Australians at War Film Archive

Richard Kingsland - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:30 **All right, thank you very much before we begin for doing this, especially at such short notice, we can't thankyou you enough for that. And it is an honour to be able to speak to you. As I said to start with we just need a summary, so if I can go back and ask you**

01:00 **to tell us a little bit about your life, just the major points from the beginning and where you grew up.**

Well I was born in Moree New South Wales in October 1916, I don't remember much of it. Left there when I was about five years old, when my parents came to the city. We then moved to a Depression time

01:30 where my father, who was an accountant was moving around the countryside winding up business. And I stayed on in town, at school, and then later working. From which I applied to join the air force in 1935 and I was with the air force until 1948 having served in Australia before the

02:00 war, Britain, New Guinea, in the Philippines and then back in Australia to staff work after the war.

Can you tell us again, in point form the squadrons you were flying with and the planes you were flying and your ranks and roles in those places.

Well I went over to England in July

02:30 1939 to pick up Sunderland [Flying boat]aircraft and we were going to fly them out to Australia. Three crews, we'd pick up three bring them out, and we'd do that three times. The war broke out and the Australian government who was committed to providing an expeditionary force found that they could provide the force but not maintain it. And as a sop

03:00 they gave to Britain our squadron which was number 10 Squadron and we flew, I flew over there until May 1941 on anti-submarine and anti-invasion patrols.

And then you moved across to the Pacific, what was your role there?

I went to America, I had a job to do in America. Picked up an aeroplane at San Diego California, flew it out to Australia. It was a Catalina.[Flying boat]

03:30 And then took it to Port Moresby in mid 1941 as commanding officer of number 11 Squadron. War broke out, in at least the Pacific War broke out in December 1941 and we were then cast in the unlikely role of long range bombing force. I came back to command a

04:00 large RAAF base at Rathmines New South Wales where I met my beautiful bride, who was on a neighbouring station. I was then appointed to be director of operational training at air force head quarters. As I say when I am fat and old and short of breath I will join the scarlet majors at the base. And I was there for a year and then I moved back to the

04:30 south west Pacific to Moratai where I was the director of intelligence with the air force and with General Kennedy of the United States Air Force. After the war I was appointed to a post as director general of organization. And from there I moved to airport manager Mascot.

05:00 I won't go into the details, but I moved out of that to fly as a pilot with TAA [Trans Australia Airways]. Back to civil aviation as a director in South Australia and then Northern Territory, and then back to the Department of Air, from which I moved later to Department of Defence where I became a deputy. And then in 1963 to head up a

05:30 large, junior, but a very large department, Department of the Interior. A rag bag department that did everything from administering Canberra, Northern Territory and anything else nobody knew what to do with, ten thousand staff. Then later in 1970 to head up Department of Veterans Affairs which I had for eleven years. Then retired, I thought quietly

06:00 to ruminate over what happened in the past, but found myself in a dozen or more widely diverse jobs. From Chairman of the Uranium Advisory Council to Australian Chairman of the Commonwealth Films Board of Review, and so on. I was also National Honorary Secretary of the National Heart Foundation for about fifteen years.

06:30 And I am slowly finally extracting myself from these odd strange jobs which I found myself in.

What about your family after the war?

My family, my wife had been very tolerant, because as I moved I moved first and then had to find accommodation for her, for us. And she moved up, and as soon as we were settled there of course

07:00 I moved somewhere else. And she had a very rough time, she was very tolerant and resilient. And we had first one child, whom I didn't see until I came back from the war, she was born in 1945, May 1945. I came back after that and saw her for the first time a few months later.

07:30 Then we had another child when we were in Melbourne and another child when we were in Adelaide.

All right, just having a bit of an audio. That was the summary we were looking for, you have obviously had a long and distinguished career, but we will be focussing mainly on your war service but before we do we will go back and talk about your childhood a little bit because I think it is relevant and it is also interesting for the archive to have that kind of information.

08:00 **Can you tell me about your family? What was your father and mother like?**

My father was trained as an accountant. He ran a store in Moree New South Wales and was doing really well, and thought he would chance his arm down in Sydney and probably set up a chain of mercer shops. Good accountant. Unfortunately the Depression came and stopped that

08:30 but he was picked up by Hungerford Spooner Accountants in Sydney and was moved out into the country, and had the incredible job of moving point to point winding up businesses. I stayed, I could have gone with him, funds were very short and I stayed on and was self-supporting in Sydney while I was at school. And then later,

09:00 finding the pressure too great on funds taking a job, having to leave school where I was doing extremely well according to the reports which I still have. And got a job with a wholesale grocer, Huxtable and Company in Sussex Street in Sydney. From where I took a job in Bennett and Wood Limited in Sydney

09:30 who manufactured Speedwell cycles, who were agents for BSA motorcycles. It was quite a big firm.

How old were you at this stage, when you first started working?

I started working when I was fourteen and I finished working at Bennett and Wood when I was eighteen when the air force came up. The reason I joined the air force was, apart from the fact that I had virtually no money, it made me much of a loner as a youngster

10:00 because the other blokes, my other relations were well-heeled. I had no funds at all which meant that I couldn't engage in the other activities that they did. I played a good stick of tennis by the way and was with the junior coaching team. But I couldn't do what the others did. I decided to better myself,

10:30 I taught myself Pitman Shorthand. I bought myself Pitman Shorthand instructor key. And I lived shorthand for nearly a year, I don't know whether you have done shorthand, but I got sixty words a minute in three months, a hundred and twenty in six, and in a year I was doing a hundred and sixty, easily, writing exquisitely good shorthand by the way because I didn't have a teacher and I just followed the

11:00 book but I thought I had to write about that size. I applied for a job at Hansard and they knocked, they said where is your certificate? I didn't have a certificate. I went to the college to get one and they wouldn't give me a certificate unless I joined them as a student, I was short of funds but I did join them. And I got fed up with everything and then applied for a New

11:30 South Wales police cadet, cadet patrol officer New Guinea, navy, cadet in the army, air cadet in the air force and a couple of other and the air force came in first. And I was selected by an Air Vice Marshal Goble of which I will probably speak more later.

We'll talk a bit more about joining the air force in a minute. We will just go back a little bit. You mentioned that life was quite hard, you were short of funds

12:00 **quite often, in what ways was your life made difficult by that monetary situation?**

Well it meant that because the other members of my family were fairly well-heeled, I always felt demeaned by not being able to participate in the things that they were doing. They were going to private schools, I went to Sydney High School, which was a select

12:30 school and member of the GPS [Greater Public Schools]. But I always felt sad that I couldn't do the wild and woolly things that the others were doing, no holidays and things like that.

Who were the others you are talking about, your extended family, your immediate family?

No cousins of mine. One was here the other night, he was an eminent doctor, child specialist,

13:00 he retired a few years ago. His father was an accountant in Castlereagh Street. Another one was a traveller for Distillers Proprietary Limited. Whisky traveller, but it was a very lucrative job travelling around the country. Another was a, managing quite a large business in town. I always felt sensitive to the fact that I was short of funds.

13:30 **What about, did you have any brothers or sisters?**

I had a sister. Five years younger than I was, she joined the air force when war broke out and had quite a good career in the air force, she died a few years ago.

Did you live together growing up?

Yes we lived together until I was fourteen, and then I, the family

14:00 went bush moving from point to point and I stayed on in town and I found a very good landlady, a very kind landlady who fed me well in the morning and I stretched my funds to my lunch and so-called dinner.

Where did you live in Sydney up until the point you were fourteen?

In Clovelly, in Clovelly in the Coogee area it is, Arden Street Clovelly. Pleasant house.

14:30 We weren't, I was never hungry and we weren't poverty stricken. But I just didn't have the flexibility that I might have enjoyed.

What was Arden Street Clovelly like in those days?

Well it was a small place, very parochial. There was a small shopping centre in Clovelly Road, you knew a lot of your neighbours. A lot of nice

15:00 people around there. And Clovelly the beach on the bay, it is a cove, it was open at that time, it didn't have a breakwater, very pleasant swimming spot. And used to go down there and bake and that is the reason I have solar keratosis at the moment.

What other pastimes did you enjoy as a young man? Swimming in the ocean was one, what else did you do?

Tennis. I was a good tennis player, and

15:30 I was picked for, I played for Sydney Boys High School with some eminent player, I was not in their class, but a bloke named Vivien McGrath who was the first two-handed backhander in Australia, it amazed everyone that anyone should use two hands on a backhand. But I played a good stick of tennis and I was picked for the junior coaching team. It was a good diversion,

16:00 also I joined the Army Reserve, not because I wanted to fight anybody but because they had camps every second weekend and you spent two days there and you got two shillings a day, which augmented my income quite considerably, because the pay that I was getting for a start with Huxtable and Company was fifteen shillings a week on which I had to support myself. Then when I got to Bennett and Wood I was up to over a pound a week,

16:30 a couple of shillings a week was very very helpful. You became very street-wise on a lot of things, on what to eat and how to eat. Indeed in going to school from Clovelly to Sydney Boys High School I am ashamed to say that I never paid a fare. I used to watch where the conductor on these toast rack trams, hop on the other end.

17:00 And as he moved down the other end I would slip off the other side, not noticeably, and then wait for the next tram and make my way to school.

Can you describe those toast rack trams for us? For someone who has never seen one?

A toast rack? Well it is a tram which has a running board, and the conductor has a strap around his neck with his book of tickets in front,

17:30 and he hangs on to the side and moves from point to point, leans on inside as he lets his arm go to take tickets and take money and grabs again to go down to the next one. And it was a series of, they were seats than ran across the whole width of the tram. And one facing the other, and then there was another compartment, one facing the other. Trams could go both ways, they had a steering at front and back.

18:00 So when they got to the end the driver went to the other end, put his controls in and off he went.

Was there very much traffic on Sydney streets in those days?

It was nothing like as intense as it is now as you would imagine. I mean our peak periods there was always a fair amount of traffic but nothing to match what we see today in aerial photographs

18:30 of major highways and roads.

I have done some driving around Sydney lately, it is not something I recommend. Can you tell me a bit about your schooling? You said you were a good student, what did you enjoy at school?

I knew I had, I wanted to be a teacher and the reason I wanted to be a teacher was one way I made money as a youngster was coaching, which was rather presumptuous of me because I was coaching people for the same examination that I was gearing for

19:00 and because I was teaching myself in some ways, I think I was a slow learner, a very methodical, and I could get other people, and I have even had letters this week, this month, people thanking me for this assistance I gave them coaching them for the examinations that I was doing myself, first, second and

19:30 third year at high school. And because I read things very thoroughly and very slowly and I was very patient, I had at any one time three kids, three kids to coach. And I got small amounts of money from each of them.

How did you start that game? Coaching, what led to that?

Well I had a cousin who I was very fond of right around the corner, delightful woman, who she was, and I started teaching her and she told her friends and her

20:00 friends came around and said will you do me too? So that kept me very busy after school.

What were your favourite and least favourite subjects at school?

I liked them all I don't think I was fascinated by any in particular. I loved the English language and I loved the sound of French.

20:30 But my tastes were varied. When I left school as I found I just had to in order to get funds, when I went to Huxtables I then still wanted to be a teacher, and I used to look out for the university calendar, pick a subject, write down the prescribed reading, go to the New South Wales Public Library in Macquarie Street

21:00 and stay there sometimes afternoons and into the night, reading the subject. Reading the books that were recommended and at the end of the year for fun, try to get a hold of the examination papers for fun to see if I had equipped myself well enough by this reading. Which had some strange repercussions in later life. In 1981 I was flying

21:30 between Sydney and Melbourne, and sitting next to an interesting man. And I was pointing out to him some geological features on Mount Hotham as we flew over with the snow on it and I said, you know I said it is a very interesting one, and we are a very old country, and pointing this out this fellow. He was very very interested. And he said how do you know all of this? And I said well as a matter of fact I used to, and I told him the story briefly,

22:00 of reading for my education as a young person. By this time by the way I was head of a department and about to retire from the public service. And he said what books did you read? And I said well the one with Mount Hotham was Geomorphology of Victoria, he said who was it written by? Well I said that was Shelbourne Hills, oh he said that's me. Quite incredible, we got to talking, he asked me what I was going to do when I was finished.

22:30 And he then, we went into a private room when we got to Mascot and he said he was writing at the moment three books, and of course I told him what I liked and didn't like about his Geomorphology, how it was hard, and too easy at times for me. And he thought of a very good idea to do a lay version of these three small books that he was doing at the time, and offered me the job of

23:00 taking his basic tome and when I couldn't understand anything, find out and get him to simplify it for the lay reader. Sounds like a very good story, but it was only this week throwing papers out, but I haven't thrown this one out was a letter from Shelbourne Hills saying come on now, please he said it won't take that much work and I really would like you to do this

23:30 but I can understand if you can't.

Wow. Where did that determination and ambition come from?

I, well I think the time of the Depression was a period of survival rather than ambition. I would have liked to be a teacher which is a very modest target, so I didn't have any great ambition

24:00 to be a leader of men or a wise man. I would have just liked to be in a secure position, because security was very important in people's minds those days and looked like a job that went on and on and on.

What signs of the Depression were around you? Were obvious to the eye?

24:30 It was the number of people that were out of work, decent people that were on a very very low dole, very low dole. Going to soup kitchens, and people of great capacity, ashamed that they weren't able, and this is the big thing, ashamed of not having a job. And my father by the way ultimately, when he finished

his run with Hungerford

25:00 Spooner moved up north into Cairns and Townsville, looking for work and sending what money he could down to my mother. It was a shocking time for people's dignity. There was soup kitchens around there, incidentally there is soup kitchens down in Canberra at the moment, every Friday night you can go down there, five hundred people go to the soup kitchen there.

25:30 I don't think they know how to handle their money, it's a dreadful thing to say but I reckon you give me the dole today and give me a, even without having my own accommodation, I reckon I could live pretty well based on how I operated in those days past. But the things that you saw in those days, with the Anzacs, when I say Anzacs, World War I veterans often sitting in the streets with their

26:00 hands out for money. And I used to look at them, particularly on Anzac Day when some of them were drunk, and I was horrified it was a disgusting sight to me. It totally disgusted me to see people in that situation.

What did that Anzac tradition mean to you growing up?

Nothing. Nothing at all. I just saw these people I saw the ex-servicemen getting together on

26:30 Anzac Day or getting drunk, of course which I was no prude but I wasn't a drinker, but I couldn't relate to that at all. Later, even after I was commissioned in the air force, in 1936 in the air force mess at Laverton Victoria we would have a dining in night

27:00 and the commanding officer and his deputies would invite their ex World War I colleagues in. And these blokes would come in, one with an arm off and one with a leg off, and frankly in 1936 when I was twenty I just thought they were silly old buggers. It really was, I am ashamed to say that's what I thought those days, because they used to get stuck into the liquor, smoked, and laughed raucously and things like that. And I was unimpressed.

27:30 **Did you learn much about the First World War in school as a child?**

Nothing at all. Nothing at all, we had, in our, I went to school when my father went away, he came to Bungendore to set up a store and I went to Camden Grammar School, which was a

28:00 good school, people from all around Australia were sent there. People from the islands, or outback and so on. Run by Reverend Marden and focussed on English history, and I knew English history very well. I did no Australian history at grammar school, I did no Australian history at Randwick Public School where I went after that, nor at Sydney Boys High School. We did English history, which I

28:30 got to know and became part of my being.

When you say it came to be a part of you being did you identify strongly with being British or?

No. But I knew a lot about it because I was fairly well read for a youngster and I knew quite a bit of history, I could recognise things, in other words I could carry on a conversation, if there was one there, with an English person about Britain's development say from Canute, to King George V.

29:00 **What did the British Empire mean to you?**

Nothing particular, there were all the forms of saluting the flag. But I didn't feel any terrific sense of pride. Even though as an army reservist we used to go through the formalities, it was mainly

29:30 taking machine guns apart and putting them together, that sort of thing. Became more conscious of it of course when I went to Point Cook in 1935/6 and Australian history, Australian military history started to come to life. Of course some of the people that created it were actually teaching us.

Apart from the celebrations or whatever, what sort of national occasions were there in those days?

30:00 Well there was Anzac Day which was a routine one. But the ordinary national holidays we have at the moment, I don't remember an Australia Day, but I remember there was Queen's Birthday and of course there was the religious holidays, Easter, Christmas and so on.

Did you celebrate Empire Day?

Yes, Empire Day was quite an important day I hadn't mentioned that.

30:30 It was a rallying point at the schools and we saluted the flag and praised the empire. The empire as far as I was concerned, because my imagination couldn't run to anything more than the globe. I knew, you'd say British Empire and I would thing of a globe straight away. Like you talk to somebody who had never flown to England, and they think of a globe or a

31:00 map rather than all of the discomforts and comforts of flying or going by ship to England.

What was your knowledge of the outside world then, before you obviously joined the air force?

My knowledge of the outside world was through the books that I was reading and the recommended

reading that I did over a period after I left school was very well selected stuff

31:30 on quite a variety of subjects. I naturally couldn't get into maths because I would require instruction there it is not easy to learn from books. But general subjects I read a bit of French, I read a bit of history, no Australian history.

What literature did you read? Are there any books that stand out that you read as a young man?

32:00 No nothing stands out, I didn't have any books which became a bible in any way. But I remember being young, good memory, and going to a good school, Sydney High School, it was an outstanding school, our teachers were extremely good. I remember one maths teacher, I must say I am very

32:30 sad to report, a war veteran, when anybody dropped a ruler he jumped about three feet in the air. You can imagine this fellow who had suffered shell-shock at some stage, and a couple of cruel people in the class would occasionally throw a ruler on the floor to see him jump. It was very very sad indeed. But our teachers there, our geography

33:00 teacher was superb, history teacher, superb, they were all extremely good. And they led us into a new world, they enthused us about the subjects. I finished up with one of the top passes in the intermediate, at my intermediate year, but immediately had to leave school. But I had six As and two Bs, and very high marks in those A categories.

Apart from this teacher you mentioned, and the drunken men that you would see,

33:30 **were there any other war veterans you had contact with?**

My father didn't go because he had defective eyesight. He wore glasses, and it might have been because of age I don't know. He had glasses and I think, I never asked him this but I think that this was probably the reason that he didn't go. I didn't know many people that had been to the war.

Any uncles or

34:00 **any members of your family?**

I had a second cousin, that's my father cousin who was blinded at Villers-Bretonneux. Came, went to Saint Dunstan's in England was trained there, came out to Australia did a law course and became an eminent solicitor in Newcastle, president of Legacy. Blind, and joined up in World War II. He

34:30 was on Warhead's Staff, General Warhead's staff at Villers-Bretonneux. He joined up again in World War II and went into intelligence. He was an amazing character, had an incredible memory, and a superb showman Talking to you about books and putting his hand there and saying I have just been reading this very interesting one, opening it up and showing it to you. He couldn't see a thing.

35:00 **When you enjoyed school it must have been very difficult to leave at fourteen, what was the situation that surrounded that?**

Well I was just, I was coaching, I had jobs, delivering milk and newspapers in the morning, things like that. Enough money to keep me going at school. Family were really out of money at that stage, and I decided, it was my decision, I

35:30 could have stayed with them but they couldn't afford to send down a keep for me there. I could have joined them at any time and then moved from point to point, from one place he was at, out to Grafton, to Murwillumbah, out to Bourke and so on. I stayed on. So I have to ask you the question again?

What was the situation that led to your family leaving Sydney and you staying on. Why did they make

36:00 **that decision?**

They, my family couldn't stay on in Sydney because my family would have been keeping myself up there and them down there. You see where all together, the four of us would have been all right. I elected and he was quite happy for that for me to stay on. I must say that he was horrified when I was what

36:30 you call head-hunted in a very minor way. In the end of the intermediate year, when Tooth and Company sent their blokes around and I was selected, recommended by my teachers to take on, to join on as a junior clerk at Tooth's and I wrote to my father in the country and said I had been offered a job at Tooth's but decided I was going to stay on. And he couldn't believe that I had rejected a job at Tooth's which was big time, see it was a brewery and it was a lifetime job

37:00 and I had turned it down. But that was, I bounced off that and Huxtables who had gone to Sydney Boys High School, father and son, were doing a head-hunt for their very small firm in Sussex Street and picked me and I went with them.

How did you adapt to living on your own means with all of that responsibility?

37:30 I was not without friends, but I couldn't join in all of the things that they were doing. I didn't find, I

accepted this as the kind of things that happened in Depression. In the same way that kids get belted up today by mad parents and they say that's what everybody does you know. Billy Connelly had a very rough, the comedian had a very rough time as a child, he didn't feel victimised because everybody else got belted around the same way.

38:00 I didn't get belted but I didn't feel, there were so many people like me who were scratching around trying to make a living.

What were your living conditions? You mentioned a landlady?

Oh good, I had a room, I shared a room on both occasions, both landladies I had who had a son. And I shared with them, they were

38:30 staying on in school and I was not. She used to serve up in the mornings, bubble and squeak which was very powerful stuff. The scrag ends of every food she had in the house and that was the main meal of the day. I was very good on Sergeant's pies, they were very expensive but they were a treat for me a couple of times a week.

We'll have to stop there and change the tape.

38:58 **End of tape**

Tape 2

00:30 **Perhaps you can tell us a little bit about how you developed an interest in aeroplanes and how early that interest developed for you?**

Well being short of funds one found one's fun wherever one could. I used to go out to Mascot on occasional weekends when I wasn't on the army, with the Army Reserve for the weekends. And it was very exciting out there.

01:00 Seeing the hangars, everything was so primitive and watching aeroplanes take off and land. And hearing people talk and I used to just hang around and listen, and it was very illuminating. To come home, it was quite exciting. To see people hop into aeroplanes pull the goggles on and off they'd go. But I had no abiding interest in, I wasn't hooked on aeroplanes, I didn't

01:30 say I would love to be a pilot or anything like that. I joined the air force because it was the one that answered my application first. And I very nearly didn't have an air force career for a variety of reasons. Because I could have failed my cadet course and then I would have been out on the bones of my tail with no job in a Depression, which would

02:00 have been pretty tough.

What was your parents' opinion of your military ambitions?

Horrified. Just horrified that I should leave Bennett and Wood which was a good firm where I was doing well. I was, became secretary of the buying manager there, a very fine bloke named Watson, and I was doing very well there. And it was my disappointment of not getting into Hansard that made

02:30 me bounce off the ropes to apply for all of these jobs and the air force came in.

Just going back a little bit, what was your, did you have a strong religious upbringing within your family?

Oh yes. My parents were kind, they were as understanding as parents could be. Because parents have a slight gap in outlook and generation. But I had no

03:00 hardships of any sort at all.

Any particular religious faith that you were brought up in?

Parents were of Jewish faith but didn't practise, they didn't go to the synagogue every Saturday. I however was, went and trained and did my so-called bar mitzvah

03:30 [which means] Son of Commandments, I had a good voice and therefore when I did my bar mitzvah I had the privilege of singing the Torah of the Law. And it was a life study. This was up until I was, that was thirteen years of age. But I didn't adopt, nor did I adapt to it, although I knew all about it.

04:00 I knew the rules, I was, I thought it rather quaint. The dietary laws, because people were, often judged people, one Jew judged another. He might say he is very full which meant to say he is very religious. They've got two sets of cutlery and crockery, one for meat and one for when they have milk because the two must never mix, and that didn't

04:30 appeal too much to me as a sort of philosophy. But there are some wonderful people there. I was with

the name Cohen, I was identified. And of course I got the chiaking which the kids got. I can remember in my very early school days kids chasing me around the playground in groups getting you, rounding you up and saying you killed our Christ you know.

05:00 And they get you in a corner and it made you feel a little different.

Did that teach you, did you learn any particular defence against this or did that shape you in any way at the time do you think?

No, I didn't. When I went to the coaching class, from Sydney Boys High School, I was

05:30 picked to go to the coaching class at White City and the coach asking the names said and you said your name. And when it came to my name, my name is Julius. J U L I U S. And that brought me more fights and whippings I can tell you that because the boys used to chiack me on that. Quite apart from the Jewishness. But they came to me and I said the first thing that came to me, and I said Dick Cohen. And that's how I adopted Dick, and I became

06:00 Dick Cohen right through my life until I changed my name in 1947.

Had your parents or grandparents come over from Europe recently or was there? How long had they been in Australia?

My mother was born in England and had been in Swansea, Wales and she came out to Australia as a young woman. Married my father, whose parents and grandparents had been in Australia, they came out

06:30 free immigrants. And one woman was mayor, mayoress, believe it or not, of a small coastal town northern New South Wales. I have got the family trees, I am not hooked on family history although other relations of mine are and you see all sorts of links.

07:00 Peter Bone who is Vice-Chancellor of the university here and was a minister of the Fraser government, we have a relationship starting from way up there, and he is out there and I am out there. But we, he calls me cousin, I think we are fifteenth cousins.

You said the education was very broad at Sydney Boys High School, did you also follow current affairs in Europe?

07:30 I don't remember. I don't, I remember we were focussed on the syllabus, I didn't buy newspapers of course, I just focussed on what we were doing and working through it and with my coaching I didn't have very much time to spare anyway.

What was your interest in politics of the day?

None. None that I can remember.

08:00 I may have but I can't remember. I can't remember any feeling of criticism that the country should be in that state that it was, or that firms were failing or that the government wasn't doing enough for, in welfare, I just accepted it. I just accepted that things were

08:30 tough and that was that. As to keeping yourself I worked on very very tight budget and if you don't have a motor car, if you don't go to films except for sneaking in on a Saturday morning an hour before the film starts, getting yourself a free seat at the back. I had no paid amusement of any sort at all.

You mentioned later in life you became involved in the film board,

09:00 **at that time did you develop an interest in films?**

That had nothing to do with anything. It was just that I hadn't stuffed up the last job that I had been given and when ministers were looking around for someone to head something up, they picked someone who was fairly safe. I was pretty safe in that I had a good record of survival. I developed my survival factors

09:30 as a youngster, and when I left the public service in 1981 at age 65, I didn't want any farewells because I felt I was going to do other things. I don't like formal farewells. But my minsters got together at parliament house and feted me there, and they said I had the keenest survival factor, which transmitted to them in many ways. I could see the best and worst case in every situation.

10:00 And I did that from my early days, when I looked at any situation I looked at the pros and cons and then of course did the silly thing, like joining the air force which was absolutely ludicrous for someone who wanted stability. Because with the air force the best you could get out of the air force at that time, was if you survived the flying training, and I don't mean death, I mean selected as a pilot,

10:30 you only had a four year short service commission and then you were out on the bones of your tail looking for a job.

Were you motivated by any social concerns or nationalistic ideals to join the service?

No. No I wasn't thinking of defending anybody, I didn't think of war, I just thought of it as a very

interesting career, possibly

11:00 finishing up as a civil pilot which I very nearly, I was very very close to my being taken on at the end of my short service commission four years, just before war started. And I applied for and got the job with WR Carpenter Airlines in New Guinea. And I was going to fly out, incredibly going to fly out VH 84s

11:30 or 6s? Four-engine ones, out for Guinea Airways, or Carpenter Airlines in New Guinea. And I was accepted and then I was talked out of it and told to stay in the air force. And then was given the job, incredibly to come and pick up the Sunderlands in England.

How aware were you at the time in the mid 30s of the rise of militarism?

12:00 **In Germany?**

We were aware that, we could se things coming. But I couldn't, it was mounting, but I couldn't crystallise it into a date, or even a war. Lets face it Chamberlain came back waving his piece of paper saying, 'Peace in our time'. I mean there were crises but you didn't expect it to turn into war because Chamberlain, after all a very honest and sincere bloke had been over to see Hitler with his piece of paper

12:30 said we were safe again.

It was a wildly optimistic gesture on his part when he did that. Most people must have felt that it was rather the opposite?

He was fooled.

Just back-tracking a bit to your early flying training, perhaps we can go there. Can you talk us through perhaps through your induction into the air force and your introduction to, perhaps to your first aeroplane?

13:00 Well there, the most surprising thing about Point Cook was the variety of people that were on the cadet course. You couldn't have picked a more diverse group. It was selected by the air member for personnel who was Air Commodore Goble at that time. He was an ex-Royal Navy pilot from Britain who joined the Australian Air Force.

13:30 And you would have thought that he would have picked people who had a naval bent or who had good disciplinary features or good sporting or good educational features, or good something, in line with a conservative view of what he would like to see in the air force. We were the most diverse group that you could ever meet. No two people

14:00 were alike, it was quite surprising, and I was a loner, and I was talking to these people, some had university degrees. Some had been state running champions, some had done all sorts of exciting things, and I just kept quiet, I had done anything exciting. And I just looked and listened.

14:30 And my early days of course were affected by the early flying training. One was expected to get off solo in ten hours, after ten hours. After ten hours quite patently you weren't going to be a good pilot. And I had excellent co-ordination, a good tennis player. But I was not doing as well as I should. It was the anxiety to do well. But fortunately

15:00 the instructors were as varied a group as you could get. They were ex-Duntrooners who had left Duntroon when they didn't do any more cadet training at Duntroon and then became pilots and then instructors in my time. At Point Cook, fellows that could stand up straight like a ram rod. I was tall stooped, and they couldn't bare to see me

15:30 slouching around the place and I was picked on quite often and made people laugh. They were doing drills and the warrant officer, or the head of the cadet flight would say "Stand up there Cohen," and I would be up there flying, there'd be a titter, no one would say anything. But someone was stooped a little bit and I was being picked on. Anyway eventually through the patience of

16:00 a Wing Commander Davis or at least a Flight Lieutenant Davis at that time, I was very lucky to have been sent off solo. And it was the beginning then. But unfortunately I was stupid, because trying to make a name for myself around the place, you know amongst all of these great people that I was with I used to, when I was told to go off and do a job, to practise circuits and bunts somewhere, or short cross-country,

16:30 I would go and shoot up the local school and do all sorts of silly things to show the blokes that I was really a card. And unfortunately the instructor, an instructor got to hear about it, and they set about finding me out, because they heard about these dreadful things, landing in a country school, taking this young lady out flying,

17:00 landing, this is me with fifteen hours, twenty hours flying. And I was to be followed and fortunately one of the fellow cadets knew one of the instructors, who confided in him, very stupidly, that they were going to get me, to catch me. His name, this cadet, was Joseph Patrick Francis Xavier Godsell. So just as I was about to take off and go and do silly things,

17:30 to do a cross-country he said they're after you, watch it, they are going to follow you today. So I took off flew my very long course, about fifty miles off Point Cook, about twenty miles north of Point Cook and then back to Point Cook and when I arrived back my instructor, not Davis, but the chief instructor came over and put his hands on me, on my shoulder,

18:00 he said cadet Cohen you are under arrest. I said what for? He said for low flying. I said when? He said we have just followed you, I have just followed you and you were low flying. And I was placed under close arrest. Incredible thing to do, placed under close arrest because I was going to run away. And I was then tried. And found guilty, even though Godsell came forward and said that he had told me, he was very brave to

18:30 come and say that he had confided in me that I was being followed. I was fined five pounds, which was a lot of money in those days, which was two weeks salary. But I stayed on, I should have been sacked or exonerated.

Had you been low flying on that particular trip?

On that day? No. I flew the course at fifteen hundred or two thousand feet. Around absolutely perfectly feeling like a saint, you know. Arriving back and

19:00 being sure that if anyone had followed me I would have been found to be not guilty.

Just go back a little bit to Air Vice-marshal Goble, how did he come to select you amongst all of the others? It must have been very hard to get into the air force?

I have got no idea. Got no idea. I knew him briefly later in life, but one didn't ask that.

19:30 I mean one didn't ask questions, when you are a pilot officer or a flying officer you don't ask questions of an Air Vice-marshal as he was then, and say why did you pick me? You know.

How would you describe the entrance procedures for getting in the air force at those times? Is there anything particular that stands out that may be different from the procedures that they use today?

He interviewed me, did a medical. I had

20:00 references, from the school which were laudatory. References from my a couple of colleagues at Bennett and Wood but not the boss because I didn't want anyone to know that I was applying for the air force, but I got good references there. He looked me over and just made a judgement on the person. I think that is one way of picking people you know, when I was flying with TAA,

20:30 I came back on one occasion, well I was flying with TAA and that's a long story in itself but I spoke to the assistant general manager John Ryland and asked him, he was my fellow squadron commander in World War II, I said John how do they pick these hosties? I said every one of them are perfect, they really are. And he said go and ask the chief hostie, so I went and saw the chief hostie and I said

21:00 how do you do it? And she said when they walk in the door she said I know, I can see it. Whether there is a built-in smile, whether there is grace, humility, sympathy, and I often wouldn't need to interview, wouldn't need to see whether they had a nursing certificate or anything like that. They'd make good hosties. And she had virtually no failures. And I found this later in life when we were advertising for people when I was in senior positions

21:30 in the public service, you'd get people with applications and CV's [Curriculum Vitaes], absolutely superb, couldn't possibly miss, they walked in the door and you had one look and said no. And so you then spent an hour going over and finding out about them and having to take them to lunch because they came from Western Australia or overseas. And then knowing full well that there is no chance whatsoever of them getting the job. So I think that

22:00 I think they're, in the same way they are doing it technically at the moment, and they say the identifiers are your eyes, body language, various sorts of how you walk, how people identify very clearly to people who are observant and they can make, often, quite reasonable judgements. Not infallible, but quite reasonable judgements on who should or should not get a particular appointment.

22:30 **It couldn't have been too usual that an Air Vice-marshal was interviewing for cadets?**

Oh no, he didn't, we didn't see Goble at Point Cook that I remember except on graduation parade or something like that. But we made, they were God-

23:00 like creatures, let's face it I was a cadet talking to a flight lieutenant, there is a big gap there, to a wing commander or squadron leader. I mean you couldn't imagine anything higher in, on the horizon than a wing commander. But there were these people who were air vice-marshals, air commodores at headquarters, which were even higher. You weren't humbled, but you were,

23:30 felt that they wouldn't be interested in you.

What was the first aircraft that you flew in?

The first aircraft was the DH 60 G which was the predecessor to the Tiger Moth, it was a Cirrus Moth, looked a bit like Tiger Moth. Under, less powered than the Tiger Moth and they were heavier on the controls.

24:00 The instruction was simple through, speaking through speaking tubes. The aeroplanes were simple to fly they really were. Because they were so slow and manoeuvrable, there should be no reason why any intelligent person with any reasonable co-ordination couldn't fly. But they wanted, after all this was an air force and they were going to put people into bigger

24:30 and faster aeroplanes later, so they wanted something a bit above they average if they could get it.

What was your impression of military life in the Australian Air Force at that time?

I thought it was wonderful, really wonderful. I mean we were living in a mess, extremely well fed, socially acceptable, smart uniforms, not overworked.

25:00 The work in the squadron was interesting. You broke rules with impunity which was a dreadful thing to do. I used to go skiing at Mount Hotham and you had to walk into Hotham in those days from Harrietville, which was a long stretch, but we used to go up there and drop our beer, and sprits

25:30 and parachutes at the hut at Hotham. Chalet, so called, and then we would go up the week later. We would take people on, from the Met Bureau we were doing Met flights, which are a story in themselves. And we used to engage in all sorts of illegal and untoward activities, all of this by the way polished your flying.

26:00 When you are not worried about breaking an aeroplane you are a different pilot to the one who goes through civil training where breaking an aeroplane is a cardinal sin. So I found, by the way, when I was airport manager at Mascot, that the civil pilots, I was an ex-air force pilot, the civil pilots were totally different beings and they flew their aircraft differently. TAA.

26:30 which was run by an ex-air force people, John Ryland who was general manager, three pointed their aeroplanes, to make sure that they had the shortest runs, because air force refused to operate from short fields in forward places. Civil pilots were used to runways and they used to wheel them in and they had a much shorter run, but ours they thought differently. And the air force people,

27:00 we really had dash and on aerobatic flying, later in my career I could demonstrate, and my wife could tell you when I was at Rathmines, I used to astound the troops with my aerobatic flying in a single engine underpowered sea plane, doing rolls at fifty feet, which was

27:30 breath taking for them because they had been brought up in a flying boat tradition where everything was staid and slow. And I showed these, raised morale at the station I think, seeing the mad CO [Commanding Officer], I have got lots of cartoons of things that I did there in the light aeroplane. It was, so what we did, we learnt how far you could take an aeroplane. You would try a bunt, you know in the military aeroplane, which

28:00 is terrifically heavy strain, an inverted loop. Very heavy strain on air frames which are stressed to take ordinary flying, a loop in the ordinary way, to take G forces in that way, but not inverse G forces when you are doing an outside loop.

Can you give us some examples of when you were outside the rules let's say, for instance when you dropped some alcohol at Hotham?

28:30 **Is there any other things you used to get up to?**

Well it was almost a running pattern of minor breaches. I used to land over at Skipton from Laverton, a station called Batengill, run by a Major Fairban, an ex-army man from World War I. And I used to go over

29:00 and have morning tea with him. Land my beautiful Demon in a paddock which had boulders hidden all over the place, have my morning tea and then fly back. He gave me a couple of dogs on one occasion, springer spaniels. And I brought them back and I came in as I was doing my final approach, saw my CO squad leader Charlesworth on the tarmac, so I came in, touch and go, went around again. He's still there, went around again, did a few more touch and goes as though I was practising landings until he went out of sight and I could get

29:30 my aeroplane into the tarmac and get the dogs out. I was written up in a couple of histories, I noticed the other day shooting up the Main Street of Corowa, frightening the residents in a Demon, which were very noisy. They had Rolls Royce Castrol engines and a wooden prop, and they were quite noisy aeroplanes when they were flying over. And it petrified the people in the street. Because I was flying very

30:00 low and it was to impress one of my fellow officers, his name was Keenan, he lived at Corowa nearby. But these, you did these sorts of thing because it was good fun.

There is nothing as fun as flying low, it is really a thrill I agree.

We did, I mean low flying was really low flying in those days.

What happened to the lass you picked up from the school?

30:30 Well I met her in town on occasion and took her for a meal. But the kids at the school were amazed to see this aeroplane come down and land on their so-called assembly ground, because you could put a Moth down on a pretty small area. And then see her go off and then come down again. You know she was a heroine. And I would go back and report that I had been doing

31:00 circuits and bunts or my navigations exercise. I didn't do this all the time, I mean this was, these were occasional things but looking back on them they mount up to a substantial number of breaches of good flying practice and discipline.

Was this because, this you know

31:30 **were you sort of developing new strategies and tactical flying, or these were all, you know, the flying you were doing there was sort of learnt from the First World War. Was there any sort of sense of developing the RAAF which was obviously a very small force at that time?**

We never thought of working with any other force, we were there to defend Australia. Nobody had it very clear in mind

32:00 how, who or how we would be attacked, I mean there was the Dutch in the north, Netherlands East Indies. We were in control in Papua and in New Guinea, we had protectorates up there. The islands, New Zealand was friendly and the islands were primitive. I mean you couldn't see who was going to attack except Japan. Everyone had a fear that Japan might come down. But we always felt slightly superior because they said the Japanese

32:30 couldn't see at night, they were nearly blind and they wouldn't be very good pilots. So we thought if there was going to be any attacks it would be the swarming over the country and we might be attacking Japanese ground troops. But we didn't have exercises designed in that way. But we had lessons in aerial combat where we would have dog fights. We would have practice in bombing, and we would do dive bombing, as

33:00 we called it then, it was not really the JU 88 vertical type dive bombing. But we were long slow dive bombing, and bombing from the aircraft as a platform and such things. We were within the limits, the instruments we had were primitive.

What range of aircraft were you trained to fly on?

We had

33:30 the Flying Bulldogs, they only had a couple of hours at the outside endurance, they had virtually, I am not exaggerating, they had virtually no instruments. We had a compass, we had a turn and bank indicator and we had the altimeter. And we didn't have artificial horizons, and you would find it hard to believe and it is absolutely true,

34:00 I could show you books on it, we had no radio. And we used to take off from Laverton, often with an overcast sky, say with a base of a thousand feet or even lower. Fly through to sixteen thousand feet sometimes in cloud, how we did it on turn and bank and that I don't know, and we would feel our way down taking temperatures on the way down, land and then report to the Met Bureau.

34:30 You'd come out, take off from Laverton and the flight might take you forty-five minutes or maybe an hour. You'd come out, having gone through the overcast, say into clear sky, or into cloud, with your thermometer, a thermometer strapped, one wet bulb on the port strut, and one dry bulb on the other strut, and your open cockpit, gloves on, freezing cold up there, no heating in

35:00 the aeroplane at all, writing down the temperatures as you saw it on there. When you came through the overcast, often by the way at fairly low level. Where am I? No visible sight, you say, 'Crikey isn't there a railway line here? Isn't there a settlement?' Or if you are over water you say, 'Where am I? Am I over Port Phillip Bay or Bass Strait?' And it was an exercise in surveyal. And this type of exercise

35:30 put us, 10 Squadron people in Sunderlands in England in very good, in a very good state to meet English weather which was worse than what we normally struck out here. And so much so that we became known as extremely safe and competent pilots and we were given lots of jobs carrying VIPs [Very Important Persons], where the less experienced people who were just going through the squadrons in the air force in the same aeroplanes

36:00 couldn't hold a candle to us on surveyal.

Did you have any colleagues that were lost in training? Any accidents?

Oh yeah. Looking, I have got a couple of studies on all of the Bulldogs and all of the Wapitis. Wapitis were the large single engine aircraft that

36:30 we went to as the second stage, the second six months of our cadet course. And I have got the history,

brief history of every one of them in a small study. And every one of them, accident, accident, written off, crashed, repaired. The number of accidents were very, very high, they weren't very severe. Occasional losses of life.

37:00 And occasionally you can understand, people getting lost without navigational aides, you can understand people of relatively limited experience doing their first attempts to fly aeroplanes progressively larger and more difficult to fly, although none of them come into the categories of the high speed aeroplanes we

37:30 have these days. But they were awkward aircraft. See one of the interesting things, the Bulldogs didn't have a tail wheel, it had a tail skin. And in order to turn the aeroplane you gave it rudder and a burst of engine. And the air stream would hit the rudder and would turn you, and that's they way you did it with Cirrus Moths. You turned by giving it a burst of engine, well in cases

38:00 like this you can find yourself quite easily knocking into other aeroplanes or turning an aeroplane up on its nose. Or by the way landing in small fields, Laverton I think was about eight hundred yards square, and if you overshot you could easily run into the fence, we didn't have runways at Laverton.

Didn't have brakes either. Didn't have brakes on those aircraft did you?

38:30 No.

Can you tell us briefly about the people you were in that course with?

Well there was some very interesting characters. We had Hewie Idwall Edwards, the VC. He was a loner like myself, a very good footballer, incredibly,

39:00 could write exquisitely good English. And romantic writing, and I could write well, and we used to exchange letters. Letters from his friends in the west and mine from Sydney and we used to have a look an one another's correspondence, he wrote extremely well. He crashed in England, pre-war in a Brennan, he had to jump.

39:30 Parachute hooked onto the tail plane, and he made a hole in the ground when he hit because the parachute was torn. Had one leg shorter than the other, had to fight his way back into flying and ultimately became famous. But while he was on the ground he was with the propaganda area and of course he wrote extremely well. We had Air Marshal Collin Hannah who later became chief of the air staff. And we had

40:00 one pilot, Hitchcock and it is quite a long story, but he was an airman in the last category of work at the aircraft depot, and he applied for a cadetship and they gave it to him because the air force felt they owed the widow of

40:30 his father who was killed looking for Kingsford-Smith and Holme. He was a very poor pilot, Hitchcock, he had no co-ordination at all, and I used to try to help him, teach him what was happening in a roll. And how to, what to do, he would come up to my room at the cadet, and I would show him, you are on your back now and you have got to continue,

41:00 continue at this point, the function of the controls have changed. You are now, when you pull the stick back instead of going up you go down, this sort of thing. Anyway he, he was recommended that he should not graduate, and it went right through to the air board. And the air board said no we promised Mrs Hitchcock that we would do the best for her son and he stayed on and he

41:30 was the one, incredibly that was flying the Hudson that crashed out here at Fairburn airport with Fairburn on board killing three minsters of state in 1940. And that's why we have a memorial out there. It was because Hitchcock was allowed to continue flying and incredibly flying Hudson aircraft which were difficult in those days. And even more incredibly flying the Minster for Air.

41:59 End of tape

Tape 3

00:31 **In the pre-war period the Royal Australian Air Force would have been a completely different organization to what we know of after the war, what was it like in those early days as far as equipment and personnel went.**

Well it was like a big club really, the numbers were small, I think probably under five thousand or less.

01:00 It was focussed for a start at Point Cook, Laverton and Richmond. So everybody at Point Cook knew everybody at Laverton and of course we made a lot of visits to Richmond and we got to know a lot of people there and we got postings in between. So everybody knew everybody but everybody knew too much about everybody. So that when they had

01:30 promotion conferences, they were quite interesting things. People used to say oh yes I remember him, he crashed a Bulldog five years ago, yes that was a pretty poor show, he was stupid, so leave him for a while. So people developed a history, people virtually had nothing private in their professional lives. These days people move from point to point with great speed,

02:00 and people are taken as you find them. But people had a tag of history behind them in those days.

When you say it was a bit like a club, was that to say it was perhaps a slightly less professional organization to what it became later on?

Well it was, no I think there was a dedication there to good flying, good behaviour. We were

02:30 no angels but there were standards that you didn't breach in the social, professional area. You were trying to improve your flying, your bombing, your shooting all of the time, but you didn't see how it was going to be used. We were in Demons for instance when we were in Laverton or in Bulldogs, you'd have

03:00 dog fights. You'd have take off and then arrange to meet at a point and we'd have, shooting at one another with cameras not bullets. And our flying became very polished, as far as we could go with very elementary equipment. I would say we about as much as you could do with that primitive air craft.

What were your views on the equipment you were given to use?

03:30 Oh it was great, the Bulldog was an exciting aeroplane really, for those days fast, extremely manoeuvrable, aerobatted extremely well. It was fun to fly, it could shoot, had guns, shooting through the propeller, it was a dangerous instrument of war in our feeling. And the Demon of course

04:00 was a little bit more advanced than that. But they were still well below the standards of the ones that were coming off, coming off in England. The Spitfire [Fighter plane] which was being born at that stage. We were flying at Point Cook when I went down to the sea plane training squadron there. We were flying Supermarine Seagulls, and they were positively the most

04:30 clumsy awkward aeroplane that was ever created. It had a big engine which was, it was a pusher, it pushed the aeroplane instead of pulling it. And it was behind the pilot up high, and you opened the throttle, it was a seaplane, opened the throttle, and the torque was so fierce that the aeroplane

05:00 almost rolled on the water and so you had to use full opposite control until you got a bit of flying speed. And when you took off they climbed very slowly, when you would pull the throttle off at height, it had the gliding angle of a brick it almost came straight down. That was designed by Mitchell who designed the Supermarine Spitfire.

Can you describe that aeroplane,

05:30 **it had a push propeller, but can you just describe what that looked like?**

Well it had a boat hull to begin with, and that hull, the pilot sat up in front. And in front of the pilot there was a little round place where a fellow went forward and picked up the buoy when you were mooring. It had a lower main blade

06:00 about level with the plane and then a higher main blade up very high. In between the two was an engine which was pushing you, incredibly noisy. And take off of course, when you took off you buried the nose of the aeroplane into the water, spray came everywhere, and you would eventually get off and shake it all off. But they did a superb job for two reasons, firstly they were used on the

06:30 naval ships and they catapulted them off. Quite an incredible performance. The aeroplane was put on a catapult, a short catapult, this is a mechanical catapult, and they would shoot the thing off, and because they flew at very low speed they had flying speed by the time they got to the end of this catapult. They carried them around, the HMAS Sydney had one, and on one memorable occasion

07:00 a colleague of mine name Tom Price, wing commander and fellow squadron commander in New Guinea, he was flying the Seagull off the HMAS Sydney when it encountered in the Mediterranean, a ship, an Italian ship the Bartolomeo Colleoni. They fought a battle from a great distance, and in between the two the Seagull was up high calling the shots for the Sydney. Saying you missed on that one,

07:30 too far starboard, too far to port, too far, too short. And the Sydney sank the Bartolomeo Colleoni, so the Seagull you could laugh at it but it did a wonderful job.

When you say Price was your colleague, were those aircraft on the back of ships run by the air force?

Yeah, it's the operational director was told where to go by the ship's captain. To that

08:00 extent they were operationally under the control of the captain, but they were maintained, disciplined the whole lot was air force.

Did flying the Seagull, Bulldogs, did it ever give you much cause for concern that there were more advanced aircraft elsewhere in the world?

No well the Bulldog was of course early, we had that 1936, 1937 and then the Demons came off

08:30 and they were sleek beautiful looking aircraft, but they weren't that much better than the Bulldogs. But they looked better, and they did carry an observer, navigator whatever you like to call it in the back. And while the pilot was strapped on in front, the fellow in the back always had a little safety toggle which he hooked into the floor in case the pilot pushed his stick forward,

09:00 in which case the fellow in behind could easily fall out.

Can you tell us a bit more about these planes? Maybe the Bulldog first, was that the first plane you flew for an extended period of time?

It was the first operational aircraft that I flew. But we found them pleasant to fly. They were very cold of course, because as soon as you move up the temperature falls, I don't know what it is in

09:30 metric terms, but the temperature falls five point four degrees Fahrenheit for every thousand feet. So if you are at ten thousand feet you are fifty four degrees Fahrenheit below the ground level. About, that's about it. So it was very cold, so you wrapped yourself up very well, had your gloves on which didn't affect your handling of the controls.

10:00 But the wind was blowing in the mouth, that was life, you took that as the normal way to fly aeroplanes.

Can you describe that flight suit or the way you wrapped yourself up?

Well we had fur lined flying trousers, fur lined jacket with I think a zip. And we had gloves, and often we had silk gloves underneath

10:30 and we put the other gloves over the top. So you wrapped yourself up well, got into the aeroplane and then you pulled on a helmet. And the helmet had the goggles attached by a little loop at the back. So you pulled the helmet on and then tied it under your chin, and then you pulled the goggles down, and then you were like a snowman, completely invisible,

11:00 but you could see out quite well. And the goggles were, had a join so you could see around corners. So the goggles went straight and then forty-five degrees at the back, so you could sort of widen the angle of vision. But you could see well enough, you felt comfortable enough until, sixteen thousand feet started to get very very cold, and although you were supposed to take

11:30 temperatures on the way down sometimes if you were very, very cold you sometimes dived down from sixteen thousand feet down to ground level. And then reported the temperatures that you took on the way up.

What were the controls of the Bulldog like?

Just like the standard controls you would find on a light aircraft at the moment. There was a control column, the control column had a loop on the top and on

12:00 the loop was a button for pressing to fire your guns. Had no brakes but it had a rudder, and the throttle strangely enough was at floor level. And one air marshal, Air Vice-Marshal Anderson came down from air board on one occasion, thought he would have a flight in a Bulldog and he hadn't flown in a

12:30 while. He gave it the gun with the throttle and he was moving around and he wanted to stop, and he couldn't find where the throttle was, the aeroplanes that he had been flying in had throttles on the port side on the side of the aeroplane. And he couldn't find where the throttle was and he bashed himself into another aeroplane. And then went back to air board and fines himself for

13:00 his stupidity.

You mentioned guns, what type of guns did they have mounted?

I forget the type of guns but they were a twin and they fired from either side of the fuselage.

When you say these were the first operational aircraft you flew, what were the operations you were flying in those Bulldogs?

Well there were very few operations as you call them these days. We'd

13:30 do our practices in bombing, because you could carry bombs underneath. You practise shooting a target, and it could be a drove another aeroplane towing, a wind sock it looks like, behind. And you made passes of this as though it was an aeroplane coming up from underneath or on top and you would see how many times you could hit the drove. And there were ranges where we did that. We had navigation exercises

14:00 which would take us away as far as it was safe to be. And indeed we moved around Australia. We flew around in 1938 we flew around Australia in Ansons, they were twin-engined slow aeroplanes, they were so-called operational aircraft but they were really only trainers. But we flew

14:30 around Australia and it was news every day. We went from Laverton to Bourke, and then from Bourke to Daly Waters and Daly Waters over to Broome you know. And then eventually around Australia in about a

few weeks and it was reported and they had photos of us sitting under the wing in hot climates and like that. We did a flight by the way from, this is 1938 and

15:00 I have the photograph here of us flying from Brisbane to Melbourne by night in 1938, that was a big deal. And there we were, all wrapped up in our fancy gear, having landed at Richmond, of course the range of the aeroplane was not great, and then flying down to Laverton, all in the night. And this was a notable news item.

Aeroplanes were

15:30 **still quite big news in a lot of ways in the 1930s, do you remember the air race in 1936?**

That was 1934 the big race. And that was when the Comet came out here. That was really big time, and the DC 2 that was the first, the Douglases, and they were flown by KLM [Royal Dutch Airlines] pilots, and they flew it as a routine passenger flight. And they came second, the Comet came first and the DC 2

16:00 which later became DC 3 virtually the same aircraft, came second. And I remember one of them, I think it was the, got a bit lost and landed at Albury, and they were running out of fuel and they flew around Albury and they put out car lights on the air field, this is as I remember it,

16:30 and they made a safe landing there and took off when they could to finish the race. You maybe heard of that.

Very famous story. Was that before you joined the air force?

Before I joined yeah.

In the air force you suddenly found yourself able to fly around Australia, was that the first time you had been able to travel widely in the country?

Yeah.

What were your impressions?

My greatest range before that had been to go from Sydney to the North Coast of New South Wales by train.

17:00 My, I widened my experience with these navigational training flights we had, they were good navigational training because you had to take care of yourself from these places. And you refuelled from forty-four gallon drums everywhere. People stood on top of the aeroplane and they passed the hose up and somebody stood below and pumped it, like a well pump. And they

17:30 would pump the fuel in, until you finished the forty-four gallon drum and then they'd wheel another forty-four gallon drum over and they'd do that.

Where would you land for these refuelling exercises?

Well there are air fields in a lot of places. But they were very primitive, they were virtually only paddocks that were level and had a wind sock. I remember going to Charleville and when we arrived there we were treated as,

18:00 treated extremely well. Harry Corones, a Greek had a rather famous one at Charleville and on those occasions when we went through would welcome us, take us into his hotel. We'd go up and shower, he would send beer up to us, and we were really heroes. I remember one story, it's apocryphal. They say he didn't

18:30 have a very good command of English, he was talking to a friend of his on the telephone and one of our people is alleged to have heard him talking about a gun. He wanted a gun brought from a station outside back into his hotel. And the person at the other end on the primitive telephones they had in those days couldn't hear he said gun. He says gun, G for Jesus, U for onion and N for pneumonia, have you got that?

19:00 And that's story went around. But Corones, when I was flying with TAA later, and our flights were, in a way epic in 1948 because when we flew from Townsville to Mount Isa we would go Townsville, Hughenden, Flan…,

19:30 No Townsville, Charters Towers, Hughenden, Richmond, Julia Creek, Cloncurry, Mount Isa, and this took all day. And that's what we did, went up and down, up and down all day. And that was the flying that was being done in 1948, 49. You can imagine the early days how exciting it was.

20:00 When we landed at theses places in our TAA DC 3 you would see the streams of dust as people came into see us to pick up the mailbags, or asking us to do things. 'Say when you are coming out again can you do this for us in Townsville for us and we'll be here on the next flight that we expect you out here'. You became a sort of bus driver. And that was, you know

20:30 not that long ago.

In those early flights in those navigation flights in the 30s can you tell us a bit about the

excitement of doing that?

Well the main excitement was if you got lost, that was the big thing. And navigation wasn't easy you didn't have many navigational aids. I remember my life was saved on one occasion, I was between Bourke and Charleville, I was trying to stretch the daylight and it wouldn't stay and I had to come down somewhere

21:00 and I wanted a field to land in, I was in a Demon. And I felt that I was going to have to put down in a paddock somewhere which is not good, you can get a rock or anything that can tip you up on your nose. And suddenly I saw a glint in the sunlight, and I turned and could see the glint a little more. And this was the bottle dump outside Cunnamulla and I

21:30 possibly owe my life to the fact that this bottle dump outside Cunnamulla was near the airfield and I just managed to get in that night, having seen the glint of the bottles where they had just been thrown in piles.

Who were all of these airfields staffed by?

No there was no staff at the airfields. It was only at big places. Some of the airfields in the early days there'd be

22:00 an airfield, for instance at Corowa, there'd be an airfield. But there wouldn't be anybody at the airfield. But if an aeroplane was flying through, a civil aircraft, they would send somebody out there, either from Civil Aviation or usually from the airline to service the aircraft. And after it had taken off the place was left. After all it might only have one or two aeroplanes a day, it was hardly worthwhile staffing it on a full-time basis.

22:30 **It was very much an emerging pioneering field at the time. Did you feel that yourselves as pilots?**

Oh yes we reckoned we were pretty good people. We had our wings up when we were in uniform, people looked up to us as being very brave. We weren't that brave but they thought up in the air, it must be very dangerous and therefore you must be very dashing and brave. When point of fact it was no more dangerous

23:00 than driving a motor car. I bought a Lancia, 1924 Lancia Lamda Six, a four-engined aeroplane, long low, it had a small engine, but it was remarkably sporty. And I bought that from a fellow officer who later was killed in New Guinea. I was booked in Melbourne for crossing Punt and Commercial

23:30 Roads at ninety miles an hour at three a.m. There was no defence, but I was arraigned before the magistrate and I was fined. But it was noted in the press, and it was a useful item. When I came to sell the aeroplane, the car, because this Lamda could do ninety miles an hour here it was proven by the charge laid and proven by the police.

24:00 **So would you say you were a bit of a fearless kind of individual back then?**

No. I think we all recognise the dangerous things to do, these were dashing, you stretched, you stretched the envelope a little bit. And when we were doing this display work we were doing, they used to have

24:30 displays at airfields around the place. They would have an air display day and they would send say three Bulldogs up. And we'd land and we'd take off and do our stuff, synchronised aerobatics, and I must say you followed the leader in that case. The leader would take you and he dived down and you'd be going very close to the ground, fifty feet or so, and high speeds for those days.

25:00 And you any misjudgements could be catastrophic, a friend of mine, Pilot Officer Lance Sutherland, in 1938 when we were doing that mid-air display at Laverton, was repeated at Richmond. And he was in a Bulldog, just doing his stuff, practising over the centre of the airfield, dived

25:30 down pulled out, and it sponged down hit the wheels crashed and burnt. We would take the aeroplanes to the extremes of their capacity and sometimes they broke. But I don't think we were any more dashing than young people in motor cars, in V8 Fords, very light body,

26:00 not a full sedan, you know, just a coupe. Very light body and with a big V8 engine, powerful, they can really move around the roads.

It must have given you cause to reflect on the dangers of what you were doing though when somebody did die in an accident?

It wasn't going to happen to me, that's what everybody said. He was dumb, shouldn't have done that. You know bad judgement, and you felt I think right through the war years,

26:30 you didn't feel impregnable but you felt that you were going to get through. You weren't just hoping against hope that you would get through. You would say you know I am pretty experienced, it would be pretty hard to knock me down. Even flying in the Atlantic where it was pretty horrifying and if you went down there, I always had a feeling I would be saved by somebody else or in some way.

27:00 But it was always the other fellow that was going to get killed. The dux of our course, a bloke at Point Cook. A bloke named Ashton Shorter he was practising dive-bombing, came down almost vertically, pulled out a little bit late, splurged and wiped himself off. And we all said he was always a bit rash you know, bad judgement, you know he wasn't good enough to really try that particular lark, it won't happen to us, and that's how we felt.

27:30 **And was the opposite true? Were there fellows that you thought well they're not going to last, they are somehow marked for death?**

Oh some of the pilots, like this Hitchcock would go, I was horrified to see the way he went. There was a bloke named Eagerty who was also an equally bad pilot who killed himself flying. Ashton Shorter was always too wild and a show-off and he

28:00 killed himself.

How much of that was to do with their flying skill, and how much maybe to do with their mental attitude?

Oh well their flying skills were very good for those days, but their judgement when you take the thing to the extreme, when you take aeroplanes to the limit of their capacity or to the limit of the controls to manoeuvre the aircraft that you want to the way you want it, you then get into trouble.

28:30 **We might just go back while you mention it and bring that up again because the tape ended on the end of the last tape. What do you think were the circumstances of Hitchcock's crash with Fairburn on board?**

On the Hudson, nobody knows. He was coming in, he was given clearance to land what could have happened was either he misjudged his height and hit the trees and went in. Or because the

29:00 Hudson if you let it get too slow, it was the first aeroplane to have vice like that, most airplanes, like its vice, which was it would flip. So most aeroplanes if you got to slow it would stall, and sponge down, and we used to practise that, that was part of our training, even in Tiger Moths as young people. They'd say pull the engine off, pull the stick back, pull the stick back and let it stall, and then you go down like that.

29:30 I will tell you a little bit more about that in a second. But with the Hudsons, the first one, when you go to the stalling point, it flipped and if it was near the ground you were in real trouble. But when you were in flying training you did, and they still do it now, the instructor would say throttle back, throttle back, keep your stick back and you would try and fly level and eventually you would lose flying speed and the nose of the aeroplane

30:00 would drop and it would go into a dive and then you would pick up speed. However if you had any rudder on at that point you would go into a spin, and a spin is the most incredible thing. Because it spun, flip, flop, flip,flop, until it crashed into the ground unless you knew what to do. And what you did was the opposite of what you expect.

30:30 Normally when you are diving and you want to lift the nose of the aircraft you pull the stick back and the nose comes up. With a spin, what you do is you push the stick forward and that allows it to gather flying speed and then you can pull the aircraft out of the spin. But Fairburn we don't know what happened to Hitchcock on that particular night.

31:00 **Let's talk about spins and stalls, these are things that you are trained for, but when they first happen to you they must be terrible things?**

I suppose, it takes your breath away a little bit until you get used to the idea that if you are up high enough you can do anything. When I was flying Met flights and flying the people from the Met Bureau, see we did them in Bulldogs, moved up to Demons we could then take up an officer from the Met Bureau.

31:30 And I was pretty experienced by that stage and I used to take them up the Yarra Valley and say I will show you how ice forms on aeroplanes, and I would fly up, and just the base level of cloud and the precipitation would occur and you could see the icing start. And when it got a little bit heavy you turned

32:00 Or if you are going up the Yarra Valley and you are going to do this and you get to a dead-end, you pull the stick back and you do a climbing turn or a half roll and go back the other way. Another thing we used to do with the people from the Met Bureau, take them up to twenty-thousand feet. And say, from the front of the aeroplane, to

32:30 the Met man at the back throttle back and say write your name on that pad you have got there, and you could speak to them, and they found that at twenty-thousand feet they had lost co-ordination. They couldn't write, it amazed them, they couldn't write because the brain wasn't functioning, it wasn't getting enough oxygen. Other things we used to do

33:00 some of them we would take them up to ten thousand feet, throttle off, and then switch the engine off. And the prop would turn and eventually stop and you turn around and you'd say, 'No noise', and you would see the white face behind you because there you are at ten thousand feet and the engine stopped. And what you did then, you do this over Laverton itself, and so you just roll over like this, they were all tied in,

33:30 just roll over and put the nose right down as vertical as you could and then that would auto-rotate the prop and the engine would start. This was a horrifying experience. And I have got, the Meteorological Bureau have got what they call Metarch [Meteorological Archive] papers and individuals over the whole life of the Met bureau have written papers which are their archives, and I feature quite prominently

34:00 on many of them. Talking about flights up the Yarra Valley, ice making, flying Met flights, putting the engine off at ten thousand feet, all very notable things in their lives in the Met Bureau.

Did they ever get angry at you when they got back on the ground?

No it was a big deal, they would go back to the Met Bureau, they were real heroes saying we have been up with the mad coot there that did all of these sorts of things and survived.

34:30 **What was your reputation in terms of being a mad coot or otherwise?**

Not particularly. I got a reputation as being a good aerobatic pilot, I certainly wasn't the only one there were a lot of good aerobatic pilots. I reckon I was about as good as they came, and that's not boasting. So much so that I got the crazy flight hat at the Flemington Race Course and that was

35:00 five minutes of sheer delight. It was an instructor and pupil act. This was broadcast to the ground. So I had an equipment officer as my so called pupil in front and he allegedly was flying and I was telling him what to do and what not to do. The audience, and I am not exaggerating I have got the clips there, a hundred and fifty thousand people at Flemington and a

35:30 perfect day for me to put on this act of five minutes.

Can you go back and tell us a bit about this event and the lead up to it?

Well they decided they would have an air display. And they had a fellow out from England to set it up, and he did it in an extremely good way. It was the first really big display, and we

36:00 had lots of little displays but this was a really big one. Casey was the Minister for Defence he was out there, with his wife. He remembered the instructor and pupil act when I met him in Washington, without any prompting, remembered that in 1941 when I met him. This was a big display, there was some superb flying of Avro tutors doing the steeplechase, going around the steeplechase course. There was formation flying,

36:30 there was bombing where aeroplanes would dive-bomb and somebody would press the switch and have something explode on the ground. It was a spectacular display and people hadn't seen anything quite as good as the set up by this English Air Commodore that they brought out to do the job for us.

And what was your role?

I had two jobs. I was in the Demon aerobatic team, but I had this five minute effort of instructor and pupil,

37:00 I was supposed to be teaching the fellow how to land, and he'd go around and do turns and do almost a roll, and then you'd do a roll by mistake and you say you've gone too far. And you'd go in to land, you'd say come on we'll do an approach, and beautifully in those days, airplanes were so slow in those days you could do everything in virtually a box in front of the audience.

37:30 It was a big audience, the whole of Flemington Racecourse, and lots of people outside. A hundred and fifty thousand people paid. And you could do it all within vision, these days with a display the aeroplanes are so fast that they come in, by the time they have done a quarter of a roll they are out of sight. But these you could see the whole thing, the whole time, it was quite breathtaking. This particular one where I came in and touched the ground,

38:00 we were going very fast and I said check, check, check, higher and higher, check. And I said I've got to, and as we did I was supposed to take over just before we touched the ground but unfortunately on this occasion, and no excuse at all because it was a clear day with no turbulence or anything, touched with my port lower main blade.

And what happened?

Well I just bounced off, tore up the turf for two or three, I

38:30 would say for two or three milliseconds. It slowed me down enough to get to almost a stall and I staggered back to Laverton and everybody, they had heard at Laverton what had happened and they came out to have a look at the wing but all I had done was taken the fabric off the engine wing and bent it very slightly.

39:00 Then I moved over to my other aeroplane for another quarter of an hour later and then did my aerobatic display.

How did that make you feel, having hit the ground like that in such auspicious circumstances?

This was, people remember that particular event. My wife will tell you, we were at a party under a year ago at Canberra Golf Club, fellow says, ‘I remember that day, Flemington’.

39:30 It was a famous event and it was breathtaking at the occasion. And lots of people remember it. Casey remembered it, and I am not boasting about it, I am just saying. What you could do in those days, you wouldn’t be allowed to do it these days.

So it’s on flim? I would love to see that, we will have to stop and change the tape again.

39:49 **End of tape**

Tape 4

00:31 **Just a bit longer on the Met flights. Were there any other particular characters or individuals that were involved in those flights that stand out in your mind?**

Well there was one fellow named Eric Reed who one day borrowed my watch, he was in the same mess, this was in 1936, and he was going to do the Met flight.

01:00 And I said, ‘Well if you crash, be careful I don’t want you to crash, you will ruin my beautiful Omega Seamaster watch’. He said, ‘Yes’. Off he went and did his flight, crashed, and he was found the next day after being upside down in a Bulldog for the

01:30 whole night with the ants eating at him, and writing his last words, etching them onto the side metal frame of the aircraft, and we went hunting for him. And as I told him I wasn’t looking for him we were looking for my watch. Which he came down, they brought him down the mountainside, and he was lying

02:00 down, he had broken two legs, one arm oh he was dreadful, dreadful mess, and he looked up and saw me and said, ‘Okay Dick your watch is all right’. So I got my watch back and I was his best man a couple of years later.

Moving off the Met flights, when did you first get wind of the war starting in Europe? Can you tell us about the news of the war

02:30 **starting in Europe and what everyone thought at that time?**

Well we’re sent over to England having been told not to leave the air force, for a variety of reasons they wanted me to stay. And then they gave me the privilege of being one of the captains to fly the aircraft out to, one of these three Sunderland aircraft out to Australia.

03:00 So we flew to England in July 1939 on QANTAS. This was a big deal because you got to England in twelve days and this was I am not exaggerating, it was considered almost an epic flight to go to England in such a short time. You took off from Rose Bay, alighted Brisbane River. Brisbane to Bowen, Bowen to Townsville, Townsville to Karumba to Groote Eylandt,

03:30 Groote Eylandt to Darwin, Darwin to Bima, Bima to Surabaya, Surabaya to Batavia as it was then. Batavia to Singapore, and so you went on. You took off in the early morning, at five o’clock or so. Called at four, had a good breakfast on board. And then you flew through, stopping at various points

04:00 alighting finally at three o’clock or four o’clock in the day and going ashore and having an overnight. So this was twelve days. Unfortunately our aeroplane lost an engine at Karachi and I had a week extra at Karachi while we waited for an engine to be flown out from England, that made mine nineteen days. Still a very fast flight.

What sort of aircraft was that?

04:30 It was an Empire Boat, which is the predecessor of the Sunderlands, the civil version of the Sunderland. And I had later, both of the, both the captain and the second pilot in my squadron in New Guinea later in 1941.

Had you previously converted to fly seaplanes?

Yes they put us through a training course at Point Cook, it was very interesting, we flew

05:00 a Moth on floats. Took a long time to get off, but once you got in the air they were even slower than they were when they didn’t have floats, two massive floats at the bottom. From there you graduated to Seagulls, which I have mentioned earlier. From there you graduated to Supermarine Southampton. We had two Southamptons, and they were massive

05:30 wooden beasts. They were made of mahogany. And Australia needed a decent sized flying boat, and Britain very kindly, having found that these could be built in metal, gave us their two wooden ones, beautiful mahogany aircraft but they were very very slow. They used these aeroplanes in a variety of ways, one was in the parachute training courses and a pilot was strapped onto the

06:00 a platform on the outer strut, one on the starboard side one on the port side, with a parachute on his back and then a strap around the strut. And the Southampton was slipped, took off, flew climbed, and then it got to about fifteen hundred feet over Point Cook airfield, then you flew into wind for a brief time

06:30 and then you were told undo your strap, so you undid your strap and you held onto the strut. Then they said pull, and you pulled the parachute ripcord the pilot chute would come out and then the big chute would come out and then you'd be pulled off, it was a pull off not a jump. You got pulled off the aeroplane and then you oscillated down, and landed usually on Point Cook airfield. I said usually, we only did one or two of

07:00 them. So I had been converted to Moths, Seagulls and Southamptons before we went over to pick up our Sunderland aircraft in England.

I will just go onto that, but was that basic parachute training for all pilots? What you just described?

No, some did it and some didn't. It wasn't so you could do anything it all it was just to keep the

07:30 technique of parachutes and jumping with parachutes alive but for no special reason. I could imagine cases where they did want to drop you somewhere and so here were people who had been through the experience of being pulled off an aircraft dropping you off. Other people of course had to use their parachutes

08:00 when their aircraft broke up in the air and they had to dive off and pull their parachute.

Did that ever happen to you?

No.

Can you just describe the Seagull, was it the Seagull or Southampton?

Southampton. Southampton had a massive wooden hull, it flew very slowly, it flew along, when we were doing the parachute jumps there was a man standing in front,

08:30 up to here out of the front, the point in the front where the man picks up the buoy when you come in to land. There would be someone in the rear cockpit where the navigator would be standing up. It was so slow. We had two of them, and the squadron leader Himple, Uncle Himple he was very old he must have been forty, he was very fond of

09:00 woodwork so when one crashed one aeroplane was cannibalised to make furniture for him to then hand out to his friends. Beautiful mahogany furniture.

And they used to stand in the slipstream was that right?

The thing was only doing about sixty miles an hour. Very, very slow. I mean it was windy and uncomfortable but you could tolerate

09:30 it for quite long times.

How many engines did it have?

Had two, two water cooled engines and they were strung up high again in between the two main planks.

And what were the tasks given to it by the RAAF?

Seaplane training, it was just training on the big aeroplane for its own sake and it did a few navigational flights. It did one right around Australia which

10:00 was in the early 30s the Southampton did this flight and it was considered epic again, the same as the Anson flight, formation Anson flight around Australia. I say formation it was a group of aeroplanes, three of them. The Southampton did it all by itself, flew around and it was a point of great interest for

10:30 every city around, large and small.

Many people would not have been able to experience a twelve day flight to England, these days you do it in twenty hours and get jet-lagged and everything, perhaps you can tell us a bit more about the in-flight service on the Empire flying boat and whether there were cabin announcements and perhaps describe some of the atmosphere on the boat as the trip progressed.

We had stewards on our aircraft, they served drinks

11:00 almost in hotel style. You could play deck quids on the gangway between, there were the seats two on one side and then there was a gangway where people walked or the stewards served you. You had a seats two facing forward, two facing aft in a virtual little cabin. The food

11:30 served was extremely good. And of course they had no microwaves in those days but it was usually food that could be kept warm enough in the containers to serve you. But it was very classy, there was no economy class, it was all first class, it was very expensive, and it carried the mails all the way. I

remember when I was at Bennett and Wood my last

12:00 period there when I was secretary to the manager we used to send our air mail orders to places in England, Accles and Pollock for our tubes for bicycles and things like that. We'd post one air mail and one sea mail in case the air mail one didn't get through. Or was damaged in some way. The flight over was, it never became boring.

12:30 Well I kept a diary on the way across, with letters to my mother, and I kept a copy for myself and every day I typed up what we were doing on the day. And I have one from Basra where we stayed at the Shatt Al Arab hotel with the seaplane at, or at least the flying boat landing there at four o'clock in the afternoon and taking off at

13:00 four o'clock the next morning for the big flight to Baghdad. Not a very long hop, but we stayed overnight and we went ashore and we ate very fine meals on shore provided by the airline. And then stumbled off to bed fairly early because we were due up at four o'clock to get on board to be off before light.

13:30 **How did you land at Baghdad? Where was the landing strip, the water at Baghdad that you could land on?**

It was on the hotel, the river the Shatt Al Arab, the river. And the airport was the other side, so you had a beautiful big hotel running lengthways along the face of the Shatt Al Arab River and the airport on the other side. Marine craft one side ordinary aircraft the other.

14:00 I have actually got the diary entry there, and of course pinching note paper as we went around. Big deal writing home to my mother, I was, it was, my father had died by then, he had died of cancer. He was hunting around Queensland trying to get himself assignments with accountants and things like that

14:30 had cancer, being treated for stomach ulcers and they didn't realise until after he was dead that he had cancer. Anyway I used to write back to my mother and I am feeling a big hero, let's face it going out of Australia on this flight, this very luxurious flight and such up-market, I mean we had on board Lord and Lady Casey, or we know Mr And Mrs Casey were on board our aircraft. And other people, the director

15:00 general of Civil Aviation and others. We had about sixteen people I would say on board, who we got to know very well. I had bought a typewriter Hermes I have still got it down like that. A very beautiful, fine, wafer like typewriter. And I kept typing the whole way across, when I got to England I kept typing there, and on the lead up to war I was posting these letters to a colleague of mine in Australia,

15:30 Geoff Hartnel, and I didn't know Geoff was doing this, but they passed it around, all around the air force and I got quite a profile from this, I didn't know he was doing this. And as war was building up and as war broke out, I gave them the story and the cold war and what was doing. And my letters were arriving every week and eagerly awaited to find out from the horse's mouth what an Australian felt was going on in Britain at that time.

16:00 **Can you tell us what you did feel? It was a pretty grim situation developing in Europe at that time.**

Well the first thing was we were all going to fly back, we were to fly and war had been declared. We knew that we were going to fly back and take these aeroplanes in Australia, for what I did not know because the war was over there. But Australia, having committed itself

16:30 to a contribution which it couldn't make gave our squadron, and I think we got the signal on the 18th of October saying you are to stay there. This is to our squadron commander. What a thrill, we were so thrilled we were staying there and going to be in the war. But from day one we had been flying with the British Sunderland squadrons as pilots,

17:00 gaining experience on the aircraft under all conditions, which we valued, we expected when we got back to Australia. So when we got the direction to stay there we quickly moved from Pembroke Dock South Wales where we were to Mountbatten to the base there and we operated from there as a full operational squadron. But it was a great thrill and I kept writing these letters, and I have still got my diary, sticking

17:30 page out, I have got the typewriter under the house here. It happened that I had run short of money in England for about four or five months and one of the pilots bought it from me. I then bought it back from him a couple of years ago when he was back in Canberra, he said I have finished with the Hermes, I said I'll buy it back from you? He said no you can have it. So I have got my old Hermes typewriter back. And if Hermes was still in existence as a firm

18:00 which it isn't, that would have been a very valuable artefact for them.

Where were you when war broke out?

We were at Pembroke Dock South Wales.

But had war been declared when you left Australia?

No we left Australia in July 1939, so we had July and August converting again to big aircraft

18:30 at Calshot, and then having satisfied ourselves there we went over and picked up our own Sunderlands and flew them back to Pembroke Dock for a start.

What were the original aircraft you were converting to to train up for Sunderland's?

They were Short Singapores and Stranraers. They were an advance on the Southampton but not a great deal. They were a big heavy cumbersome aircraft which were to be

19:00 used for reconnaissance but never were.

The flying boat is virtually unknown now in air forces, why was there such a fascination with flying boats around that time?

Well the first thing they had flexibility, you could put them down in any harbour around Australia. They are a romantic aircraft in that they don't land on dusty airfields but you land on rivers and lakes and harbours

19:30 and so on. Their take off and landing is spectacularly beautiful, just caressing the waves as you come in. And they are a most unlikely aircraft the fascination was with us, was in New Guinea using them for the tasks for which they were used but for which they were never intended and no one ever heard of them. No one ever heard of Catalinas. Last Anzac Day

20:00 here, the secretary to the minister for defence, the parliamentary secretary had a big occasion out here about the Coral Sea Battle. And she put out a press release about all the Australian Navy did, and the United States Navy did, not a mention of Catalinas. And I wrote to her and I said let me tell you that the Catalinas were there.

20:30 and furthermore I lost two of my crews, one shot down never heard of again by Coral Sea, by the Japanese aircraft in the Coral Sea, another shot down and one person killed, then they took them prisoner and took them to Rabaul and beheaded them. All very romantic, and exciting and sad. But not a mention of this, she wrote back and said, 'I am very sorry, I didn't know you had a crew

21:00 I didn't know you people had a crew there, but actually we made it a naval occasion for the Battle of the Coral Sea because Australia had naval ships in the Gulf in the Gulf War'. So I wrote back and I said to the dear lady, 'I don't know if you noticed', I didn't say it in a sarcastic tone, I said, 'I did hear that there were air force aeroplanes in the Gulf War as well'. But the point I am making is that

21:30 nobody on the jobs that we were doing, because they were secret, knew about Catalinas, knew about flying boats, and everybody just thought that these aircraft were just stooging around the Pacific looking for submarines that were only very rarely seen. But they were a romantic aircraft.

We will come to this story, I certainly agree they are a romantic aircraft the Catalina is one of my favourite aircraft

22:00 **just to look at. Real instrument of destiny, but you were trained and flying relatively high performance fighter aircraft essentially, and you were starting to convert to fairly heavy not so manoeuvrable aircraft. How did that affect your flying?**

Oh it was a sad loss, I mean I was very fortunate. Pardon me, I was very fortunate to be in the war early,

22:30 for a variety of reasons. For vanity, career, satisfaction, any reason at all I was very lucky to be in then. I never looked back and said oh gee I wish I had remained on Demons which were the aeroplanes I had been flying before I went onto flying boats. They were, I was interviewed about pre-war flying on

23:00 one occasion here, I was given the story of pre-war Australia on an interview like this for the compilation of some historical records. And it was reported and they said Kingsland fighter pilot, and a great friend of mine Dick Creswell snorted every time I saw him. Fighter pilot. Creswell of course who had been in

23:30 Kittyhawks and fighters all through the war, fighter he said you were flying boat. But I could never get it into his head that I was flying fighters, so-called, Bulldogs and Demons before he joined the air force, before I converted to be shamed according to him to be in the sedentary, slow, uninteresting flying boats.

Did you have any desire to

24:00 **go on and continue towards the higher performance fighters like the Spitfire?**

No I got enough excitement with Sunderland aircraft. We were fighting the weather we had occasional brushes with the enemy in an aircraft that wasn't designed for aerial combat.

Can you tell us about when you first laid eyes on the Sunderland?

Well I had first laid eyes on the Empire

24:30 Boat which was a Sunderland. So it was no surprise to me when I saw them, they were the same as the Empire Boats except they had turrets. Front and back and guns from the side, so there was no surprise to see them. You know it was certainly impressive and good looking aeroplanes. You could stand on the main plane and you'd have, they were a hundred and twenty, a hundred

25:00 and forty feet wide, about that. It was quite a stretch. They were big interesting, they were graceful on take off, and dramatic. Because when you take off in a flying boat its not just skimming the water with the sound of water brushing there, if you hit a chop it bumps. If you hit a swell you get a really good bump. And because the hull has to be

25:30 light it is thin, so if you take the floor boards of a Sunderland up while you are taking off you can see the ripple of the skin and that makes a noise. So it is, the noise it is quite a noisy aircraft on take off until you get on the step as they say, and that is on the chin there and it rolls along there and then you are carving the water instead of just sitting and pushing it along in front of you. For a start a flying boat

26:00 when you open your throttles in a Catalina and a Seagull the spray just comes all over. All over the top of the aircraft, and then of course you are moving forward, brushes off or you put your wipers on and then you take off.

Can you describe what you see when you get into a Sunderland and how you get into it?

A Sunderland is moored and you take a boat from the jetty and it comes alongside and there is a door, and you walk in the door as you

26:30 do if you are entering a modern jet aircraft. When you go off the gangway you go through a door, in the same way, this one happens to be at water level and you walk on board. And you had to be very careful with the marine boats because very thin skins. So you didn't bump them too hard. In point of fact picking up

27:00 people in difficult circumstances as you are required to do and as I have been required to do but not in highly dramatic circumstances, you have got to be very careful because of the wind. You turn the flying boat or all aeroplanes tend to turn into wind. The wind blows and they tend to orient themselves pointing into the wind, so if you are coming alongside in a boat and the wind changes, you can swing around

27:30 and what you don't want to do is have the boat, bomb scourers or a passenger boat hitting the side of your aeroplane, you develop great skills in seamanship. So at Rathmines, I might tell you later, where we had a marvellous instructor, people learned how to handle their boats better than probably anyone lese in any air force in the world.

Once you get on board the Sunderland, how do you get up to the flight deck?

28:00 There is stairs leading up to the flight deck. In the same way on a modern aircraft you go on. Go on board on a jumbo you go along one level, and then there is behind the pilot's cabin in the jumbo there is another cabin, which sometimes is for business class, sometimes for economy. And the Sunderland is very similar. You

28:30 get on board, there is a small set of stairs and you climb up the stairs and you get into the pilot's seat, and you are sitting up higher than the crew, who apart for the navigator and the engineer who is up there with you, the remainder of the crew are down below at the lower level.

Can you take us through the key positions in the crew? What are the positions in the crew on a Sunderland?

Well there were two pilots, and even though they were very long range, one

29:00 navigator, then you had a mixture depending on the aircraft and the jobs. But there'd be captain, second pilot navigator, all essential. Then you had a fitter 2 E, which is an engineer, and then a fitter 2 A, which is air frame. Then you had one air gunner, or two air gunners, and then you had one wireless

29:30 operator or two wireless operators which took you up to about nine people. The navigator had the toughest job by far in that he was flying with virtually no navigational aid, and going very long distances. And if you don't get to where you want to, for instance a convoy, and you don't get there and see the convoy, you have wasted

30:00 a dangerous mission. I say dangerous because you were flying for hours before dawn and come flying back into darkness for hours into darkness in England for no point at all. So the navigator has a very tough responsible job, the fitter has to watch the engines, he has got four engines and he has got to watch them. There is not much he can do about them, but he can give advice about whether to let the flaps in because the engines were heating up or such,

30:30 or if there was something wrong advising on control, mixture the mixture of fuel and things like that.

In water did you have a sump that you could pump water out if you had a leak and things like that? If water got into the Sunderland how did you?

31:00 If water got into it? Well they weren't pressurised aircraft so if water got in, which it didn't, I don't remember a case where an aeroplane getting holed and then having water rushing in, because if you were taking off, the danger with a flying boat is hitting simple things. Hitting a coconut in Port Moresby harbour can hole your aircraft, or a bottle

31:30 can hole your aircraft. But usually they didn't and they'd get swept aside, but if they didn't and they made a hole and you had some water coming in you'd be off. Or if you had the hole when you came back, you would probably bale a little bit but you would beach your aircraft very very quickly so that you didn't sink. But the aeroplanes weren't pressurised, open the door throw stuff out.

32:00 **Did you have any, a galley or bunks?**

Bunks yes. There were several bunks in the Sunderland and they were quite comfortable and the pilot would, the captain usually being the most experienced would take it off and get it on its way and go for an hour or so, possibly go down and have breakfast or have a snooze, after all he had been up early.

32:30 Two o'clock in the morning to get to operations room at three, take off at four, fly for four hours before you got light say at eight o'clock. So you had to rest, not that, I don't remember ever sleeping although, sorry that's wrong. I can, I could on longer flights I could put myself to sleep very

33:00 quickly by process of relaxing, from your brow, nose, down slump. And I learnt that, my wife will tell you this is not joking. We can get on to an aeroplane and we get on board, we get on at Fairburn and we're going to Melbourne, and I'll sit back close my eyes and just relax and we'll take off and I wouldn't wake up until we were in the air.

33:30 I could do that and I haven't been drinking or over tired. It was just that I wanted to relax because I had something to do at the other end. So you have to learn to relax, otherwise you became very tense and that was bad.

What was the endurance of a Sunderland?

Normally we flew about sixteen hours, that was the normal. The Catalinas normally eighteen, twenty, when necessary.

34:00 You know you might have a flight for eight or ten hours if you had a convoy very close to the coast. Say on a short day you could take off an hour before dawn, reach the convoy, stay with the convoy during light, no point in being there in the dark because you can't see anything. Take an hour and a half back and then you might be only doing an eight or a ten hour flight.

What armaments and bombs did you carry?

Well they carried

34:30 depth charges on the Sunderland, and they were inboard, and they had flaps on the side which came down and you wound out depth charges. When you were flying out to the convoy, they were all inboard, then when you were due to get there, say we were due, they would open the slides down the side then they'd wind manually the depth charges out onto the underwing

35:00 and then close the doors again. Then you'd have two depth charges either side and they were set for varying depths so if you saw a submarine, on rare occasions, because your main value out there was keeping the submarines down so that they couldn't track the convoy. So if you, when you're doing your search ahead of the convoy, the submarines would see you and immediately submerge for fear of being attacked,

35:30 and they couldn't see the ships. And the convoy is changing course all of the time, and could often bypass even a pack of submarines. Because a Sunderland or other aircraft had made them keep their nose down, for quite some time. They wouldn't go down and then come up again in ten minutes because they know they would be seen. So they'd have to stay down for at least half an hour by which time the convoy would have moved in another direction.

36:00 **Just briefly want to stay on the Sunderland just describing it, because these aircraft are no longer around. The instrumentation, was there any particular instrumentation that was particular to?**

Well there was a lot of instruments. Because there was four engines you had four sets of engine instruments but they were nothing as compared with the number on the modern

36:30 air liner. Although these are now converting back so that you see very very few and you just call up on your screen what you want to see. But the intermediary airliners between then and now carried quite a few instruments recording a lot of things that we weren't required to record.

Can you take us through a typical take off in a Sunderland from a pilot's point of view what you were doing?

37:00 Right you are all on board, captain says doors closed and there'd be someone up forward with his nose sticking out in the cold in the middle of the night with his hand on the rope which is on a ballard in the aircraft. And so the captain says start starboard inner that's got a generator on it. Start starboard inner,

it would cough, go.

37:30 So start port inner, and it would go, so you then had traction, you would call to the bowman, slip and you would slip. This was if you were in relatively open water. If you were in tight water as we often were at Mountbattenyou would start starboard inner to get power and then you start port outer in order to get something which could turn the aeroplane,

38:00 starboard outer, when both of those were ticking over you then say slip, and then you could guide your aircraft by using the engines, not the rudder. Because they were of no use, not by the rudders on the aeroplane. So you just gave it power, if you wanted to turn right, if you wanted to turn starboard you give port engine and so the aircraft would turn. Then you would

38:30 taxi out avoiding other aeroplanes which was pretty hard at night. And then you would taxi out of the harbour, the danger there was the harbour was fairly full of boats, but they had left a track for you to take off. So you taxied down past the flare path which was usually small boats moored, and the small boats would have a light on them, and they would have half a dozen

39:00 of them. And you would check to the end, turn, and having flicked your switches to make sure your magnetos were working on all of your engines, turn around then open out through the gate, the aeroplane, the engine, you had four throttles. Captain here, four throttles forward and you would get to the gate

39:30 which was the normal maximum speed. But for take off you had to go through the gate up and over,, and you would hear terrific surge of power and then you would pull off. Then as soon as you were off throttle back so that you didn't hurt your engines. The danger in this when we were flying from other places like Oban in Scotland. The waterway was so deep you couldn't anchor the boat and so

40:00 you had three boats, little boats with a light on each and the front one going forward and the others following him into wind, and they were guides to show you where to go. If however they were (UNCLEAR) as sometimes occurred or they were being used as a landing path when you were coming back at night and they weren't expecting you because the weather was so foul

40:30 and they didn't think anyone could get through, they might drift close to an island. And that happened to me on one night. Touched down after a very long and very painful flight. We alighted, touched the second flare and as we hit the third flare the third flare hit and island and my Sunderland went up the island. I tried to turn, couldn't turn, the engine flew

41:00 out of my aeroplane, slid back into the water with four depth charges on board and we slowly sank. I have got lovely photographs of that.

We might continue this

41:12 **End of tape**

Tape 5

00:31 **Right just take us through the circumstances of that particular landing again.**

At Oban?

Yes.

We had had a very bad day, weather was foul, we had no navigational aids, we had been out on convoy patrol all day. England had closed down, we had taken off the weather had been pretty poor. Weather in Scotland is shocking so often.

01:00 this occasion not only Scotland but the whole of England was out, it was under cloud. And we had virtually no aids. I had a navigator who had been and done an astro-navigation course and he was using a bubble sextant, and we flew above the cloud to get a fix, wondering where the hell England was.

01:30 He gave me the fix and we felt our way down from there into the Firth of Lorne which was a sort of channel, very wide at the opening and then becoming narrower and narrower as it went inland. And we poked our nose down and eventually broke through and saw the water, very very lucky we didn't hit it. I had my landing lights on

02:00 and we saw the water and then we flew at water level. Now I had the first radar on in our group, our coastal command group. And our radio operator had to tell me land three miles to port, land two piles to port. So you turned, land two miles to starboard, so you turned to port, it was, then he would say two and a half to port, two and a half to starboard,

02:30 and we steered progressively, a mile to port a mile to starboard you know. Eventually feeling our way up the channel, and we broke through and there was a little, the cloud broke a little over Oban and I said

there is the flare path. Did a climbing turn, turned around and then made an approach, touch down, everybody says thank God

03:00 throttle back gently, we touched down with the second flare and as we passed the third flare a long way along it hit the side of the hill. But I could see it, I had my landing lights on I could see it in front of me and I put my port motor on full burst to try and turn to try and get away from the island and couldn't, and we

03:30 hit. The port motor flew out, never recovered by the way, up the mountain and then into this deep Firth of Lorne, where Oban was, and then slid back. My second pilot navigator then went, the craft started to sink we were below water level there, they went down. I have got a letter by the way only this year from my second pilot on that occasion

04:00 telling me about how he and the navigator went down to make certain that the depth charges were on safe. Because normally when we were flying out in the ocean they were cocked and ready to go in case we wanted to drop them. But to make certain that they were all off they had to dive down and check that the depth charges were safe. So that they were unlikely to explode

04:30 as we sank. Another letter I got two years ago, and this is pretty hard to believe, my navigator, a sergeant with whom I have maintained contact over the years, confessed that the navigation course that he had done in Wales, confessed that he had never done an astro-sight and the first astro-sight he had ever done was on that aeroplane that night. But fortunately it was an accurate sight

05:00 and got us down safely. And that night from Coastal Command we lost two Sunderlands, Four Hudsons and eight Ansons. Who were relatively short-range aircraft who had gone out and then couldn't get in, who had tried to get back in and then crashed on the way in. And unfortunately I should have been in there safely except for the bone headedness of

05:30 one of the landing path crews who didn't keep their eyes open, didn't expect to see us.

Can you tell us how you and the crew got out of the flying boat?

The night? Of course the landing path boats came alongside and took progressively the crew off. They were very small boats. One of my crew, the

06:00 wireless operator broke his arm badly. Got him off, all of us had a few bruises. And we were progressively taken away. The aeroplane was stuck on the side of the, just on, it settled on a ledge on the Firth of Lorne and they eventually towed it off the next day. I have got photographs of that in there,

06:30 which is very sad because that was the first time I had crashed a Sunderland, I was a very experienced pilot. This was the end of 1940.

You said it was a particularly bad mission, can you take us through perhaps the start of that mission?

Well the first thing you do, you go to the operations room and find out where you are going,

07:00 see the Met officer, to see what the conditions were. The Met officer was always locked up, they were dark in dreary, he had no idea what it was like outside and we usually had very little faith in them because the weather usually comes from the west as it does in Australia and Britain, and there was no reporting systems out there because there was wireless silence with the ships. The ships could have given you weather reports,

07:30 pressure, temperature, cloud base, the whole lot. But they were all totally silent out there, otherwise they would have been picked up by the German shore radio outlook, otherwise German submarines. We'd get our operation order telling us where the convoy was, how long we should be there, when we should get there

08:00 on their reckoning. Then we'd go down, the second pilot would go down and get the pigeons, that sounds rather funny but we always carried pigeons. And we would go down and get on board, the crew having been on board before checking everything through. And you'd hop up in your seat, the pilot in his seat, second pilot in his seat, engineer in his and off you'd go and I mentioned you'd do the take off. Take off and you'd fly, the navigator would call for a change of course at

08:30 times so that he could get a sight on a flare to see what our drift was. And then having two drifts, doing a drift while we were flying straight to the convoy,

Can you describe that action of navigating for dropping a flare?

Well the flare was a, self contained, it

09:00 was bulbus. You opened the side door of the aircraft, pulled a pin and threw it out and then when it hit the water it then burst into a flare. You had various sorts, some had parachutes little parachutes on them. And they would float down, other ones you would just shoot off and they would burn with a red glow and red smoke, and the

09:30 navigator would check then to see how far you had drifted, what your degree of drift was. This told you the strength of wind one way. To get a really good fix you need three, but two was enough for us to give us a course. It was remarkable we always got our convoys, this is after four hours flying in the dark. I don't know whether you

10:00 know, but the slower you fly the more difficult navigation is. If you were in an aeroplane that went like a bullet, the wind would only take you a little bit off course, but if you are flying at fifty kilometres an hour and you have a fifty kilometre per hour wind on your starboard side, you'd be going forty-five degrees to the angle of where you want to go. So we were a slow aircraft, they were only flying at ninety knots or so, so the wind had a great effect on it.

10:30 But we never missed a convoy in all of my time, and I never missed a target in Catalinas, because the navigation was so good. It must be, I think Almighty lent a hand, and I think errors cancel themselves out. If the pilot wasn't flying, don't forget the pilot was told to fly a course he has got to fly that course to achieve what the navigator hopes.

11:00 But if you drift a little bit, the pilot gets a bit lazy and moves off track, he can very easily get away and miss the target he was looking for. You get to the convoy and identify yourself, and then get to the front of the convoy and do searches of various patterns to make certain that you can see the subs down in front of you. If you saw a sub of course you attacked. We had that joy

11:30 on occasion, but they were very very rare. Then you do this pattern, and you go backwards and forwards until you were relieved. If it was a long day, in summer you can have a very long day, you can get out there at dawn, you might be relieved at midday and fly back. And then another aircraft take over, then you fly back to base. Hopefully the weather will be all right, and hopefully, by the way, the balloons will down. Because you get back to Plymouth Harbour,

12:00 Plymouth was under attack on occasions, and the people left the balloons up, they were supposed to close all of the balloons when we advised them we were coming in. On occasions they didn't, and I don't know whether it was lack of knowledge or deliberate but we couldn't, the flare path was free of balloons, but it didn't give you much leeway. The balloons were there to stop German aircraft low flying over the town and dropping their bombs, it was

12:30 quite a dramatic sight seeing the balloons up high.

On the particular occasion you had to divert to Oban you said the mission had been difficult and long, can you describe that particular mission?

All the missions were long. It wasn't particularly difficult except that the weather was lousy all of the way. We struck our convoy and we were then flying at fifty or a hundred feet above the water

13:00 doing our patrols, hoping that if there was a submarine there that he would see us. Better on a clear day when we could be up reasonably high, a few hundred feet, a thousand feet so the subs from a long distance could see us and then they would duck down, and that was the aim of the exercise. But the weather on this occasion, actually I had flown off from Oban. O B A N. And we were coming back to Oban,

13:30 But flying all day with poor weather, particularly if it were windy and cloudy, and you were down almost water level hand flying, you couldn't put your automatic pilot in there because automatic pilot is not totally reliable. And you're hand flying all of the time, and they are heavy aircraft, and the aircraft, by the way, were not waterproofed,

14:00 they were not pressurised. So if you were flying through water, a moisture laden atmosphere or in rain, drip came on, and so often you would come back from a trip with your neck stiff because you had been sitting there for a couple of hours with water dripping on the back of your neck or on your knees. I was sent to hospital on one occasion after doing jobs in bad weather for three or four days in succession.

14:30 And I had, I was a bit stiff in the back of the neck, a bit stiff in the knees and had a cough, and immediately these were the symptoms of polio. Cerabro-spinal meningitis and they whipped me into the naval hospital as soon as I landed. Into the naval hospital at Plymouth and they said we'll do a lumbar puncture and I said no way. And the fellow looked at me, the naval doctor and he said you are to have

15:00 a lumbar puncture and I said I am not having a lumbar puncture. I have been flying all day, several days, each day, no time off. I am stiff and I have a cold, if this persists and it is CSM [Cerebro Spinal Meningitis]then you can do your test. They called the captain down, I was a flight lieutenant at that time. And he stormed down, somebody refusing treatment

15:30 prescribed by him in his own hospital, and I said if you try to touch me I will go. He was furious, anyway next morning I was right again. It was just, just that we were cold, wet, damp. You don't know what it's like sixteen hours say of everything wet, your flight suit is wet, bits dripping in, it is not a heavy rain, you can't put a hood over yourself, it is just bits dripping down from the side. And when you look out the side, you

16:00 want to see something because visibility is bad, you pull the screen back on your side to look out and a bit of water comes in again, it's rather a damp thing. Of course on other days, Bay of Biscay, we were doing anti-invasion patrols on the Bay of Biscay, weather is absolutely perfect, sun beaming down. You

strip down, you make certain you are keeping a good lookout because that's what you are there for, but having the sun coming down instead of the muck from the western approaches. It was heavenly.

16:30 **How far could you patrol out? There was a gap wasn't there?**

There was a gap, yeah. A big gap. And we went as far as we could, sometimes we flew for eight hours to stay out there an hour.

17:00 And then fly eight hours back, but very interestingly ships coming in, because they had radio silence, if they were in bad weather for a long period, they had concerns about their own navigation, because of currents and wind. And the navy eventually, it hurt them it made them swallow very hard, when we arrived out, having fixes on the sun, particularly in the morning which would give

17:30 you a longitude, we could do that pretty accurately. We'd get a longitude, it would be cloudy over the ships, but we had been with our bubble sextant over the cloud, get a longitude in order to know how far we had to go before we popped down under the clouds to see the convoy. And they were told if they were not sure of their position, longitude was their main worry, they would say WAI [Where Am I],

18:00 flash it at us, and we would say WAM, wait a minute. We would go above the cloud and do a check for them. The Australians were vulgar would put WFM, of course everybody knew what that meant. And we went above cloud found out and came back. The navy found it difficult to ask these pseudo navigators in the plane where they were, but they, if they had been out in the Atlantic, all the way from America and had

18:30 no sun or star sights on the way they really had to rely on someone who had come out from England or could pop up and get them a fix or a longitude.

Can you describe any other discomforts on these long patrols?

No, it was the monotony, I'll tell you one discomfort, and it's when you come

19:00 back, you had been out all day and you come back at eight o'clock. And you say I think I'll go to the pub, Plymouth and have a drink, you would go to the pub and you would have a drink and people would have a look at you, and you were in air force uniform, and they would say you are blue orchids. I remember them now, blue orchids over here you know. And we had been flying through muck all day, and then being looked at by others, other servicemen by the way

19:30 including some locals, as being blue orchids who were just over for the evening. But no, it was often we let our pigeons out. It was very interesting, if you came down and you wanted to be picked up, you let your pigeons go with a little message container on his thing. And if you had lost say two engines and come down in the sea, let the pigeons go.

20:00 But we used to practise with the pigeons, we'd take two or three with us. We'd open the door on the side, wrap the pigeon in newspaper and throw him out the side. We would wrap him in newspaper because we didn't want him to get in the slip stream and hit the tail plane at all, so for him to go down. So we would wrap him up, throw him out like that and he'd, the paper

20:30 would float off and we just couldn't believe it. We knew where, say we were coming out from England we knew exactly where we had come from, the pigeon would take one swoop and turn and go right back along our tracks. The rear gunner in the Sunderland would see him going back. It was quite remarkable that they knew exactly where they were and would go back to their perch. And we did these practice runs to give us a bit of confidence,

21:00 and the pigeons came back. We always sent message everything fine, we are at position such and such, everything is fine. And then the pigeon would go and we would know that we would get our messages through if it was necessary. See if you went down you mightn't be heard. A) because if you broke radio silence it might be an invitation for subs to come in

21:30 on a convoy, or you might not have radio contact because you were along way out.

Were you ever called on search and rescue out there to pick up other crews that were down?

This is, people thought that people could just go down in the ocean and pick up people. The swells in the Atlantic have to be seen to be believed, some of them are thirty feet high

22:00 you know, and an aeroplane getting in there would be lost in a trough. And could easily, if the waves were breaking, could easily be broken. I went down a couple of times, I went on one occasion it was fairly flat, a light swell, alighted, along there a ship had been torpedoed. We often saw ships when we got out there, ships had been torpedoed and the destroyers or frigates were picking up survivors.

22:30 I actually saw that at sea when I went across the Atlantic on a ship later, it was horrifying. But we saw one boat all by itself, and the destroyers were a long way over the horizon, and I alighted and we went alongside. Now this is not easy because the boats, the boats off the ship the life-boats are very heavily constructed and so you wouldn't want to bump one, and so we had to

23:00 shout instructions that we would be coming nearby, and watch very closely on no account, we are trying

to avoid hitting you or you hitting us. We came, on this occasion, we called out from a distance with our engines throttled right back, and we would like you, the water was all flat, it was all men, ‘If you

23:30 could swim, could you swim over towards us?’ None of them said no, ‘We’ll switch off engines and you can come alongside’. And they said, ‘Where are you going?’ And we said ‘We’re going to Plymouth’. And they said, ‘Oh no we’re going to America’, and we said, ‘Come off it’. And they said, ‘Well there’s a destroyer, this is an exchange, a destroyer over there’, they could see the smoke over the horizon but not the ship. A destroyer

24:00 making smoke coming towards them and they thought they’d be picked up. Anyway we said ok, anyway we started engines, took off again quite safely, and we flew back to Plymouth because we had finished our patrol. Unfortunately the weather changed and these people were not picked up by the destroyer of course

24:30 it couldn’t find them, and they rowed back to England, I think it was three weeks. They were on their way rowing, running out of food all of the way, it was a horrific trip, and came into Plymouth and we made contact with them there. They knew, we said we were going back to Plymouth and they asked the question and we met them. And they said what fools they were, because they wanted to go to America and they didn’t want to come back to Plymouth but they rowed back anyway.

25:00 How they got into Plymouth I don’t know because it was, the first point was Land’s End, you would have thought they would have pulled in there, but they were down a bit south, and I think they just hit the coast around Plymouth.

Extraordinary.

Sounds like a fairy story but it is quite true. But in answer to your question no, we were going down and picking up people because every time we went out to a convoy, see a convoy was sometimes two hundred and fifty ships, and almost

25:30 invariably some ship had been knocked off somewhere along the track, either when we got there or on our track in. And these poor diggers were in the water, oil all over the place. It was rare that a convoy would not lose a ship in a day.

Can you describe what you could see from the air?

26:00 Oh you could often see the ship with its nose down and about to go down, sometimes we’d see them go down. And you could see people leaping off the stern of the ship, others in boats, others in the water and with oil, even though the sea was choppy, there is almost a sea of oil where the torpedo

26:30 had hit the ship, knocked its tanks out, and there was oil swimming around. And these poor buggers were swimming around in that, if they took a gulp of the oil, straight down their lungs. And they didn’t look pretty, I saw them when we came across the Atlantic, we picked up people, that’s another story.

We’ll have to get onto that too.

27:00 **I was just wondering, did you ever get a chance to have a go at some of these U Boats [Untersee boots – German Submarines]?**

Yes well I made a few attacks. It’s very hard, you’d see a U Boat, you’d see a periscope, you would rarely see them on the surface because they would see you and they would dive. And that takes them a while to do, but we’re very slow and by the time we get there they are down. And you see their conning tower and you say well what do you reckon?

27:30 Do you reckon he’s going to turn right, left, go straight ahead, or do you reckon he is going to dive straight down? Because our depth charges were set at various depths, fifty, hundred, hundred and fifty feet. If you were late, if you were late and you had seen him go down well you said I have got no idea where he is I hope he has dived down far, set the depth charge for a hundred and fifty feet. And down, you would have two

28:00 on a hundred and fifty feet on the outside, one on a hundred there, one on fifty, or you might drop the whole lot. Generally you wouldn’t because you would only have one go. Because you were dropping one or two you would try to pick out the height of where they are. But if you see the conning tower go and the stream, if it were fairly clear still water, you would se the conning tower go, it would leave a little trail. And then you say which way? And then you go down and push the button,

28:30 you would do it from a very low height and be almost on top of where you thought he was. But to get them was very hard, and I must say Coastal Command in the navy were quite right, you never got credit for one unless it was proven that it was not, that is if it came to surface and they all surrendered. So you say anti-submarine patrols, we were doing anti-invasion patrols which were important

29:00 that’s down in the Bay of Biscay in the French coast. And other jobs, taking VIP out to Middle East places.

Can you describe the Bay of Biscay patrols, what was the particular purpose of those again?

The Bay of Biscay patrols was, at the time of the Battle of Britain for instance.

29:30 They were sending over photo reconnaissance aircraft, fast ones, along the German coast to see if there was any shipping movement. But if the weather was crook they couldn't see, they might be able to get over there but they couldn't see through the cloud, they didn't have devices such as they have now. The Sunderlands would be sent out. And this happened not only in the Battle of Britain but on

30:00 other occasions. They would say down to the Bay and see if you can see anything there. And in case a convoy, or a force was moving in to make a raid or move to make a landing. And so we went down there, fairly boring trips because you didn't see anything. If you had have seen anything I think they would have had aircraft out there to make certain

30:30 you didn't report it. And on one occasion we had been doing these for several days and I thought that I would take the aircraft in to the French coast. And do something active anyway. And the reason I did, it wasn't totally stupid there was a fifth layer of strata cumulus cloud, about two thousand three thousand feet thick. And so I knew where Brest

31:00 was and I knew the submarines were there, well I had been told. So we, I asked the navigator for course and we hopped into the cloud and we steered and he said we should be over Brest now. So at that point we popped out from under the cloud and there was Brest. And we had our depth charges ready to drop, which were funny things to drop on submarines in dock, but three

31:30 ME 110 fighters, their latest fighters came up from below at us. We were at about eight thousand feet. Under the strato cumulus [cloud], so we were pretty smart and we just ducked back into the strato cumulus and we headed back to England. And we had been going about ten minutes and the strato cumulus started to break up. And unfortunately the ME110s had been controlled by radar

32:00 or had been advised by radar where we were. And as the strato cumulus started to break up they started to come at us. So I had to dive down, very steep level to water level to bring our guns to bear. We were very vulnerable from underneath. And these aircraft made passes at us. Now at this point we were getting very close to the coast of England and the ME 110s broke off. But they peppered us we were really, no-one in the aircraft was hit, we had holes in the

32:30 everywhere. And they had incredibly bad luck. They didn't hit a tank, they didn't hit a man, and we came in they had written us off by the way, we told them we were being attacked by three ME110s and they didn't think we would have much chance at base. We didn't tell them how or why it had happened. I didn't even confess for a long time what we had done, what a stupid thing I had done.

33:00 But it taught me a lesson.

Can you describe what you were doing and what the crew was doing when you were being attacked by the fighters?

Well everybody is engaged on a gun. We have got guns either side, one out the back, one out the front, obviously one turret, twin point five guns. And you flew the aeroplane around, and if the ME110s were coming in this way you would turn in towards them,

33:30 and you were very slow and they tended to overshoot that way. What they like to do was to get underneath and shoot up that way at an exposed aeroplane, a Sunderland or a Lancaster or anything, come up at you that way. That's where the main danger came from. My second pilot wrote to me this year, the end of

34:00 last year, the second pilot on this particular trip. A pilot officer we were always running short of crews over there and we borrowed one from the Royal Air Force Coastal Command, group headquarters, mild little bloke. And he was as cool as a cucumber in this. And he has written a story, which he sent me only this year, of his time with

34:30 me as his captain, and of this particular event. At times I am inclined to think I exaggerate, I mean stories get a little better, like the story on Sherbourne Hills and with him on an aeroplane and unexpectedly finding him the author of a book which I was quoting. Not until you see it in writing that

35:00 you say oh gee it wasn't exaggerated. Now this particular flight was a stunner, and it, the media got a hold of it. I say got a hold of it, they were told how a Sunderland was attacked by there and got off, and it made minor headlines in the columns in the Telegraph and the Times. And there it was. My second pilot, writing his story before he made

35:30 contact with me again, the end of last year, writing his story, not knowing he was going to speak to me again. Knowing about the fact that the PR was given out about this Sunderland surviving this really difficult attack, difficult situation, and they didn't mention that the pilot

36:00 handling the controls was an Englishman from the Royal Air Force. Actually we both had a go at the controls, and we were throwing the aircraft around very very wildly. And he was furious at this, and he has written his autobiography. And this section, he has got about this attack, he was my second pilot at Oban when I crashed there and

36:30 the reason that I found out about him was that I saw a film on Oban in wartime, BBC [British

Broadcasting Corporation] film, posted out by my daughter many years ago. Now it was a BBC tape and the fellow at the end of the tape said he

37:00 crashed his Sunderland in Oban. I said crashing his Sunderland in Oban? Royal Air Force type, so I was quite surprised, his name was mentioned, his name was Martin Butcher. And at the end of credits it said, yes credits it was TV that's right, credits, Wing Commander Butcher, but I

37:30 assumed it was him. And he said he crashed his aeroplane, and I said bloody hell I crashed my aeroplane there at Oban. Not until he sent me his autobiography did I find out that he later, when he went back to the Royal Air Force squadrons had his own Sunderland aircraft and he incredibly at Oban was led onto the rocks in the same way as he and I had been led on the rocks before,

38:00 and it's all there in writing you know. And I was saying that sometimes these stories seem exaggerated and you get a great thrill when you verify and you find out that you haven't exaggerated or exaggerated much you know. By virtue of reports of other people or photographs or other material.

Very good, I think we might.

38:26 **End of tape**

Tape 6

00:30 **Ok just going back to talking about the Coastal Command role you were playing in the early days of the war in 10 squadron, you were based at Mountbatten in Plymouth, can you describe that for us? What was going on there?**

Well it was a little peninsula abutting the city of Plymouth, it

01:00 was only a very short distance from the peninsula to where Drake used to play bobbles. On Plymouth I can't think of the name the place where he played. We had a few hangars there and a very pleasant mess. We were, when Plymouth was quite regularly bombed

01:30 and in particular one very very bad period in 1940 when it had three successive nights of major attacks, we got all the unders and overs and wrecked our hangars and aircraft, and we saw what was very much

02:00 like Canberra's bushfires the other day . There is a fire-storm and everything burnt out. But it was a pleasant place, overlooking Plymouth Sound.

Can you describe a bit more about that bombing, where were you at the time and what you were doing?

Well we were operating from Mountbatten at that stage but they had a series of three nights bombing.

02:30 And it virtually destroyed the town, on the scale of the Coventry attack, they had had attacks before, they had attacks afterwards but this concentrated one was very great. The Prime Minister of Australia was there on the night, I don't know what he was doing. He came to visit us in Plymouth and we saw him before and after the bombing, where he was during the bombing

03:00 I don't know. I am not suggesting he was hiding or anything like that, but it was a quite traumatic night. The Commanding Officer of Mountbatten of the whole station was an English group captain, and he walked around the station, with his tin helmet on, walked around the station all night, wouldn't go under cover as the attacks occurred. But we eventually were all tucked into the trenches

03:30 that were there for us and watch our hangars get knocked down.

What could you see crouching in a slit trench when everything was being bombed?

Oh you could see the sky was black and red, a terrific red glow. Continuing explosions, and you could hear bombs whistle down and you just wait for the, to go off. The Plymouth people were exceedingly brave.

04:00 Everybody put on brave faces, and after each day went about their business as much as they could, most of their businesses were knocked down, or trying to repair things or set up somewhere else. And after the three nights they recuperated as quickly as you could, after everything had been knocked down they started to rebuild again.

How did you physically stand almost

04:30 **three nights of constant barrage like that?**

I think we were all, I think most of our Coastal Command crews were used to disruption, we didn't have sleeping hours as normal people did. Up early in the morning, sometimes two, three, four. Sometimes flying into the night, and so it didn't take

05:00 very much adjustment. Of course I assume we must have got some sleep, we must have. I don't remember going back into our mess and sleeping but we probably did.

Did the bombs get very close to where you were?

Oh yes, I have got some magnificent photographs of our hangars, which we just had our slit trenches just outside the hangars, and there are these half Sunderlands, with a tail sticking in the air and the front of them bombed

05:30 out. The hangars themselves were very, very big because they were big aeroplanes but the rooves had gone off them. It was a state of total destruction.

What was the situation with casualties at Mountbatten?

We didn't have any lost life. A few people had minor injuries, that was all. And I don't know whether Plymouth had large numbers of

06:00 deaths but the destruction was almost complete.

How did you set about cleaning up and getting back to business after that bombing?

Well it was just a matter of course, lets face it, it was not new to us, so when the crews were getting tired, particularly the pilots and particularly the captains who carried a fair responsibility, a good commanding officer would look and see who was looking a bit ragged, and

06:30 they'd be sent over to group headquarters and be given a bag of confidential documents to carry as a courier. Couriers were running all over the place carrying, these were real documents. Lock and key, and you take them up to London, and they'd take them off at the ministry and they you'd have a night off. And I was in

07:00 London on many occasions when there was bombing. And in point of fact I drove around, I was taking out a lady who was a nurse and ambulance driver, and driving around in a bombing raid is a terrifying experience. She was as cool as a cucumber, I didn't say a word and tried to look cool. But hearing the bombs coming down, the thing is of course the bomb that is going to kill you

07:30 you are not going to hear it whistle, it will hit you before you hear anything from it. But you hear these things whistling down and you say one two three, you're expecting a stick at four, one, two, three, four and bang it would be very close and make you sit up.

What does that whistling sound like when a bomb comes down quite near you?

Well it was, the sort of sound

08:00 which we make in our Catalinas when we used to take beer bottles over Rabaul in order to keep the anti-aircraft gunners head down, we'd throw bottles over and they would just whistle, and sometimes we'd put a razor blade into the neck of the bottle, semi-break the blade, bend it. And that made a beautiful whistling noise and when that came down people would expect more than just a bottle.

08:30 But the whistling sound, no different to anybody just whistling through their lips, but the pitch is a little higher as it gets closer to you.

How often would you get down to London on leave?

Oh once a month, six weeks.

What would you do when you had a bit of leave?

Oh no when we took leave we didn't go to London.

It was just the dispatches?

It was just those jobs, I

09:00 don't remember leave. I was, when you got extremely tired you got a couple of days off, not stress leave but when you were really tired, and we'd go down to Torquay, the beach there. The only problem is if you go down there and you're in your togs and you're sitting in the sun you tended, and I got a couple of times white feathers., You know from people seeing apparently fit young men lying on the beach, possibly talking to a woman

09:30 and wondering why isn't he up there fighting the war like their father, brother, son is.

What would happen in those circumstances?

Well you shrugged it off, you didn't have a conscience at all you had been working. But Torquay had a big hospital there and people who had, particularly pilots who had been burned, they had a burn unit there.

10:00 And we used to drop, if you could get a day or two off, nip in and have a drink with them around the pubs, but they were pretty horrible sights some of them. Fighter pilots and people who had been in an

aircraft that was blazing and have the skin on one side of their face just red raw. Not making heroes of themselves but having some recreation, had to get in at night by an early hour,

10:30 and they were all put to bed quietly to try and give them some recreation.

What sort of mixing did you do with the English population in those times?

Well a lot. The English were exceedingly kind, particularly to the foreigners, the black troops like ourselves. They went out of their way, opened their homes. Lady Esther,

11:00 was the member for Plymouth and she knew our squadron fairly well, and she was very, very keen to get young Australians to marry young, she was an American, to get young Australians to marry young British girls and she used to invite us to tea dance and such. Parties dinners and that. She didn't get one wedding bell out of it,

11:30 but the kids were young, beautiful, polished but not for us. We repaid in kind sometimes. When we went up the Middle East taking people to Cairo or Bizerte in Tunis and things like that, we always dropped into Gibraltar and we would pick up from Gibraltar eggs, tons of eggs and oranges. All

12:00 of these had been picked up on ships running along the Spanish coast by the British Navy. And brought into Gibraltar which was overflowing with eggs and oranges, and these things were quite short in England. And we used to load our aircraft up, all the crew would have a few boxes of eggs or onions and we used to come back and give them to people who had taken care of us. And these were a great thrill, because eggs I think they only got one a

12:30 month or something like that, they got virtually no meat during rationing.

Did you get the opportunity to see many young women at the time?

Oh sure yeah, Women from the other services WAAF [Women's Auxiliary Air Force], we had WAAF officers on our station. Then we would strike women when we were moving around bars or in town and relationships were struck very very quickly

13:00 because things were, life expectancy was, although people weren't being killed people didn't think that their luck would hold for all that long.

Did you still have a feeling that you would get by all right, that you weren't going to die?

I had a great deal of confidence that I would make it until May 41 when I reckoned an invasion was imminent and I reckoned if we were over in Britain you would

13:30 have been fighting as ground troops and I wouldn't have given us much chance there. That was one time that I really felt that I was getting toward the end. And then New Guinea, Port Moresby which I could talk a little bit to you about later, Port Moresby, flying from there doing jobs, I

14:00 was feeling that if I got over that night maybe I would get over the next night, but it wouldn't be too long before I got knocked off. I gave away all, I had some worldly possessions not many, but I gave everything I had away. Wrote to my mother and said clean out my room and give stuff away to people who might be able to use everything to formal wear to

14:30 gramophone records to books to everything.

How did your mother react to that?

I think she had a great deal of faith that I was indestructible. I don't think she was worried I think she was very proud that she had somebody up there. And this was in Moresby, or when I was overseas, and when I was at Moresby she felt she got a lot of reflected glory,

15:00 her son was up there. Been given a small amount of press coverage here and there and she revelled in it naturally.

You mentioned a period in 1941 when it looked like Britain would get invaded, can you just talk about the atmosphere in England at that time when the Battle of Britain was on?

Well Britain was, the Battle of Britain,

15:30 things looked very tight, people were tensed up, people were expecting invasion .There were lots of 'dad's armies' around the place, people with antiquated weapons who were going to do as Churchill said, fight till the last ditch. I think the British would be formidable in retreat,

16:00 but they had very few weapons. After Dunkirk in 1940, when they came back from Dunkirk they had lost all of their equipment, the British expeditionary force went up the mainland and was pushed back, they lost everything they came back and England was virtually without weapons. If we had been invaded the Germans were extremely well equipped and very strong,

16:30 and they would have mown down everything in their path. But the Britains would have fought doggedly there is no doubt about it, and they would have fought to the last man, there is no doubt in my mind at

all. Men and women, but nothing by the way in my later reading, nothing compares with what the Russians suffered and their losses. One didn't come to that realisation until reading and studying after the war and you realise what the worst war in the world has ever been

17:00 and that was the German attacks on Russia and the retreat by the Germans.

There was horrific losses there. What did you know of the other branches of the air force at the time? The RAAF in Bomber Command?

Well I knew quite a few Australians that were in Fighter Command

17:30 and had been in the Battle of Britain and some others in Bomber Command. This is because on our cadet course when we finished our course a certain number would be sent over, they were volunteers, they would go over and join the Royal Air Force and cut off with the Royal Australian Air Force and these all had friends in the RAAF. So there were links,

18:00 Edwards was one. We used to drink together when I went over to England, after war started. We used to meet up at Piccadilly if I was coming down to town or doing a courier run. We used to meet up and go down to the (UNCLEAR) in civilian clothes. And we had great fun, the fighter boys were there, they were always a very brash lot. We reckoned we were the

18:30 cream, big aircraft, tough jobs, and the fighter boys had done very little at this stage, and this was before the Battle of Britain. And they used to all undo their top button there, and we'd be at the bar and these fighter chaps would come in and we'd have a chat with them. And we'd say you know you boys don't realise how much we civilians are doing for us, and we'd draw them, get them to shoot a line about

19:00 their training and what they were going to do and the battles that they imagined. But they were all put to the test with the Battle of Britain and did an extremely good job.

Fighter Command might not have been tested but Bomber Command was certainly in action by that time.

They were in action and they were very ill-equipped, their navigational aids were very poor. Studies that were done after the war revealed

19:30 a very small percentage of hits on targets. They were certainly bombing Germany, and they were hurting in many ways. But taking out vital installations, when you send two hundred or five hundred aircraft over in a night to get to a target, and they are all over the place, people getting bombs dropped on themselves, their own friendly

20:00 bombs dropping on an aircraft down below, with navigational aids virtually non existent, with decoy flares being lit by the Germans, and Germans fighters up, the amount of direct hits would be very limited. It was then that they set up the Pathfinder Force, it was under an Australian, DCT Bennett, who was an Air Vice-Marshal. And they has these top flight Royal Air Force people and including some Royal Australian

20:30 Air Force who delineated the target, so went over and really hit the targets in the centre and got the fires going.

What were Coastal Command losses like in comparison with the other?

Well Coastal Command was comprised of many aircraft. It ranged from Mosquitoes and Beaufighters at the end of the war, and then there was Sunderlands and humble Ansons[Training plane] Weather took a fair toll on them, I have got one piece of paper

21:00 which was sent out to me by my ex-second pilot Vic Hodgkinson only this week, and it was an article on Coastal Command. And they lost ten thousand air crew. That's a lot of people when you think it was virtually a non-combatant force. They were out there aggressively on submarines, but fighting weather.

21:30 Occasionally getting shot up by enemy, but nothing like the day-to-day arms locked conflict that the bombers and fighters had when they went out on their jobs over Europe. But they lost ten thousand people, and this article goes on to say, I had been coming to realise it myself, knowing bomber pilots, including one extremely good navigator

22:00 Arthur Hoyle here I don't know whether he is on your list but he wrote a biography of Edwards, he was a Distinguished Flying Cross man and a very good friend of mine. He did a tour, almost two tours in Lancasters, bombers at least, Lancasters at the end, and they did a great deal to affect the German war effort, but Coastal was the one, according to this article, that saved Britain.

22:30 The lifeline across the Atlantic, if the didn't get the munitions and food from America in Britain, Britain would have had it. That was the important one, if there was no bombing at all, the lifeline had to be held. And so the bombers were important and they did some great things, and some awful things. Like Dresden at the

23:00 end of the war which was demolished, quite unnecessarily destroying a city of great heritage and had no effect whatsoever on the outcome of the war. Now Coastal had lots and lots of losses, one of my own

friends, a Squadron Commander, Dick Atkinson, an Australian, one of our really greats who was on Catalina Squadron Commander after me and did infinitely more than I did. Had already

23:30 done a magnificent tour in the Far East in Catalinas, after war was lost in the Far East for a start, Atkinson joined us with Scully another Squadron Commander. (UNCLEAR).

(UNCLEAR)

24:00 Yeah well he having done a tour, and gained a DFC in auspicious circumstances, joined us and then he took a squadron of Catalinas and then when he finished he came back to me at Rathmines as one of my key instructors. But he couldn't bear the quiet life of instructing in Catalinas there, applied to go back to Coastal Command from which he came. And he was on Mosquitoes and was ultimately shot down.

24:30 He was a great bloke.

How many mates did you lose in the squadrons that you were in?

Well we knew a lot of the Catalina people because Rathmines was a training station and I was there for over a year and I saw a lot of crews go through and I knew a lot of people. I forget, people knew me I was the CO I often don't remember them I am ashamed to say, but I got

25:00 to know a lot. But the Catalinas had quite heavy losses considering there were only four small squadrons, four squadrons of nine aircraft each, and they lost three hundred and twenty air crew. Well three hundred and twenty is a fair number. And of course there were other losses, people who died of natural causes when they were back on the mainland and not in combat.

Would there be any rituals or service, or something yo would do if a plane did not come back?

25:30 No, there was nothing you could do, I mean if a plane didn't come back you didn't know where to look, I mean let's face it you were going out, you were flying for a few thousand kilometres, you wouldn't know where they had gone down unless they had sent a signal. If somebody had sent a distress signal and said we are going down at a particular point or near somewhere you would have people out straight away to

26:00 see if you could pick up them or the bits. But if you didn't know where they were, if they went out on a bombing mission and just didn't return, or this one that I mentioned that we sent out on the Coral Sea, he went out, obviously saw the enemy or they saw him, he was shot down, where, how I don't know. One of the most difficult jobs I ever had through the war was when I came down from Port Moresby to command Rathmines, I took a hotel room in Sydney at the Australia

26:30 and I invited in relatives of some of the crews that had been shot down. And said if you would like to talk to me I can tell you about the operations, but I didn't know the crews that well, but they were in my squadron. Lets face it we were very busy, in a variety of ways. But I knew them

27:00 and I had written to their relatives, and I just got the pile of letters when I came down and invited them in. And they rang at the hotel and I had quite a few people through. And this was very painful, because seeing the distress that they were in, particularly those that didn't know where their relatives were. Were they shot down? And executed? Were they prisoners of war? Did they die in the air or what?

27:30 You couldn't tell. Some of them, not many, but some looked at me and said well you know you're pretty young and fit what are you doing down here? You know. Why aren't you up there? I said well I was up there, and I didn't volunteer to come down but I was appointed to come down and command Rathmines possibly to pass on some experience that I had gained in Britain and up in New Guinea. But that was no comfort to them, others of course were most grateful,

28:00 and that was very ,very painful. But in the crew mess at, or in the mess it wasn't a crew mess, in the officers' mess, sergeant's mess, airmen's mess, when people went missing they'd say oh God so and so didn't make it last night, not home. And they'd say gees that's pretty tough. And you don't expect them to come, if they don't return, they go

28:30 out on a bombing raid and you don't hear from them, you assume that it is likely that they are dead and at best prisoner of war. And knowing what we knew, that if you were a POW and you were a pilot you stood a fair chance of getting your head chopped off, if you were an officer which was the graceful way of doing it. Or a bayonet if you were a sergeant or an airman.

29:00 **We'll start talking about your role in New Guinea in a moment, I just want to go back and clear something up that we didn't cover. When you first get together in a squadron, say in 10 Squadron for a Sunderland, how do you crew up for a Sunderland? How did that happen?**

Often, you didn't know anybody, but you mix with people. A

29:30 (UNCLEAR) for instance Hodgkinson this bloke that I talked about that was my second pilot, Attie Wearne who I am certain that you will be interviewing there. Attie Wearne I picked him for my second pilot, tough nuggetty type. And I looked around and said well you'll have to join me you know. And he wouldn't know, wouldn't know me

30:00 but he'd know a bit about me, he couldn't say no anyway. And you look around for a navigator, often the navigators were very experienced people because they had been in the air force for quite some time. But the, it's a pilot's air force and it had been right until the last ten or fifteen years. It was pilots, pilots were everything, the other aircrew were well you are important, but, the pilot's

30:30 the one. The pilots were the ones that just flew the aeroplane I mean they just had good coordination to land and take off, and when they were in the air they were only steering. Now having said that, some of the pilots were awful pilots, Peter Isaakson, rather famous RAAF Lancaster pilot was an awful pilot. He bumped them in, hairy on take off

31:00 Edwards, Edwards knocked out eight operational aircraft not on operations. Just having a little fly and he wiped them off, eight of them . He had no coordination. Although he was a good Australian Rules footballer for Western Australia. Coming back to your question how did you pick your crews? Well it was a very chancy thing, but if you didn't pick somebody the CO would say to the

31:30 wireless operator, you better go with that mob, or the gunners, you go with that mob. They were low men on the totem pole, the pilots considered themselves number one. Permanent air force considered themselves the crème de la crème, particularly the pilots, and every body else was just there to support them.

How did you get on then

32:00 **in your own crew?**

Well it depends on individuals. I won't mention names, there was one bloke senior to me in 10 Squadron and the crew hated his guts. He came on board and said fix that up that's not tidy, do this do that and bullied them. I was infinitely more sympathetic I enjoyed the friendship of my crews, and I get

32:30 correspondence right up until, I am talking about this year, or last year, from crew members harking back to our good days and our bad days together. And how we enjoyed the occasion. Often, let's face it as a Commanding Officer in Moresby of the squadron, and as a senior man

33:00 over in England for a long time, a lot of crews passed through my hands, that's putting it the pilot's way. They came on and went off to another crew. Or came on like Attie Wearne and Vic Hodgkinson and others who went on to do great things. But being a Squadron Commander I flew with individuals, you had a new man come in, often at Captaincy rank in New Guinea, I sometimes flew with a new man I knew

33:30 to give him the feel of the operations up there, and not be a member of the crew officially. He would be captain he would have a second pilot I would just go with them. But you saw lots of them all of the time, and you tend to, you can't remember them all. It is very embarrassing, I hate reunions. I get compelled to go because I am a patron of

34:00 the Catalina Association Crews and I am well known to the Sunderland crews. I hate going along. A bloke will come up to me and say remember that night over Gasmata. And this is a big night, maybe a fellow, it might have been ground crew that we were using as air crew for a night. Or it might be air crew down, a sergeant or corporal or LAC,[leading aircraftsman] down the

34:30 line who flew with you for a couple of operations. And they say to you gosh do you remember that night? Wasn't that horrific, they're with their wives, and you don't know who he is, you don't remember the night. What do you say? If you say yes you get caught out. If you say no they say you don't remember? Gosh that was an incredible night. And they recall things so it is very very hard. If you say you know you get caught out, if you don't remember you have hurt them.

35:00 Because often this is their lives for them. A bloke who has been on ground crew, who has been on ground crew say at Rathmines or around Australia, does a tour, say twenty or thirty operations on Catalinas. The biggest thing in his life and he just lives on it, I mean people now who are eighty-five years of age still talking about it.

How did the hierarchy work within,

35:30 **I mean you said it was a pilot's air force, was the pilot always in charge?**

Yes.

Was he always the ranking officer as well?

Yes, usually the ranking officer. Sometimes it isn't. We had in the Catalinas we had sergeants who were captains., They had done a tour as a sergeant as a second pilot, done a very good job, come down to Rathmines done their captains course, gone back before they got a commission.

36:00 Or they got a commission and they were pilot officers and they had a second pilot who had just come into Catalinas who was a flight lieutenant. Or an engineer that might be a flying officer. But that didn't matter it was the pilo's air force, I don't say that gleefully, I just say it because it was a fact. And because it harks back to the fact that pre-war our aeroplanes were single-

36:30 engine aeroplanes and they had one or two people in them. And so the pilots dominated everything.

What was the relationship like then between aircrew and ground crew? You mentioned that a little bit already?

Oh very good. I, people of any whit intelligence, sympathy look at the ground crew and say you are doing a marvellous job. The Catalinas and Sunderlands we brought back we

37:00 often over flown past their maintenance hours, had been worked hard, flow hard, often bounced badly, mishandled, engines often over-ridden. People getting into a scrape, having the engine through the gate for quite a long time, you know burning the hell out of the engine. The mechanics down below patched them up, those that had been hurt or damaged or bent in some way, and they did a superb job.

37:30 Kai will tell you that at every reunion that I go to I always specifically say we were a team and the team was not only the air crew or the maintenance people but the doctors, engineers, administrative types, and the people in orderly rooms who kept the wheels turning. Often, it was really a team job.

38:00 **Did your team within a crew extend to one ground crew team? Did one ground crew team work on a particular aeroplane the entire time?**

One ground crew? No. The aeroplanes would come in and they would be handled seriatim. They didn’t have a ground crew that handled that. Although in the squadron the divided, for instance when we were on operations at the operational base a crew would tend to focus on that aircraft, but that wouldn’t stop

38:30 them, if that aircraft wasn’t flying for a day they would move over to another it was fairly flexible.

Same with the aircrew? They’d move through a number of different?

Aircrew tended to be more coherent and stick together because they were a team. Sometimes they moved out for promotion to second pilot to take captaincy, or a second WT[Wireless Telegraphy] operator experienced moving out to be

39:00 the number one operator on another aircraft that had just come off the line and things like that. So there was, there was some mobility and turnover. There was a limited number of people in the squadron, and most of them knew what each other looked like, all of the air crew knew one another reasonably well, and knew most of the ground crew.

What about your relationship with the actual aircraft?

39:30 **Did you know all of the individual aircraft? Did you have a particular plane that you always flew?**

You were allocated an aircraft and that was your aircraft but it was not exclusive. If you had the day off somebody else could take that aircraft, or another crew could take that aircraft. Sometimes they wanted to rest a crew, sometimes there was a job that required different qualifications, someone who had had different experience. And somebody else might take your aeroplane, but you tended to stick to the one aircraft.

40:00 **Did you name that aircraft?**

No.

They didn’t have call signs or numbers or?

They had numbers on their side and RB was 10 Squadron. And there was RBA, RBB, and RBC, and I am not sure of the designation, it was P, P9601, P9602.

We have to stop to change the tape again.

40:27 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:31 **The historical nature of that squadron.**

Every unit thought it was the centre of the universe. We naturally did, we got to England first, we got undue publicity for the jobs that we were doing. I mean they were important, difficult, well executed by experienced people, but it didn’t warrant the press cover that we received in the

01:00 early part was because there wasn’t much else to talk about in the media, and anything we did was news. And for instance that job where I stupidly stuck my nose over Brest, it became national and international as far as Australia went, news. And that was unwarranted.

Did that put you under certain pressure?

No

01:30 not at all we didn't feel that we had to meet any standards at all, we just thought we were pretty good. They were big aeroplanes, they were very impressive Sunderlands, and when you are the captain of a Sunderland you felt as though you are probably the captain of the Queen Mary. It is that important. It is only when you see something from another service that you start to get a little humble. The Hood was in Plymouth Harbour,

02:00 and we captains were invited over the Hood and we had a day on the Hood and I came back and I was stunned. I couldn't believe that so many people could be on a ship, that they had such incredible defences, by the way, anti-submarine defences around the water line, their engines were so big, that they had a young city, you know cooks, people being fed, it was

02:30 truly incredible. I went out in a submarine for an operation once for experience and we went across to Brest from Plymouth and I learnt a lot there, and that was another shocking experience. I associated war with noise, when we were flying Sunderlands it was noisy, the reason I am deaf now is I flew Sunderlands and Catalinas and they went for a long time, it is the length of time that your ears are being beaten,

03:00 not the individual crack. You get twenty hours of pressure. It's like the kids in the discos these days getting eight or ten hours or six or eight hours of that noise blasting at their ears, that's sending them deaf. There are more young people down at the hearing services now then there are old people. But the thing that shocked me in the submarine was the quiet. You know we went off, the engines were, you know the diesels

03:30 were running and then we were under water and it was quiet. And it was uncanny. You know I just felt it was so unreal, I just expected something to happen all of the time. But most other, the Sunderlands were noisy and the big ships were noisy when they were out.

What did you learn on that submarine excursion?

04:00 Not much at all, just that, I didn't have to learn anything because I knew that if we were going after submarines, if you saw a periscope it wasn't one of ours anyway if you could get near it. So it didn't help with anything there, but it think it was an intelligent thing to do to make you feel part of a team air force and navy.

04:30 **It must have given you some insight into what your enemy was experiencing as well, because you were on submarine patrols in your aeroplane.**

We didn't care what anybody thought if they were in submarines when we were attacking a submarine on a rare occasion. And when we were doing bombing in New Guinea we didn't care what happened to anyone underneath us. I would hope that we didn't kill any of our own civilians who might have been remaining there. But as for thinking about the welfare of somebody underneath you when you are bombing

05:00 from an aircraft, you didn't think about it, and this I think was borne out by most of the bomber crews I have spoken to. They went over to do a job they didn't think. Even the people, I knew one of the blokes on the Mohne and Eder Dam job, with the bouncing bomb. They had no feeling had no feeling for the fact that when the dam walls broke there were people

05:30 down there swept down the valley, they were the enemy. And you weren't gleeful about saying I can imagine kids and women being washed down there and dying, he just said they are all enemy down there and I hope we have done as much damage as we can. And you weren't by the way venomous about it. I felt no personal hate against the Germans, at

06:00 all. Although I must say (UNCLEAR) you had your disc, you wore it around your neck with your name rank and number. And I had J.A. Cohen, but I always had Buddhist because if I had put Jewish and I had been knocked down you would have into a camp before you knew where you were.

Did your Jewish heritage ever influence you one way or another towards the Germans?

06:30 No I mean if I had been Christian I couldn't imagine myself feeling any different than I did as a Jew. I mean the news was getting around that they were getting a bad time because people were coming over to Britain from Germany, from 1934 to 39, they had five years of people coming over saying that things were really tough over there. You know the

07:00 Krystal Nacht when they broke the windows of all of the Jewish shops. and things like that. And we knew about it, but there is a limit to the imagination you know. I was a young person, in 1940 I was twenty-four. I had some experience but not that much, and you just can't put an old hat onto young shoulders.

07:30 I thought about it and thought about how dreadful it was, but its not until you have been through certain things. That's why when I was in Veterans Affairs I used to talk to the widows I used to say I have no idea, I cannot imagine what it is like to lose a loved one, it must be dreadful all I can say is it must be dreadful, I cannot imagine how dreadful, how painful. But my imagination won't go out that far.

Was there any time perhaps after the war that those blinkers that you had put around

08:00 **yourself came down to a certain extent and you began to think more about the reality of war and what was going on in your time?**

Not particularly, it wasn't fast either. My instructor who was so kind to me, so patient with me when I was getting to the critical stage of whether they would keep me or not in the air force

08:30 Curly Davis, Reginald Henry Davis. He was senior to me because he was my instructor, but he was made a POW in the Netherlands East Indies, and he came back after the war with his rank at that time which was Wing Commander. I had progressed through to Group Captain and incredibly, I don't know why they

09:00 did it, they put him on as one of my deputies when I was Director General of Organisation. I had no sympathy for him on his POW. I do now, I know now what, I think I know now what it must have felt to be a POW. But I felt at that time this is 1948, 47 48, two years after war finished, I felt that the POWs had had

09:30 it sweet, I mean they didn't have to go on the bombing raids every day, they weren't losing the percentages that the Bomber Command was. They were, certainly things were rough, they didn't get much food but they didn't die. Of course I didn't realise how many did die until later. So it took a long time to sink into me the horror of being a POW and here was I with my

10:00 deputy Curly, offering no particular sympathy to the fact that he had been a POW.

Was your reaction similar towards the stories of concentration camps and the horrors that came out of Europe at the end of the war?

Yes it took quite a while to sink in. I went to Belsen in 1955 I was on a really upmarket course in Britain, the Imperial

10:30 Defence College, which I had been selected for in 1946 as a kid, and the air force fought to send me over there. And Defence, that is the Defence Minister fought against me going considering I was too young. So I didn't go, but I was a civilian later, in 1955 I went over to

11:00 Imperial Defence College in my right as a civilian. And we did a tour of Europe and we went to Belsen. And to go and have a look at the huts and to see the rooms and see where the people were showered and where they were burnt, it really sent shudders down your back, it was really horrific to see the buildings. But as I say limits to the imagination, and of course of

11:30 interest people can't take all of it in, people can not take in what is going on in Rwanda or Liberia in Africa at the moment. People don't know, and people don't know what's going on in South Africa with five million people with AIDS [Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome] . They can't, people can't absorb all of those horrors, very clever, intelligent, wide minded people can take quite a bit

12:00 but again you require some of the experience to put your, to mix my metaphors, to put your mind on the right footing.

That's a very good point, because if we did acknowledge it all we wouldn't be able to live our lives in a way, and especially if you have got a job to do, like you had a job to do in the war you have to concentrate on that?

It's my back yard look out. You say how horrible it is, and you know how awful it is

12:30 with kids starving, seeing poor little kids there with sores and distended bellies, and do you put your hand in your pocket and say I'm going to give until it hurts? No you don't. So we're a miserable lot of coots. That's what we are. And I say that people find it very hard to absorb the pain and suffering that other individuals or groups suffer.

That's almost a great summary of a lot of things.

13:00 **Let me get back to something else. You did some escort duties flying Sunderlands, there is one particular exercise that I want to talk about, where you were flying dignitaries,**

Ferrying.

Ferrying people sorry, before we talk about that particular episode, how often did you do ferrying of dignitaries and such?

Oh I think I did about half a dozen to ten ferry flights.

13:30 To Cairo, to Bizerte in Tunis, one memorable occasion that I force landed in France and I had very important people on board to go to Tunis. We struck very bad weather I couldn't get over the mountains, the Pyrenees in the Sunderland, and I said to my passengers, my very important passengers

14:00 including General Northcote who was later governor of New South Wales, I said, 'I wouldn't dare take you through that', I said, 'I could but it would be too dangerous', I said 'we'll go back to Britain. We'll start tomorrow'. They said, 'No way'. I said, 'No way?' They said, 'If we go back to Britain the Prime Minister will say don't go and we do want to go on this'. So I alighted on a lake in Cazaux near

Bordeaux in bad weather in France.

14:30 And struck up a friendship with a young man, Christian Cataly his name was, and we corresponded after he took care of me, I landed, alighted next to a fishing boat, they ferried me ashore. The next day we went over the top and got to Tunis. That started a friendship that has continued through all of these years, I lost him during the war, he found me after it, by going to the embassy, our

15:00 embassy in Paris, then writing to the RSL [Returned and Services League] here and then the RSL putting a little column, they seek him here, they seek him there, and they found me and they put me and Cataly together and we have had a correspondence going since. But lots of interesting episodes on those ferry runs.

That particular episode where you landed near Bordeaux was that behind enemy lines at the time?

No.

That was before Dunkirk?

No this was

15:30 the end of 39 and France fell June 1940.

So most of these were done at the very stage of the war or over a longer period?

Over a longer period. We were taking people down to, well until I left and well after. I left in May 41 and we were still taking people down to the Middle East and going down to Gibraltar and flying out to sea, across the bay of Biscay and then

16:00 into Gib. And then proceeding on via Malta to Cairo or other places.

And what was your attitude towards doing these kind of jobs, were they prestigious or a bit?

These jobs? Yes they were if they became public, if people knew that you had carried a very important person around a certain aura came from that, you felt pretty good.

16:30 You felt privileged to do it you felt pretty proud, no end to our vanity of course. And you were very proud of yourself. You couldn't write home and tell people unfortunately, that you carted this or that important person, except when an occasion occurred that was a bit dramatic you might get some publicity.

What was the most dramatic occasion on those operations?

17:00 I had to take the leader of the expeditionary force, the British expeditionary force in Europe, and the minister of information in Britain, Mr [Alfred] 'Duff' Cooper, to a place called Rabat in Morocco. And we alighted on a very narrow estuary. Churchill had sent them down there to try and rally the French and this was only two days after France fell, and France at that

17:30 stage was under the control of Monsieur Petain, and these people and the Britain hadn't realised it, were all pro- Petain. So they were virtually the enemy. And we alighted there, put our people ashore, in a very narrow estuary of the river the Bou Regreg, and come about nightfall I got a

18:00 message, our WT operator got a message from Britain from Churchill saying to Gort to leave immediately things aren't as we expected. In other words they didn't realise, it hadn't been realised that we were in enemy territory. So I called for a boat to take us ashore, we anchored and they wouldn't take us ashore. Eventually

18:30 I switched on all of the lights on the aeroplane, and there was a blackout down there, they were horrified, they eventually sent a boat alongside, and I got a revolver out and stuck it in the ribs of the French Policeman that came to our aircraft and we went ashore and I got to the hotel, again under a bit of fire, and told

19:00 Gort what had happened. He was trying to rally the French there and doing no good and we were held, and fortunately they hadn't taken our guns away and we shot our way out. Back to the aircraft, and on board, then the boats didn't come and take us, immediately they circled around and just prior to dawn I had

19:30 my eyes bandaged up so I would be totally, have all of the night vision, said start starboard inner, start port outer, and we actually started the four engines together, and they all started and we taxied out through the harbour, knocked the float off, out to the open sea and got off and back to Gibraltar. It was a really hairy night.

Had you been trained much in using small arms?

20:00 Oh yes. We all carried a revolver and you did some sort of revolver practice, and that happened to all officers and by the way including female officers. My wife, she could use a Smith and Wesson. I had, one of the greatest tragedies of the war was when the Japanese were advancing I gave my Smith and Wesson to a man that was in charge

20:30 of my base at Vila in Noumea, Vila in New Hebrides. And I said I would like it back, and we have had him here in this house and he still had it and I would have liked it, and I told him I have always yearned to have it back and he never gave it back to me. Yes we could use small arms. But Harold Gort would have been running, fight, try to hit someone,

21:00 we did hit some people getting out, it was in a narrow passageway and you couldn't miss anybody anyway.

Was that a difficult thing to do to get the courage to shoot your way out of that situation?

No spur of the moment.

How did it come, that particular episode when you had to shoot your way out?

21:30 Well we thought we had been taken down to, we were taken to see the chief of police at Rabat and they didn't take us there, they took us, we were in a gaol, they took us in the front door we went down we were in a room, they said we will be back in a moment, they came back and said we'll bring the chief of police down and the door was locked. So we shot the lock off the door, raced down the passage, there were people coming out and there was a narrow passage people coming to us, and I was the only one using a gun I

22:00 just shot at these people. The car that brought us there was still outside, stuck my gun in the blokes ribs and down to the harbour, and he took us down very quickly. And we then were allowed on board, they didn't know what had gone on up there, we were allowed on board. And we just waited through the night. We signalled back to Britain, we are on board. Duff Cooper the minister of information

22:30 had come back earlier, and we were all on board just waiting. Awake all night just waiting for the dawn for us to see if we could make a break for it, and we went through, the reason we didn't land in the harbour at Rabat was that it was far too crowded with fishing boats. It was only a small harbour anyway. That's why we had to land in the river, which was very narrow, not much wider than the aircraft itself.

What was that waiting like? What was going through your mind?

23:00 Oh we were worried, yes. Nothing, I just felt, I took a decision when we got on board, the only way to get out, you couldn't go off in the dark because you would have crashed into a boat, you had to have enough light to see, and you had to have enough dexterity, because you had no rudder, you had to get enough speed if you could so that your rudders were some use in turning, and your engines. And so it

23:30 was a combination of the two that took us through a harbour that had quite a few fishing boats in it, we were lucky to get out. And there was a bar there we went over the bar and then we hit the sea, the surf. And that really belted the Sunderland, it didn't like it at all. We got off, immensely relieved.

What was the situation with the plane, had you damaged it at all?

Port float was damaged and was flopping.

24:00 We were sworn to secrecy on this because it was a secret mission in going down. They didn't want to antagonise the French, and if they heard that we had done what we had done, which was shoot somebody down there, or by the way if it had been revealed that Gort and Duff Cooper had tried and failed, it was

24:30 bad propaganda both ways. And we were sworn to secrecy. The story didn't come out until 1950. And when my engineer Conrad Gehrig. He was living down here until he died a few years back. Con was he was a QANTAS executive, he was an engineer, became, very capable bloke. And he was the head of one of the QANTAS engineering department,

25:00 lived next to a bloke who was a journalist and they were talking one night and he told him the full story. No one had told it before, next thing I know it's in the paper. I got a few telephone calls, I will show you the article, about selling the full story, well almost the full story of the Rabat episode.

How did you land the Sunderland when the float was damaged?

25:30 I signalled ahead to Gibraltar, and said that my port float was flopping and they, we did a couple of runs over Gibraltar. They had a boat, an air sea rescue launch with padding on the top. So I, we said we'd do a couple of dry runs. I had plenty of fuel, because we had enough fuel to get almost back to Britain, we came in and did a run and came in,

26:00 did an approach and the boat came in alongside us and kept behind us, and then I took off. Didn't touch, and then the next time I came around I touched, touched. And then as I slowed down it accelerated, the boat accelerated, and we slowed down and they pulled up and stopped and they had padding over the top and it just supported the. I don't think we would have gone under but it could have.

Sounds like quite

26:30 **a practised drill, quite a lot of preparation goes into planning that kind of?**

Well I don't think it was that hard. They just had to, I had to make certain that I alighted in front of him. They kept a regular pace, the harbour of Gibraltar was quite big,

27:00 and so he was running along and I could see where he was and so I said well I am going to touch down in front of him, but not far enough ahead that he couldn't get under my wing. And he did that. They fixed, the float was fixed very quickly. All it was, the main join to the wing was broken.

Have you ever been back to Rabat?

No, I don't want to go. My wife asked me, we have had offers, but I

27:30 shot a few people that night. I don't think I want to see, I don't want to see it. I wasn't sorry for the people or anything like that, it was just a revolting night. And all I would see was the hotel, the Bolima where we were, I had seen the gaol, I would probably see the wharf where we went ashore. But it wouldn't

28:00 mean much, it was all very clearly in my mind even though, the episode by the way only took from, it was a limited time, it was only twelve hours, thirteen hours we were at Rabat. So we alighted there in the afternoon, and we took off just at dawn the next morning. So I don't feel as though I know the place very well, but I have had, I have taken guide books out and had a look to see where

28:30 I traipsed and how I got into the hotel and where they would have driven us, and what roads they would have taken me down. But it was dark, I was lost for a while when the woman dropped me at the hotel, she said the hotel is over there and she went off. We were being followed. And she drove off, and I started running to the hotel, but

29:00 it was blackout, I couldn't se anything, there were no lights on the front porch. I was being told to stop and I didn't. I eventually got into the hotel.

You say it was a horrible night looking back in your memory on it, was it a source of pride? What you did on that night?

I felt I was

29:30 a) very lucky and b) being an experienced bloke getting in and getting out, and taking control of the situation with a very great man, Gort was a VC[Victoria Cross], he was a great man. I felt very proud of myself. In point of fact I was only

30:00 sorry we couldn't talk about it, we were told that we were. Gort, a most interesting episode, I have got a letter out there from Lady Del Isle who was the wife of a VC and the daughter of Lord Gort, she was writing his biography when she was in Australia when Viscount Del Isle was our Governor General. She met the head of Red Cross in Melbourne who was my navigator on that night. And she said oh you were in Sunderlands, would you

30:30 have known a man names Dick Cohen? Oh yes he said. And he has changed his name and he is in Canberra. So she invited me to tell her what was happening. What happened? She said he wouldn't talk about it. Because he had been told, by the way, not to. But what incensed him was the indignity of the head of the British Expeditionary Forces,

31:00 being handled like a common thief. Being wafted away, he was very hurt, he was really hurt. He wouldn't talk to Duff Cooper when we came on board, but he did tell him afterwards apparently. But there was no record other than there is a book called So Few written in 1940 the end of 1940 and I was one of the chapters,

31:30 about a secret flight to Africa. They said, and when I got to the hotel I was restrained, after that nothing is known about what happened. This is the official record but they did get away. But Lady Del Isle said Gort wouldn't talk about it. And I have got her letter saying thankyou very much because I told her then, because Gort was dead. And most of it had been in the paper, and she was most grateful, but she died before the

32:00 biography was published.

Just before we move on from this episode again. Being put in a situation where you have to shoot someone is not a common experience for an air force pilot. To be that close to someone that you have to kill or be killed. Does that stick in your mind as one?

I don't know whether it was kill or be killed because I don't know if the people chasing us in the gaol area were armed.

32:30 They were when I was going into the hotel, but they were coming down, I had shot the lock off, they were coming down, whether they shot at us I am not too sure, all I know is that I did. They were coming up the passage at us and we walked straight down into a room but it really must have been a cell of some sort, because we were locked in. And we got out the front and fortunately the car was still sitting there.

33:00 We were only in there for a short time before we started to get a bit suspicious and then I tried the lock. I had my gun on, and my flying jacket on and nobody took it from me.

It must have been nonetheless a frightening situation?

Well it was breathtaking,

33:30 everything was so fast. It was breathtaking. And I didn't feel any great glee about anything at all, but if somebody is chasing you with intent when you stop you say thank heavens I am not back there, I am on the aeroplane now and we have to get away. And that's what you thought about very hard. Of course what you didn't think about was behind you there are eight or nine blokes all with wives and children back in Australia too. They're your crew.

34:00 **You were a, what was your rank when you left 10 Squadron?**

Squadron Leader. I was promoted to Wing Commander at the Catalina squadron, then I was promoted to Group Captain some time in 1943 while I was commanding Rathmines.

34:30 **Was that unusual even during war time to have such a rapid advancement through the air force?**

Yeah it was unusual. It was fast, there was others later who were even younger, but I was the youngest Group Captain in the RAAF at the time I got my Group Captaincy. And I took it as a matter of course it was, I am very pleased, delighted, you got brass on your hat what's more. And you got

35:00 more pay, I mean I didn't think of that I mean you always had plenty of money with your rank in the air force.

But you also had significantly more responsibility with every notch up the ladder. Was that right?

Yes you got more responsibility. You're pretty confident, young people are very confident and I had gone through from 1935 to 1943 when I got

35:30 my Group Captaincy, that's eight years, that's building., becoming very sure that I could do most things. Which I couldn't but I thought I could.

Were you ever tested in that belief?

Yes I was, I was made director of intelligence at the end of World War II, towards the end at Moratai with RAAF Command, I

36:00 was the head of intelligence there. I hadn't been in intelligence before. And I had under me the most brilliant team, the RAAF Intelligence team that the Americans relied on and wanted. And so when I was appointed head of intelligence for the air force, their senior intelligence officer, Kenny, General Kenny who was commanding the 5th Air Force, 13th Air Force,

36:30 which comprised Far Eastern Air Force and the RAAF Command, wanted my people in Manilla, and Moratai and Brisbane, I had three bases, for my main intell people. And so ex-officio I was Director of Intelligence to Kenny. Kenny was very demanding and I found it very difficult handling. And I would have to get up very early in the morning, four o'clock,

37:00 brief myself, with my four or five key people. A novice in the game, brand new, and then having to brief Kenny or Bostock when I was in Moratai, and I found this very wearing, very tiring and I found I was getting the jumps and hots and colds and all sorts of things. Then I started to train myself, I bought a book called Release From

37:30 Nervous Tension by a bloke called Fink, and I learned how to sit down, relax all the way down. And I took control of myself at that stage and continued on until the end of the war. Adequately, but not very effectively. My people were, the team were superb, I was nominally in charge.

Was that nervous tension you were suffering built up

38:00 **from the constant pressure you had been under throughout the war?**

No.

What was it due to?

It was due to the fact that ti was the first time I had struck a job that I felt I was not on top of. I felt when I had my squadron I felt I was on top of that, when I had my aircraft in Britain I was on top of that, when I had Rathmines I was could do anything. When I was at air force headquarters I wasn't tested, that was easy,

38:30 relatively easy. Then coming back then to the intell area where it really was putting a demand on, demanding experience which I didn't have. I mean you need, four of the five key people were lawyers, top lawyers, Wing Commanders. Really, high mental calibre and they were very tolerant of me,

39:00 and very co-operative I got along well with them, but I wasn't in their class and I could see it. And I wasn't used to it, and I didn't feel an antipathy at all towards them .A great pride in having them, but incapable of translating all that they wanted into leadership. One of them should have been in command. But they weren't pilots, so they put a pilot there in charge. They said

39:30 its air force, air war, we're dealing with sending photographs intelligence aircraft out. We are getting messages in decoded, you were decoding all of this sort of stuff, a pilot should be naturally able to handle all of these things and of course I was not trained that way.

We just have to stop there.

39:56 **End of tape**

Tape 8

00:30 **Perhaps you could tell us a little bit about leaving England and how you got back to start up 11 Squadron or be in 11 Squadron?**

Are we ready to record now?

We are recording.

Good. I was sent over to America, discharged from the Royal Australian Air

01:00 Force because America was not at war, and I also had a job to do in America. I was to go around with the Australian minister to the United States, that was Casey, and move around the aircraft plants, and he was moving around and he took me with him. And he was talking to the chief executives and boards of the aircraft companies to

01:30 find out their feelings about entering the war. Because Roosevelt was reluctant and it was important to hear what these heads of industry, because it was a big industry in America, the aviation industry, making aircraft for everybody in the world including themselves. Anyway I was sent up to Glasgow to await my ship,

02:00 and unfortunately, they gave me money and said you are on no account to talk to anybody or tell anybody what you are doing until you reach the trade commissioner in New York. They gave me quite a bit of money, discharged me from the air force and I was purely civilian and sat in the hotel waiting for the ship and it didn't come. It was bombed in Hull. Eventually when it did come I was almost out of money, and I got on this banana

02:30 boat that went across the Atlantic. We were about a third or half way across and the Hood was sunk in front of us. Not visibly, but it was within you know fifty or a hundred miles of us. And in a convoy of two hundred and fifty that we were in scattered. My ship had been decommissioned from the trade in the West Indies as being too old

03:00 but was brought into service when they were so short of shipping. And I was onboard with a motley crew of people, including young people who were going over to work on the Manhattan Project to do nuclear work. But we were all very secretive. After the Hood was sunk, there were ships everywhere, we headed up north and almost hit the Pole, freezing, and then came down and eventually went to Montreal. I went through, had a very

03:30 interesting time in New York. I wrote an article on it if you are interested about my experiences in New York, then over in San Diego, and where I picked up the aeroplane was shaking them down and meeting very interesting people.

Can you tell us a little bit about what happened in New York for the record?

Well I had come from Britain which was blackout, cars had little slits to let

04:00 headlights out. We were rationed and things were very very tight. When we got to New York the place was rich, I stayed at the Pennsylvania, the Hotel Pennsylvania, a song was written about it, Pennsylvania 6 5000. Benny Goodman was playing up top, and I had a ball I can tell you that. I got down

04:30 to some pretty low joints and such and met all of the strange characters that you meet in New York before I went down to Washington where Casey was, and we then went around the various aircraft plants. And I talked to the chief pilots and things like that, and they wanted to know about the war and flying. And I extracted from them how they felt

05:00 and what they thought their bosses were thinking about in relation to America entering the war. And that was an interesting experience and I wrote quite a bit on that. Got back to San Diego, and enjoyed that thoroughly. Just as an aside, after shaking my aircraft down, that's what you call getting used to the aeroplane, and vice versa, I got

05:30 into the elevator to my very fine apartment that they had given me. And a very beautiful girl got into the elevator, I had already said seventh floor and she said sky room, I turned around to the elevator attendant and said sky room which made him grin, I went up top, she went over to one corner and I sat at the bar. And next to a film star named Basil Rathbone, now you probably don't remember him but he was a great, and he introduced me to

06:00 the mob and I got to know them very well, then I flew the Cat to Australia.

Can I just, were you there to pick up a Catalina and bring it to Australia? Was that part of your mission or was that?

That was my mission, that's what I was there for, I was going to pick one up and they said they would use me, because of my experience, to accompany Casey, who was a pilot by the way, and so was his wife, both crook pilots

06:30 but both trained by the air force in Australia.

Why did they decommission you from the air force?

Because America wasn't at war and you couldn't go over as an air force officer into an American military camp, I think it might have been considered that they might have been breaking neutrality by having a serviceman there. So I was discharged, services no longer required, it was in the Gazette before I left

07:00 so I was an absolute clean slate, civilian. I was asked on board ship by one woman who I had met before what was I doing on board the ship? And I said, 'I am just going back to my job in Australia'. She said, 'What were you doing in England? Were you a conscientious objector?' I said, 'Well sort of'. And the news went around the ship and I got a very frigid reception by a lot of people on there who thought I was just shrinking from the war in

07:30 Britain and going out to Australia.

What was your impression of America overall?

Well I learnt first of all they were totally different people. Although we spoke approximately the same language, we thought and acted differently. They were very impressed with speech, they were very impressed with Casey's speech, his English speech

08:00 they thought I was English because I had been over in England and I was speaking very precisely, separating word from word, which I didn't normally do. And the reason for that was that America was an immigrant country, people came from other places and they were very proud of their children. When their children could speak so well, and it became a mark of pride amongst the immigrant families, I saw this, that their

08:30 children were speaking such good English and it was a mark of great pride to them. The parents, in order to convey anything and not having a command of English, exaggerated things, and you find that this is probably the source of Americans being so excessive in their use of superlatives. Each trying to get a message across saying how bad or good or wonderful anything is. But I met the yokies, people who

09:00 came from the mid-west. Who were on the west coast, who had come from Oklahoma from the drought, and they were sad. The Americans didn't like them very much, Americans liked success, they always did, and these weren't successful people, they were poor people at the end of their trolley line, as I found in San Diego, they were pathetic. They reacted to me, I got to speak to them on a few occasions and learnt just a little bit about them.

09:30 So it was a, quite an educational experience.

How long were you in America?

Oh only about six weeks. You can pick up a lot in six weeks, if you are fairly experienced, as you would know if you know about a place, a little bit about their history, or their street furniture, you then look for a little more deeply into the place that

10:00 you are going. My wife and I have travelled around and we've had two or three days and feel as though we have been at a place for weeks. Because we had read before and knew a little history, only a little.

What was your impression of America's willingness to go to war at that time?

The aircraft people were all mad keen to go.

They would have a vested interest of course.

10:30 They had a vested interest, they were very very keen. The average American was not very interested. They wanted to know about the war, but they didn't have the language, they couldn't understand, again experience, they couldn't understand what rationing was, I mean you go into a hotel and you order a steak and it covered the plate and flopped over the sides, that was enough meat for a family for a month or three months in England. You know, the New York cut that size,

11:00 they had no idea. They were intelligent enough to be interested but they couldn't comprehend. They couldn't comprehend the dangers of war, of course they were projected into it a little later.

What was the outcome of your mission aside from picking up the Catalina?

I have no idea. Casey reported to Britain on the

11:30 feeling of the aircraft manufacturers and they therefore became very strong allies with the Britons trying to talk the president into throwing their lot in. It's amazing that they didn't go in earlier because the German submarines were knocking off American shipping on the coast and it still didn't project up high enough for Roosevelt

12:00 to say okay we'll go to war.

It does seem to show a certain depth of understanding of America that at that stage you would lobby the military industrial complex for America to go to war.

No we weren't lobbying, what we were trying to find out was their feelings and what they were telling. We didn't try to influence them, I don't think we could have very greatly. We were trying to find out what their attitudes were and what they were telling their chief, the president.

12:30 **You understood that they had a lot of influence in the White House? Was that the purpose of the war, if these people were willing to go to war then they would influence the White House? To actually go and see what these people were feeling was to gauge the American willingness for war, or to influence, it shows an understanding of the influence that the industry has on**

13:00 **politics in America.**

Well they knew the industry had a very strong lobbying position in the White House. What they were trying to find out was how strong was the advice that was being given. And the advice was very strong pro, there was nothing much that Britain could have done to stimulate the munitions industry

13:30 in America to doing more. That's what they wanted to know, they didn't need to waste resources on that. They had to get other people around Roosevelt to get him to throw his lot in. As he was being picked all of the time by the Germans in one way or another. Britain was hoping that they would come in, of course without America there is no doubt that Britain would have gone down. Particularly

14:00 by the way if Hitler hadn't been so stupid on the Russian front, Britain would have been down and right out.

When you picked up your Catalina was it a new plane?

Yep.

You couldn't fly it by yourself, where did the rest of your crew come from?

The crew was a QANTAS crew that they had over there, the QANTAS crews were flying them out, and here was one where they said well here is a captain, an experienced person

14:30 who can take that aircraft, so I took that aircraft and I had a QANTAS crew.

And where did you fly that plane?

Flew to Honolulu, on the way across to Honolulu we had a wind change. It was what they call past the point of no return, there is no point in turning back and we had to press on and so we just made Honolulu.

15:00 I had very little fuel in the tanks there. Then we flew down to Kan Tong Island, very interesting, run by Britain and America, Noel Coward was there, little weeny island. And then we flew out to Australia.

What was your leg out from the mainland to Honolulu?

I think it was about twenty-four hundred miles.

How many hours?

It was twenty-four hours and thirty minutes. And we went because we

15:30 thought we had a tail wind. See normally, if you get a west, if you get up high you strike westerlies but we had no oxygen so we were relatively low, and so we were, we took it when we could see a neutral or an easterly trend which would allow us to get the aircraft there. The Clippers could do the job, Pan-American Clippers had a much greater range than we did.

16:00 **Did you stay at the wheel for twenty-four hours and thirty minutes?**

No had a second pilot, I forget who it was. It wasn't a big event, you know I was, no I certainly didn't stay, I rested, slept I assume, I forget now but I went down to the bunks and I had my eyes closed.

16:30 **When you got back to Australia what was the next step in forming up into?**

I went straight to New Guinea the squadron had been formed and was operating with four Empire Boats which had been taken from QANTAS. And they were, had holes cut in the side and had machine guns sticking out of the side of the Empire Boats which was rather quaint, not that they could have done much with it. And they were doing the jobs around the advanced operational bases, flying out

17:00 in the same way that the Catalinas did when the Catalinas came, looking out for submarines. If a submarine was there it would keep its head down. They did carry munitions but they couldn't have done much damage.

This is before Japan had entered the war?

Before Japan had entered.

Can you tell us,

By the way we had them still when Japan had entered. We had some

17:30 Catalinas and some Sunderlands in 11 Squadron until February or March. March 1942, and we were using them too by the way to pick up people in Catalinas and Sunderlands around the islands, taking the women and children off as the Japanese advanced.

18:00 And I am still getting calls and letters as recently as this year from people saying we have been looking for you for a long time, we have traced you, you were the one that picked us up and took my wife and daughter to Moresby or down to Townsville in front of the Japanese advance.

What was the role of 11 Squadron when you were placed in command of it?

18:30 Well it was anti-submarine and reconnaissance until December, then as the Japanese moved south the role of 11 was to attack and we were used as a very long range bombing force. And we tried to get to Truk, Kavieng and the other islands North of New Guinea without much success. Getting there in bad weather, getting through by the way from Moresby

19:00 getting through into tropic front was pretty horrific. Flying low, and probably and experience very few people have had, flying low through incredible storms which was just front which moved north and south in the tropics. When they hit Rabaul and took Rabaul we then started doing night bombing raids

19:30 almost every night. And going over the place and staying there for quite significant periods. Dropping a bomb, getting in the search lights and being attacked by anti-aircraft or Japanese fighters, losing an occasional aircraft. We were very slow, they had radar, there was no doubt about it. Everyone thought that the Japanese were a) couldn't fly at night and b) had no radar.

20:00 We'd get to Rabaul and we would come in, pitch black not a sign of anything, good navigation. We'd get there and suddenly the search lights would come on and you could get pinpointed very very quickly. Then you dived to get out of it, and squirmed in every possible way to get away, sometimes bombing from, I jettisoned bombs on the very first trip there, we were attacked by three fighters.

20:30 We were very visible, the two exhausts were there and they just came in and we had no chance whatever. I jettisoned which was probably as good as anything anyway, it was over the middle of the harbour, lord knows what I got, then into cloud, then break away. On another occasion when I was a bit tired I got absolutely fed up and dive bombed the aircraft. Just put her nose down, rolled over on her back and

21:00 dive down to hit a wharf that I was told to take out, Daboy[?] Wharf there. And knocked out the wharf I believe and over the hills and out. And I thought I had just come home, see memories fade because they were pretty busy times. And my engineer, and I have got his book there, Jack Riddell his name was said you didn't come home. And I said well I thought on that occasion I did and he said no you didn't, you came

21:30 back over the top and you dropped a five hundred thousand candle power flare, lit up the place and you could see what was there in the way of Capital Ships, Cruiser, Battle Cruisers and signalled that off to home. And the Americans came over the next day from Townsville and did a bombing raid on Rabaul.

22:00 **Can you turn a Cat over and dive bomb it like that?**

Not normally no.

How inverted were you?

Oh not really it wasn't that bad. I call it a dive bombing attack, it wasn't a JU88 vertical like that. But being a good aerobatic pilot I got her up and stall turned and down and she was on her back but you couldn't hold her that way for too long, she had a very high lift and it progressively turned into a steep dive.

22:30 And that became George Johnson, I don't know whether you know the author but he wrote My Brother Jack, and he was he, and Osmar White were two war reporters I think is what you call it, official war

correspondents, and they were with my squadron

23:00 and we used to drink at night, and they wrote up this, wrote up the story, both Osmar White and George Johnson wrote up the story on the Cats and of me. They were rather amazed by it all.

Prior to the Japanese coming into the war, what submarines were you looking for?

Looking for German submarines, they were around, they knocked off some shipping on the Australian coast. Not

23:30 much but some, and they had armed merchant cruisers which knocked off some of our ships. It was an armed merchant cruiser that knocked off the Sydney. It thought it was just an ordinary merchant ship, got up close and it was hit and sank the Sydney with all hands. That was in the Indian Ocean.

Did you see an German submarines?

I didn't no.

Were you doing much flying personally as officer in command?

A bit yeah quite a bit.

24:00 I like flying and I enjoyed going around to see the advanced operational bases.

Where were the advanced operational bases?

In Rabaul where I had an intelligence officer in command. And I had Tulagi which is just north of Honiara, small island, place called Tanenbogo, and then Vila in New Hebrides which was beautiful, French.

24:30 and after all I had been in the war in Britain you know, it was pretty tough, and these were idyllic places. And Noumea and New Caledonia was gorgeous, really gorgeous, and I couldn't stay a week. But I was just going around and inspecting the bases and have a night with the blokes and probably do a job on one, but they didn't need any help. But it was for fun, and to just keep my finger

25:00 on what was going on. Because they moved around the fellow at Rabaul went to Tulagi, the Tulagi bloke went to Vila, the Vila bloke went to Noumea. By that time the aeroplanes were probably due for some servicing, and flew it back to Rathmines. I remember on one flight I was at Noumea and I had had, I was going to stay there two days and when I arrived they said are you going to Brisbane? And an air radio operator,

25:30 they were AWA people, that was before your time but that was the big electronics firm here and they were running operators and one of the AWA blokes wives was two weeks overdue, she was having complications and they wanted me, would I take her to Brisbane? Rather than Rathmines, and I said

26:00 yeah delighted, no problem. You know not thinking, being naïve and not having any imagination. We got her on board and she was in a bit of a shape, not very well, and we flew, wasn't a dramatic flight and we had an ambulance meet us at Brisbane in the Brisbane River. And she was taken off to hospital and had a baby almost immediately afterwards. My wife and I were rather amused because I used to get lovely Christmas messages and cards

26:30 from the man and his wife and his lovely daughter, each year for many ,many years saying thankyou, thankyou, thankyou, and I didn't think it was very much until we had our children ourselves and realised that having a baby two weeks overdue with complications was not the sort of thing to have on an aircraft where you didn't have any paramedics at all.

27:00 **The war must have got quite a bit more serious rapidly once Japan came into the war?**

My word, there was no, we were gone definitely gone. There was no doubt about it. I moved my people out of, Rabaul was attacked and my people came down. We brought some of them out and the others were picked up by my blokes at Toll Plantation. That was a very gallant flight, finishing

27:30 at dusk picking up the remnants of the Army and the air force people at Toll Plantation and flying them down to Samarai [Island] where they alighted at night. And including by the way my intelligence officer who had Rabaul, I was very fond of him Robbie, he was there. And he said the sweetest words he ever heard

28:00 in his life was when I, I had laid the flare path and I asked, I checked with Len Gray the captain I said is Robbie on board? He said he heard my voice and it was the greatest thrill of his whole life. He was an Englishman and we were great friend for years after. When he died, he had a marvellous library and for Dick he had on it. And when he died very quietly at Armidale New South Wales, and in his house

28:30 were a pile of books for me of things we had talked about at Moresby with George Johnson and Osmar White, very touching.

Did you lose many crew as the Japanese advanced down at that time?

Oh yes. We had odd losses over

29:00 Rabaul. Lost a couple of, lost one crew at Kavieng, taking off for an operation there. Hitting a swell, what people don't realise is that flying boats are frail, and this fellow was relatively new to flying boats. He was one of my own friends off course Point Cook, and he was a stubborn,

29:30 rather proud sort of bloke, and I said I will show you the way around and he wouldn't let me give him some instruction. He said well I have done my instruction at Rathmines, I said it is a bit different here. He wouldn't take it. He crashed, hitting the first, one swell and then the next, up a bit higher, hit the next one up a bit higher, aircraft broke in two and we lost the whole crew. That was just an ordinary accident, it was fully laden with fuel and bombs. But

30:00 others were lost over Moresby itself, we lost a couple at Coral Sea. Paul Metsler, who was one of my people who, intelligence wasn't very good at that stage and the Japanese were coming down towards Rabaul, and we sent out a reccy we didn't know, we thought they were coming down we weren't too sure. We had reccies going out everywhere and one reccy was in charge of Paul Metsler

30:30 who I knew very well and had him in squadron and he saw some ships coming down and he thought they were Australian Navy ships, he wasn't too sure, shows how bad intell was. And he flashed the code letter of the day expecting to get a response to indicate that they were friendly, and all that happened was as soon as they saw him off came the aircraft off the carriers and shot him down. He was then in the water for quite some time.

31:00 And they started swimming, and they were ahead of the Japanese fleet, they were alight, they lost one bloke in the aircraft killed, and he landed in the water. The aircraft burnt, he had to put it down and it burnt. And then they started swimming, and they eventually got, they saw some ships on the horizon and it was the Jap fleet coming down. And they picked up Paul and he was very proud they just kept on swimming, and when

31:30 they got on board they saw sharks around a spar in the water, around there and they were very lucky they weren't eaten. Anyway they were taken back to Rabaul and they didn't get the chop because they were the first lot, and they were sent back to Japan, POWs right through the war. And I see him from time to time here now.

Where are most of the operations coming from at this point in time?

32:00 Based in Port Moresby and we stayed there, we had no fighter protection whatsoever, except for forty-four days when they sent number 75 Squadron up to Moresby. They gathered, things were crook, we were getting bombed every day and I was losing aircraft, and they scrounged from the Americans a set of Kittyhawk fighters assembled them at Townsville, brought crews in from down south, not really

32:30 fighter boys, gave them a weeks training and they flew up to Port Moresby. Port Moresby attacked, this is how bad the intell was, attacked the anti-aircraft gunners with light machine guns attacked and damaged four of the aircraft coming in, one irreparably. None were fortunately shot right down. Then they fought for forty-four days, got whittled away. Commanded by a friend of mine Les Jackson,

33:00 he is a Wing Commander and he had been in the Middle East, and he was one of the three people who was experienced there. He was shot down and walked back for twelve days through the valleys. Up again and then was shot down and was lost. But they were there forty-four days, they were down to one aeroplane alone and then that was the end. And then we had no fighter protection. And they, the Japs could come over and do what they liked over Moresby, we had one anti-aircraft

33:30 battery on Paga Hill. It was sad, really sad. And we were undefended. And we were ready to disperse if the Japanese had landed we were going to disperse down the coast and hope that we would be picked up. You couldn't do hand to hand fighting with a squadron of two hundred people, well there were two squadrons, two of two hundred. Plus a very very small Army contingent, most of which were starting to move up the Kokoda Trail.

34:00 **The Battle for Kokoda was on at this time?**

No it was starting.

How many aircraft and what kind of aircraft did you have?

In our squadron we had nine Catalinas or Empire Flying Boats. And there was a second squadron, number 20 Squadron had a similar amount, we were never up to strength and we were losing aircraft in

34:30 battle and we were losing aircraft in the water. Very hard to keep up, eventually they had to move them back to Cairns in May 1941 and then they operated from there, made the trips much longer. Sometimes staging through Darwin, or Moresby and refuelling there and then going off. But some of the flights were from Cairns all the way up to the Netherlands East Indies or Rabaul.

35:00 **How did you find living at Port Moresby at that time?**

I found it a very pleasant sort of place. See we, this is the sad the most incredible thing about flying in an air force. A flight to Rabaul was a shocker getting off was extremely hard because we were overladen with fuel, we had taken off all of our armour plate out of our aircraft. We had taken the self-sealing elements

35:30 out of our tanks and our wings. So we could decent load on and take it a decent way. So we would eventually get off, but you wouldn't take off over the hills and fly to Rabaul direct, you flew down the coast because you were climbing slowly all of the way turn the corner at Milne Bay port and Samarai [Island] and then you're off. You're into the dark by then, see this is three o'clock in the afternoon, you're into the dark and then you fly until about midnight when you get to Rabaul.

36:00 Through the inter-tropic front, absolute shocker, and then waiting there everything very silent, going over Rabaul and getting, put vulgarly, the shit shot out of you, it was really just, you were just sitting ducks up there, and then hopefully turning around and coming home to Moresby or Samarai, where the lady who ran the hotel loved the Catalina people. I had a refuelling base there, sometimes if we

36:30 were short of fuel, refuel there. And I got a letter only this year from her daughter saying you took me out of Samarai an hour before the Japanese landed there and you let me sit next to you as the pilot and took my mother out, and her mother loved us Catalina people. She used to worry about us see us going off and coming back looking very very tired. I had an American on staff, one of my pilots we

37:00 were short and we borrowed two from the American embassy here. Shows you, we had a Royal Air Force Chief of Air Staff Sir Charles Burnett and he was pushing people over to Britain and I was short of pilots. And I had one bloke, Hutchinson whom I tried to preserve in every possible way, and unfortunately doing a patrol he was shot down

37:30 while the Japanese were doing an unexpected raid on Lae with fighter escorts. They shot him down, but I came back from one raid, an all night one arriving back on the Sunday morning and I thought I better show my troops I was still alive, do the right thing, went out on the church parade, not being a holy man but we went out there and stood there in the hot sun. And Hutch had a look at me, I had just finished the job and had come in and I was going to

38:00 go to bed after that. And Hutch had a look at me and he said Dick old man, he said you had better shut those eyes, you'll blink to death, unfortunately lost Hutch after that. But the flights were very demanding. And they were very long, and the anomaly was that I had this mess. Certainly it was only an ordinary fibro tin shed, sort of thing. But it was comfortable and plenty of food, clean sheets at night, excellent food.

38:30 and you'd think life was very good, you would enjoy yourself, have a few beers, well I was drinking whisky at the time. But knowing full well the next night or the night after you would be over Rabaul. And that was, the contrast was terrible, comfort, danger, comfort, danger. It's what army people

39:00 don't realise, army people going through, I would hate to be in the army, I would hate to be in the desert. I saw a little bit of the desert when I was flying people out to be in the Middle East. I would hate to be in the jungle, I used to fly over the jungle and see what sort of ground was the Kokoda Trail and I imagine mushing through there. But they did their job and they came out, it was awful

39:30 all of the time. But it was the contrast with us. Intense danger and then comfort, intense danger and then comfort. It's weary.

We might just stop and have to change that tape there.

39:44 **End of tape**

Tape 9

00:32 **Can we just go back to that particular incident where you lost your friend, did that particularly affect you at the time? Hutch.**

Yeah I think it probably affected me as much as many. We were good friends, although we hadn't had, I felt a terrific

01:00 responsibility because I had sent him on the job. And just like the Americans when we had our people in the Gulf War, Gulf Wars they were keen and in Vietnam they were keen not to have too many casualties of their allies, in my own way I was very grateful for the services of Weller, Lieutenant Weller, and Lieutenant Hutchinson and I sort of felt a personal responsibility to see that I didn't put them out on

01:30 too many jobs, or too many tough jobs. And he was killed on one which I thought was a sweetie, you know just flying up and down the north coast of New Guinea, the other side of Papua, the other peninsula, to see him shot down that was very sad indeed. But we weren't too sure exactly what happened except that we got the message that they had been attacked, and were on fire. And they had landed and we had hopes that he might survive

02:00 anyway, but he didn't.

Did planes go out and you just never found out or heard what happened to them?

Oh lots yeah. And I mean we had cases, two or three years ago they found a Catalina in an island in Indonesia, and it turned out, to be not one of my people, but one of the 11

02:30 or 42 Squadron people later. And the brother of this bloke went up there to retrieve the remains of his body. After the war by the way he knew his brother had been shot down and about where it was, and he was army, and he managed to wrangle himself a trip to look around the island to see if he could find any trace, mad hope that he might have gone into the jungle and survived. That was not likely, but just the possibility of

03:00 finding him or something to find out what happened to him. And he was very hurt, this brother that was in the army was very hurt that the Catalinas got no publicity at all, see our work was secret. The mining work was secret, not the bombing the mining, this is after my time. The mining was very, very secret. Nobody knew about Catalinas and he felt that his brother, Tempelly his name was, Tom Tempelly, had

03:30 didn't get the recognition he deserved. When he said, 'My brother was killed in Cats', they said, 'What are Cats?' He said, 'Flying boats'. They said, 'What stooging around the Pacific?' 'No he was shot down on a mining run'. 'Oh come on, not Catalinas', you know people didn't know. Anyway they found the body and they had a burial service over there, and everybody from the family went up there and it sealed off,

04:00 a, the story of their relative. In the same way as in this house, as Kay will tell you, I had the mother of a sergeant who was in 10 Squadron who was sent off on a fruitless mission in a Seagull over to France and he was shot down at a place called Ploudaniel. And

04:30 nobody knew anything what happened to him until well after then end of the war. And here was this man's wife who was up here, and a son, who didn't know whether they had a father or not, whether he was shot down or whatever. And they found some bits of the Seagull aircraft and I went up and presented them to the Australian War Memorial. And we had the son

05:00 who was a doctor by the way, not a simpleton. An erudite young doctor who felt that here that after the bits were handed over to the memorial that rounded off the thing. And he felt as he told us later, so much happier. He had lost his father, but now he knew what had happened, the episode was closed. He felt that he could get on with life much more easily. And that

05:30 had a different effect on different people.

At the time, when you were incurring quite heavy losses up in 11 Squadron, how were you dealing with the possibility of going out and possibly not coming back?

I used to have my fingers crossed and just hope. See we didn't have tours, in Britain the Bomber Command had thirty

06:00 tours, thirty ops tours, far too long, but it was tours and if people got through that they knew. But when we were up there we didn't know how long we were up there for. See I was in Britain flying from September the 3rd on operations in, certainly they weren't bomber command type operations, but I was there until May 41, that was fifteen to eighteen months.

06:30 No thought about when I was going to finish, if it was as stressful as New Guinea I would have been very worn by the end of that time. But people at headquarters didn't feel that we should have actual tours. What they did, when a fellow had done enough operations as a second pilot, they'd bring him down, make him captain and send him back again. Other people, like Keith Bolifo, a great friend of mine

07:00 from, his wife is here in Canberra. He just flew right through the war, he was worn. A man mountain, he was a big bloke, but he was worn. I was worn, I have got photographs here of myself, a press photo when I was at Rose Bay when I came down from Port Moresby. My fighting weight was eleven stone six, I was nine stone six when I came down from New Guinea. It was the heat, and work, and responsibility But I didn't

07:30 feel enervated, I just felt getting towards the end of the time up there, which was only six months of war, five months of war, that I couldn't see myself lasting because the operations were far more deadly then they were in Britain. I couldn't see myself finishing. I have had letters from blokes a couple of years ago

08:00 saying they just found out where I was, and remember you gave away to my brother a beautiful Hardy's Brothers trout rod. And I wrote back to me, no you gave to me, and I wrote back to him and I said gee, I am doing trout fishing down here I would really give my right arm for a Hardy Trout Rod, but the bugger didn't give it back. But I had given away,

08:30 I gave away everything that I had because I was so sure that it was only a matter of time before I bought it. I wasn't doing that much flying but I was doing a lot.

Did you write a letter that would be sent back to your family or parents in case you didn't come back?

No, I didn't. Nothing as dramatic as that. I used to write and say that things were tough, and the

weather was hot,

09:00 and we were on ops, or we had met so and so. Or there is some nice blokes here, I have got copies here, my mother kept all of my letters. I said nothing dramatic. I put on a show a bit when I was in Britain when I was at Oban after my aeroplane sunk and I sent her a letter which I had had in my pocket and was going to post and it was all damp and I said that was from a crash and I felt pretty good.

09:30 And I was showing off there, but I didn't do it from the New Guinea side at all.

It was a vastly different war in New Guinea?

Oh yeah, and nobody understood it, least of all the people at headquarters, who were, the top people were World War I people and Burnett from Britain. Who was a nice bloke, his daughter was out here, WAAF officer, they were very nice people but he

10:00 had no idea. And the people at area headquarters at Townsville, North East Area headquarters it was called. They didn't really know what was going on either, they gave the orders but they didn't come up and fly with us.

Can you tell us about your personal role in the Battle of the Coral Sea? And also the role of the squadron?

I can't give you that on authority because I wasn't there,

10:30 I was posted down the day before the Coral Sea episode occurred. So I can't tell you anything about it, all I know is that the Japanese won the battle and then stupidly turned around. And we knew that convoy with all of its escort was going to come down and occupy Moresby, and that was revealed later.

11:00 How much I knew at that time I am not too sure but I was sure that Moresby was gone. So you'd have to speak to somebody else about Coral Sea.

Why did you leave 11 Squadron?

Because they wanted a commander at Rathmines to take over a permanent air force person. The person that was there before me was not very interested in operational flying.

11:30 His name was Dermott Connelly, he was a fat bloke and he loved the movies. His great joy was running the movie theatre there himself, and growing things. But he wasn't really, he had never been on operations, and they wanted someone down there that could do that, and that's why I was pulled down there to give a lead.

12:00 They could have easily given it, by the way, to Scotty Allen who was the chief instructor at the Seaplane Training Flight there, who was infinitely better emotionally equipped in every way to take command of the station. But I was permanent air force and I was pulled down, I outranked him. He was a Squadron Leader I was a Wing Commander

12:30 and they brought me down to command the station. I didn't do a bad job of running the station, I lifted their morale by exhibitionism and giving it a good touch. And everybody knowing that I had been in the war up there. Scotty Allen could have done it but Dermott Connelly had to go, so I was brought down. He wasn't in disgrace, he was just useless.

13:00 **Just before we come down to Australia, what was the morale of number 11 Squadron while you were up there?**

Very good. I never saw any sign of wavering from the job, I never saw people claiming that they were sick and couldn't go out on operations. And this is partly because of crew spirit, you just couldn't, if you were a pilot, you just couldn't let your crew down. Say I'm sick and the boys knowing that

13:30 you were just feigning it. I have no doubt that people, if they were intelligent, would have had that in mind, but there was no thought of that. But in point of fact right through from the whole period up there, they were young people eager to get to the war, and they were aggressive and they were very very good. And did a wonderful job. Without them I think the Japs might have tried just a little bit earlier to

14:00 move down, they weren't too sure of what the strength was at Moresby.

What was the situation towards the end of your time with the 11 Squadron with the Kokoda Battle?

We didn't have any relationship to the Kokoda battle.

But you must have known it was going on or?

We knew that people were moving up there, and we knew that the Japanese were on the northern shores of New Guinea, but we didn't know much about it.

14:30 We were absorbed, we were self-centred on our air force role, we were not protecting them. Like an air force cover for an army operation. We were out to hit the enemy and hopefully deter them or reduce

their capacity to do what they would like

15:00 to do, which was simply to walk down and virtually take over the whole of New Guinea. They took over Milne Bay, they landed at the wrong place. Our people were at Milne Bay, when I saw our, this was after my time, the Japanese just landed at the wrong place if they had landed at the right place they would have just wiped Milne Bay and then you would have been, it was the first Japanese defeat of the war, Milne bay. I wasn't there but it was a

15:30 very important defeat.

Can you just quickly tell us what its like to fly as opposed to a Sunderland, what it was like to fly a Catalina into battle and what made it good for its role from your point of view as a pilot?

Well it was not good for its role. It had a long range and therefore could get to place that other aeroplanes could not get to easily. It could stay over the target or around the target and annoy the hell out of the Japanese

16:00 throughout the night. Even when you weren't over the target, if you stayed away, it kept them awake and this brought them out. People said later in hindsight this probably got them out and had them in trenches and had them anopheles mosquitoes bite them and they'd get malaria. But they weren't suited for that sort

16:30 of thing at all. But for mine laying incredibly, this was after my time, they were slow, and they could get down into a harbour find a datum point drop a mine after they had been directed by the navigator to fly a number of seconds, and do a turn, fly another few seconds. A fast aircraft would have been out too fast. But unfortunately during that period they were vulnerable because they were so slow and flying at a hundred feet in an enemy harbour of which they had very

17:00 few plans. So they did a, they were an outstanding mine laying aircraft. They were not the sort of aircraft I recommend anyone to do any bombing in.

How did you find the aircraft after flying the Sunderland?

They were a different aircraft, they had a slightly longer range. They flew very sweetly,

17:30 they were very noisy. The propellers were very close to the ears of the captain on the port side, and the first officer on the starboard side. And you can tell, the Catalina captains lost their hearing on this side, and the first officers lost the right ear. But they were big engines and they made a lot of noise. So being there and flying up there

18:00 for up to ten, twenty hours was very trying on your ears, very trying on your wellbeing really.

Can you describe any of the other discomforts? Was there bathroom facilities or anything else on board?

Well you could, yes there was a

18:30 very crude lavatory which if it got, of course the aircraft was very confined, if anybody had excreted there you tossed it over. But generally most people, unless people had a little bit of diarrhoea which was occasionally so, people would excrete into the pot and then

19:00 hopefully walk down, and it wasn't too rough, and toss it out of the back. But it wasn't as good as we had on the Empire Boats going over to England which were very very sanitary.

Did you enjoy the Catalina as a pilot?

Oh yes, But they weren't an aircraft to enjoy. An aircraft to enjoy was a fighter aircraft or something you could throw around. Even a little Sikorsky.

19:30 The OS2U, what they called the Kingfisher, we had a squadron of those at Rathmines. But they were beautiful to throw around, they had no power at all, but they could do reconnaissance, be catapulted off American ships, and they could fly short distances. But they were very manoeuvrable. The Cats were big, you couldn't throw them around, you could shoot up the place if you wanted to, but it wasn't a very thrilling experience

20:00 like doing it in a light aircraft.

You must have been feeling like you needed a bit of leave after you were up in Moresby?

Yes well I got a couple of weeks leave. I don't think I took more that a couple of weeks, and I picked up very very quickly. You know good food, early nights, and life was coming back to normal very very quickly. And of course with the comforts of Rathmines. I set it up

20:30 very very well. I was all for making it as happy as I could for the pilots, and crews after they came down after operations. Or when they were doing exchange, doing some retraining and going back again. And I demanded that we got a fenced off area in the lake where we could test, I got the works people to do it, to test our inflatable dinghies, which was utter bullshit. It was made so that we could have a

swimming pool.

21:00 We had a formal opening of the swimming pool, including the doctor there in his long johns and night cap diving off the spring board that we had there. But the place was called Cohen's Country Club because it developed a bit of an aura of comfort and fun. We had a railway station called Awaba, and we decided we'd have our own Olympic

21:30 Games down there. We had somebody run on the station with big banners saying Athens to Rathmines via Awaba. And they came on and we had a sports day. We lightened things up a little bit, and people joined in fun. Some of the kids were a little bit apprehensive about going up, you know, because they heard the tales what it was like, but they all performed. Everybody

22:00 performed admirably in New Guinea. And in Darwin later when they moved over there.

What was the atmosphere like in Australia in mid 42 when you came back?

Oh nobody, people didn't realise how bad things were. And it was a shocking surprise in Sydney harbour, as my wife would tell you, when the Japanese came in, put midget submarines in and shot onto shore from the submarines.

22:30 There was near panic amongst a lot of people. People moved out of Sydney in swarms, you could have bought a mansion in Vaucluse for two thousand pounds. A mansion. People just moved out, I don't know how well Australians would have performed in the event of a major attack on a capital city. Because they weren't blooded in the same way that people were overseas. In the way that people were in Britain, with the bombing, having had bombing,

23:00 it strengthened their resolve to resist the enemy in every way. We hadn't had that. We had a little touch, Darwin was very serious. And it really woke people up to what it was, but that was not a capital city, it was a town with a very small population. And Townsville had a bomb or two, but it was nothing really. Nothing to blood people and get them used to the idea of keeping their pecker up as London

23:30 progressively developed in their hard times. Plymouth, Coventry, Manchester, every place that was bombed in Britain. They developed a courage, and I would hope that ours might have but I don't know how they would have been initially.

What was the role of Rathmines the squadron, what you were doing at Rathmines?

24:00 Rathmines? Well because the Japanese submarines were moving around the coast at that time, and there were losses, we had number 9 Squadron and they moved out to do anti-submarine patrols from there. It was quite a big base, we had when I was there, two hundred officers and two thousand airmen. That's quite a substantial crew of people.

24:30 Most of them were engaged on maintaining the Catalinas where we had a Flying Boat Repair Depot, number 2 Fling Boat Repair Depot. And we had a the Operational Training Unit which was under my people. I had a team of very fine instructors, very fine instructors. Scotty Allen, by this time, who was one of our greats, had moved over to take over number 1 Flying Boat Repair Depot

25:00 at Lake Boga on the Murray. And it became a very big important base for servicing, and no one could have done it better than Scotty Allen, he was superb.

Were you flying yourself at this time?

25:30 Yes I kept flying., I used to fly up and down to Sydney, fly to Eastern Area Headquarters for meetings. I used to fly on the odd operations. Wasn't very exciting. And I would

26:00 fly to teach people or to show off at times with the Sikorsky for a bit of fun.

After a intense period of hazardous flying how did you take to coming back to Rathmines?

Oh I enjoyed very much the safety of it and the pleasure of being in command of a large station . Having the respect of the people there, because I had been on operations, I had been in Britain and in New Guinea, I had a DFC from Britain and they said well you know he must be a decent sort of bloke. Actually I was recommended not for a DFC but for an Empire Gallantry Medal because it was a ground rather than an air activity that I had done

26:30 on that occasion. But they said if I had an Empire Gallantry medal, as I heard later, they would have had to declare on the citation that it was for a ground operation and this was a secret operation at the time.

Around this time did you have much leave?

Oh I had as much leave as I wanted, I didn't need much. I was enjoying life on Rathmines, there was nowhere for me to go.

27:00 Seeing my mother in Sydney when I went down there on occasion, but leave wasn't anything.

Was there anything else significant that happened at Rathmines?

I met my then future wife, she was an officer on a neighbouring station, and we used to entertain a small number of men and women officers from that station

27:30 in our officers mess, and they invited us back on occasions to theirs. And on one occasion, I didn't do it often, I saw her across a crowded room and I was with a nursing sister from our station, she was very old, she was thirty-five. And I told Nell, this was nursing sister, I said that's the girl I am going to marry. And she said well it's stupid to say that. And I said well I have been looking at her, that's the girl.

28:00 so I set upon it and met her, invited her to a meal at Rathmines. She had been flying by the way at Rathmines with Scotty Allen because they were giving them, the fighter sector officers experience of what it was like to be up there and to be controlled by the ground people, because they controlled the aircraft in the air, where they went.

28:30 And she had flown in Catalinas, but I took her up in a Sikorsky, I didn't give her any aerobatics but took her up to impress her. Then I used to go in, take my car in, if my car wasn't right, on one occasion there wasn't a sedan available, I took her for a ride in a crane. But took her for dinner in Newcastle and then we were very

29:00 intimately associated but not sexually, which would be the practice these days. And when I had her posted down to Melbourne I managed to get a flat and gave her very short notice and said we're getting married. And we did in the Toorak Presbyterian Church by the Reverend Doctor Watson.

29:30 And we lived happily ever after.

Can you tell us, you were saying you got her posted to Melbourne?

Well I went to see the director of postings an air force pilot from the citizen air force a Group Captain Love. Him I knew, appropriate name, and I went to see him one day and I said Allen I'd like an officer from the fighter sector,

30:00 a WAAF officer posted down to Melbourne. And he looked at me with horror and he said Dick I didn't think you were that sort of man, and I said no this is on the square. I said I really want her down here, I am going to finish my wooing and I hope marry her very very shortly after she comes down here. He didn't ask the natural question is she pregnant? Because nothing was further from my future wife's mind or mine, of any pre-marital intercourse. You didn't

30:30 do it in those days. So we were, she came down. I managed to get a flat from a colleague of mine who I had been flying with in England., Bruce Courtney a Group Captain, Wing Commander at that time. And we took over his flat, illegally. Was owned by a French woman, very pleasant little flat. And we then got married and lived there for a time, until such times as I was

31:00 posted to, up north.

Where was that, when were you posted?

I was posted up north in 1945. My wife, we had decided we would have a child, and she wasn't going to leave the air force as a pregnant person so she told the director of WAAF that she wanted to have a child and ask for her release.

31:30 When she was released we then set about having a family, She became pregnant. She went over to South Australia to live with her sister and I was posted to do a staff course, which was silly, at Mount Martha in Victoria, she came over and saw me there. Then I went up north and our baby was born three months

32:00 after, I didn't see her until she was three months old.

And then you were posted back?

I was posted back to Brisbane, and then down to Melbourne, and then by devious means got a house for her to live in, brought her over from Adelaide, and I was at the Air Force Headquarters by that stage as a director and we stayed there happily

32:30 for a year or two before I decided to leave the air force in 1948.

Can we just stop there for a minute. Can we just cover the time when you were posted with RAAF intelligence up in Moratai? Can you tell us about the time up there before the end of the war?

Well I had a base

33:00 in Brisbane where there are quite a few people. I had a few floors of the AMP [Australian Mutual Provident] Building in Queen Street. I had a team at Moratai, a small team there, and I had some of my people with General Kenny in the Philippines. And I rotated between those three places. We used to take off from Brisbane at midnight, arrive at Gove in Arnhem Land at dawn.

33:30 Where I would see Group Captain Ryland who was a fellow commander, have breakfast there and then onto Moratai and do what I had to do there. Clean up there and possibly go up to Manilla, see the

General, then come back to Moratai. All very demanding in flying time but I wasn't flying myself. But in April 1942 we

34:00 were going to Malaysia, or Malaya as it was

45?

45. I am sorry. Had been taken by the Japanese, and the Britons had moved out and they had their headquarters at Kandi in Ceylon. The air force had their headquarters at Manilla, and I was sent over as an intell man with a team of three, a signals man, an

34:30 operations man, and one of the two administrative men, to arrange overlapping bombing zones between the Americans in Manilla and at Moratai and between Kandi at Ceylon where Mountbatten had his headquarters. It was a very interesting trip because I found there was almost a carnival atmosphere at Kandi

35:00 we were very surprised because the Americans, with all of their faults really got their heads down to work, but there was the round of cocktail parties going in Kandi. Not that they were not doing their job but it was a much more relaxed atmosphere than it was in the Philippines which had been taken over. And when we were in the Philippines you could still, our headquarters the Far East Air Force headquarters was there, but you could still hear shooting at times.

35:30 From Intramuros and the walled city in Manilla where there was still some resistance like there is resistance now in Baghdad. And so it had a war-like atmosphere, but the Americans of course, while I say there was a holiday atmosphere to a degree in this Kandi, the Americans also made sure their people were extremely well fed and services from the time

36:00 they landed in Manilla, when they landed in Manilla, with ice cream and chicken and good food. Much infinitely better than our troops got when they moved forward into Balikpapan into Borneo.

And how were you moving around at this time?

I was being flown by American, they had transport wings everywhere,

36:30 quite remarkable. The way they operated, the Americans had a bench life for things in the tropics and one transport squad DC3s in Moratai I remember they had marvellous equipment, spares and everything there. And after three months they would close it up and bury it. That was gone because it was past the use by date and they had new stuff in there. We had to beg. I used my influence

37:00 to get from the Americans equipment. For our own aircraft that we couldn't get easily but they were throwing away and replacing with new and fresher material. But being flown around by young American pilots was a source of fear for me a that stage. Probably the only time I was, probably the greatest fear I had during war I thought it would be dreadful to get knocked down

37:30 there. It would be like getting run over by a tram in Canberra, flying in a DC 3 between Moratai and Manilla with pilots of very limited experience compared with my own. And seeing them fly poorly in bad weather, taking off, using their brakes roughly, on one occasion in Manilla I had got on an aeroplane and it was in a Commando, a

38:00 C46 Commando. And they are a bit harder to fly than the 3s, and I didn't like the feel of the pilot. He had to go back to the tarmac to pick a couple of American officers and wanted to come down to see my chief in Moratai and I said to my colleague a Group Captain, a colleague from Moratai I said, 'Well I think I will go and see the general in town', I had a few things I had to finish off, he said, 'Come off it, you don't'. And I said, 'No I don't really but I don't like this bloke',

38:30 he said, 'Oh don't be stupid'. Anyway I said, 'Well I am getting off', got off, went and saw (UNCLEAR) at work and I took an aeroplane the next day and went down to Moratai and continued my work. Things were fairly frantic, we were building up towards the Balikpapan series, the Oboe series of operations in Borneo. And after a few days there I said, 'Have you see this Group Captain around?' They said, 'No he went missing in an aircraft between Manilla and Moratai'.

39:00 We don't know whether he forced landed or crashed, but they never heard of him again, he just disappeared and that would have been me.

You got off that plane?

Yes it was quite a remarkable, Moratai was a small place it was a small island, I must say the Americans were most imaginative in moving through to Manilla island hopping. Moratai was a very small island and there was a fence across a sector, and behind that fence were Japanese.

39:30 Very poorly armed and very hungry, but they were there. And you could hear them chattering at night. And we were on the other side of the fence. And if you went swimming there, people said watch out, you don't want to go past that point because you'll be in the Japanese sector. But they never attacked us. They were very lightly armed, I don't know who they were but there a lot of Japanese there. And that was the

40:00 highly intelligent work of Macarthur. Going through that way, he took over, when he moved up the coast

to Northern New Guinea, just took as much land as he wanted. Bypassed Rabaul, no thought of taking over Rabaul again. The Australians were thinking we must go and attack Rabaul, you know get it back. There was no need to do that you just bypassed it, they were isolated.

We might just stop there, change the tape.

40:30 **End of tape**

Tape 10

00:30 **Dick where were you when the war in the Pacific ended?**

I was in Brisbane or Moratai, I am not too sure where I was. And I don't remember the occasion. I don't remember any great celebrations. And the reason is that I have been busy since 1945, I mean it's a long time ago.

01:00 And I reallyy don't recall a lot of things I had a pretty full life. But when war finished I was called down to air force headquarters and then became director of training for a start, holding the fort for somebody. And the director general of organization.

You said you left the air force in 1948? What were the circumstances that you decided to leave?

01:30 Well one of them was I didn't like the Chief of the Airstaff much, Jones, who should have never been the Chief of Airstaff. I had been I one of my

02:00 officers, a bloke named Hinnock, who later became an Air Vice-marshal, who asked me whether, my advice, should apply for the job of airport manager at mascot in the Department of Civil Aviation. And I said, 'Yes indeed, your wife doesn't like Melbourne, she is a Sydney girl she loves Sydney'. I said, 'I am younger than you are', and I said, 'I am senior to you by one rank,

02:30 there is only one good job in the air force and that's Chief of the Airstaff,' and I said, 'I'll get there before you'. So he said okay and off he went. Next thing I know, about a month later I get a call from the Director general of Civil Aviation, Air Marshal Sir Richard Williams, who knew me pre-war and in war years. And he said, 'Kingsland', I was Kingsland by this time,

03:00 he said, 'I hear you would like to be airport manager Mascot'. I said, 'There is nothing further from my thoughts. He said, 'Well', I said, 'Why did you think that?' 'Hinnock said if he didn't take it, you Kingsland would'. I said, 'No I said if I were you, I said to Hinnock I would take it'. Anyway I thought it over, he offered me the job, and I talked it over with my wife. So I halved the salary and went to

03:30 Mascot as airport manager. And another reason was by the way, there was several very complicated reasons, but one of them was people were starting to laugh at my jokes in the mess and they weren't very funny. And you can ask my wife, I used to come home at night and say I will develop a God complex, I was senior, had lots of junior

04:00 officers around the place and they were very cow-towing to you all of the time. And I had seen the effect of that on other people and I thought it was time I got out and did a job and earned something on my own merits. And went to Mascot and incredibly didn't stay there for very long before I went flying with TAA.

What were your emotions on leaving the air force, it had been such a big part of your life?

04:30 My emotions were strong in that I wouldn't have left if we had had a good Chief of Airstaff. Jones was a good man, don't underestimate me. He was a gallant World War I pilot, he was a very capable middle level administrator, totally lacking in imagination, and I used to go to board meetings and I was appalled to think that he was the head of our show. He was not a disaster, but just not

05:00 good enough and he was going to be there for a long time. And I just couldn't see myself staying, and I wasn't such a strong character, I was a man who had a very keen sense of survival. I really should have stayed in the air force, pursued a career there and gone through say to Air Vice-Marshal or even Chief of Airstaff, but certainly to Air Vice-Marshal, which was a good career. Very pleasant one, wonderful one for my wife,

05:30 a lot of travel, good pay, fine retirement.

You mentioned that sense of survival, I am not sure that you talked about it on camera so much, can you tell me what you mean by that?

Well it was surviving in the big city by myself, although there were relations nearby around the same suburbs I was a loner, very much alone. And I was watching money, I was watching to improve myself in my job,

06:00 when I moved it was precarious ground, into flying. And I developed very keen instincts there, watchful

the whole time to make certain I didn't put a wrong foot out of place. And then did incredibly stupid things like low flying, showing off and things

06:30 like that. But my sense of survival was keen in that I could look at situations and tell, make pretty good assessments of things with a very untutored mind. I was not university trained.

Were you making such an assessment when you decided to leave the air force?

No I think that was off the cuff.

07:00 But it was a combination of a lot of things which led me to go. I was going, one of the reasons I changed my name I was offered a job in Montreal at ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organisation, and Montreal was an anti-Semitic city and I didn't want my children to go through the jibes that I went through as a kid, as a Jew with a name like Cohen.

07:30 Everybody knew me as Dick Cohen I am known as Dick Cohen, everything that is written about me about the place they say Sir Richard Kingsland was Dick Cohen, you know, and that's the way it is in the official history of the air force. There it is a big photo of me. Flight Lieutenant J.A. Cohen a sombre looking me a Flight Lieutenant, and then in brackets changed his name by deed poll in

08:00 1947 to Kingsland. But they didn't mention of course that it was my step-father, who my mother married, and of whom I was very very fond to was a fact in the selection of the name Kingsland. People thought it was a bit presumptuous. Kingsland, from a Jewish name to that, but in point of fact it was my stepfather's name and he was very happily married to my mother.

How did your own parents feel about you changing your name?

Didn't worry at all.

08:30 Everybody knew me as Dick Cohen, people have a little jibe every now and then if they want to, and it's very easy. People do say things that it is better that you don't hear.

It seems that you did have a very full and successful career after you left the air force as Sir Richard Kingsland, was there more to it, you almost had two different lives

09:00 **up to that point, your name change came in the middle of that?**

It was incredible life. I have had, I want to tell you, Civil Aviation I went out flying against the wishes of Sir Richard Williams who wouldn't let me go. I resigned he said, 'Stay on I will give you a year's leave without pay and you can fly with TAA', Ryland said, 'Well I will take you on and pay you.' And then Williams recalled me

09:30 put me in South Australia director, and then Northern Territory which was big at the time because Darwin was a very big airport in the early days. And the most incredible thing happened, he wanted, South Australia and Northern Territory merged and I was doing that but I was, my story in Darwin was only for a year, is a story in itself, but I had

10:00 trouble with the unions up there. My security people in the airport at night wouldn't move the bins. We had a lot of aircraft coming through, KLM, BOAC [British Overseas Airway Corporation] as it was then, QANTAS, bringing lots of immigrants out to Australia, and they had children, and they were filling the waste bins with nappies and stuff like that. And I said to the security people, 'We have four aircraft coming in every night, would you mind just taking the bin

10:30 from the area where we have the, the holding area, take the bin or bins, you wouldn't get your hands dirty I'll give you gloves, put them out there and pick up two bins and put them back for the next aircraft'. They wouldn't do it. And I saw the unions and they said, 'No they weren't allowed to do it, they were security people they couldn't do it'. I said, 'Well I haven't got enough people to put people on to change bins at night', I had limited funds. And I had a lot of things to do with it, so I said all right. Each night I went out to, I was staying at the

11:00 RAAF base, I would go and see the movie at the drive-in and I would then come out and move the bins myself. After each aircraft I would wait for two or three hours, move the bins out and bring the other bins in. Oh the security guards were embarrassed, and then it became a joke in this small town of Darwin. What I was doing, and a very senior bloke from the Public Service Board

11:30 was up there at the time, he was later Sir Edward Hicks, he later became secretary to Department of Air but he saw this and locked it in and when he took over Air he wanted somebody to get the service people and civilians merged and to work as a team, and to take the service people under control because they were sitting on their arse doing virtually nothing because they

12:00 didn't like that sort of work. They wanted somebody who could control them, get them going and get the civilians to work in with the service people. And he negotiated with Williams and brought me down from Darwin. That changed my whole life, I then became the Chief Administrative Assistant to the Chief of the air force and from there Assistant Secretary, and then I became, when Hicks moved to Defence he

12:30 pulled me across there as one of his Deputies. And I moved on from there, the chance of me getting Interior which was a big Department, which was running a big one, not an important one, but it had a

vast number of ramifications and a large staff of ten thousand people, eleven thousand actually the Interior, was again a chance almost the equivalent of my getting transferred from Darwin.

13:00 Hicks negotiating to get me out of Darwin to do a job in air which led me to another track.

Do you feel that the factors that have shaped your life then, you have mentioned luck and survival, how big a part does the war and the air force play?

Oh it had a vast, a very big place because I became a small identity in a small

13:30 at the beginning of the war because I was in England and I was literate, I could write and I had a terrific love of English. I could change character in a day, read a book and I would adopt the style of the person that I had just been reading. I wrote well, these letters were good stuff and they were being passed around. They were

14:00 was the trigger to give me a profile which had people like Williams and Casey remembering me when I really didn't deserve, I didn't deserve the admiration or respect that they might have had for me. There were plenty of others who were better but I happened to be at the right place at the right time to get the right jobs, and it was luck.

Apart

14:30 **from putting you in the right place at the right time did it change you in other ways? Was the Richard Kingsland that came out at the end of the war different to the Dick Cohen who went in?**

I was a lot more confident, still very much a loner although I was apparently gregarious. I was and still am a loner. I like seeing people I like having conversations but I don't want them to be too long. I don't want people to stay in my house, as my children do,

15:00 they're wonderful, they have people come in from all around the world and staying in their house for weeks on end. We value our intimate relative loneliness. Complain like hell when we have to go out and enjoy it all of the time, but we are not seeking it.

15:30 So I am not unique I have found other people who are like me. But I am certainly not gung ho, I am not a golf club man. I think there are so many other things to do rather than playing golf or bridge which seems to be the main occupation of my peers at the moment.

As you have mentioned already you have been very busy since you left the air

16:00 **force in 1948, but have you had time, maybe since you have retired to reflect on the war and what you did in that period of your life?**

Well I think about it because I have written about it. I wrote a series of six articles, I wrote one, by the way, on learning to fly, and I showed it to a pilot friend of mine at the National Press Club. This is after, this is only a few years ago,

16:30 and they said you better get that out to Ian Mathews at the Canberra Times and get that published. I said oh, so I put it out there and they got it published. I have got the article here I will show you. They said you got any more? I said no I haven't. They said would you like to do another article? I said oh yeah., what would you like? They said anything. So I, there is a very interesting story about how I found, I don't know if you know your painting, a Rupert Bunny painting that I found in Paris

17:00 in very interesting circumstances where I worked up a relationship with a very old lady and had a correspondence with her over a few years so I wrote that article. Then they say, what about another one? So I wrote another one. The beauty of this was that the Press Club said hey, you are a professional, you are not just one of our visitor member, you are now a professional, and as you are retired now you are a professional journalist retired and your fees instead of being there are down here.

17:30 But I like writing and I have had more than my share, infinitely more than my share of the good things in life and of praise. And I know it full well, I know me, and it's very experienced but very ordinary.

Looking back at the war then, from this vantage point so far on in your life, what does it mean to you now?

18:00 It gave me opportunities that I would have never had at that rate. Moving from a Flight Lieutenant at the beginning of the war in September 1939 to being in 1942, three years after Group Captain and heavy responsibilities, an undeserved, it is, I

18:30 genuinely mean this, an undeserved reputation, order of reputation. Which I gladly accepted and which has been very useful to me ever since, and it breeds success. If you are known people will take you. The jobs that I got post war are totally fascinating I have had an infinite variety of jobs to do,

19:00 I was picked, not because I was good, but I was picked because I didn't stuff up the last job. And people are safe, they say well he is there, he has got a profile, he didn't wreck the last thing he was doing, lets give him this one. And it was things which were well beyond my comprehension which I had to learn

and I did.

You might say undeserved but are you proud of what your generation did for this country?

I am proud of

19:30 the people that did incredibly good jobs. I hope one day that you meet Arthur Hoyle, people that really did tough ones, I am proud of those greats in our community. I am proud of the public servants who have had top jobs and people sneering at public servants, and people total dedication, great brains and great capacity I am proud of being of that group,

20:00 but I don’t put myself into that category. I am talking about the really top flight public service, the people like Bunting and others like that.

Are you a member of organizations like the RSL?

I am a member, I am a honorary life member of half a dozen organizations. People have tended to latch on to me because I had a bit of a profile that was useful, or

20:30 they felt I might influence the relationships of their organization. For instance When I was in Veterans Affairs I was made a life member of the RSL and the Career in South East Asia Association and things like that. People will latch on all of the time if they think there is some advantage in it.

Does that type of organised commemoration not sit so well with you?

I

21:00 frankly get bored with it. I do feel a sense of duty in some ways. I am going down I have been invited down to the Battle of Britain celebrations, it is going to be a very big one in Hobart next month. We are being flown down by service aircraft, my wife as well. And we’re going down there. I don’t like reunions, I don’t like these shows, but I go up to the War memorial on the two major days on Anzac Day and Remembrance Day. I go to meetings of

21:30 odd associations at times. I feel a sense of duty, I don’t want to appear stand offish, but I don’t get any great satisfaction out of it.

Why do you go to the War Memorial on Anzac Day? What's in it for you?

I just feel it is a sense of duty., I have had a great deal from the services. I admire greatly servicemen who have done such wonderful things. Our people at El Alamein, our people at Kokoda, in World War I, the least I can do is just go up and pay some respect. But I am not totally involved.

22:00 I am not involved emotionally, I have respect and I feel that as I have a bit of a profile around the place it probably behoves me to go up there.

Do ever remember negative things about that period of your life as well? People you lost or difficult things you had to do? Did they ever traumatise you in your post war life?

22:30 I was very sad that I was a practical administrator and I promoted people because, not because of how good they were but because of how good they would be in their next job. And I lost the affection of some people because I said you are extremely good, doing a good job there but I don’t see you up one higher.

23:00 I was a fairly good judge of character of capacity, I had a great recognition of brains, I am a keen admirer of brain power, people with analytical skills, people who I have philosophers in the book case who I read and revel in and I am amazed and I appreciate, I think they are wonderful. And I think I can pick the sorts of qualities that are great

23:30 in my own people and I would only promote in the people I thought were worthy of coming forward. Just because they were doing a good job where they were was not sufficient, I lost friends that way, that was very painful.

Have you talked to your children about your service career?

They have heard quite a bit of it ad nauseum.

24:00 Not that I raise it but at an age like this I can relate back to things, and they mention something and I say well of course on another occasion I did this. And I can see the glazed look come over their eyes, I cut it short and then I tell them, and I have told them even recently, I said I have a lot to say I really can’t take you back and I don’t, there is a gap,

24:30 a generation gap. People think differently, do things differently, and in many cases better than I ever did.

I think you mentioned when we arrived that you agree with the ideas of this project, that’s very forward looking to the future, do you think it is important for future generations to remember what took place in this past century and the wars?

Oh there is a great, if they read history, history is so important. People

25:00 think history is Kings and this and that, but if people analyse the great people they will see how the so-called great people now operate. History will show you how government administration developed and how it is falling into decay. Because people don't know their history, because people who know history in Australia know the Westminster System in Britain and we have a bastardised

25:30 system of Westminster now which is progressively falling apart. This is not just an old man, this is recognised by intelligent people. I think that everybody should be forced to read the great philosophers. Certainly read the Bertrand Russells, but certainly read other people who made forecasts of the future,

26:00 thirty years ago, fifty years ago and a hundred years ago. And say how accurate were they at picking out the weaknesses and strengths. You will see through the ages philosophers ranging back to Plato, if people read Plato carefully, which I haven't, not carefully. If people read Plato carefully they would see a relevance to the present day situation in government and in

26:30 personalities.

The purpose of the archive is to be put away for a long time, hopefully fifty, a hundred years time, people are looking at this. Is there anything perhaps as your last words that you would like to say, given your own life experience and what you know now that you might like to leave as a message for those future people watching this?

Well I think that, if I have one message to give it is that we are living in an incredibly marvellous world. We are

27:00 marvellous things, human beings. The human body is a miracle, in its mechanisms, its capacity, the mind and its repair mechanisms. It is all there to be wondered at, including the insects and the animals. If people could become interested, that's point one, point two, we are in a very ,very mature world now

27:30 we have everything we want in the western world. There is no reason that we should increase everything in size all of the time. There is no reason why we should demand novelty all of the time. We should say there are so many wonderful things here that you could enjoy yourself, there is no reason that we shouldn't all be spending a wonderful life. But it will not happen because I think we will go along the path

28:00 of materialism, increasing size and a lack of real practical sympathy for the real downtrodden. Who will be down here in ten, twenty, fifty and a hundred years time.

Thankyou very much for taking part in this, I can't express our gratitude enough, it has been a pleasure talking to you. Before you get up, we are just going to take a photograph of you, we'll take the microphone off.

28:30 **INTERVIEW ENDS**