably never forget it anyway. But that was an unusual experience.

And he'd turned up in Hamilton?

He'd turned up. He was on a ship, he was on a ship, you see. He was a sailor. And it wasn't Hamilton. It was Portland. Portland. It was the port of Portland. That's where the ship was, you see, and he went to that dance and he saw me and he recognised me from when I was playing in the band at the Queen's Hotel in Candi. That's a small world.

31:00 **That reminds me of your other story about the small world. In regards to Len.**

Oh, with Len Hastwell?

Mmm.

Yes, well now. Len said goodbye to me in Melbourne when we finally got back from Sri Lanka. He went his way, and I knew he lived in Adelaide. And my daughter lived in Adelaide, I used to go over there to see her quite frequently, and just out of curiosity, and I used to look at the phone book and see Len Hastwell, and think

31:30 "Oh, being a pilot, he'll probably be out flying in a Qantas plane, flying somewhere around the world. He won't be home." This happened quite a few years, this is fifty odd years after I'd last seen him, and I

was looking through the… My daughter had shifted residence in Adelaide to a new locality, and I happened to look in the phone book this day and found that Len Hastwell's address

32:00 is the same street as what hers were. So I wondered if it would be possible. Surely it wouldn't be the same bloke. Anyway I rang up, I got on, his wife answered the phone and I said, "Does Len Hastwell live there?" And she said, "Yes, he does." And I said, "Would he have been in Sri Lanka during the war?" She said, "Yes, he was." And I said, "Would you believe who this is? This is Lionel King." She said, "I can't believe it," she said, "he often speaks of you." And I said, "Now there's a man I haven't seen for fifty years."

32:30 He's living just across the road from my daughter. So we had, when we met up again, we had quite a long session down at the local RSL [Returned and Services League]. A lot of reminiscing to do. But it took fifty years to catch up with him. And the other friend, Leo Wright, that I was in Darwin with. Isobel and I went back. Sixty years since I'd seen Leo. We went back to the sixtieth anniversary of the bombing of Darwin,

33:00 in 2002, it would have been. We went back. It was last year, in February, and we were going through the Parliament House, in the Parliament House Library, there's a great big mural on the wall with names of all the people that served in Darwin during the war. How my name didn't… I was looking for my name but it wasn't there. How it wasn't there, I don't' know, It should have been but it wasn't.

33:30 Obviously, not everybody that was up there got their name on this. Because there were little patches that had been written on and sewn together. Some lady up there had spent weeks and weeks sewing this great big tapestry with all these names and numbers of all the personnel. And while I'm looking there, and I see this Leo C Wright. I said to Isobel, my wife, I said, "It's got to be my mate Leo," I said, "I've been trying to find him for sixty years."

34:00 Anyway, we went and had a talk to the girl at the library that was in charge of it, I told her the situation, she said, "Well, do you know where he lives?" I said, "He used to live in Victoria." Anyway, she went away and came back and said, "Look, hang on." And she came back about five minutes later, and she's got an extract from the Melbourne electoral roll, with about three of four Wrights on it. One's a Leo C Wright and an address and telephone number, so that night I went back to the motel and rang him up, and there it was. He was in Melbourne and I was in Darwin.

34:30 I'd caught up with him again. It took sixty years to find him. But I finally found him, and we've met quite a few times since.

And where does he live?

He lives in Melbourne and he's the secretary of the Australian TPIs [Totally Permanently Incapacitated] Association. He finished up, he had a big, had an accounting business in Melbourne for many years after the war. But I just sort of lost track of him. You know, you just lose track of people. But I always wanted to catch up with him, and that's how I caught him.

35:00 **Mmm. Amazing.**

And that's about it.

So, anyway, you came back and you got a job with Ansett.

Ansett, yes.

What sort of work were you doing there?

Clerical, again. Actually, accounting. Because I studied to be an accountant. Before the services. While I was still at T H Laidlaw's I was studying accountancy, and when I came back after the war I continued on with that and did a bit more accountancy by correspondence. And my actual job, I was trained as an accountant.

35:30 That was what I did at Ansett's, and after I got married, while I was there. Well, I think I mentioned I met the lass that drew up the maps for Burma, over in Sri Lanka. And then we bought a little country store at a place called Nerrin Nerrin in the bush, and were there for a few years. Had two children. And there was an unfortunate break up in the marriage, and we went our separate ways. But we still kept, to be good friends.

36:00 We still are. And I see the children regularly. And we're still very good friends, haven't had no nastiness about it at all. And that's about it.

And she lives nearby? Is she still in the area?

No. She's just recently shifted to Noosa. To be with her daughter. Her daughter lives in Noosa.

36:30 And my son lives at Portland. And he works for Alcoa.

So what was the little store that you had? What kind of a store?

Mmm?

You said you moved to Nerrin Nerrin?

Oh, a little country store. A little country store, sells everything. Local post office, and groceries and newspapers. You name it. That was what it was. But we were there for about four or five years.

So does that mean that you left the job at Ansett's?

Yes, I did, I left the job at Ansett's and went down there.

37:00 Going to make our fortune, but we didn't. It was, oh, it was an experience, but it was quite, you know quite rewarding in a way. Little country stores, you meet a lot of country friends. They're different to the city people. But my life since then, has,

37:30 oh, I don't know if you want to go on any further with that or not.

What, your time in Nerrin Nerrin? Yeah.

Or after, since the war.

Yeah.

Do you want to cover anything more in the war time? Anything further you want to go on to.

Well, is there anything else you can recall?

I don't really think so. I mean, we've probably covered just about everything there that's relevant, anyway. I can't think of anything else that came out of it.

38:00 **Well, we can talk a bit more about post war stuff. Because you've got other interests. I mean, you've got the Australian War Birds.**

Well, if you want to got into that.

Definitely. So tell us about the Australian War Birds.

Can we just have a break for a sec? If that's all right?

Tape 8

00:30 I think some of them could be working in what they called the 'Waffery', their own camp. Oh I would say there'd be nearly a hundred girls at the Air Command camp that I can think of. There were a lot there. Nearly every office had one or two WAAFs in it.

So there was opportunity for lots of social . . . .

Yes. Plenty of opportunities for social encounters. Yes.

01:00 And we took advantage of it whenever we could. But strange as it may seem, things in those days were slightly different to what they are now. You didn't make friends quite so easily. It was a different way of going about things like that. If you wanted to meet a girl, it's not like it is these days. If you wanted to meet a girl, the girl would want to know a bit about you and what you were like before she'd go out with you.

01:30 And I suppose they find out. They had ways of finding out. Oh, they were nice, most of them.

So did many people, males and females sort of get together in relationships?

Oh, form relationships. Look, I wasn't there long enough to find out, but I have no doubt there would have been permanent relationships developed from it, yes. I know of one case

02:00 where one of my friends, we used to knock around together, he was engaged to one of the girls he used to go out with, so it's quite possible he married her later in life. Quite possible. I mean, a lot of that happened where there was camps with mixed personnel, male and female personnel. I mean, it's natural that those sort of relationships would develop.

And were the women safe, would you say?

Fairly safe, yes, yes. There was not much for them to worry about, really.

02:30 Their camps, they always had what they called a guard on the WAAFs camp. There was always a guard positioned there at night time, so that people couldn't, so there wouldn't be any intruders. They were pretty safe.

So there were no incidents of rape or . . . .

No. Never ever heard of it.

And what about with the local people?

Well, they weren't able to get too close to the camps.

03:00 You see, the camps were, had a perimeter, where the locals couldn't come in. The only times they could get in was if they had special passes, or any special reason to be in there, like special business, like I said the meat truck, with a few of the coolies on the truck. They normally wouldn't be in there. Some of them had jobs to do there, like cleaning. Some of the locals had cleaning jobs.

03:30 I know one man that used to come in was the Mahout who had an elephant. If any heavy work had to be done, or if anything had to be moved that was too heavy for a person to move, the Mahout would come in with the elephant and the elephant would move the thing. Like pick up, if they wanted to shift a big safe from one office to another, the elephant would be called in to do the job.

Really?

Yeah. And the elephant would move his trunk around, the mahout would show the elephant what was wanted, speak to him in his language,

04:00 and the old elephant eventually would get the trunk around the safe, lift it up, cart it out of that room, take it round, deposit it on the floor in there. Yeah, I've seen them do that. They're amazing animals, elephants. I have a lot of time for elephants. But they'd do all that. If you wanted a tree shifted, or a, you know, piece of heavy item of equipment shifted from one place to the other, the elephant would come in and they'd shift it.

04:30 They'd put a rope, form a rope, tie a rope around the items to be shifted. They'd have, and the elephant would pick it up, not with the trunk, but usually pick it up with the mouth, steady it with the trunk, and then they'd lift it and cart it and put it wherever they wanted it. Elephants do all that sort of work over there.

Gosh. It's extraordinary.

I used to, I was always fascinated with the elephants.

05:00 You could see them, the Mahout would have an old well-trained elephant out and they'd be teaching a young one what to do, and you'd quite often find, you'd be travelling along a road in Sri Lanka in a car. This even happens today. And you'd find an elephant, an old elephant, with a big log. And it stopped in the middle of the road, you know, it was tired, it wants to have a rest, so it dumped the log and probably behind it were a baby elephant that's learning the ropes, and it's got its little log. He dumps it. And then when the big one's ready to go,

05:30 he picks it up and then the little one will pick his up and follow it. And the Mahouts, if they're going to shift, say a load of timber, from that spot to that spot, they'll set the elephant to work in the morning, and he'll start carting from there and dropping it there, and he'll probably go on all the morning. And the Mahout will be away in the tavern having a few grogs while the elephant just keeps working. And then the elephant will come along and pick him up and take him home.

06:00 There's some amazing things go on over there. That's why I say it's such a fascinating island. And these things, when you come from a place like this and to see that over there, it's a different world.

So they're very well trained, and I guess they're very well cared for?

Oh. They're very well cared for. I mean, an elephant to a Sri Lankan is like owning a semi-trailer is to a person in Australia. It's an equivalent. That's his lifetime income. So they look after them. Just wash them every day. Groom them. They're really pampered.

06:30 You'd love it.

Oh, I'm sure I would. I'm sure I would. So, getting back to your female friends, I mean, it's a very important thing to have. Well, you were kind of fortunate in a way, I guess, to have female friends in that war situation.

Well, you were.

Because a lot of others didn't, because . . . .

Most people that went into the services didn't have that opportunity. They went away and that was it.

07:00 That was a different situation altogether, of course. So, you know, I was friends with one or two girls over there, but it was only friendship because I was engaged to a lass back home, and I was going to do the right thing, and that was it. But we just remained friends. We corresponded for a while after the war and then we just sort of lost touch with one another. And haven't heard from them again.

You were also playing in the band during that time, so . . . .

07:30 In Sri Lanka?

In Sri Lanka.

Yes, I was playing in the band the whole time I was over there.

So, I'm imagining that those social situations in the, where is it? The Queen's Hotel, and what other places did you play?

Oh, we played at the Queen's Hotel mainly, and the Officers Club in Candi, which is not very far from the Queen's. I used to be out a couple of nights a week, nearly every week. Which was quite good. And getting paid for it, too. Which was another help.

08:00 **So there was lots of opportunity for the service men and women to dance and mix and . . . .**

Oh, yes. It was a normal dance. There was even some of the locals used to go to that. Some of the burgher girls that used to work on the units. They would go to the dances as well. But, and the ones at the Queen's Hotel. Some of the locals were there. Like I said, that Laska seaman that had obviously seen me at the Queen's Hotel. He was just a local, one of the local Sri Lankan population.

08:30 But that was, that was about all we did.

OK. Sorry we went back.

Pardon?

We went back for a bit. We'll go forward. So, being back home in Hamilton, and you went down to Nerrin Nerrin.

To Nerrin Nerrin. I had a shop down there for about four years. Then . . . .

So, just tell me why. I mean, you went from working for Reg Ansett,

09:00 **which was still very, kind of similar work to what you'd been doing during the war . . . .**

It was similar. Kind of similar.

And then a complete change.

Yes, I don't know. People do these things, and then later on in life, you wonder 'Why did I do that?' But I just thought of felt like I wanted to get out and get a little business. So we bought this little country store, and we were there for about four years, and while I was there I kept in touch with the bank I'd been playing with in Hamilton, and then I heard about this band in Ararat,

09:30 this Wal Baker's band and they were looking for another trumpet player in that band, so I joined up with them, and I used to commute between Nerrin Nerrin and here, to play for dances, and we used to go right up country as far as, right up as far as Swan Hill, Ouyen, be away all night, and not get home till six o'clock in the morning. And I think this is probably what was the break up of my marriage at that time. Because my first wife was there and we had the two children,

10:00 we were there for about four years, and then decided it was time to get out. We'd had enough. And we moved to Ararat, and just after that we were divorced. And I played in this big dance band here in Ararat, well all the time, right up until, oh about ten or twelve years ago was when I stopped playing.

So what was the standard of that band, compared to the one you were playing in Sri Lanka?

10:30 In Sri Lanka? Oh, this one here would have probably been better. It was a really top line band, this one. Baker's Modernairs were well known countrywide, in every, you know, everyone knew about Wal Baker's band. And it was a good one. It was a real kick to be playing in that.

Was it challenging for you? Or did you slip in . . . .

11:00 Oh, I enjoyed it. We used to do a lot of rehearsing. You know it was a well-rehearsed band. We weren't just any old group. They played good stuff and we practised a lot. The other, one other thing I could have mentioned. I think I mentioned to Colin [interviewer] earlier. We were, when I was playing with this little group, Frank Thomas's Rhythm Group in Hamilton, we had a visit from the Graham Bell Band. I think most people have heard of Graham Bell. He had a very good Dixieland band here in Australia,

11:30 and he was doing a tour and he had Rex Stewart, one of Duke Ellington's top trumpet players and after they put on their performance in Hamilton, they all decided to come round to the local café and we gave them a welcome, and there was big a jam session there with all that group. And I was playing alongside Rex Stewart. That was the highlight of my career, I can tell you, because he was a world-renowned trumpet player. And I enjoyed that. But, apart from that I've spent most of my time up here.

12:00 I've been in accounting in the car industry, motor vehicle industry. I sold motor cars for quite a while. I met my present wife here in Ararat. She lived here all her life, and we were married, and she sold motor cars as well as I did. What else do you want to know? I'm sort of running out of puff now.

12:30 **So hang on. You went from the store in Nerrin.**

I went . . . .

Well, you were in the store for four years.

Yes, and then I came here and I started to live in Ararat.

What work were you doing?

Ah, I started working as an accountant for a motor dealership. And I did that for, oh, quite a while, and then I decided it might be an idea if I had a go at car selling, so I did that for a while, too, which I enjoyed doing,

13:00 but you probably won't want to go right into my life, right up to now, surely. Or do you?

Well there's a couple of other things I know of, which is your involvement with the War Birds.

Hmmm.

I don't know about that organisation and also your interest in vintage cars.

Well, you see, my interest has always been with aircraft, and anything associated with aircraft, and the War Bird Organisation has been formed for quite a while,

13:30 mainly by aircraft owners, or pilots. And their aim is to keep the old aircraft flying. Like people keep vintage cars going, they keep vintage aircraft flying. And they have war time, why they call it War Birds is that they mainly fly aircraft that we used during the war, like Kittyhawkes. There's a couple of Kittyhawkes restored and flying in Australia. There's one, I think only one Spitfire flying in Australia.

14:00 There's a number of Mustangs. Other older aircraft type. There's a couple of Wirraways [training aircraft]. There's a couple of Boomerangs. They're an Australian made aircraft flying, they belong to the members of the War Birds Organisation. They're scattered all over Australia. But they have their fly ins and get togethers and meetings and air shows, and I just like to be involved in it, because I'm interested in aeroplanes, and interested in things that went on during the war. And that's my involvement with the War Birds.

14:30 And we've got a lot of, made a lot of good friends there, who own their own aircraft, and as I say, we get to meet them, and talk about aeroplanes, and watch them, and enjoy them flying. And that's one of my interests. The other thing I'm tangled up with is the local Grampian Vintage Vehicle Club which restores older type cars and keeps them running, and go to shows with them, and have days out, and run club runs around the area.

15:00 That's another one of my interests, and also local co-ordinator for Neighbourhood Watch. That keeps me reasonably busy. But that's what I . . . .

So, with the War Birds. Just going back to the War Birds, you say you have an involvement. Is it just attending this way, or do you . . . .

Just attending.

Are you involved in the organisation?

Oh, only just in the functions that they have. But I'm too far away from them to be actively physically involved with any restoration work.

15:30 You see a lot of them are non-flying members, but they're still involved in helping to restore some of the old aircraft. I'm too far away from any of the activity to be able to be involved with that. Most of that goes on in the cities, like Melbourne and Sydney, up round Brisbane, up around that way. But I still like to go to what air shows I can attend.

And do you get to fly in any of these?

No. Unfortunately, no. I haven't had a chance. I would love to, but I haven't had a chance.

16:00 **So, with, now just tell me about your car. Your Ford. What's the story about the Falcon?**

Yeah, that one. We called it Mandy. We bought that new, in 1965. We've had it ever since. It's been used day-to-day, just like any other car, and it's a rare motor car now.

16:30 It's like a good wine. You keep it for long enough, it matures with age and gets to be worth more money. And it's a well-known car throughout the motoring fraternity. The motoring people that go to the shows have seen it, and enjoy it, and that's one of my hobbies.

So you drive it down to shows?

Oh, yes. Drive it all over the place, yep, yep. It goes everywhere.

17:00 It used to be our normal car until we decided to, you know, until we decided to pension it off and get something a little bit later. At the time, it didn't, a few years back, it didn't seem to be, it was just another FB Falcon, but by keeping it up till now, and the fact that it's a two door, which is a very rare one. There's not many of them built, it's now become what they call a collector's item, or a classic. But that's, we bought that back in 1965.

What sort of shows do you take it to?

17:30 Well, they have a lot of car shows. Like, well, they're just people that have cars like us. They all get together and display them. Places like Hanging Rock has a big car show there every year. They often have them at Albert Park. We've been to a couple of car shows at Albert Park where there's been over a thousand cars there, vintage cars. They're all lovers of vintage cars, like the vintage aircraft, and they just go out and admire each other's cars and drool over them.

18:00 We're known as petrol heads.

Just going back to the War Birds again. I think there's more of to explore there. I remember hearing about superstitions regarding planes. You know, that pilots would do certain things before they'd get on a plane, because they were superstitious. Or they'd only get on it in a certain way, and touch certain parts.

18:30 No, I've never heard anything like that. No. I've heard of the odd one that might have a lucky charm that they take on their aircraft, or something, but not to my knowledge. I've never known anybody that's been superstitious to that extent.

How do you find pilots? Or say, back then in the war years. What sort of people are they?

What, the ones like nowadays.

Well the ones that flew those . . . .

Flew those aircraft during the war?

19:00 **Yes.**

You see, there's still some of them flying. I have a very good friend, Jack Curtis, in Sydney. He was a Mustang pilot during the war. He now flies civil airliners, DC3s. He went, he came through to be chief, he was one of the check pilots with ANA before he retired. And he still kept on flying. He still flies. He's still got a commercial licence. And he's, you know, just a great guy. He loves aeroplanes. Just goes to air shows

19:30 and flies his little, when he ever has a chance, he flies a vintage aircraft. Probably an old Mustang, or a Boomerang, or a Wirraway. Whatever he can get his hands on. If he has a fly in it, and that's it.

So, they must, do they have different sorts of ways of being flown, or do they have different engineering, different mechanics, you know, from a Mustang to a Wirraway to a Spitfire . . . .

20:00 Oh. Well, they are different aircraft. But they're not to the, you know, old aircraft are like old cars. They're not as involved as the modern aeroplanes. I mean, the modern aircraft, their technological marvels, you know, the big jets and that sort of thing. But the older aircraft, they're simpler, a bit trickier to fly, for sure, but the maintenance of them, there'd be far less than there is on a big aircraft, but they still have to have

20:30 all their routine maintenance, and they still have to have aircraft engineers to maintain them and look after them. But they have to be maintained and kept up to a certain air worthiness standard, the same as a car has to be kept to a roadworthy standard. They have very strict regulations to keep them flying. And as I say, it's not a cheap sport, believe me. Only the ones who can afford to indulge in these things. There's a limited number of people.

So how do they finance the upkeep of these planes? Is it private . . . .

Most are privately owned.

21:00 Nearly all privately owned. I don't know of any that would be making money out of them. They might get an odd opportunity, like they might be required for a movie set, or something like that. Well, there was a movie out just recently called 'The Thin Red Line'. In Australia now. Some of our War Bird members participated in that, in providing aircraft for background scenes and things like that. They painted them up in wartime colours

21:30 and made them look like wartime aircraft, and I have an idea there's another movie being made round about now about wartime aircraft, and they hope they can get a few more of them used for period aircraft. Like they have vintage cars for period shots, they have to have the right aircraft for the time. And that's what the War Birds are involved in. But the War Birds are mainly private people

22:00 that just enjoy flying their aeroplanes for pleasure. And occasionally displaying them in front of the public. Well, you've probably seen Avalon. The big shows they have at Avalon. Always a lot of War Birds there, and they put on a display, and have a bit of a dog fight, and mock bombings, and this sort of thing.

Have you ever flown in a cockpit?

Have I? Only, yes, I have in a bigger aircraft.

22:30 I've been, a few times that we've been back to Sri Lanka, we've flown with KLM [Royal Dutch Airlines], and this is of course well before the days of September 11th, and the twin towers effort, because you couldn't get in now if you tried. But in those days, going back to '83, '84, and we used to fly over, I used to spend quite a lot of time up in the flight deck with the crew of the 747s, KLM 747s,

23:00 and they were mainly interested because of the fact that I'd flown over there on the original kangaroo route, and took nineteen and three quarter hours. And that rather intrigued them, to think that we took that long from Exmouth to Colombo. They do that same leg in about four hours now that took us nineteen and three quarters. It used to amaze them, so because of that I was able to get up in the flight deck and spend quite a bit of time with them. Matter of fact, one time when we came back from Sri Lanka, I spent nearly the whole trip on the flight deck.

23:30 Which was good. I enjoyed that.

Yeah, I bet.

Being a lover of aeroplanes. But that's how things have, how flight has changed. From nineteen and three quarter hours. The same leg now takes four hours. It's about a nine hour trip from Melbourne to Colombo, and nearly five of it's over Australia.

24:00 **Now, you went back to Darwin for the fiftieth anniversary of the bombing.**

Yes.

What was that trip like for you? What was that experience like for you?

Very nostalgic. We found a lot of places that we, Darwin has done a really good job up there. They, the Darwin people have never really forgotten what was done for them during the war by the people that served up there, and every year

24:30 they have an anniversary of the bombing on the 19th February. Every year that's on. Of course, in 1992, when we went back, that was the fiftieth anniversary, that was a fairly big one, and they also had another one in 1992, oh, 2002, sorry. It was the sixtieth anniversary, and we've been back for both of them. The fiftieth was very nostalgic because I hadn't been back to Darwin since I served up there. We found all the old air strips are still intact.

25:00 We found Sattlers, Strauss, Pell, Hughes, Batchelor, Fenton. All those air strips are still there. Coomalie Creek, where we had our camp, that's still. The air strip's there. The camp's gone, but the air strip's still there. The air station, the big air force station is still there. We were able to go to back to all those old places. That was a real nostalgia trip. No doubt about it, brought back a lot of memories. And that's when I caught up with one of the members of the 49th Pursuit Group,

25:30 when we went back to the fiftieth anniversary one. That was in 1992.

One of the Americans.

One of the Americans. Yes, I mentioned that earlier. He was, he'd come out specially for it. Actually quite a few of them came out for that. The sixtieth anniversary, that was last year. That was quite good. The Darwin people really turned it on for us. Put on marvellous meals and they had a fantastic concert party,

26:00 put on a big concert for all the veterans that returned. Really looked after us. Bussed us everywhere we wanted to go, and the young people up in Darwin acted as our tour guides. It was really great. They really gave us the VIP treatment. Because the Darwin people have never forgotten.

So how was that? Having young people, a couple of generations younger, taking such an interest in . . . .

They did.

26:30 It was surprising. They were mostly secondary school students. I'd say probably between twelve and about sixteen and seventeen, and they acted as tour guides, they acted as ushers in the theatre to usher you into your seats, and they were really great.

And they were interested in your stories?

Oh, they were really interested. They were. You could see they were, it wasn't put on. They were definitely interested. And that was so encouraging for our Darwin Defenders Group that went up there as a group, to find that the Darwin people have never forgotten.

27:00 They know what went on. We were trying to publicise through our group what really did happen, so that the people down here, the younger people in our schools will learn what really went on. It's part of Australia's history that should be brought to light.

Did you feel kind of a sense of responsibility, in talking to the young people about what happened, and I guess setting, getting facts straight and giving them an idea

27:30 **of how severe and how serious war is?**

Well, when you talk to young people, most of them are interested to find out what actually happened, because they don't know. It is part of history that they haven't heard about, and you get a lot of different reactions talking about it, but mostly of interest, wanting to know, wanting to know what our history is. Because we're made more aware of it in the schools.

28:00 **So sixty years on from that pretty extreme experience, well, your war years, how do you view war now?**

War? I don't like it. I mean, it's a thing, we shouldn't have to have it. I think war is unnecessary. I might have a different view on life, but life's too short to be doing those sort of things.

28:30 There're too many other things in life to be doing, than to be fighting. I don't know whether it's just the makeup of human beings, or what it is, or whether we've lost touch with something in later years, but there always seems to have been wars, and it seems there always will be. I think there's a streak in human nature that just is not prepared to give that little and take that little, to be able to negotiate a settlement of the differences.

29:00 I don't know whether that's a view that's got any relevance to it all, but people, I think, if they're going to live together, they've got to be prepared to give and take a little. And there's not very much give and take in this world today, unfortunately. I've often made the comment that we've seen the best of it. I'd hate to be growing up, or bringing up a young family now, because there's not very much to look forward to in this world.

29:30 I mean since this terrorist problem that we've got now, that's a feeling that we've never had in our world before. I mean, even during the war, we never had that unknown fear of what's around the corner. I mean, you could take a walk down the street in relative safety. You walk into a building, there's not the chance it's going to be blown up. Or there's not going to be an aeroplane fly into a building. Nobody would kill anybody willingly. This is the point. Life was valuable.

30:00 I don't think I ever heard of anybody prepared to blow themselves up, to kill some other people. I mean, this is something that's only happened in the last few years. I mean, you must have realised that. It's a phenomenon that I suppose we've got to live with, but these radical elements that are prepared to blow themselves up to achieve some crazy idea that they've got in their head,

30:30 it's, I just can't accept it. It's beyond my belief that anybody could do a thing like that. And I don't know what we can do to combat it. I mean, I guess we're just going to have to live with it. Our world's never going to be the same again.

What do you think about reconciliation with the Japanese?

That's was hard for a lot of men that were taken POWs.

31:00 A lot of them would find it hard to reconcile that. When we were selling motor cars, we found a lot of, of course, this is going back a few years. A lot of the people that had been, particularly been POWs, been POWs with the Japanese, you try and sell them a Japanese car. Uh uh. They would not be in it. Of course, that's changed, I think ideas have softened, and Japanese have been accepted now. But there was a lot of animosity towards the Japanese just after the war.

31:30 I think the Australians felt they couldn't trust them. But I think that's gone. I hope it has.

What about amongst your colleagues and, well, I guess you don't mix that much now with people that were in the war. Do you?

I don't. No, I don't have many friends that were in the war. I mean, most of them have gone. I don't have,

32:00 I don't think I've got any friends in Ararat that served, oh, there might be one or two. In Probus, I think there's one or two men there. But I don't have any close contacts with any of the people that served in the war.

What about their families?

Mmm? Families? No, I haven't, no, no contact at all with any of them. But I do worry about the future and what our young people have got to deal with.

32:30 There's a lot of problems in the world to be sorted out. I don't think war's the answer. I don't want to get onto a religious tack, because that wouldn't, as they say, you don't mix religion and politics. I don't want to sort of bring that into it. But there's a sense of values that we seem to have lost. We seem to have drifted away from the old teachings

33:00 and the old restraints that we used to have years ago that seemed to keep us on the straight and narrow, and I think when you get away from that you leave yourself open to all sorts of problems.

So what do you think is important . . . .

I think, important, I think you should have a sort of a goal in life that you're working to. You should have something that you can sort of look up to. I feel religious upbringing has quite a lot to do with it. I don't mean a specific religion but a belief in some,

33:30 a sort of a peaceful co existence between human beings. I mean we're all human beings, we're all similar. It doesn't matter what colour we are. And I think probably travelling to Sri Lanka made me appreciate this a bit more. The fact that there's a different race over there, they have a different religious belief altogether to what we have. I mean, I was brought up Church of England, not that that mattered. I went over there and they're all Buddhists.

34:00 Yet, their views on life and where they're heading is not that different from ours. I think you've got to, you know, you've got to give everybody a little bit of leeway in their beliefs, and I think a little bit more understanding and a little bit leeway towards other people's ideas might help a lot more in a peaceful settlement of our problems.

Did you find Buddhism interesting? Did you have much . . . .

34:30 I didn't make very much actual in depth study of it, it's just that I thought it was a very peaceable type of religion. They don't go round looking for trouble. They seem to keep pretty much to themselves. They've got some funny ideas to our ways of thinking, but I suppose we've got some funny ideas to their ways of thinking. But, you know, they're a very peaceable society.

35:00 And they've, they had a bit of an affect on me, obviously. Because I just thought, you know, you have your own ideas about what's what in the way of, and how we got here, and what we do while we're here, and to find that there's another religion with totally different ideas, but they're still heading towards the same goals and they've got a totally different way of looking at things.

35:30 And I think we could be a bit more tolerant.

So you came from that environment and that culture, which was very new for you, and it sounds like you learnt a bit while you were in Sri Lanka.

I did. I learnt a lot.

Back into the Australian culture, sort of post-war, relatively conservative, was it, for you?

When I came back it was. Yes, it's only in the later years we've changed. I mean, we were a fairly conservative society back in the forties and fifties. It's only that we've emerged,

36:00 probably in the sixties, we started to get free from a lot of the shackles that held us back in the earlier days. Whether it's good or bad, it's hard to say. But the things that worries me in the world today, is the violence, and that sort of thing that you never saw, even that violence didn't happen even in the war time. Violence, I mean, violence happened between armies that were fighting and things like that. But the violence that is happening in our streets, you didn't see that in those days.

36:30 You could walk down a street, safe as a house, in Melbourne, anywhere you wanted to, back in the war time. Didn't need to worry about locking your house up. But now, people are erecting barricades everywhere, they've got security systems, guard dogs. It's an awful way to live. It's like living in a prison, I think. That's why I like the country life. But we're even finding a little bit trickling of it out to the country now. That's why we have Neighbourhood Watch.

37:00 We try to keep an eye on things around the place, so that we keep things a little bit more liveable. But that's the thing that worries me in society today, is the amount of unrest, intolerance. We went away, fought what we thought was a war to, you know, make things safe for everybody, but it's not safer. It's worse. Things were a lot safer before the war than they are now.

37:30 **You returned to Sri Lanka several times in the eighties. Is that right?**

Yes.

So that was, you know, quite a few years, decades on from when you'd been there.

Mmmm.

Did you notice changes there?

Not that much. It's a culture, or course, that doesn't change rapidly. They've got more technology obviously than they had, coupled with all the modern things that we have here, like TVs and all that sort of thing,

38:00 but the place itself hadn't changed. I mean, all the famous places that you go to, all the famous sites, they're all the same. Festivals are all the same. The people haven't changed that much. They're still very friendly people. I find that it hasn't, I didn't notice very great change at all. It's a while since we've been back. It could have changed more now, I don't know. But back in the eighties it was still very much the same as when I was there.

So did you to back to the Peradeniya Gardens?

38:30 The Peradeniya Gardens? Yep. Went back there. We always go back to Candi. Candi is our base actually. We always end up spending about a week in Candi. The Peradeniya Gardens are just like it was when we were there. The buildings are still there, two of the buildings are still there, that were there when I

was over there back in 1945. Two of the big buildings. Mountbatten's big headquarters building is still there, and the little office block that I used to work in that's still there.

39:00 Matter of fact, I think the same table is in there. Looks like it. Looks old enough to be it. I wouldn't be surprised if it was.

So you could actually go inside these buildings?

No, you could look though the window. They were locked up, but you could see in.

So what are they used for now?

I don't know. Part of the gardens. I'd say they use them for storage rooms, something like that. It's a big botanic garden. Mmm. Now what have we missed?

INTERVIEW ENDS