

Australians at War Film Archive

William Little (Pappy) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/757>

Tape 1

- 00:42 **We'll come back to that. That aspect of it is even interesting to discuss. Why don't we start at the beginning?**
- Here we go.
- Where did you grow up? Where were your born?**
- I was born in Ballarat
- 01:00 and grew up in Ballarat so you might say I know quite a bit about the town. The early days, I can remember back to where I was three, about three years old. I can remember where we lived. We lived in Sturt Street in a divided building alongside of St Peter's Church. It's gone of course like most of the things
- 01:30 from the early days have gone. Especially in valuable areas. Do you want me to say anything about what I did there because I remember it so fine. The building had a long passage that ran down one side and I was lucky enough to be presented with a wooden train that you could actually sit in and run up and down
- 02:00 this passageway from the entrance which was on Sturt Street, right to the back door and out into the small yard behind. That was the sort of toy that I remember vividly. We moved from there to another place in Skipton Street and it was another fairly small place. It was quite small. Things were fairly grim in the 20s and 30s.
- 02:30 There wasn't a lot of - people just lived wherever they could possibly get in. And I remember it very vividly. We had a duck and a pen in the backyard and there's a strange incident that I remember. A cousin visited us. She's still alive and lives in Melbourne. She's a fair bit older than me. She had the temerity to feed the duck on chewing gum.
- 03:00 I was intrigued with this. I knew this wasn't the sort of thing you really should do but I did mention it to her years later and she was quite oblivious of ever doing such a thing at all. I used to visit my grandmother's house a lot. She lived in Dawson Street which was the next street back and it was great. Now I've got some very strange things to say about her. She had a sage bush right at her back door
- 03:30 which was full of snails and for some reason or other I had a bit of a thing about snails. They fascinated me. And when I would arrive there, this is when I'd actually started school, I'd bring as many of them inside and let them crawl around on her kitchen table. It must have horrified her quite a bit I suppose.
- 04:00 Yes, there were plenty of things to play with there. At one stage, before my sister was born - I was four years old when she was born - we went down to a farm the other side of Frankston. It was a big property owned by a very important person apparently because the house that they lived in was virtually a mansion but we lived in a little house where the entrance was,
- 04:30 a sort of a gatehouse I suppose you can see. Dad was supposed to farm a certain area and supervise the whole farm. It was a great place because my sister had just been born at that time and I used to go out with Dad. He used to set rabbit traps. That's a vivid memory, rabbits struggling with traps.
- 05:00 He used to grow a lot of tomatoes. I can still smell rotting tomatoes even to this day. They had a dog called Dismal Desmond, a spotted thing it was. It followed me around everywhere because it was about as high as I was at the time. And wherever I'd sit down it'd snuggle in alongside and sit there and lick me ears.
- 05:30 I know I had big ears and it attracted this dog in a serious sort of way. Anyhow, the thing didn't turn out there. I visited the big house one, was ushered in and taken upstairs to the chap that owned it. He'd been a colonel in the British army in India so you can imagine what he looked like, a very overbearing person. But he spoke to me quite nicely I remember and I was lifted up to look out the window

- 06:00 of the upstairs part, you could see over Port Phillip Bay from one window and over wWestern Port from the other window. Very nice it was, very nice. But before that long we came back to Ballarat again. The school that I went to was Golden Point, only a couple of blocks away from here. I loved school. I thought school was marvellous.
- 06:30 You learned things every day if you wanted to. Some of the kids obviously didn't want to learn. They had no interest in school whatsoever. We went through the grades. The teachers were quite elderly to our mind and quite severe at times too. Beating up children was not forbidden in those days. I think they enjoyed it really.
- 07:00 Anyhow, we worked our way through the school. School time for kids, especially for boys around the Golden Point area was marvellous because some of the mines, the big mines had just stopped working and you could visit what they'd left behind, which was all sorts of machinery and they never sealed the shafts when they went at that particular time so we could find our way down into them especially through some of the tunnels
- 07:30 and roam around these old workings far below ground. Of course, our parents didn't know what we were up to. Well they'd have told us not to but they never even got that far so we were free to do this sort of thing. And then, oh what comes next?

Was that dangerous?

It was terribly dangerous but the adults had no idea

- 08:00 of what was down there. In mining in those days, they'd make a drive - that's a horizontal tunnel looking for the oil bodies and then they'd suddenly go downwards just from the floor of the tunnel and they never ever covered those things up. They left them open. You'd be walking along in almost complete darkness. Some of the kids would light bits of bark as a flare to
- 08:30 and you'd come to the edge of a sort of a precipice and it would drop down goodness knows how far. Well we found out we could get around those by being very careful and continue on. You found all sorts of things down there where the men had been. But it was another world altogether. Well eventually,

Well I was going to say it sounds like there was an awful lot for you to do in Ballarat as a child?

- 09:00 Oh yeah. It was a wonderland for kids especially round Golden Point. The whole countryside had been altered with the mining. There was these huge mallet keeps with the debris that they brought up from down below just dumped around and there was even some of the batteries where they crushed the oil. They were still there. And there were things you could crawl up on as well as crawl down on. It was great, yeah. Now eventually our schooldays
- 09:30 ended and we entered a different phase of life. We went on to secondary schools. They were much...

Your family, you had a big extended family here in Ballarat?

No, not really. I had aunts and uncles of course but not what you would call a big family for those days. I know lots of the kids at school there was nine or ten kids in the family. That was

- 10:00 an extended family. But in ours there was only Mum and Dad and myself and my sister. So it was quite small for those times.

And what did your father do?

Hah. He was sort of an entrepreneur I suppose you'd say today. He was a bootmaker but always wanted to expand his business. He had several different businesses

- 10:30 going at the one time and he travelled, all within Ballarat's environs. He'd visit them on and off through the day and I don't, I can still remember exactly where they all were too. Some of them were very tiny. In those days, a boot repairer would have what was called a kiosk. It was just enough room for one person
- 11:00 to stand in it and collect the repair work that was coming in for shoes and send them off to the place where the activity took place and then deliver them back from that particular spot. I don't think that sort of thing still exists even in some cities. You'd have just a place where you leave things, you get them done and you collect them from them but there's no actual work takes place there. And I used to have to visit these places
- 11:30 even as a schoolkid and pick up things and take them back again by bicycle. They were the days. And well, technical school that I was sent to, it was a choice. When you left sState sSchool you either went to a tTechnical sSchool or to a hHigh sSchool. And if you were going to be an accountant or someone important you went to the hHigh sSchool but I was sent to the tTechnical sSchool.
- 12:00 You learnt to use your hands on all sorts of materials, either timber, iron and anything where you could create things which I liked. I don't think I'd have liked the high school. I don't think I was smart enough for one thing. We did notice that when we come to leave the State state School school the ones that seemingly had the most brains went to

- 12:30 the High high School school and became something fairly important. Anyhow, High high Schoolschool, Technical technical School school seemed to pass fairly quickly and when I was about 14 or 15 I think, I made a decision to leave school. What I wanted to do was something along a trade line but I didn't get that opportunity.
- 13:00 I could see I was expected to go into the business which by that time it wasn't just repairing shoes, it was selling footwear as well. And although I didn't like it much I've got to admit, that's what I had to do. And this sort of thing went on for years until World War II broke out.
- 13:30 When it started in Europe I started to think that this was a different sort of activity altogether. It sort of intrigued me a bit that you could do something different other than working in a shop serving people. That was interesting in a way. You had some interesting people to deal with but there was a much wider field out there. I followed the war in Europe. Not many kids my age did I imagine but I
- 14:00 could see it had possibilities. So I made arrangements to do some training to prepare me for a different sort of life.

Can I ask you what it was about - why did you follow the war? You would have been 14 or 15?

Well my father had been in World War I and he brought back an awful lot of material to do with the war. And I'd read it all through and found it extremely interesting and

- 14:30 I thought I'd like to do the same sort of thing. He'd had a pretty rough sort of - he'd been a dispatch rider and rode a motorbike backwards and forwards to the front line taking dispatches and orders. He didn't talk much about it but he told a few stories that intrigued me. He would have to go into headquarters which were quite a way behind the front line and stand there and wait
- 15:00 while decisions were made on where, when the next attack was to be made. And he listened to the discussion between the generals as to why they were going to do this or do that. When they decided, when they'd make an attack which cost many, many lives, they knew it. They made it just as though it was some groceries that they were deciding whether they'd buy or not. There were men's lives at stake. This horrified him.
- 15:30 And then he'd have to take the dispatch sealed, right to the front line to where the troops were that were going to make the attack and he'd have to hand it to them and wait until they'd read the instructions and he'd watch the expression on their faces that they were absolutely horrified. They knew they'd lose countless men if they had to carry out but they had no say. They were told to do it. And
- 16:00 that's the sort of message he got over to me, how serious war was. So I wasn't going to involve myself in it blindly. I knew the sort of things that happened and I suppose that made a difference.

Were you interested in the politics?

I can't say. I can't say I was. Being so young I probably didn't appreciate the politics. I know my father appreciated

- 16:30 the politics that were involved, every bit of it because the war, the political war against Germany in particular and the way that the Generals spoke, he absorbed that information and they were political people. There was no doubt about it. So when the time come after about the first year of war in Europe was over,
- 17:00 I decided that yes, I'd like to do something and they had, the authorities had established a training corps. It was part of the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] actually and so I joined it. I enjoyed it. It was mainly preparing air crew because they were in great demand at that time. They were losing quite a few people over Europe even at that early stage.
- 17:30 And the sort of thing we did was a bit comical when you come to think back on it. They had part of the drill hall here in Ballarat that was reserved for their tTraining cCorps. And on weekends you had to turn up to drill. The chap that drilled us was an ex-aAir fFlying cCorps pilot from World War I and we thought he was rather strange.
- 18:00 But he knew how to get control of a group of us - we were virtually kids. We were 16, 17, mainly 17 year olds. Anyhow, he'd march us around the streets and we thought this was - we got some strange things called to us by the local population. But what I liked most was one night during the week they had the use of Dana Street School and
- 18:30 we had serious training in maths and that's something I had always been terribly poor in. I could never understand it but the way they put it over, they had regular teachers that lectured, I could understand it marvellously. And I thought that's something I've been missing out on for years. And that went - I looked forward to the Wednesday night meetings. Well it wasn't a meeting it was a class. And it was important
- 19:00 for those who were going to become air crew because it was a pretty complicated sort of business that they were getting into, especially when it comes to radar navigation and things like that because they hadn't been taught any of that at school, even at secondary school. Not a mention of anything like that.

And they managed this in an interesting sort of way because they'd bring aircraft into it every now and then. "If you were in such and such an aircraft, you would have to do so and so."

19:30 And um, that made it a bit specialised I suppose. Well eventually the years passed. Japan came into the war.

Sorry can I just stop you there? Just go back a little way and I'm curious about your friendships within Ballarat. So you sort of hit this point where you were a teenager and you were looking...

Yeah, yeah.

20:00 **So your friendships in Ballarat are one thing and what were the other boys were doing? You know, was everyone sort of going into, or had this interest in the army or joining up?**

Yes.

Or were they off doing other things?

Well before the war it was all sport and I wasn't particularly interested in doing sport. So it cut me off a lot from companionship. I was mainly limited to friendship with employees

20:30 of the business. We'd go on lengthy bicycle rides and trips into the country and there was a lot of country around, don't worry. And I didn't have the variety of people as companions that I should have had. They were all under, now that I realise, a certain obligation to be nice to me. They may not have been if they hadn't been employees.

21:00 But I think, I think we got on fairly well. They were a little bit older than me of course to be working. You know, they were quite pleasant times. Yes.

What sort of work did your mates do?

Well, these were all working on the footwear trade. They were tradespeople. Apprentices to

21:30 bootmaking and things like that. Pretty limited that way. Rarely got in contact with people from other trades. That was a bit of a problem.

What was your social life like at the time?

Virtually none. No it's a bit hard to describe. It was almost non-existent in Ballarat I'd say.

22:00 There was dances, concerts, pictures as the movies were called in those days, but nothing like the standard that's developed into in this day and age. Anyhow, the um, yes Japan. Can we get back onto, move...

22:30 **I just have one other thing I'm curious about which is the Depression years were going on during your childhood?**

I shouldn't have passed that without, yes...

There's probably a bit you could say about that.

Well from 1929 on until World War II things were very grim. Jobs were almost non-existent. There were families that just managed to keep alive. We saw them, especially in the east of

23:00 Ballarat which was always classed as the poorer area where the workers lived. The upper class lived over on the Plateau over on the other side. But we were amongst the poor on the east side. There were soups served to certain kids at school every day because they knew very well that the family that they'd come from were very short of food even. The kids always wore almost worn out clothes,

23:30 footwear that was well past it's useful time. But those kids were, I made friends with a number of them at school and they were, they had some interesting stories to tell. They'd talk about their Dad not having any job. He was on the dole. And being on the dole meant you had to go to any work that was selected for you or you didn't get it. You didn't get any pay.

24:00 If you refused a job there was no pay for perhaps weeks to come. I don't know how people managed during those times. It must have been pretty shocking. But there was a new type of companionship that grew up, I think amongst the whole population. I sort of sensed that. I was only a kid but I could sense that people were going through hard times

24:30 and they were prepared to help one another, mainly all in the same boat but they tried to help families that were without money and sometimes being forced out of their accommodation even. If they were in rented accommodation and there was no income it meant that they were out on the street. Hard times and I've even heard some people say in more

25:00 recent times, what Australia needs is another depression to shake everybody up and put them back into the frame of mind that they had during all those years. It was a long time, the thirties. There was no help from organisations really. The Salvation Army apparently used to help a lot. Church organisations

were pretty limited in what they did.

25:30 This is my own personal opinion. And there weren't any outside organisations to help people. It wasn't the first time there'd been a depression. There'd been others in, earlier in the time, especially around the turn of the century. There'd been one then. You would have thought, you would have thought really that they could have learned from those times. The government of the time was criticised, as they still are,

26:00 but there was reason to criticise them back then. They didn't seem to do anything for the people. They claimed there was nothing that could be done. It was as simple as all that and we didn't have the variety of media that we have these days. It was just print media. Radio was just coming in and it was strictly controlled, by who?

Around Ballarat, how was your family? Were they coping?

26:30 They were fairly well off. I used to get this thrown at me at school sometimes. We lived in a big house not far from here with big grounds around it. We had a car. They knew that Dad had several businesses going. And some of the poorer kids would say, "Wwhat's it like?" They'd come out with, "Wwhat's it like to be rich?" they'd say.

27:00 This appalled me. I'd never considered that we were rich by any means but that's the sort of thing they'd say. And I don't think it was a malicious kind, sort of thing to say. They'd sometimes laugh and run away. But it made me think and made me realise that we weren't the worst off by a long, long way.

So what could you see was going on in Ballarat amongst these poor

27:30 **families, the unemployed families?**

Well there was people around the streets begging or busking. Anything, anything to get some money and the sort of donations you'd get was probably just pennies under those circumstances. Not the sort of thing that, I suppose some of us have automatically tried to get rid of some of those

28:00 memories out of our minds. It's, you should never forget what times can come to.

Who were the Bandicoots?

Who told you about them (laughs)? Well there was a lot of that. Well you needed food and around Ballarat there was paddocks of potatoes growing. It was a great potato growing area.

28:30 Supplied a good bit of Australia and even apparently exported some overseas. Well a popular pastime was to creep out just on dawn or dusk and creep into a paddock and do what the bandicoots do: dig a hole as close to a potato plant as you possibly could and you soon came to huge potatoes that they grew in those days

29:00 and you'd carefully remove them. Now I didn't do this but I know people who did. They'd sneak off, probably riding a pushbike with some potatoes in a bag on the handlebars and they'd carefully take them home and they were right for food for perhaps a week. Only potatoes, but that was what the bandicooting was.

29:30 **So how would this affect the farmer's crop?**

Well they'd hardly miss them I think. They were huge crops they had in those days. Acres and acres with nothing but potatoes in them. And if you're - and I'm quoting someone else again - if you were very careful you would fill in the hole that you had made when you took the potatoes out and nobody was any the wiser. But things were tough. It was food and some of the early people that were sent out here as criminals, that's why they were sent out.

30:00 They'd stolen some food from a farmer's paddock. That was enough to get sent out to, even to Tasmania.

So an you recall what sort of jobs people were being sent to do?

Road making. The Great Ocean Road that we have here in Victoria was constructed mainly during that time, during the 30s. It was a terrible job.

30:30 Cutting a road into a cliff face. No machinery whatsoever. It was pick and shovel is the way they did it. They used explosives sometimes to blast through solid rock when they came to it. I actually saw them at work. We travelled along there by car. You'd have to stop every now and then by Lake Lears, a narrow track for you to get past where they were working

31:00 and you were right on the edge looking at the ocean below you, which was quite exciting I thought. And reservoirs were built during that time. Pikes Creek that you come through on the way up from Melbourne. All the work on it was done during that time. The authorities must have created headaches for themselves thinking of what they could get people involved in rather than have them just wandering around.

- 31:30 But I never ever found out where the money came from to do those projects. It must have cost a mint to make the Great Ocean Road, even with the poor pay which the workers got or to construct a reservoir like Pikes Creek. That was strictly the government's job I suppose. People are still paying taxes. Some people are still working I don't know -
- 32:00 I don't know the link between the Commonwealth and the States over the Depression time. I don't know if that story's been written even. It would interest some people but it wouldn't interest the majority of people, probably. It happened and that's it. Perhaps you shouldn't talk about it, but...

So did that mean there were men, fathers leaving Ballarat to go and work?

Yes exactly. The so-called breadwinner of the family

- 32:30 was often taken away many, many, perhaps hundreds of miles to do a job. And the family had to maintain itself somehow. How they did it I can't really say. But while he was away, he would send money to them. A pitiful amount for what they got in those times. But they managed. There are a lot of stories of what families did, like the mother of the family where there were often
- 33:00 half a dozen children at least in those days - what they did to exist on. I know a bit because an uncle and aunt of mine lived in Melbourne and they had four or five children and there was no work, no work in cities. You had to go into the country to have a chance of part time work doing anything on a farm. These people that lived in Melbourne, they
- 33:30 had stories of what they resorted to to survive during the Depression years. They'd often going around raiding rubbish bins even. Strangely enough, they lived in Toorak, but not in the Toorak that had the good reputation where all the rich people lived. More Prahran, alongside it where you
- 34:00 went, you went from one street where there were mansions into another street where there were tiny just tiny cottages where people lived.

So on reflection, of what you can recall of that time, what impact did it have on the community in Ballarat? Do you think that it drew people together?

Oh yes.

There was more compassion?

Oh yes. Although they were grim times, they were good in the way

- 34:30 that people got on with one another. They realised that they were all in the same boat sort of thing and if they'd made a real effort they'd survive it. But they didn't know how they were going to survive it. The only thing that meant survival was World War II when it came. Suddenly there was money for everything, jobs for everyone and
- 35:00 people really welcomed the fact that World War II came on but they thought it was going to stay in Europe. They didn't realise it was going to come as close as it did. But it altered the future for everyone. I know I myself have thought back what would have happened to me if World War II hadn't come along. It would have been a terribly dull monotonous life
- 35:30 working in the shop all that time.

So did you start to see the impact here in Ballarat of the war before you enlisted I guess?

Yes. It was remarkable, as soon as World War II broke out there was a rush to enlist to go overseas because Australia declared war on Germany as well, which was all very well. They never thought it was going to

- 36:00 affect them as much as it did. But it sounded good: we'll declare war on Germany too. But there was a rush to enlist. And it wasn't limited only to those that had been out of work and seemingly in a hopeless position. Some of the well-known names around the town joined from important families. They generally seemed to go up the ladder fairly quickly.
- 36:30 Some of them got commissions, some of them got commissions almost as soon as they went in because some of them of course had seen service in World War I as well and they hadn't had time to forget what they'd learnt. So they were put in charge of various aArmy groups, aArmy in particular. Ballarat did have a big naval interest.
- 37:00 They, during World War I they - (breaks). We were up to when Japan comes into the war. It frightened a lot of people. Even in Ballarat people started digging slit trenches to hide in when the enemy
- 37:30 arrived. It's an, it was an incredible period really. I personally didn't think that they could possibly get this far. But lots of people said on land they might not get this far. There are bombers though not realising that actually there were ways of getting to us without having to come overland; that the Japanese had submarines that could carry aAircraft.
- 38:00 Only one as a rule, but they came into down the east coast and of course Sydney was attacked. That shook people up a bit and it was attacked by planes that had been launched off submarines. And then

the submarines came into Sydney Harbour and attacked. This was getting a bit too much. Buildings were being camouflaged,

- 38:30 sandbags put up around entrances to buildings and windows were being taped over. That was a bit of a joke really. I think we even did it in Ballarat, taped windows to stop blast effect, stop flying glass it was thought. And the Japanese flew aircraft over Melbourne and over the air base at Laverton. All in one day, they flew around and
- 39:00 just pleased themselves, observing. This was kept secret all during the war. People would have really panicked if they'd known this had happened. A German raider sailed through Bass Strait and laid mines as it went. Just like that. Just off Apollo Bay, an American ship collected one of the mines and sank.
- 39:30 There was a desperate attempt to try and keep all of this secret but we used to visit Apollo Bay because we had friends who lived down there and we happened to arrive down there not long after the lifeboats had come ashore from the American ship. One of the local shops took photos of the lifeboats and displayed them in their windows and the authorities went down on them in no time.
- 40:00 They were supposed to have been kept secret. I better not jump ahead here because there's a connection with surveillance over Bass Strait from the place where I was. I've lost the track.

Okay, you were down in Apollo Bay?

We had friends who lived on hills that over - have you been down?

Yeah, down in the Otways?

Yes, up in the Otways the people had a farm. It was the strangest farm

- 40:30 you could imagine because there's no flat ground in the Otways except for a couple of valleys but they lived on a hillside. They'd gone there in the very early days and settled. I suppose the land was there virtually for the taking and it was covered with enormous trees when they arrived and they set to work clearing a grazing farm if you please on the mountainside. I suppose they'd looked at pictures from
- 41:00 Switzerland where they do this sort of thing. I don't know if there was any huge trees in Switzerland to have to clear to do what they did. Anyway, it was a marvellous view. You could see right over Bass Strait. And they had an internee billeted with them. He was an Italian. Funny little fellow he was and he loved being just an internee and
- 41:30 allowed to please himself most of the time. He was even allowed to leave the farm and go down into Apollo Bay. But then they became a bit suspicious that he used to wonder around at night with a torch. And they found out, they were almost certain that he signalled to something out in Bass Strait from the hills out along the farm. But they never ever proved anything. They watched him.

Tape 2

- 00:35 The internment regulations were extremely lax. They put a lot of trust in the people that had been interned. They thought they weren't capable of contacting the enemy. Of course any letters that they wrote were severely censored but eventually found their way back to their country of origin.
- 01:00 What happened in the Apollo Bay region was that the friends that we had, had this chap deposited on them more or less, although they found him very useful. He was a good worker. But it was these people's neighbours that complained. They didn't have an internee with them, and he was free labour so he was worth having, but they complained that he was a bit suspicious
- 01:30 with his walks at night with a torch and the times he turned the torch towards Bass Strait. I knew him and I don't think he had enough brains to be involved in something as complicated as signalling to a vessel out in Bass Strait.

How old were you when you went down to visit these people?

Well it was at the beginning of the war.

- 02:00 The war had been going about a year. Can we work that out? I was about 16 or 17. 17 I suppose. Yes it would be 17.

So were you intrigued by this man?

In a way. He spoke in riddles really. If you asked him about his home.

- 02:30 for instance, he'd break into Italian and of course, that was the end of it then You had to lose interest almost straight away. Mmm. But the whole western district was covered with every here and there, an internee of some sort. It wasn't confined at all. They just wandered around.

03:00 But when the Japanese come to be interned, there wasn't a lot of them and they were kept locked up. They weren't allowed to go wandering around anywhere. That was much more serious.

So let's just go back to your enlistment, when you joined up - that period of time?

03:30 Well if you were a member of the Air Training Corps you went to be, to Melbourne to be examined and to give them all the details a couple of months before you became 18. And that's what happened to me. There was myself and another chap from Ballarat that I got to know in the Air Training Corps. We were sent to Melbourne together to the rRecruit dDepot. We thought this was great. A big step this one.

04:00 They kept us down there all day. Medical examinations, psychological examinations; asked you what you wanted to be and then generally told you you couldn't be that. Both of us wanted to be air crew. "No, no we don't need air crew. You've got to be something else." And they had a list on the wall of all the

04:30 musterings in the aAir fForce for you to pick from. "Would you like to be a cook?" "No. No fear." "A guard?" "No, not really." "Did you want to work on the engines?" "Yyes." "Did you want to work on the air frames?" "Mmm." And then I saw one that I thought this is a good one: an armourer, handling the guns and the bombs.

05:00 That really appealed to me. I'd experimented on my own with explosives from time to time and I thought, "No this is going to be great. I can do it officially now." And they also said when I said, "I wouldn't mind being an armourer." "Yes. You might even be able to become air crew by being an armourer," because armourers were often if it was a bomber squadron, armourers were often roped in to be an air gunner as well. They knew the weapon they were handling

05:30 and they could be quite useful. They said, "Yes, you might even become air crew through saying that you'll be an armourer." So I said, "Right I'll have that." and they wrote that down, but there was no guarantee, they said by being that. "You could end up being anything, you know." And they had old chaps sitting behind the desks that looked as though they had been in the permanent aAir fForce and they knew what they were talking about and they'd sort of wink at you at times when you said you wanted to do this or wanted to do that,

06:00 as much as to say it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work that way at all. Anyhow, we returned to Ballarat, the pair of us that night, full of hope that we had taken a vital step and it turned out we had taken a vital step because it turned out that once you had passed the examination you were for it. You couldn't back out. Right close to your birthday you'd be called again. Your birthday had to have passed, that's right.

06:30 You had to be 18. You were called in and you were really, you had to take the oath and you were part of the aAir fForce then and they said, "Go home and we'll get in touch with you." They got in touch within a few days actually. "You're in. You have to report at the rRecruit dDepot." That's where everyone had to report in Melbourne. And, "You will

07:00 enter the RAAF from that day." So that chap that I'd gone to the pre-examination with, we were both called together again and we went down. Well it was quite an experience. We learned a lot...

How did your parents react?

Well I wasn't going to mention that. It was rather strange. And this is something that I left out

07:30 but I should say it, I know and I will. They'd got me into a course, an engineering course where you learn turning and fitting mainly, and they'd arranged for me to work in a factory in Ballarat which was reserved occupation because they were doing war work. I'd gone along with that. I went to night school.

08:00 A couple of nights a week it was and learnt how to use lathes and various types of machinery and they thought this would prepare me to go into this factory in Ballarat where I would be in a reserved occupation. Mainly my mother's idea I think. I never discussed it with her. But Dad I think was secretly pleased that I had other ideas. He went

08:30 along with me learning the metal work which came in handy later in my Air air Force force life actually. Anyhow, I came home one night from the night class and they said that our neighbour, who was already working in the reserved occupation had said that I could go into that job at the same factory as he worked. I said, "Oh I've made another decision. I'm not going to.

09:00 I'm going to follow up the aAir fForce." There was a deathly silence for the rest of the night actually. I rode it out anyhow. I'd made up my mind. I was going anyway. And they said, "We'll have to let the neighbour know you're not going into the job where he's working," and I said, "Tthat's all right. You can let him know."

09:30 And the next few days were a little bit tense. But the decision...

Did you parents talk to you about it?

There was no discussion. Well they could see I'd made up my mind about what I was going to do. But my future was going to be very, very different by deciding that I was going to go into the RAAF rather than working in a war factory.

- 10:00 I also had an uncle who was working with the Commonwealth aircraft factory in Melbourne and he was teeing up a job for me as it turned out, that I didn't know at the time, to work there. That was two places that were for reserved occupations. But I didn't want to work in a factory. It didn't sound too exciting at all whereas the other did sound exciting and it was.

So how would you describe yourself as a young man

- 10:30 **at that stage in life?**

Oh, a frustrated person I should say. Yes, yes. But with a glint of light at the end of the tunnel and joining the services was going to be the track to take, easily, yes. But it was going to be much better than I'd expected.

- 11:00 I was going to be able to mix with - which I'd found out a bit being in the Air Training Corps. There was a good mix of blokes in it and it gave me a taste for even more mixing with other people. That's what I wanted. It got a bit too much perhaps at times, but no it was the thing to do. And I haven't regretted it, ever.

Can you recall how you felt taking the train down to Melbourne?

- 11:30 Oh full of enthusiasm. You were going into a new life and you had no idea of - well I was going to say you had no idea, we had a bit of an idea of what aAir fForce life was like in Ballarat because there was a local aAir fForce station, 1WAGS [Number 1, Wireless Air Gunners School] where they learnt navigation, wireless work in particular

- 12:00 and it was supposed to have been an air gunnery school as well but it never developed that far. And I got, by going to night school, I got to know some of them from out at, who were already airmen who were out at the local base, and hearing them talk about the sort of life they were leading, that really clinched it.

What was it. Tell me more about that. What did they tell you?

- 12:30 The sort of life that they led. That they were popular wherever they went. They were blokes from all states and they got on well with one another you could tell. They were also doing extra night courses at the school mines. They were doing night courses at the Sschool of Mines to advance themselves. They could get promotion if they had the qualifications of using metal

- 13:00 working machinery even. They were doing this of their own free will but it wasn't costing them anything. The aAir fForce was paying for it. But they were still going to follow the radio navigation business. They impressed me. Not that I needed any impressing.

So they wore uniforms? Were they around town?

Oh yes, yes. They used to come around the town. They were popular wherever they went. It seemed the life.

- 13:30 So the services needn't have advertised a great deal the way they did to try and get more to join. It was just the fact that the way that a lot of them behaved themselves when they were out of camp. They didn't have - they were looked after fairly well at that particular stage, when they were still doing courses for various things.

- 14:00 Anyhow, will we go on about the first day.

What were you going to say?

You don't want to hear anything more about that particular state do you? We'll have no tape left.

Oh no I think it's interesting what impresses a young man and how it helped you make a decision.

The mere fact of mixing with such a variety of blokes was tremendous. There was characters

- 14:30 that you didn't know existed even. The sort of jobs that they'd done. Some of them weren't too bright certainly. They hadn't had much of an education. They'd done state school and left even before they were finished the state school level even and gone into to do hard work somewhere because it was Depression and you had to get into it. If you found a job you had to get into it quickly.

- 15:00 You couldn't see that an education was ever going to be much use to you. I think I even felt that at tTechnical sSchool that all the things we were learning might be a waste of time. Turned out it wasn't. I should have learnt even more probably. Especially working with various materials and things.

- 15:30 It was a great opportunity that I didn't appreciate enough. Now are we travelling to Melbourne...

Yes, we're travelling to Melbourne now.

On the train? Melbourne was a very strange place in wartime. I suppose all the cities, yes I know what Adelaide and Sydney were like too. But it was a bustle everywhere. Everybody was frantically moving from one place to another.

- 16:00 They were engaged in war work of some kind and the streets were full of aArmy mainly. Some of them had come back from the Middle East even. They were seasoned soldiers, real tough characters they were but great blokes. So final examination, couple of needles if I remember right but you get that many, you forget when you got the first ones. We'd waited all day at the rRecruit dDepot
- 16:30 and we thought what are we going to do tonight? There were a couple of places in Melbourne that they could send servicemen to to hold them for a while before they decided what to do with them. But just about tea time we were bundled out onto the roadway and marched down to Spencer Street Station. Generally, when you first entered you did a rookie course at Shepparton
- 17:00 if you were Victorian. And we thought, oh well this is where we'll be going. We all piled onto the train. It's all secret you know. There's whispers going around. We're going so and so. Somebody told me. It was all wrong. We were all on the train and a rumour goes around, "Wwe're heading towards Adelaide." "No, we can't go there. There's no rookie
- 17:30 course there." Anyhow, this train moves out through the railway yards with everybody glued to the window seeing which sort of direction we're going to go on. We're headed straight for Ballarat. And what was, and what was beyond. We moved through Ballarat at about half past eight or something like that in the night. I looked out the window and thought, "Why am I looking out the window? Nobody's going to know I'm on this train. There's troop trains going backwards and forwards all the time."
- 18:00 I didn't expect to see anybody I knew. That was right. There was nobody on the station at all. We moved through and travelled on through the night, all night to Adelaide. Arrived there about dawn. Found Adelaide a very interesting place. We all piled out onto the roadway again. Roadways were very handy to assemble groups and it was announced we were going to march to
- 18:30 where our accommodation is to be. We marched up King William Street then past St Peter's Church, up and around towards Colonel Light's statue and everybody's saying, "Where on Earth are we going? There's no RAAF base around here." Then we stopped in front of a huge two-storey building that had been a Lutheran college; Emmanuel college it was called.
- 19:00 We all looked at one another and thought, "Are we going to live in here?" Yes, we were going to live in there. The whole place had been seized from the German Lutheran movement and stripped completely of everything. There were no furnishings of any sort left inside. It was a vacant building. And a couple ducked upstairs to have a look around and said there's nothing in the place.
- 19:30 And then we were addressed by a little Scotch aArmy sSergeant who had fought in World War I. We could hardly understand some of the words he said but we got the gist of it; that's where we were going to live for quite sometime while we did a general course to prepare us for what we would do later in our life. It would be handling
- 20:00 woodwork, metal - mainly metalwork. And somebody pipes up and says, "Where are we going to sleep?" "On the floor. We've thought of it," he says. "Wwe've thought of it. There's a shed down the back." It had quite a big backyard. It had been a horse stable at the back. "You'll find a lot of straw in there and hessian palliasses." as they were called.
- 20:30 "You'll fill one of those with the straw and take it inside and find a place to lie down. And that's what we all did for a couple of hours trying to sort ourselves out by filling these hessian bags with straw and finding a spot that you thought you would be comfortable in. And then later, when they thought everybody had had time to settle down, an evening meal. I don't think we got any lunch that day. We were too busy.
- 21:00 They were good at missing out on meals in the, in the, perhaps all the services, but particularly in the RAAF. You could be put to work on a job and you could go past the meal- time and they'd say, "Ooh it's too bad, too late to eat now. You can wait for the next meal." Tea was served. It was a pretty rough and ready sort of thing. They were completely unprepared for anything at that stage. It was 1942,
- 21:30 late September of '42. Adelaide was in absolute chaos and Japs were bombing Darwin. And everything available in the way of materials had been sent up to Darwin to protect it, including every rifle that was available. We were supposed to be using rifles for rifle drill. For about,
- 22:00 I think it was four or five weeks they'd allotted, there were no rifles. Nothing to - there wasn't even broomsticks. Some bright spark said, "Tthey have broomsticks you know." "We haven't got any broomsticks. "There's a war on." We used to get this thrown at us quite frequently. There was a war on you know. Anyhow, we survived the first night. It was a real circus. Blokes, for the first time in their lives had to
- 22:30 sleep under these sort of conditions in a huge old building and laying on the floor. Their sense of humour seemed to emerge around that time. They made jokes of things, fortunately. Could have been quite serious. The next morning we were all dragged together after what they called breakfast. It was indescribable - well for us who had never had to eat that muck before.
- 23:00 It was called porridge and what followed it was something indescribable. It was vegetables and meat mixed together. And as soon as they thought we'd had time to finish that they assembled us on the

parade ground at the back, which was just the backyard of the building actually. And read out a whole lot of don'ts to us. "You won't wander out on your own from here.

- 23:30 There'll be a guard on the gate. You'll have to have a pass." Not only that, "The locals," - it was an upper class area actually - "won't appreciate you people wandering around." We were all in civvies of course, a great mixture and no issue of uniforms at that particular point, the first day. The second day. We'd been in a day already. And then they told us we'd be paraded for all sorts of things.
- 24:00 There'll be dental parades. We'd have to be X-rayed again and all sorts of things like that. We thought this is going to be a lot of fun, but first, we'll do some drill. And we did drill. We got yelled at by drill instructors. We got called all sorts of things, some things we'd never been called before. And then there'd be a short spell and we'd all
- 24:30 get together in little groups. I never worked out how this thing happened. Sort of, blokes looked at other blokes and thought, "He looks a reasonable sort of bloke," and then somebody else would join them and you'd get little groups sort of scattered around the parade ground, all mystified completely, wondering what was going to happen to us. The first day was about the worst I suppose. We soon got the knack of moving our feet the right way and holding
- 25:00 ourselves upright. Not slouching and that. We were soon told about all that sort of thing. And then we started the parades for the various things to get the uniforms issued. And was it a circus. There was hardly anything in the way of uniforms that fitted anyway. "The best of them had been sent up to Darwin, you know." That hadn't happened actually at all. That was just an excuse. The RAAF had taken over the
- 25:30 Exhibition Buildings in Adelaide and it was turned into a massive complex of dining rooms. Dare I call it dining rooms? They were mess rooms and they were a mess as well, but you got all your equipment issued to you by going to different parts of the Exhibition Building. And eventually you ended up with something like a uniform. I ended up with trousers and a coat that were different shades of blue, for instance.
- 26:00 Some got things that were too big or occasionally too small. I thought that's going to be fun. At least my clothes fitted me. They had a job finding a hat for me but I eventually got one and I've still got it. The people who worked in the stores area were the most unusual people you would ever come across. Everything you asked them for, they grizzled about it.
- 26:30 They might have had good reason to grizzle about it mind you because the piles of material was awfully small. They'd outgrown the need for people in the services and before the Japanese had come in it had been marvellous - this is the way the story went; that they had enough for everybody and would always, at that rate, would always have enough. But you know, "What's happened, the Japanese have come into the war
- 27:00 and we've had all these people brought back from Malaya and Singapore that need new things. They've got to have them first." It turned out they weren't getting them either. Nobody was. Then, and that's we drilled and drilled and drilled for about a fortnight, all day, every day. We got noticeably better at it. We even noticed ourselves.
- 27:30 We fitted together better and a certain amount of pride started to come out, especially if everybody had a uniform on and drilled together. We noticed we were getting fairly good. And then it was announced that all the marching wasn't going to be wasted. We were going to be educated at what had been an old power station in Adelaide. It had no machinery left in it any longer. It was just a big dirty empty building.
- 28:00 We were going to learn trades there, mainly on what to do with metal. And we would march there from the College which was, a couple of miles I suppose it would be. And we would march back again and there would be two shifts. They devised them into two, Flight A and Flight B
- 28:30 and one would have a day shift learning and the others would be on night shift and then they'd be reversed which was fun. We were taught well except that all the tools we had to use had worn out well and truly. The good stuff had gone to Darwin. That was the story for Adelaide: gone up country they have.

This was the delayed effect after the bombing

- 29:00 **of Darwin wasn't it? They weren't very well prepared.**

Well Darwin continued to be bombed. That was the catch. They knew it too. They had a continuing argument. Everything that was produced, new stuff had to go up there. We had to put up with whatever we could find. After we had been on the actual course for a couple of weeks they took some of our members,

- 29:30 new raw recruits and sent them to Darwin. There'd been an unexpected loss of life up there so they needed replacements. So they took some from our course that had only been in for less than a month I suppose, and sent them up there. They didn't get any instruction. The rest of us often wondered why they picked certain ones. They were a little bit dumber than the rest of

30:00 us it seemed though. The characters when you found out who was going they were going to be part of the anti-air defence of Darwin. They could sit behind a machine gun like anybody else could and press a trigger. That's all they had to know, it turned out.

Did you know what the loss of life was like in Darwin?

Ah, it was filtering down. The official figures

30:30 were published in the newspapers of course but there were people being invalided back down to Adelaide being the nearest city to Darwin and they brought stories with them. Quite horrific ones of how they were getting belted around up there. So we got the official news and we got the unofficial news.

And how different was it from your perception?

31:00 Enormous. They were getting slaughtered at that particular time. The Japs [Japanese] were over every day several times, indiscriminate bombing over the area. And the servicemen were all in fairly limited areas so they copped it. We were even threatened once, when we got a little bit lax, that if we didn't behave ourselves, that we would be sent to Darwin.

31:30 **So did Darwin become your kind of first sense of the reality of the war?**

Well it was certainly the closest.

When did that start to happen for you? Did you realise that, doing all this drill stuff, it's all a bit of a circus?

When you started talking to ones that had been invalided back down you got a better idea of what the war was like. Because there was war going on in New Guinea as well. And we didn't come across the survivors from that

32:00 until we got to Townsville much later on. About a year or so later.

So okay let's continue with this story of training?

There's lots of stories.

Yeah, can you recall any sort of funny incidents or...?

In Adelaide?

In Adelaide, yeah.

Adelaide was great. The people are all for anybody in the services. They established what ... entertainment places

32:30 and the name just avoids me at the moment, but there were several of them spaced through Adelaide and people volunteered to man these places, provide entertainment, food, no liquor of course; they were often church organisations, but it was the sort of place you could go. Well you could write letters of course. That was always on. But you could converse

33:00 with other people outside the group that you were tied into doing that particular course you were doing. It was only on for a limited time. When that finished you would be dispersed all over the country probably to more specialised groups and yes, people would be standing at their front gates even

33:30 and you'd walk past and they'd sing out to you and things like that. That was great. Adelaide people had a terrific reputation. And it wasn't the first time they had to cope with service people. They'd had the aArmy there a couple of times back from the Middle East and they'd behaved themselves quite nicely so we were told we were under an obligation to behave ourselves as well.

34:00 But that happened to varying degrees. Some got onto the liquor while they were there. I hadn't reached that particular stage at that time so I had no trouble behaving myself. We had a march through Adelaide just about when our course had finished. It was to raise money for the war loan and it was a tremendous scene. They had the aAir fForce units, some nNavy blokes and a large aArmy contingent

34:30 and we all marched through proudly through Adelaide from one end to the other. And we had the rest of the day off. I remember.

Yes, I imagine participating in something like that where you've got all your services, the forces coming together?

It's a strange thing but it was quite impressive even if you were part of the march itself. You looked around you and everybody was doing the proper thing and you did feel better. You thought back

35:00 to the first day you come in and you had no idea of behaving as a group. You were still an individual at that time but from there on you were not an individual, you were part of a huge organisation and you automatically did the same thing at the same time. Eventually as time went on you became an individual again. If you were an Australian you did anyhow. Australians had this

35:30 reputation amongst forces from other countries that left a little bit to be desired - that Australians always did what they wanted to do and we were not an organised force like the Americans. They were terribly organised. They all did the same thing at the same time and if they broke away at all, they really broke away. I shouldn't have said that perhaps.

That's all right. So given that that's kind of the mythology or maybe the truth about Aussies

36:00 **and you were with a bunch of boys, a lot of them from the country presumably?**

Yes, oh yes.

They were bush boys?

Yes, and the ones from the country I found the most interesting. They'd lived a different type of life to the town blokes. The town blokes had lived a very narrow, well to my mind, a very narrow sort of life. They'd almost always stayed in their suburb even, or within a few blocks

36:30 of their home. They weren't venturesome sort of people. But the country fellas were. They'd done all sorts of things. There was no limits to them. And the aArmy, it was in the aArmy it was particularly noticeable. They were mainly country blokes. They could look after themselves and I studied them; the way they acted. I thought I could learn a lot from them.

37:00 They were experienced and experience rubs off and you never know when you are going to be in a situation that's tough and some of that information might save you and that comes in a little bit later on while we were in Townsville, if we ever get there.

Well we could go to Townsville.

There was another place in between.

There was a long journey wasn't there? There was a long train journey?

Oh yes.

37:30 **From Adelaide? You tell me.**

Well, we were notified that we'd been given the musterings of our choice in nearly every case and I was going to be an armourer so I'd have to go to Hamilton in Victoria. That's where the Armament School was. We left Adelaide. I'll skip a few things that happened on the way.

No don't. Tell us what happened on the way.

We were dumped off at Ararat, at an ungodly hour in the morning

38:00 on a station that there wasn't a single person there. And we had to go into the town to find out what we should do next because we were still a long way from Hamilton. Anyhow, fortunately we found the house of a fella who worked on the railways, and he said, "Oh there's a train goes down there sometime this morning." He said, "I'm gonna be guard on it," he said. He said, "Don't go too far away.

38:30 I'll blow, I'll have the whistle blowing when we're ready to go." Anyhow, we wandered around the town. There was nobody in the street. Oh there was a milkman. We wandered around the town waiting for this whistle to blow and eventually it did. We hightailed it down to the station. I think there was five of us, only five going to be armourers. The train's puffing - a steam train of course - puffing away in the station

39:00 and the bloke said, "You heard the whistle all right?" "Yes, yes, yes." "Where do you want to sit?" There was only one carriage on the train so we thought that's the proper place to be so we all piled in there. We'd only just got on and the thing started moving and moved out and took the rail that leads down to Hamilton. They were connected fairly well at that time. And

39:30 we didn't stay in the carriage too long. We worked our way through up onto the top of the coal tender. I'm still not sure whether that was a good move. It rocked, the train rocked around and all the coals kept moving into different positions and it was dirty too and the soot coming out from the engine and drifting back over us. The engine driver looked around and waved to us from time to time and we realised we were probably breaking a regulation

40:00 by being up there but he didn't mind. Anyhow we arrived at Hamilton. Nobody there to meet us. This was the thing that often happened in the aAir fForce; no-one to meet you when you arrived in a place. We started wandering up the street and somebody hollered out to us, "Where do you think you're going?" It was one of the famous drill instructors. They've got a frightening sort of a voice and they always seem to surprise you. So we all stopped straightaway and he came over

40:30 and wanted to know why we were here walking around the street. He said, "Follow me," which was the usual; "Follow me." We followed him and we walked through Hamilton and up to the Showgrounds. We had a look at it just the other day when we were down there. It's changed quite a bit. And he took us in and said, "Don't you move from here. I'll find out where you're supposed to go."

- 41:00 And he came back with somebody with a bit of rank. He was a sSergeant but the one to come back was a wWarrant oOfficer. He was even more fearsome really. And they said, "Right, tents over there. Get yourselves settled." Well it was a mManual cCollege all over again. There was boards laid on the floor and you had the palliasses again but in a tent
- 41:30 this time and that was um, and at Hamilton and it was winter time, or just the end of winter it was as cold as Ballarat, and that's saying something. They came looking for us a short time afterwards. They allow you a certain time to do a job and then they come looking for you. No chance to hide. We were told we were going to be on course number so and so and there was others already there. We were the last ones to arrive, of course.
- 42:00 "Where did you come from?" "We came from Adelaide."

Tape 3

- 00:30 **I think we'd just arrived at Hamilton for your armoury training there. Before we go to Hamilton, just one or two little questions just to fill in a few little gaps in the pre-war years? Did you have a girlfriend before you went off on your many travels?**
- No. At what stage? Before I joined the aAir fForce? No, no. I saw the girls I went to school with from time to time of course
- 01:00 And most of them grew up quite nicely, yes. But no I didn't have a girlfriend.
- And I know you were talking about your school years.**
- Mmm.
- I read in your notes something about an odd teacher that you had. You were talking about the politics of the time and how, was there not a teacher?**
- Oh yes, yes, yes. We missed that didn't we?
- Could you tell us about that individual?**
- 01:30 Do I start onto that?
- Yes.**
- Are we ready, right. When I was doing a technical phase of schooling at what was called jJunior tTechnical School school in Ballarat, we had a couple of very interesting teachers. One, a young chap who belonged to the scouting organisation that was very keen on fascism. He
- 02:00 made trips overseas which was possible during the thirties. He visited Italy; was impressed with Mussolini. He visited Germany and he thought Hitler was really something and he wasn't wrong there and he brought back lots of literature and objects from the German Junior League sort of thing and from the fascist organisations in Italy
- 02:30 and very carefully showed us these objects and also subscribed to Italian newspapers. Italy was invading Ethiopia or Abyssinia as it was at the time, and he used to display these at the school which surprised a lot of people and I think it offended a few of the teachers who weren't of his frame of mind.
- 03:00 It was full - the newspaper cuttings - well not they weren't just cuttings, they were complete newspapers and in colour and it showed what was happening in Ethiopia. It was pretty gruesome stuff but it was supposed to be good for the fascist organisation to show that they were teaching these natives a lesson. And every chance he got, he got a few words in during a lesson, often towards the end of the lesson,
- 03:30 in favour of fascism, that we could learn a lot from it. He, when I left I saw him in the street a couple of times. He was always a very friendly sort of chap and he'd wave out and sing something. But after the war I met him at a place called Port Arlington; met him in the street. He seemed of a different frame of mind altogether. He seemed uneasy. I don't know what had happened to him.
- 04:00 He might have even been interned during the war with his philosophy being so at odds with ours. Anyhow, I only exchanged a few words with him and he found an excuse to go. He still looked the same. He didn't look any the worse for wear so they hadn't roughed him up apparently. But no that was an interesting point that somebody at that time was allowed to promote
- 04:30 an organisation such as fascism. Mind you there were a lot of people out here that had suffered during the Depression that would have been glad of any sort of other political organisation and Mussolini looked as though he was doing marvellous in Italy. As they said, he made the trains run and so on. It was the old thing that they kept saying. And that part was true and he was an interesting character.
- 05:00 And I often wondered why I was attracted to him and his philosophy. Actually, I changed as time went

on and became pro-cCommunist and that doesn't fit well with fascism at all. So I made a change that way.

So was he actually exhorting fascist principles?

Oh, oh yes. Well and truly. He'd really soaked up the German Youth Movement which was pretty spectacular

05:30 And practised - he wanted to practise it out here I think. He wasn't getting any takers from school. I know most of the chaps weren't interested in that sort of thing; in being organised even.

What sort of things was he saying?

We should organise ourselves. We can do a lot. And this was the fascist line - if we all work together for an idea. And it was an idea.

06:00 He hoped that the lads would rally around and say that they wanted to form an organisation here but none of them did that I knew of. I think I was alone in interest in reading the papers.

Did he go deeper into the ideology; into the sort of nasty stuff?

No, he was careful not to do that, no. He knew I think that most of the kids would discuss it with their parents, especially their fathers at home at some time and he didn't want to lose his job.

06:30 He could have lost it very easily if many had said to their parents, "We've got a teacher at school who's a fascist," because it was never very popular out here. Popular in Italy but not in Australia.

That's really interesting. I guess we can jump ahead, jump back to Hamilton now so if you want to tell us about your experiences there?

At Hamilton?

Yes.

07:00 Well there was a lot of experiences at Hamilton. We were told straight out that it was going to be a hard course; that armament was a complicated business. It wasn't just a matter of pressing a trigger and hoping something fired. You had to know the story behind guns, behind ammunition, behind pyrotechnics but we were all interested. We were fascinated with this phase of the RAAF. That we would actually be able to handle ammunition

07:30 and bombs. Most boys had this sort of strange link to blowing things up. In Ballarat you could obtain explosives from the mining days and we were even told at school how to make explosives. It became more complex as you went through, left sState sSchool and went through sSecondary sSchool because the sSchool of mMines in Ballarat was right alongside the jJunior tTechnical sSchool

08:00 and you could wander into the School of Mines, which was all about explosives and chemistry. You were able to do chemistry and you quite innocently learned in chemistry lots of things you could make. They generally went off with a bang but it intrigues boys and I think now that nearly, when it come to chemistry, nearly everyone in the class

08:30 was attentive in case they missed out on something. If it was maths or something, or English, there was a lot of talking and muttering and doing anything but what we should have been doing. But no, this other thing, especially the SSchool of MMines was - do you know the SSchool of MMines? No it was a complete, the sSchool of mMines in Ballarat was set up to study mining in particular; all types of mining, not only gold mining.

09:00 And it still is an amazing complex where you can learn anything at all to do with mining in general. So that's the sort of thing that interests boys. Now we've wandered away...

That's okay.

Well we were told, it was laid on the line anyhow, that we would stay there

09:30 for about a month or five weeks learning nothing but about ways of destroying things. That particularly appealed to most of us which was a very good idea because the idea lingers on afterwards. Once you've got all that information in your mind, it guides you along. You become not only interested in your own destructive power but also in the enemy's destructive powers. And you compare them.

10:00 Right from the time the course started, which was strange in Hamilton, there wasn't the proper aAir fForce establishment. It was spread over the entire town. And the staff, as I was to find out later, were all billeted out in private homes. You weren't in dormitories of any sort.

10:30 Each department was in an old deserted shop and you had to, the halls where they, where they, where you learned was school, church halls so you had to go to different ones to learn about different things. You were traipsing around the town, filing into these empty halls to sit down and learn about a particular phase.

- 11:00 It might be small arms or machine guns or 20mm cannon or pyrotechnics. They were all separated from one another. It must have been terribly hard to administer. Of course we didn't appreciate it at the time. But the administration centre itself was a big house on top of a hill that had been taken over. It had belonged to a very wealthy person and there had been lots of wealthy people in Hamilton. They'd earned millions on their western district farms and built the homes in Hamilton.
- 11:30 Now they were all becoming very useful. Well this went on for week after week. There was a break at one stage that caught everybody unawares. They were all tested for colour blindness. It was supposed to have happened earlier in the piece apparently because if you're colour blind you can't become an armourer because everything is colour-coded, especially detonators and things like that and that's rather important to know colour from colour.
- 12:00 Only a couple failed the colour blind test. They were hoisted out straight away. They had to become something else. The rest of us went merrily on and most of us passed because we were all interested in what we were doing. What interested me about guns in particular was not that they killed and destroyed but they were intricate pieces of machinery, extremely intricate pieces;
- 12:30 and some were so unbelievably simple that you wouldn't believe it. Well when Owen invented his sub-machine gun it showed how simple the whole thing could get. When we finished the course, postings were put up. Most of them were sent to OTUs - Operational Training Units where they'd be most useful because they were starting to use real weapons at that particular stage and I was posted to a School
- 13:00 itself. It had never happened before that somebody off a course had been posted to the school. I got commiserations from a lot of the ones that were going to OTUs. They were sent to be the choice things to be sent to. Oh you were handling real stuff there, you know, and you've got to stay with it at the teaching stage. Well I had to accept it. You couldn't say, "Well I don't like this. I'd like to go somewhere else." No, that wasn't in.
- 13:30 Anyhow, we got leave and then when we came back, it was Christmas of '42 and I got a surprise. There was a group going to Cressy and to train warrant officers armaments. That was a special category and to do that they had to actually fly, drop bombs and they were supposed to fire machine guns as well.
- 14:00 And off we went, a stinking hot summer that was, to Cressy. Cressy was interesting. It was an operational unit. They were flying out from Cressy over Bass Strait looking for the enemy, hoping to spot a German mine layer again. They made a nuisance of themselves apparently. Talking to some of the air crew that went on these flights, they flew
- 14:30 mainly Avro Ansons, which seems a bit strange but they did carry anti-submarine bombs with them all the time in case they spotted a submarine but a few Beaufighters took part in it. They flew from Sale along and landed at Cressy to do the surveillance. They used to pull up all sorts of shipping that they came across. They'd order them to come to a halt and they'd fly down and examine them just for the fun of it because it was rather boring work out over the sea.
- 15:00 We, my first flight in a service aircraft was from Cressy, a bombing run. I was an observer. This was an unusual start for my time in the RAAF. We took off from Cressy air strip carrying practice bombs only and flew out over a whole series of lakes that extend from Cressy down towards Colac. We dropped the bombs. I sighted where they landed.
- 15:30 They'd landed fairly close to the target and we flew around a bit after that just to fill in time I think, and then back and I'd made my first flight in a service aircraft.

Was that your first flight ever?

It was yes.

So that must have been quite an experience in itself.

I'd seen Kingsford Smith when he was flying trips from Ballarat here. That goes back a bit. I remember Smithy when he was hanging out of a window and waving to everybody.

- 16:00 But it wasn't even suggested that I go for a flight with him at that time. I don't know what he was charging but I wasn't going to be encouraged into flying. I had a cousin at the same time who was terribly interested in flying and his parents were trying to discourage him because planes were crashing fairly frequently, especially light aircraft in those times. And Ballarat Airport had a bit of a bad record but he'd made up his mind that he liked flying but he never joined the Air Force.
- 16:30 He worked in a protected job. Well after our time at Cressy we came back to Hamilton. I found I was billeted at a private house with a family which I thought was pretty good. You were getting the best of both worlds, sort of thing. And I stayed in that place for six or seven months, until I was posted away actually. But the work in Hamilton
- 17:00 was divided up into different sections. There was what they called "the Flight." It was a couple of paddocks, some distance out from Hamilton but it was called an airstrip. Well there was no made airstrip it was just paddocks. And we had an Anson aircraft, a Wirraway, a Hawker Demon and a very small Moth which belonged to the CEO [Chief Executive Officer]. We were supposed to keep an eye on it just the same.

- 17:30 The area looked like World War I frontier base. The buildings were made from what they called 'battle boxes'. The FairyFairey Bombers that were sent out from England were sent in these big wooden cases and that's what we had to operate from out there. A couple of tents that kept blowing down and a large building that was probably more, probably a hay shed originally
- 18:00 but it was used to store the aircraft in one at a time. We couldn't fit them all in at once. It was funny out there. It was just, just so laid back. We played all sorts of games with pyrotechnics, fired them at one another and things like that and we were never visited by anybody with authority at all unless with the CEO came out to fly his little plane around a bit. We all behaved ourselves while he was there.

- 18:30 Then I was transferred in which I wasn't too happy about. They had a workshop...

Sorry 'in'? What does ...?

Into Hamilton itself. It was, it had been an old garage and it was classed as our workshop and a few machinery, a few bits of machinery had been sent in. I found the characters that worked there very interesting. They were tradespeople. One was a coppersmith by profession and he was an excellent

- 19:00 welder and I got to watch him at work and he said to me one day, he said, "Do you want to learn the trade?" and I said, "Yyeah I wouldn't mind," and he said, "Wwell you just come and watch me whenever you feel like it." Well this just wasn't going to work out because there were WOs [Warrant Officers] that were in charge of the workshop wasn't going to let me stand around and watch somebody do welding all day. But the first job they gave me, I remember this as plain as anything. I lined up at a bench because there were benches there
- 19:30 and the WO came along and plonked a lock, a huge door lock down in front of me and said, "Mmake a key for it." I thought, "Ggee whiz, this is going to be a test." He sort of looked at me out of the corner of his - he wasn't a bad sort of bloke but he looked at me out of the corner of his eye as much as to say this will settle him. He won't be able to do this. Well I got to work and I actually made a key that would work the lock. He said,
- 20:00 "Have you had some experience at this sort of thing?" and I said, "I did some night school and I'd learnt quite a bit from there," and he said, "Right, might be possibilities for you." And he brought in the 37mm cannon out of a Cobra, an American aircraft. It had been in a crash and it was twisted. It's about this round, the barrel. He said, "See what you can do with this."
- 20:30 And he must have known that I was going to have to call on the welders to soften it a bit so we could try and straighten it. I was still working on that when they shifted me some time later. They put me in charge of an armoury. An armoury is full of guns and in this case they were to be issued out to the students who were learning armament right from the basic part.
- 21:00 And I was in charge of an armoury. I had to hand out the guns, mainly machine guns to the students and they'd take them back to the various class rooms that were attached to it. And I one day found out that you had to sign papers of course when you're put in any of these jobs. I had a look through the papers and I found out I'd signed for a whole lot of things that weren't obviously there.
- 21:30 There was a hall alongside that nobody ever seemed to go into and I thought there's things on here that must be in there. So I went in and had a look. There was two gun turrets, a Fraser Nash and a Bolton Paul on trolleys. They would be, you couldn't estimate what they'd have been worth. They were made to actually be fired while they were in motion. And I'd signed for them. And a power plant for them, a KVA unit.
- 22:00 And I went and complained and they were amazed that I complained and I said, "Look I'm only an L.A.C [Leading Aircraftsman].. You've got to have stripes to be responsible for all this stuff." "No you don't," they said. There was an old fFlight sSergeant there. He'd been in the permanent aAir fForce, was due to be discharged on the day that war broke out so they just extended his commitment straight away. He looked at me and said, "Listen mate,
- 22:30 you do what you're told in the services." I said, "Yyes, but this is not fair." He said, "Tthey can even make you have a baby." I looked at him and he said, "Bbut they can't make you love it though." And that was, that stood for the rest of my time - you did what you were told. Because I did try to protest a number of times later. I thought I was being committed to more than I should have been.
- 23:00 But the regulations were so flexible that what overrode the lot was you do what you're told.

So just a short time before this you were learning about the armament there?

Yeah.

And sounds like a couple of months later you were..

Yeah you were in charge.

You were in charge?

Oh amazing it was yeah.

Or is that just indicative of how skilled you actually were?

Well in a way I suppose, I suppose I was flattered that they thought I could take such a position and silly enough to sign for so much stuff.

23:30 But then I stayed in that particular position until I was sent to an eEmbarkation dDepot. I kept at the same job. It wasn't a bad job because I lived just around the corner from where the armoury was in a private house and ate meals at a café in the town. This was unbelievable. Everybody I've mentioned this to says, "Hhow did you manage it?"

24:00 It wasn't a matter of managing it. It was the way fate deals you a hand.

So were you actually teaching as well?

No, I didn't have, no, you had to be sSergeant before you could teach a class. They were fussy about that bit. And they were good at it too because I'd experienced how good they were when I did the course.

So your rank hadn't changed at all?

Not at all, no. But then the word came through that I'd been posted

24:30 to eEmbarkation dDepot in Sydney. I'd got to know the personnel officer at Hamilton. We'd been to a do down at Portland the night before and we really lived it up and I get the word the next morning to go and visit him and I thought, "Hello, somebody's reported us," or something like that and I walked him and he said, "Your posting's come through." And I said, "Oh where to?"

25:00 "Embarkation dDepot," he said. "That's what you want isn't it?" he said. "Yeah." He said, "Look I can have it cancelled." He said, "No, you want to go don't ya?" I said, "Oh yes." "I thought you would." He scribbled something on it. "Off you go. You can leave today if you can get all your stuff cleared." And that was unreal getting all the inventory checked off for the things I'd signed for. And they had to come and look to see what was there.

25:30 "Yes, righto good luck," he said and I went back and started checking all the stuff off. I was short of one file, including all the material that was in the armoury including a secret bomb site that everybody shivered when they looked at it because it wasn't in general use and, "All right," he said, "slip down to Hewitt and Witties and buy a file there. It'll save us a lot of trouble," he said.

26:00 So that's what I did. I raced down to the hardware place and got the ten- inch file and, "Right," he says, "right, you're off. You can go. You've got a fortnight's leave and then head off for Sydney." Then I came home and spent the fortnight doing -that's something I don't terribly remember what I did during that fortnight. Nothing important here in Ballarat. I don't even remember how I got from Hamilton to here. That's strange. I remember all the other things.

26:30 Oh I probably had something else on my mind. Yes I did.

Can you tell us what that was Jack?

Well I'd got to know a girl in Hamilton. And...

That was a long time ago..

She knows, she knows...

We'd like to hear a little bit about that?

That was one reason I had to toss up a bit in my mind as to whether I'd

27:00 stay in Hamilton or go overseas somewhere where something dangerous might happen. Anyhow, she decided she'd write to me all the time I was away. She didn't know how long I was going to be away. And I was quite tempted to stay a bit of the fortnight down there though I didn't. She was busy anyway. She worked in a café. Used to wait on us when we were having lunch.

The café you were telling us about before where you had lunch every day?

27:30 Yes, the café I mentioned before. The Hollywood Café it was called in Grey Street, the main street, yes. It's not there any longer. Anyhow, managed to fill in the fortnight here and then headed off to Melbourne and you had to go through Melbourne. You always had to travel by train unless there wasn't a train and then you could catch a bus or find some other way of travelling around. Then off to eEmbarkation dDepot

28:00 in Sydney, Braefield Bradfield Park. It was on everybody's mind to get to Braefield Bradfield Park. From there on you had to move forward. There was no way of coming back from there. So I get to Braefield Bradfield Park and the chap that I had been billeted with in Hamilton was already there. He'd got posted a day or so after I'd got posted. He was a transport driver so his was a different field altogether to mine.

- 28:30 Anyway, every day into Sydney, in across the bBridge. Look for a hotel that was open. Most of the Yanks had gone at this stage. And Sydney was quite a good place to be in. We went to roam about the town and yes, we'd end up at Luna Park quite often. That's where the sheilas were.
- 29:00 **But you just said goodbye to your sweetheart?**
- We're awful. That's not the end of it.
- Well that must have been a really emotional time though, saying goodbye to your sweetheart, your family.**
- Yes. You know you're going to be away but you've got no idea how long it's going to be and none of us had any idea it was going to take us a hell of a long time before we got back again or if we were going to get back again. There was all sorts of stories
- 29:30 coming back from New Guinea. Milne Bay had been a tremendous battle. Moresby was being bombed regularly and deadly. And there was a couple of other places that you could go to. So you sort of lived it up. Anyway, eventually the time in Sydney came to a halt and we were all ordered onto a troop train at Central Station and headed north. There was a lot of doubt
- 30:00 about how far north we'd go. We arrived in Brisbane and the train stopped there early in the morning at Indooroopilly and we were all told that we would probably be there all day. The rail lines to the north were cluttered with transport mainly carrying bombs and ammunition up north that had been unloaded in Sydney. So we managed to fill in the day. "Don't go too far away from the train." A couple of them
- 30:30 did take a risk and got into Brisbane apparently. But I didn't want to miss the train. It was heading in the right direction so I stuck with it. Night came, Brisbane was blacked out. Searchlights were sweeping the sky. We passed a couple of gun emplacements and crews were standing by their heavy anti-aircraft guns. Looked real warlike. I don't know why though - well they were still
- 31:00 worried about attacks from the sea and anyway, we left that bit on and we were soon out in the bush. At that time you didn't have to go far from Brisbane and you were in the bush. We spent days, days travelling on this train. Sometimes the blokes would often walk alongside the train, it was going so slow and when the crew would pull up the train, walk to the rear to the guard's van to have a chat to the guard,
- 31:30 we'd all have a go at them. It was a real circus really. It was something to lighten the strain of travelling on a troop train. Passed through small towns where some of the locals actually came out and waved to us. That was a bit of a boost. And then we arrived at Townsville. Well Townsville was a war town if ever there was one. It had been through the mill. It had had a few bombs dropped on it so that qualified it as being a frontier town.
- 32:00 I don't know that that went in the paper at the time. Flying boats, Jap fFlying bBoats had flow all that way down from Rabaul of all places to drop bombs on Townsville, just to give them a warning that things could happen. But the whole place was a bustle. There was trucks and personnel everywhere. You could hardly move, in the railway yards area in particular. And we were sent out to what was called a pPersonnel pPool;
- 32:30 a horrible little place with prefabricated huts in it to keep you, give you some shelter amongst mango trees. The mangos were rotting and falling down and there was flying foxes gobbling them up, sometimes on the way down even. We were held in - we weren't so bad there. We knew we were going to go somewhere. We were going to be sent to a proper unit.
- 33:00 And one unit had been formed over at Garbutt, which is the big aAir fForce complex there and still is. A new unit had been formed; the only aAir fForce unit ever to be formed in Townsville at any time up till then. It was 80 Squadron. We'd heard about rumours about it. We were all hoping, "Oh new squadron, it'll be great. We'll be able to start right from the very beginning."
- 33:30 And names were read out and a lot of us that had formed a bit of a group amongst ourselves were all allotted to this particular squadron. We had no idea what stage it was at or what it was going to be like. We didn't even know for sure what sort of aircraft they'd have. They, , anyhow, we were bundled onto trucks and taken out to a place called Black Weir.
- 34:00 It's on the Ross River, well inland from Townsville. The truck, the truck goes along the road to reach the weir and then suddenly turned to the right. We were pulled up by guards: "Where do you think you're going?" "We're new intake for 80 Squadron." "Oh, all right, in you go." The truck wandered around roads
- 34:30 in the bush until it finally came to a halt and this was the headquarters. A large tent had been put up and a few personnel were around it. The rest were tents dumped in heaps everywhere in the bush to be put up. You put them up yourselves, we were told. And it was hot and dry. It had been a particularly dry year there. And , well we did. That's what we did straightaway.
- 35:00 We got to work and put tents up. Most of them did. I was a bit cunning. I looked around and found a tent that had been put up already. I thought that's a risk but I'll claim it. And nobody already owned it as it turned out. I could have been hoisted out of it quick smart but I made myself at home in it. Some, a

couple did come around much earlier, joiners of the squadron apparently that had been over at Garbutt

- 35:30 and they looked at me and saw that I was comfortable and decided I'd be all right. I was soon joined by a few more and we established ourselves not too far from the ablutions block. It's important that you keep fairly close to that for water supply alone because of the large water tank attached to it. I should mention what water is like in an area like that. It's heavily chlorinated for safety reasons
- 36:00 and you never forget the taste of chlorinated water. You shower in it. You drink the same stuff, not after you showered of course but it's all the same water source and um, from there on the place gradually grew. It was interesting to watch; watch a squadron form and grow. New arrivals almost every day and
- 36:30 buildings were going up. They had civilians building the more complicated buildings and we started to form groups almost straight away. Blokes that decided they were going to stick together for the rest of the time however long that would be. And we ended up with a group of about ten or eleven I think and we did stay together for quite some time.
- 37:00 I suppose we didn't all have similar interests. We were quite a diverse group really. There were a few Sydney blokes in who had spent most of their time surfing for their lives so they didn't have a...but they had a good education which made me think that New South Wales was giving their kids a better education than Victoria was. I did think about that for a bit but it wasn't going to help us a great deal from there on. And then there was the day when the aircraft arrived.
- 37:30 The airstrip ran parallel to the river. It was quite a good one, properly surfaced and it was at the time when there were dispersal bays. The aircraft were taken away from the strip and hidden supposedly in these little bays that branched off windy roads and there were one or two aircraft to a dispersal bay. And we couldn't wait to see the aircraft.
- 38:00 We'd found out they were going to be Kittyhawks and they were going to be brand new and we couldn't wait to have a go at 'em. This day we were taken down to the beginning of the dispersal area and turned loose and told to pick our aircraft. Well we didn't know who was going to be flying them. This was going to be a bit of a catch but I picked on one in particular. It had, it was just as it had arrived. It had
- 38:30 the armourer's toolbox in front of it; a beautiful toolbox. The flight mechanic who was going to look after the engine, there was his toolbox and the airframe fitter, there was his toolbox all lined up in front. I don't know - I never ever found out who'd gone to so much trouble but we couldn't wait to get to them and start looking at what we were going to use for some time in the future. I'd only been there a short time, gazing at the aircraft mainly.
- 39:00 I'd poked, I'd looked down the barrels of the guns and thought, "Jjeez they're big," and two officers turned up. One was a squadron leader and the other was a fFlight lLieutenant. I thought, "Jjeez I've picked a good one here." Most of the pilots were at that time just fFlying oOfficers or something like that well down the scale and I'd got these two. And it turned out that Squadron Leader McKinney was going to be the fFlight Leader leader of the whole Squadron squadron and
- 39:30 Olivier, a battle-scarred veteran from the Battle of Britain was going to be his co - when one wasn't flying the other one would be flying and you've met him haven't you now. He's still around. They were the pair. They were nothing like the high-ranking officers that you would expect. These blokes had both been through it, especially one of them
- 40:00 and the first thing they started to do was polish the aircraft. It hadn't even had the markings put on it at this stage. But here was a brand new aircraft, a nice olive green mainly but- and the rest of it camouflaged with stripes, a few stripes on it and wriggly lines. And they started polishing it. And they said to me, "Do you want to help?" and I said,
- 40:30 "All right, yes, yes." Well there was nothing an armourer could do at that stage. The guns were obviously perfect so I hopped to and helped them polish the aircraft. They wanted to know what I was and they said, "Yyou'll come in handy," and I didn't know just how handy that I would come in in the long run.

Tape 4

- 00:24 The time we spent in Townsville oh month after month after month - September, October - five months in Townsville, was a bonding time and it came in very handy later on. The camp, as it established itself, we as armourers had nothing to do. The guns weren't being fired. Pilots were learning to fly the aircraft and that was it. They were told not to fire the guns unless they were engaged in combat. Bombs were not going to be carried
- 01:00 and that was to change drastically later on and the rest of us sort of organised ourselves into groups. We took up horse riding. There were some stables not far from the Black Weir and we found it very quickly and we went along and yes, there was quite a few horses but not enough saddles so some of you were going to have to ride bareback.

- 01:30 For some strange reason all of us that went there kept up this practice of visiting this horse hype place and going riding at every chance we got other than the times we went into Townsville and made a nuisance of ourselves around the hotels. But the horses were trotted out and they were a motley lot. The Yanks had been there before us and they'd ride horses into the ground
- 02:00 and break horses badly really. Anyhow, they trotted out the horses, one after the other and different blokes grabbed different ones and then one come out and I thought, yeah, I rather fancy that one. It was a young one and no saddle. And I said to the bloke that ran the place, I said, "Wwhat about?" "No, shortage of saddles. You'll have to ride it the way it is." And I'd never ridden a horse before and one of my mates said,
- 02:30 "Go on, I bet you've ridden horses. You come from Ballarat," you know, out in the wild sort of thing. And he said, "Hhop on and see." And I hopped on the thing and I had no idea what was going to happen and the horse realised he had somebody who wasn't in control and it headed for an archway and kept going. As it went under the archway, I grabbed the archway and the horse went left me swinging in mid-air.
- 03:00 That was a bad start perhaps but the horse seemed to regret that it had done such a thing and it doubled around, it come back and stood alongside me. So I got on again. It didn't repeat the same thing again. It had just been trying out something I think. Eventually, we were all up. I can't say we were saddled up because half of us didn't have saddles and we headed off. Well the horses knew exactly where they were going to go and we didn't. They went, they followed a certain track around the area and there weren't very many houses, out where we were.
- 03:30 They jumped over certain things, obviously the Yanks had had them doing that sort of thing. Mine was particularly keen on jumping low fences and without a saddle, and being inexperienced I soon learned on what to do and trusting luck a fair bit at the same time. And the first day we didn't go too far, just a few blocks and we ended up back at the place
- 04:00 and the fella looked at us as if to say well nobody's badly injured yet anyway. And we went a little bit further each time we took the horses out. We headed along the river and kept going up narrow tracks. Mostly the ground was terribly flat and we found the horses knew where they could get out onto open country and once we got out into open country they took off.
- 04:30 And there was a race between all of us and there was scattered cattle around and my horse, for some reason or other, liked jumping over calves, right over the top of 'em. It would head straight for them and up it would go. It was quite alarming and one of my mates, Bill Simon, used to ride alongside me a fair bit and he'd say, "God you show off a lot." And I said, "I'm not trying to make it jump over these things." "Go on," he said. "You're showing off."
- 05:00 But we had a hell of a lot of fun on those horses.

Meanwhile, there's a war going on.

Meanwhile there's a war going on. And our aircraft were in the air most of the time but we weren't needed. The flight - the riggers and the flight mechanics had to be there all the time because the aircraft was being used but seeing the armament wasn't being used, there was nothing special for us to do. And we would have whole days in Townsville just chasing the grog, to use the term.

05:30 And that wasn't a problem with your COOs [Commanding Officers] ?

Not at all. They were glad to get rid of us. We had the armament section was divided into two: the fitter armourers which were Class 1, we were Class 2, had to service the whole armament system on each aircraft. They had to take all the guns out, put them on a mounting, test fire them and what is called 'harmonising the guns', the six 50-calibre machine guns

- 06:00 on a P40. They don't just simply fire in front of the aircraft...

Sorry, what's a P40?

A Kittyhawk. Yes, Kittyhawks are P40s and the streams of fire from those guns meet at a certain point in front of the aircraft decided on by a conference between the pilots generally and the armament officer.

- 06:30 And it can be quite a distance. They all meet. All these streams of ammunition meet at a certain distance out in front of the aircraft so when they attack an aircraft they try and get them with that particular spot in mind and it just tears them apart, no escaping it. And that's where manoeuvrability comes in. They have to try - the enemy has to try and dodge that particular spot. So they had to work, even when we didn't have to work.
- 07:00 We weren't qualified to do that particular phase of harmonising the guns to meet at this particular point in front.

So what were you doing?

We were in Townsville amusing ourselves. Yes, we got experts at dodging jobs around the camp. There was always jobs to do around camp such as digging pits for toilets and things like that which was a hateful sort of a job. And they could always find you jobs around the camps. And we got

- 07:30 into the habit of being where they didn't expect us to be. There was a lot of scrub and you could wander off into the scrub quite haphazardly and keep going and you got out on the main road and got a lift into Townsville in no time. There was just so much military traffic on the roads and they'd all stop for you. You just stood on the roadside. You didn't even need to put your hand up or anything like that. If they saw you, they'd screech to a halt and they'd say, "Hhop up," and you'd scramble up on the back with a mixture of stuff up there
- 08:00 which was amazing sometimes what was loaded in the thing, and you'd crawl up to the back of the cabin so you could thump the cabin when you had gone far enough and wanted him to stop to get off. We didn't catch on that for a start and we got on and stayed at the tail of the thing and couldn't get them to stop when we wanted them to. But if you were just behind the cabin you thumped the top of it and they stopped immediately and you'd nearly get going sometimes. And in town, the first thing you did
- 08:30 as you were driving in a bit, you looked at all the hotels and it wasn't hard to tell whether the beer was on or not. If there was nobody in sight at all it meant one of two things. Either they were all inside and crammed in or it was closed but as you went past the doorway and the door was closed, that was it. Even when they got a full house they left the doors open for some strange reason. Well there probably wasn't room to close them.
- 09:00 And you found one that was in operation and all of you, there was a group and there was about seven or eight of us that always stuck together – safety in numbers; we were all good drinkers so, and there'd be a dive for the open hotel and you would stay there until they ran out of every ounce of beer, no matter what it tasted like and sometimes it was awful because it had been brought down from
- 09:30 Cairns and it had gone off on the way in a manner of speaking. It wasn't made to travel, Cairns beer, they said. Well we used to drink it even if it had gone off with disastrous results which I won't go into describing at all.

You should.

And when you left that hotel, you looked around for the next one. And this could keep going all day. One day there was an unforgettable experience.

- 10:00 We'd just been tossed out of one hotel because they had run out of beer and nobody would move. They were going to wait for the next lot to arrive which the hotel owner said won't be till tomorrow, but some of them said they'd stay. We walked over the railway yards and there's big meatworks at Townsville, a huge one. They were making bully beef and putting it in the little tins that it goes in. And there's a few meatworkers standing there
- 10:30 and they said, "Looking for a drink?" and we said, "Oh, are we what?" And they said, "Ccome, follow us." And we followed them and about a block down there was a hotel well out of bounds really for us and we all went in along with the meatworkers and there was no glasses. "Don't worry about that," they said. They'd all brought opened bully beef tins with them.
- 11:00 And they said, "We use these, they good enough for you blokes?" and we said, "Oh yes. We'll lick it off the floor," one bloke said or something like that. So they handed these – and it's the only time I've ever drunk beer out of these bully beef tins. They had a sharp edge on them too. So you had to be a bit careful and we stayed there for the rest of the day. There was extra beer for them because they were important workers in the meatworks tinning bully beef and it didn't run out there.
- 11:30 We were in a right state by the time the day finished. We staggered out on the road and managed to get back to camp and were asked where on earth we'd been all day. They happened to have been looking for us. We said we'd been busy. They weren't inclined – they were giving us a lot of leeway because they knew the officers knew we were going to be out of circulation for a long, long time.

You must have had a wonderful hangover cure?

Especially after the crook stuff, oh yes. No there wasn't.

- 12:00 You got out in the fresh air and that was it. Another thing that happened and this is really important; we got some Australian cCommandos who were sent in to tell us hints on how to handle the enemy. A lot of the blokes thought it was just a circus. We were taught
- 12:30 unarmed combat and what not to do when the enemy is close to you. And I lapped up every bit of information those blokes told us. Some of the blokes just yapped and ignored it, reckoned it was just a waste of time. We were never going to get close to the enemy but I stored it all away and it came back to me at various times later and I'm glad that I listened to what those experienced blokes had to say.
- 13:00 They'd been to the Middle East. They'd come back and they'd been to New Guinea. Some of them had been in Timor and escaped even. And they had a lot of good information and when they found that you were interested in what they were telling you, they'd tell you a lot more. Things to dodge mainly. One bloke said to a small group of us, he said, "It's not necessarily what to do. It's what not to do." He said, "A lot of
- 13:30 our mates are still back there," pointing towards the Islands, because they didn't take any notice of

things they were told.

What sort of things were they?

How to react in tricky situations. If you get separated from a crowd and find yourself in the jungle and on your own and that happened a few times and it was my own fault. You can throw your life away. But I didn't,

- 14:00 luck is a big thing. A lot of fighting men would say luck doesn't come into it at all. It's entirely up to you but it's not. The enemy is trying to outsmart you all the time. And that comes in later on.

Meanwhile, back at camp, on those rare occasions when you do have to work, what were you doing?

That brings me in to another story too.

That's what we're here for.

- 14:30 This was my first lucky escape which affected me from thereon. We got to the stage where the pilots had learnt to fly and fly in formation, close formation, and try and reach the absolute altitude of the P40, which was a bit lower than the O, which wasn't good news. We got to what was called 'scrambles'. The aircraft were parked along the edge of the strip, all the engines stopped.
- 15:00 The pilots were allowed to put their parachutes into the aircraft. Each one was allotted a particular one. He couldn't just run out and pick whichever one he fancied. They were all numbered and that's what they were supposed to get into. We had a model of P40 at the time that had to be started by handle. I know this sounds a bit strange to people but at that time, fighter aircraft in particular,
- 15:30 the only way to start them was to have somebody in the cockpit and you inserted this handle just below, behind where the engine sits and you wound and wound and wound. It's what's called 'an inertia starter' and when it reached a certain pitch and you had to judge that pitch by listening, you pulled a little toggle that was in a hole in the side the aircraft and it engaged it with the engine itself and then of course, the whole thing turned over slowly
- 16:00 and gradually gained a little bit of speed. You got this huge propeller whirring around right behind where you are. Two people had to do this job. When it reached a certain pitch, one person – and it was generally a flight mechanic that you found yourself with. Armourers were not supposed to do it but we had to because it was good for us, they said. One person pulled this huge handle out and moved away and
- 16:30 the one that had pulled the toggle and the engine was turning over and flames shooting out of the exhaust right above your head, you had to let – once it fired and the chap that was up in the cockpit which was the pilot by this stage. He'd settled himself in; he usually did nothing except
- 17:00 rev the engine as fast as he could and you were caught in the slipstream which pushed you back against the leading edge of the wing and you're trying to close the little trap door over where the handle had been. Well that's what I was trying to do. And there was a great panic. The aircraft were all moving off one after the other reaching a fair sort of altitude. This one wasn't starting as quick as it should have started and he's giving it too much accelerator; well too much throttle actually
- 17:30 and he starts to move forward and I was stuck there, against the leading edge of the wing and I looked down and I could see the wheel starting to move. They had no belly tanks on at this particular stage. Now belly tanks were carried for extra range but for scrambling you never had a belly tank on, only the framework that held the belly tank in place. And I thought now I've got to get between the wheels and
- 18:00 throw myself down and dodge that thing as it goes over. How I managed to push myself around in front of that wheel and throw myself down is still a bit of a mystery because you couldn't see. All the gravel and stuff was being churned up and flung into the air with the slipstream from the propeller. I threw myself down, felt something catch my back on my way down and then I thought, "Nnow I've got to dodge the tail wheel. I don't want it to run over me." So I counted a few soft counts
- 18:30 and rolled to one side and I missed the tail wheel. But I got a nice cut from the framework that holds the belly tank. When the dust cleared, I stood up and there's a group of blokes standing around looking, mostly expecting to see a body laying on the ground, and I just blinked my eyes and looked at them and nobody said anything for it seemed like an eternity. And then I walked towards them and of course I was covered in,
- 19:00 caked in dust and a tear on the back of my shirt where the thing had dug in and then somebody said, and I don't remember the exact words that were used. There was probably swearing involved in it. And one after the other they said, "Gee, you had a lucky escape then." And I said, "Well it's luck isn't it?" I didn't go and report it. They wanted me to go to the medical people
- 19:30 but I heal up remarkably well and I knew there was a cut on my back that would heal. And if I reported it there would be an enquiry into it and the poor pilot, he would get into a hell of a ...for not confirming that the area was clear before he moved out onto the strip. And he was away at that moment up with the rest of them flying around. And when he came down, a couple of my mates went up to him and told him what

20:00 had happened and he was so apologetic about it. And he wanted to know had I reported it yet. Oh but the CO would have torn strips off of him. He might have even been tossed out of the squadron. And nobody came to me and asked me awkward questions about it. I think all the ones at the strip appreciated that somebody's had a narrow escape and that the pilot had had a narrow escape as well.

20:30 Anyhow, he came up to me and he was very apologetic and I remember saying, "You won't do it again will you?" which was a stupid thing to say. Anyhow, it never happened again. Not that sort of a thing.

Was it luck or was it actually that you knew that plane back to front and you knew how to dodge it?

Yeah, and I had the strangest experience. I thought I'm going to die as I was throwing myself down. It must have been only split seconds

21:00 I suppose but it went through my mind: "This is the end. You won't survive this." But I felt so calm. I wasn't panicking and trying to - well I knew I couldn't get away. There was only one avenue to follow and that was to throw yourself on the ground and hope that everything missed you. But that sort of came to me again much later on when I was in sticky situations,

21:30 I thought, "You've escaped once. You will escape again." It applied to me but it didn't apply to everybody.

So in a way it was just not fearing?

Yeah, but going calm in a situation it starts to prey on your mind a bit: you should be frightened. That was one of the things the army blokes told us: if you're scared, you'll probably survive. All your instincts will be working. But if you're feeling assured that you're not going to

22:00 come to a sticky end, you're in trouble. And that's the way I used to feel.

So what - you talked about the harmonising which was different. There were two groups of armourers?

Yes, yes.

What were your specific tasks?

Our jobs were each time, each day an inspection had to be done and signed for. You had to check - you had to unload all the guns. The guns were normally kept loaded all the time, just in case.

22:30 **What sort of guns are we talking about?**

Browning 50 calibre. They were big heavy machine guns. I've got a round off one of them up there, as I said in there. And at that time you had to work under the wing to do this inspection. There's flaps that cover, they're caught up underneath so the guns are sealed off so that much dirt doesn't get in.

23:00 There's slots in them for the empty cartridges to drop out and of course the bullet goes up the spout. But you had to unload each one, oh and there are stories attached to that too - and yeah, and cock the gun without a round up the spout, as they say. But the foreign pin was held to the rear by an electric solenoid was there to release it so it could go forward and fire the round. Then you hopped up in the cockpit

23:30 and you tested the dropping arrangement that was there for later on for dropping bombs. You looked at the gun site which was an electronic gun site even in those days and then you uncovered the firing button and you pressed it and you automatically tensed yourself in case one of the guns hadn't been unloaded. And if there was only just a click

24:00 from the smaller guns you got back down and you reloaded them all. And then you went to the strip tent and you signed that everything was all right on that particular aircraft. For a start off it was marvellous. We only had one aircraft to be responsible for. As time went on we ended up with at least six aircraft each that we had to check and sign for and they were being used in action every day.

24:30 **Can you tell us the actual composition of the squadron? Obviously there were units, ground crew, air crew and the makeup of that?**

Yes, yes. There was - to start at the very bottom there was what they called 'gGeneral hHands'. They could be called on to do any sort of work at all. They weren't specialised. And then there was the gGuards. They were a low classification. They did permanent guard work, day and night.

25:00 And then you moved up. There was wireless people, people who kept up the oxygen supply, instrument makers and instrument repairers. They were fairly high classifications. And then we were along on the same level, gGroup 2 with the flight mechanics and the air frame people who looked after the body work of the aircraft.

25:30 And then above us there were the fitters; all the fitters in the various classifications. They were all gGroup 1. They were supposed to be able to do anything and everything. At times they didn't do a great deal but when the aircraft started coming back damaged, they had to work on the damage that was

done. We weren't supposed to touch it at all. All we had to do was report bullet holes and shell damages and things like that. A squadron is an amazing organisation really.

26:00 There's butchers, there's cooks and there's people who wait on tables for the officers and all these people. All have to be able to work in – and the transport section. Oh I forgot the transport section. They've got complete control over any transport that's needed and they have to maintain – they've got two classes. They've got fitters as well as ordinary drivers as well.

26:30 It was good to know some of them. They roamed around the town quite a bit and they were able to procure things. And they didn't give up that habit even when we got into action. They still procured things such as whole vehicles at times.

What did “procuring” entail?

Pinching. Yes, knocking it off or something like that. I'll skip just – I better not skip there...

27:00 **No skips.**

No skips. Anyhow, the time eventually at Townsville – well there was that many rumours that we were ready to go and we'd go by boat. The pilots would stay behind with their aircraft and fly them up when we arrived in New Guinea. Very vague at the time, just New Guinea somewhere. Actually, the pilots happened to know exactly where they were going but we didn't. But it was thought best not to tell us

27:30 or we might get too full on one of those drinking binges and start telling exactly where we were going. It makes sense later on. And there was a ship at the wharf in Townsville called the Anson Burlingame, an American Liberty ship and it was being loaded and the news filtered back to us that the main cargo was layers of 500lb bombs

28:00 and 44-gallon drums of aircraft fuel, layer after layer. Everybody said, “We won't go on that, will we?” But yes we did. The morning that we were told – we were all going. All of us hurry. Let's get everything ready. The gear's all been, all our equipment's been sent down and stayed on the ship. It was raining.

28:30 We got on the back of the trucks and drove right through Townsville from one end to the other. We only saw a few people. They didn't wave to us or anything like that. They didn't know we were going to do anything special I suppose. And we reached the ship and we found there was not only 80 Squadron was going on it but a repair and salvage unit going on it as well with all assorted equipment the repair and salvage unit need like cranes, mobile cranes and all that sort of stuff to lift aircraft

29:00 and move them from one place to another when they're a virtual wreck. Anyhow, we go on board and, are we ready to leave that one, yes. We go on board. There's no streamers and crowds waving and cheering or anything like that. The wharf's deserted except for some wharfies and a few of them sang out to us and wished us good luck as we went up the gangway.

29:30 And when we got on board, they told us there was two types of accommodation. Have a look around yourselves. You can be down in the hold on top of the cargo and we knew what the cargo was. They said, “We've put planks down for you to put your stretchers on. It's quite nice down there.” But I had been told by my father who went overseas on the small ships in World War I, that if you're going through the tTropics and that's where we would be going, you don't go down in the hold.

30:00 That is the last place to be. Not only is it uncomfortable if the ship gets hit by a torpedo or something, you're going to go down with it. So I found a nice spot on deck and not too far from the entrance to the hold. And me and a couple of my mates settled ourselves down down there. The only cover on deck was tarpaulins crazily strung up above the deck level. If it rained, you would have to be lucky not to get wet.

30:30 And it was raining at the time and I was able to pick a spot where it hadn't leaked up to that point at least. And there were some anxious to get down out of the bad weather and they went into the hold. And it wasn't long before they kept coming up gasping, especially while we were still at anchor, moored actually. But it was terrible down there. And it wasn't long before everybody was on board and then we started – the engines started up and we moved very slowly away

31:00 in tow from a Melbourne tug. It was towing us out from Townsville wharf and we wondered why and one of the crew says, “We've got to be towed out because of the minefields. We've got to take a zigzag track to get out. It's to keep them buggers out,” he said, meaning the Jap submarines. And we took this, we were towed out to sea and there was a cCorvette waiting for us to escort us up the coast.

31:30 It kept fairly close to us on the seaward side on the way up because there were submarines around. There was more than had been led on and we were on our own with one escort. We reached Cairns. It was still raining. We went into the entrance to Trinity Bay and we'd hoped to keep going all the way to New Guinea.

32:00 Nobody whispered a word about stopping at Cairns but the idea was that we were to make up a convoy. Some that were already there and others that were still to arrive and then we would head for New Guinea. But it was awful being stranded on the boat and seeing Cairns, the little town that it was at the time and the hotels were open and we couldn't get in. Somebody had the bright idea that we try and get ashore in a life boat or something,

- 32:30 which was quite impractical anyway. Anyway we sat there for a whole day and left the next day. And we found there was several ships together to try and make New Guinea and the escorts had been; there were several ships to escort us by this time. We moved out and up the coast a little bit and out through a spot in the reef that's called The Gap. It leads out into the Coral Sea.
- 33:00 We turned, we turned to swing away from, in single file we had to go. We had to make sure we were in single file and the escorts, the escort were keeping a watch on the outside because once you got out through the rReef you were really at risk. That's where the submarines hung about. And we moved out through the Coral Sea; took up positions. The escorts tested their guns which was quite spectacular and assured us at least that their guns worked at least anyhow. But it was mainly
- 33:30 the anti-aircraft guns that they tested and we thought, "Hullo, we're being attacked from the air as well." And we were just about to lose sight of Australia. You could see it fading in the distance, the Queensland coast. And my position on the ship was near the stern. And around the stern area itself we weren't allowed to put our stretchers because the gun crew of the big gun were right above us and they
- 34:00 wanted - they didn't want anybody stuck too close to them. And there was four of my mates standing looking over the stern railing and one of them, Flip Phillips, looked a bit concerned. And he said to the others, "I wonder if we'll see Australia again?" and I thought, "That's a strange thing to say," because I felt quite assured that I'd see it again anyway.
- 34:30 And the others looked at him and they all looked thoughtful and from there we just - they forgot about it I suppose from there on but they were to remember it later on. And we just moved away through the Coral Sea. At one point some of the ships left and headed towards Port Moresby and the rest of us headed on towards Milne Bay. The entrance to Milne Bay is quite spectacular. You travel through what's called the China Straits.
- 35:00 They got their name from the gGold rRush days when the Chinese coming from China to the gold fields down here used to travel through them as a shortcut. Some of them used to come to grief and be cast ashore and the local natives ate them. They didn't like, they didn't like the Chinese too much because they reckon they were rather salty. But the Chinese kept coming and kept getting cast ashore there and eaten.
- 35:30 Not all of them. Most of them arrived in Australia and created wealth for themselves. As you travelled through this narrow passage you think, you think it can't possibly be deep enough to keep, to cope with a ship the size that we were on. It was about a ten thousand tonne ship and loaded right down to the very limit with all that weight down below. We'd got halfway through. We'd lost sight of our escort and
- 36:00 a Beaufort from 100 Squadron came down towards us flying just above masthead height and flew over us and kept going and then he climbed and went away and that gave us great assurance that we had our aAir fForce looking after us sort of thing. When you come to think of it later it didn't mean we were but he'd scanned the whole sStrait anyway and you make a sharp turn and you go into Milne Bay itself.
- 36:30 Milne Bay is much narrower than is showed on maps. Any maps, even the Japanese maps showed it as being a very wide entrance and it's a very narrow entrance. Mountains rise on each side of you and you think you're never going to come to the land end of it but when you do it was an amazing sight. The Yanks had established a big naval base there and there'd been an awful battle there when the Japs tried time after time to take it.
- 37:00 Well you just looked around - when you finally dropped anchor you looked around you and thought "Ffancy this being hidden away." You felt as though you were in the middle of New Guinea instead of just at the end of an inlet. And there was a few things floating around in the sea. Even though the battle had been the year before there was bodies floating around; Japanese bodies of course. We'd retrieved all ours I suppose.
- 37:30 And wreckage. And we knew there'd been a couple of Japanese ships sunk. They were at the bottom of Milne Bay. And we were, everybody was anxious to get ashore to say they'd been ashore on New Guinea at least. We hadn't set foot on land yet. We sat there for a couple of days and there was rumours and then finally they said, "You can all go ashore." Well was there a rush. And they'd brought a big pontoon alongside
- 38:00 and we all jumped down onto it, mainly at once and we were towed ashore, past a couple of ships that were there. They were very interesting. They were armed merchant ships with the guns all hidden on them. Huge guns and gosh if the enemy attacked them they'd know all about it. Anyhow, eventually we touched on land and we all jumped onto New Guinea. There was no trouble getting transport because we wanted to see where the airstrips had been.
- 38:30 There were tremendous stories about the battle that had gone on with 76 and 77 Squadron. There was one stage when the aircraft took off and fired their guns at snipers in the palm trees at the end of the strip to try and wipe out the snipers. We all thought this had been a lot of rubbish but we wanted to see where it had happened. There was a lot of transport. You could go in any direction you wanted. We wanted to go up the valley
- 39:00 as far as we could, past the spot where was the furthest the Japs had got and then they were beaten and had to withdraw. We found the spot. It was a gory sort of, oh macabre sort of monument that had been constructed by the local forces, decorated with Japanese skulls and the message was that this was as

far as they got. There was nobody

- 39:30 admiring it except us because it wasn't strange to all the ones who were actually stationed there. And we went past the airstrips and saw what they looked like. They were metal airstrips that had been laid down against all the odds and we thought, "Ooh yes, yes, yes. It mustn't have been a very pleasant place to be." And it hadn't been a pleasant place and we went, and we kept going until we got to an aArmy [Australian] Comforts Fund place.
- 40:00 It had been built in the native style but there was room for you to sit at tables. The roof was thatched of course and you could get yourself a drink and biscuits and things like that. It was amazing because on board ship there was nothing. Just enough to keep you alive you know. That's nothing special. And this was special. So we stayed there awhile and fed ourselves on the biscuits that they had and you could even get tea or coffee and
- 40:30 eventually decided that the day had gone a bit to go any further. Somebody warned us not to take the road further inland; that it gets a bit rough in there. I don't know exactly what they meant by that. Probably the enemy was there. Anyhow, we headed back to the ship and found there was to be a concert party at night; an army concert party at sea sort of thing.
- 41:00 Where we were moored and it was quite a good concert party. We enjoyed it a lot, clapped madly and that sort of thing. We were there for a few days and then it was decided that we should complete the journey which was going to be a bit dicey. There was to be a convoy formed outside of Milne Bay, not in the Bay. We noticed a couple of ships before we left and then we followed the track down the Bay and out, outside and headed north-west to follow the New Guinea coast
- 41:30 up Gona and Buna and those places where there was still some fighting going on. And it was dusk as we finally left the area behind and found ourselves in open sea. The escort closed in considerably and we thought, 'Ooh yes, this is interesting'. Darkness dropped as it does in the tTropics. It's just like pulling down a blind. Everything is - it's light one minute and pitch dark the next and we're all moving along nicely...

Tape 5

- 00:33 Suddenly a message goes through the whole convoy. It must have been transmitted by wireless or something but they were supposed to be under radio silence because the enemy picks it up as well as you do. The whole convoy stops. Our engines on the ship stopped dead and we can't hear any noise from the other ships
- 01:00 which are reasonably close to us. And there we are riding, no anchoring of course, and the order goes out, everybody keep dead silence. Don't even move around and we do as we're told because we're in strange, strange territories. But everybody's straining their ears to try and pick up some sound. You could see the New Guinea coast faintly. We were off so most of them
- 01:30 decided either Gona or Buna, one of those places. And not out of sight. They always hugged the coast as long as they could assuming there's no submarines between them and the coast because the water would be too shallow but the other side was quite exposed. And we sat there for about half an hour in dead silence. I didn't realise that a ship that size could stay that quiet for that long. The crew were not a navy crew of course. They were Hispanics, merchant seamen.
- 02:00 And we always considered they clomped around and especially the gun crews, they dropped things, ammunition and stuff and all the gun crews are in position and the one, the big gun at the rear is constantly moving a little bit from one side to the other, where they were getting instructions internally through the, because they're always in touch with the bBridge.
- 02:30 And we're getting more and more anxious and then it's announced that there were submarines in the area. That's why we had to make a sudden stop. And we waited for perhaps an hour or so just without any movement and all of a sudden everything changed. I don't know whether they had tracked a submarine down or it had given up and moved away but suddenly everything burst into life. Everybody clanks around and the gun crews
- 03:00 could stay with their guns in that area. They stayed constantly with them - not the same crowd all the time. They changed from time to time. Then we'd move on up the coast at a slightly reduced rate this time. And the next morning when the sun comes up we're at Lae, lying at anchor in Huon Bay. It's a disappointing sight in a way. The town
- 03:30 that we'd seen pictures of has vanished completely. There are a couple of sunken ships in the harbour. A few barges moving backwards and forwards from ships that are unloading, small barges. In the middle of Lae there's what's called Lae Hill. It's a flat-topped hill and it hadn't been used for anything special in peace time but now it was
- 04:00 there were several anti-aircraft batteries on top of it and there were army units, Australian army units moving around it and we were informed that the Japanese had had a hospital inside the hill and it had

been sealed in along with a lot of their forces. They'd blocked all the exits to it and they were all trapped inside. And now and then there'd be firing and

- 04:30 smoke would rise from a certain area where they'd been trying to escape but they were going to hold them in there and let them die in the hill. I had mixed feelings about this sort of thing but it was going to happen quite a few times afterwards. They'd hold themselves up expecting - I don't know whether they expected to be released sometime, but they were kept in there until they died. Often they were helped along by explosives being loaded, lowered into these spots where they were, especially bunkers.
- 05:00 We sat there for a short time and barges arrived, scrambling nets were lowered over the side of the ship. They're like huge camouflage nets but the squares in them were like a foot square; heavy rope. The barge comes alongside and you're lined up with your gear. You're allowed to throw your kitbag down into the barge but you're supposed to keep your rifle with you all the time.
- 05:30 Well it looked to be a bit hazardous to crawl down these nets to the barge that's bombing up and down below you and still have a rifle slung around your neck so a lot of us started dropping our rifles into the barge as well. We were told off well and truly for this sort of practice. You don't let your rifle go under any circumstances. Anyhow, I dropped mine in; got yelled at but it was too late then. Then you scrambled down the net and threw yourself into the barge when you hoped it was in the right position.
- 06:00 Rising gently instead of dropping away from under you which left you a fair stretch to go. And when the barge was crammed full it headed for the shore. You couldn't see exactly where you were going ahead because the ramp was up. You could get a bit of a glimpse out the side and it looked a war-torn place. There was coconut palms hardly any tops left on them and stumps of trees and a few army personnel strolling around watching us come in.
- 06:30 And then you hit the shore. All of a sudden, everybody ends up in the front end of the barge and the ramp goes down. And strangely enough, there's always a gap of water between you and the shore. They haven't gone up far enough. And you were going to get your feet wet at least, well perhaps even more than your feet. So everybody starts floundering down the ramp and through the water and up the beach at the other side, looking quite amazed when they get there.
- 07:00 And they generally find that they've left some of their equipment on the barge. So we all go through this and eventually we're all standing on the sand looking as bewildered as you possibly can but with our equipment around us at least anyway. And there's a lot more to come ashore. Trucks arrive and they start picking up anybody and everybody and we say, "Where are we going?" We thought at least the drivers would know but they didn't know where we were going either. Somebody has to tell them.
- 07:30 And we'd move away from the spot to make room for more trucks as they were arriving and we start moving inland. We travel inland past the remains of the airstrip, with the remains of Japanese aircraft scattered all over it, past Lae Hill where the strange noise is coming from; past the cocoa plantation and then 15 mile inland to a place called Nadzab where they were constructing
- 08:00 a huge airfield complex. And when we arrived there we were taken to where our advance party had been flown in some time before and they hadn't done a great deal. They said they couldn't get the materials that they needed. They didn't have any mechanical help whatsoever. Everything had to be done by hand. Timber had to be sawn by hand and terribly primitive.
- 08:30 But a couple of things had arrived and we were surprised to see, one of them was a piano of all things. We'd bought it at Townsville to entertain ourselves with while we were in Townsville and somebody had the bright idea of sending it up to New Guinea as well. And we thought, "That's not going to last long." And beside it was a whole heap of coffins all stacked on top - very rough ones they were too - all stacked on top of one another alongside it.
- 09:00 They'd managed to get there but a lot of the tools and other things that were supposed to get there were still missing and we all said, "That's what you'd expect." The first night was very uncomfortable. We had temporary accommodation. All the tents hadn't arrived. Fortunately, it was marvellous weather. By saying that I mean it didn't rain. And the next day, we were all called together and told
- 09:30 we were starting a very serious phase of our operations and we'd sort ourselves out during the day. Late in the day we got an unpleasant shock. The CO had arrived and he would like to drop a bomb on the Japanese. So we had none of our proper equipment. It was still on board the boat, yet to be unloaded. But, "I want to drop a bomb on the Japanese" - and it's got to be a 500 pound one
- 10:00 so it had to be carried underneath where the tank is usually carried, the belly tank. So we trotted off down to the strip. His aircraft is there. He'd flown in on his own and he's parked in amongst the jungle and he said, "Put the bomb on. I managed to get it." And here's this 500lb bomb laying alongside and we've got no way of putting the thing on.
- 10:30 So being ingenious was needed right from the start. Our, the aArmament oOfficer, the wWarrant oOfficer, the aArmament sSergeant were all pushing one another out of the way to show how it could be put on. We had to go into the jungle and cut saplings and make a cradle for this blasted bomb and work it in underneath the aircraft. It got dark so we
- 11:00 turned the lights of the jeep onto it and used torches and we fell over one another. We jammed our

fingers because the thing kept rolling around. It seemed to take - oh and an air raid alert went and all the lights went out everywhere. We left ours on and kept working on putting the bomb on. And a Yank yells out, "I'll shoot, I'll shoot your bloody light out if you're not careful," and anyhow,

- 11:30 we eventually got the thing on. It was great to hear that American bombs had two loops on them that would hold them in place whereas British bombs only had one and the carrier of course - it could have been an English one but it wasn't. It was an American one and it clipped on nicely and this great bomb hanging underneath it. We tightened the clamps down onto it. Somebody had the fuses even for it.
- 12:00 Oh the CO had arranged that. He was going, he was definitely going to drop a bomb on the Japanese. And we finally got home. It was after midnight when we got back and he was going to go off first thing in the morning. And somebody had to go back there and be present when he took off apart from the ones that would always be there of course, the flight mechanics and the riggers. I didn't get picked for that. That was a wonder. All those sort of things happened later on. Anyhow, we got the news later on
- 12:30 that he had taken off at dawn, gone to a place where there was Japanese. Wasn't hard to find, they were everywhere, all around us. And he dropped the bomb on them. And he was very pleased. He was over - he'd like to do it again. But the Yanks persuaded him not to do it during the day because it was busy during the day. They had enormous numbers of aircraft at that particular place and they had it all worked out who they were going to bomb during the day
- 13:00 and why they would and how they would and they had two or three squadrons of Mitchell bombers, light Mitchell bombers that were really attack planes. They were loaded down with armaments of various kinds but carry bombs, large bombs at the same time and they were going to be busy all day. He was quite put out that he wasn't going to have another go. But from there on things went fairly well. We settled in sort of thing. The aircraft arrived in no time.
- 13:30 And we started going into operations immediately. They decided that just carrying one bomb under the belly wasn't going to be enough. They wanted to carry three bombs so extra carriers had to be fitted to the wings. We were going to have a hectic time. The, they were capable, the P40 was capable of carrying three 500lb bombs which made them a pretty deadly sort of an object.
- 14:00 An Australian dive bomber squadron, Volti engines aircraft was there operating actually from the strip next to us, and they couldn't carry that sort of a weight and they were specially designed as a dive bomber. But a Kitty HawkKittyhawk could do more damage than what they could and if they, the Volti engines were caught by Jap fighters they were dead sitters. They couldn't defend themselves whereas a Kitty HawkKittyhawk could. So
- 14:30 there was something in the wind. The news went around the 24 Squadron, the Volti engines were going to be sent home and we would have to take over their job and they'd been bombing anything and everything and we would have to do the same sort of thing.

That was an American or Australian Squadron?

Australian. The Americans did the heavy stuff and the Australians did the so-called lighter stuff; picked out special targets whereas

- 15:00 Americans flew in lots of, oh I saw 70 Mitchells in one day going out on a raid. They'd just plaster an area completely. Supposedly wipe it out but the Japs would just dig themselves in; go into their fox holes and they'd survive. But everything material on top would be destroyed, absolutely. The Americans were a bit of a problem. We'd only been there a fairly short time
- 15:30 and they decided that - of course the Isle of New Britain, which is the next long one up that runs the same way as New Guinea had been taken at Christmas and this was February. They had a couple of squadrons stationed there and they'd managed to get the strip into operation at Cape Gloucester. They wanted to bring in a Lightning Squadron, a P-38 Squadron back to the mainland so they could
- 16:00 attack targets on the mainland rather than on New Britain. There's a bit of a story connected with that. They were frightened to go near Rabaul which is on the other end of New Britain and the part they'd taken was the opposite end, as far away from Rabaul as possible. And there was an American squadron operating from Cape Gloucester called 80 Squadron. They were all P-38s.
- 16:30 So one 80 Squadron was to change places with the other one and we were the advance party that was to go to Cape Gloucester to get ready for our aircraft to arrive. The Lightnings had all arrived back in New Guinea not far from where we were operating from. So we were going to be the first Australians back onto New Britain since the beginning of the war.
- 17:00 And when we flew there and it was an interesting start to the flight. As we took - we were flying in C-47s of course or DC-3s or whatever you like to call them. Though the C-47s had no furnishings whatsoever inside. There were seats folded down but we always had so much equipment on board that we couldn't fold them down so we sat on top of our cargo. As we took off we realised that the petrol cap on the port side
- 17:30 hadn't been screwed back on and there was petrol streaming out as we went down the runway and down off the trailing edge of the wing. When we got in the air we let one of the crew know what was happening. We thought, "Oh, we'll have to back and get it put on." He watched it for a moment, queer

sort of a character - and as he watched the petrol stopped dropping off the trailing edge and started moving back up the wing with air and moving right to

- 18:00 behind where the engine was working with flame coming out the exhaust and the two were right against one another and I said to him, "Won't it catch fire?" "Probably not, probably not," he said. "Anyhow," I said, "will we get to where we're going?" I thought we'll lose a lot of petrol from one side - it was a long trip to Cape Gloucester. And he said, there's another thing he said,
- 18:30 "If we lose enough petrol we'll get lighter and we'll be able to travel further." And I've often thought about that and I thought it doesn't make any sense whatsoever. He watched it for a while and was quite happy with it and he went back up the front and locked himself in the cabin. He was what we used to constantly call a crew chief. It wasn't their proper name. They were really load masters. They were supposed to supervise everything you loaded on board. But they were a weird lot. Anything went with them.
- 19:00 Whenever you arrived over a new airstrip they'd look down and say, "It's too small. We'll never make it," and then they'd disappear. The safest place was where they were up the front I suppose anyhow. And they wouldn't be mixed up with all the cargo when we came to a crashing halt anyhow. We did reach Cape Gloucester. We flew over the cruiser Australia at one time, very low and I thought, "That's pretty dangerous," knowing what navy gunners are like. They're likely
- 19:30 to shoot anything down that comes anywhere near them. But there wasn't a shot fired at us. The gun crews were in position on it - we could see glimpses as we went past it. Cape Gloucester is really something. Do you want me to...?

Keep going.

When you look down, there's the - and I've got a photo of it - there's black sand beaches. They glisten unbelievably.

- 20:00 There's a reef runs around the whole island at a short distance out and the waves are breaking on it. Then there's palm trees. Then there's a grassy expanse that the Japs used for - as an aerodrome. They never did much work to aerodromes. They had two strips. One was a fighter strip, entirely grassed and bumpy. I'd like to have seen them land on it; and a bomber strip which they'd graded a bit and left
- 20:30 a huge quarry right at the end of it. Then we circled around and we noticed that there was a volcano overlooking the area - Talawi it's called. It was smoking away and we hadn't had a good look at a volcano up to that time. We'd seen some in the distance but this was fairly close and the whole area looked terribly battered down below. There's been a real ding dong go there.
- 21:00 The Yanks that were there were the first marine divisions. They'd started the war by attacking Guadalcanal and they'd grabbed it eventually. Then they'd been brought back to Ballarat and they'd had their recreation leave here in Ballarat which we were soon to find out about. As soon as we landed they said, "Oh you Aussies are real welcome. You come to relieve us?" and we said, "No, we're aAir fForce." Oh dear. And one of our blokes said,
- 21:30 "No, we're nice dooey." "Oh are you?" He was a cow of a bloke this one, Snowy Southern his name was. He was always having people on. The Yanks really thought we were aArmy for a bit because the sort of clothing we wore was a slouch hat and drab clothing and things like that. We hoped that we did look like the aArmy really but they soon realised we were aAir fForce.
- 22:00 We got around to, where the place that had been allotted to us for a camp. There wasn't a single thing there. Not a tent, or any building. There was a great pole that looked like an electric light pole with no, nothing, no attachments whatsoever to it and we were all amazed at why it was there. It was apparently something that the Japs had put in for a wind sock for their air, their fighter strip
- 22:30 which ended where we were supposed to camp. And the day passed. We continually sent our NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] to find out where we were going to sleep. Darkness came and we still had no particular spot to sleep. And it, the reputation for the place we were told by the Yanks is you get air raids every night and sometimes several times during the night.
- 23:00 And we said, "Bbut we've got no slit trench to get into." And they said, "Don't worry about that. Don't worry about that. We haven't either," they said. I said, "We thought that you're all right. You've had experience on Guadalcanal with putting up with just about everything that you could put up with." And then one of the Yanks said to a group of us, "Where you guys all come from?" and several of them were from Sydney and a few South Australians, that didn't mean much.
- 23:30 I said, "I come from Ballarat." "Oh, Goddamn you come from Ballarat. We've been there." I said, "Yes, we were all very much aware of you when you were there." They used to hurtle around the town towing their artillery and one thing or another. Oh I had to answer all the questions about how Ballarat was when I left it. They'd left it just about after I'd left it really. And, "Ddo you know Miss So-and-so?" Oh God, it was a real circus for a while.
- 24:00 And wherever we went from then on we got asked where we come from because the Ballarat in particular went down real well with them. They were hoping that when they finished their stint there they'd get sent back to Ballarat but they never did. They didn't get back that far any more. The war had

moved on. Well we spent that night in the open. It got quite cool. We were right on the beach, actually on the beach itself. And the waves were rolling in.

24:30 Oh very idyllic in a way I suppose and it wasn't terribly cold although I shivered, but it might have been for some other reason. The air raids came on every now and then. The aircraft came over - I suppose they came from Rabaul up the other end of the island and they had plenty of aircraft there and I found a little bit of a ditch I could roll into at the edge of a creek and every time the air-raid sirens came -

25:00 we weren't flooded with air raids at this time but vivid pictures in our mind of what the Darwin people had told us of the Japs coming over dropping frag bombs and flattening, slicing everything off at the roots sort of thing, including people. And they, anyhow there were only about three alerts that night. Bombs were dropped but they were some distance from us. You never knew what the Japanese had in mind as a target,

25:30 except that you'd like to be away from ammunition dumps and fuel dumps but they generally missed them and hit something else and you could have been in that particular spot.

And this was your first time you'd experienced air raids?

This was the first experience of air raids. And the next day,

A little bit scary I take it?

Well that, that that sort of amazed me too. I was sort of quite resigned to the fact that it's luck. You hear the bombs coming down,

26:00 and they always sound like they're right above you and after they'd exploded you relaxed quite a lot. You didn't get that lot at least. And that continues on with you right through the whole time; that you're going to be lucky enough to escape but there's always that little doubt in the back of your head that perhaps this time. And there was one occasion when it was very much different.

26:30 The next day they gave us a job unloading the aircraft as they come in bringing all our equipment by air in and we had to unload it on the end of the strip. Well there was a daytime raid and the signal was fired into the air from anti-aircraft batteries and with the Yanks, every anti-aircraft battery fires three shots and we were in the middle of the strip at the time.

27:00 And there was a lot of Negro soldiers from a work unit - they weren't allowed to get too involved and we were standing with them. Well they just vanished in a flash. And we could see them looking up from behind various objects and we're still standing in the middle of the strip. We were blissfully unaware of what could happen and they can, the Japs can send in fighters at different times and strafe the strips from their machine guns.

27:30 And they were saying, "Come on, come on, come on. Aren't you fellas frightened?" and they shivered with fright for what could happen. We eventually sidled up with some of them and they were really in a funk over what could happen. And nothing happened. No aircraft arrived. The all clear was given which was one shot in the air from each gun, one single trace of fire thrown up into the air.

28:00 We felt heroes actually. It was just cause we didn't realise what could happen. They'd been to places. They'd been to Guadalcanal along with the marine division and they'd been bombed mercilessly and shot up during the day time and we'd only well experienced a couple of small night raids by just two or three aircraft.

Did you want to have lunch now?

28:40 **So we've had our break and you've just arrived in New Britain?**

Yes and we've just spent the night in the open and the next day they gave us a job on the airstrip; load aircraft. Not our aircraft, American aircraft with all sorts of -

29:00 look the Yanks carry shocking things around with them. All sorts of odds and ends. Anything that will move, they take it with them.

What do you mean?

Well, whenever they take a new place, they set up an ice-cream factory first before they do anything else. Their canteens are called PXs [Post Exchange - American Canteen Unit] and they sell anything and everything. If you've got the money you can buy just about anything. They even sell stockings - or nylons they were then, nylon stockings.

29:30 What you would do with them in a place like New Guinea in wartime, the mind boggles.

Trading?

The natives wouldn't know what to do. Look the mind - really you can't imagine what the natives would do with some of the things. But they had expensive wrist watches and things like that even. Well you wouldn't want that in the tropics. Everything rotted. Even steel things rusted out in no time.

30:00 **Was there a black market going on?**

Well that's what they did back in the States. They had all these things so they took everything out they used to sell in the States out to the Islands and whenever they set up a PX they sold exactly the same things to the soldiers. And they made nice coffee, that's one thing they used to do.

So describe to me the set-up on New Britain. The Americans were there?

Mmm.

With this big...

And they just had this corner of New Britain; a very small corner. They pushed the enemy back

30:30 into the, into the - I think I was going to say shrubbery; into the jungle. We were holding them there. They had the knack of pushing the Japs back and then getting an agreement with them of some sort or another that if you stay where you are it'll be all right. We'll leave you alone. And they wouldn't establish like - there were no lines like the trenches of World War I where they had to hang on all the time. They'd just leave them. They'd walk away and the Japs'd stay behind that particular invisible line.

31:00 Well us being inquisitive often walked through that line into the area that the Japs had that was theirs and they didn't appreciate that.

The Japs didn't appreciate that?

No of course not. They had an agreement with the Americans and the Americans never told us any idea of where the perimeter at all was. It was just an unofficial line that they'd drawn through there. So we fell for it very often.

31:30 Found ourselves well inside enemy territory. It was our fault. We were just so inquisitive. If I'd stuck to the rules, I'd never have walked out of our camp even to go looking around. But there was a few of us, about half a dozen in our group and another group of about half a dozen that continually wandered out of camp whenever they got the chance to assess the enemy and the first warning you got were a few shots fired at you generally.

32:00 But there was some exceptions to that where they just didn't do that even and I don't know what they were up to. But we'll come to that a little bit later.

So it sounds like the Japanese were very, very close by.

They were on our doorstep all the time and in position, in positions that looked down on the airstrip that we were operating from. They knew everything we did all day long and they had those huge binoculars

32:30 that the Japanese aArmy issues on the stand and big heavy tripod and they could have seen the minutest detail of what we were doing, how we worked on the aircraft, what goods were brought in and out, what units even. They'd be able to read colour patches on the Americans' sleeves. You know how they went in for their colour patches - great elaborate things, inches across. They'd have known exactly what units were operating there. That was weird.

33:00 You knew that every minute, everything you did you were under observation. Even in the first place, in the Markham Valley at Nadzab where we were, everybody knew that there were observation posts on the mountains that rose up all around the valley. And we knew that they were watching us all the time. But the attitude was "Well if they're that inquisitive, let 'em watch. There's nothing they can do about it. It's not going to really help them in the long run.

33:30 They'll report it all back to their headquarters; how many aircraft have come in, what they're loaded, the sort of weapons they're loaded with this time. It - you felt as though you were on show.

Were you concerned about snipers?

Yes. There was always snipers, yeah. They got worse the further we went. Because as we got even closer and closer to the enemy all the time. There wasn't room to keep away from them. And their snipers were pretty deadly, yes there were a couple of incidents with them.

34:00 But something that we couldn't work out that after a landing, um, the Japanese withdrew from the beach area immediately. It was silly to try and hang on there. They knew they'd get killed so they'd just go back a little bit, climb up trees, strap themselves to the branches and snipe from there. Well it was only a matter of time before they were going to die.

34:30 Talk about kamikaze, yeah. The invading troops would know exactly where the shots were coming from and they'd shoot them and they'd die up in the tree just hanging their by the belts that they'd wrapped around them and the rifle would come dangling down below them. They were prepared to give their lives. Dead end thing, crawl up a tree when your enemy's approaching.

So by that stage how much death had you seen?

35:00 Well the first of it was ...well there was dead people everywhere.

You talked about Japanese bodies in the water..?

Yes, at Milne Bay even and they were from the year before. They reckoned they were coming up from a wrecked Japanese ship that was lying on the bottom and they were gradually working their way out from the ship that would be badly damaged and floating to the top.

35:30 There's a certain time limit apparently before a body reaches a surface. It's , the gases if we need to go pathologically into it, but sooner or later the body comes to the top. We later, I'll just wait, I won't jump too far there – but anywhere where there'd been an invasion, there was going to be bodies around. Both sides are going to lose some but in the Pacific War it was the Japanese that lost the most.

36:00 They lost colossal numbers of men and in one case, at Cape Gloucester that I can talk about, the other group that was sticky noses apart from us, they pushed well into enemy territory to try and reach the top of the volcano and they actually did too. On the way they passed what had been a Japanese hospital..

36:30 The Japanese had had to withdraw and leave the patients in the hospital. It wasn't a properly built one. It was a series of tents joined together. And they all the ones that had been left behind had been shot through the head. The Japanese had shot them themselves as they withdrew so that they wouldn't be questioned and give any answers when, this group of ours think

37:00 they'd reached the hospital before the Americans had even. The Americans weren't terribly curious to do the sort of thing we did. Once they'd made this imaginary line and went with the Japs and said, you just stay that side and we'll stay this side. That was the end of it but our blokes kept poking around and going through it to see what was behind this imaginary line. And they'd all been shot and um...

Was this something you witnessed?

No, we didn't, we weren't there at the time but they reckon it was

37:30 only the day before. Two of the fellas in this other group were medical orderlies and they had a look at the bodies and they reckoned it was only a day or a couple of days since they'd been killed. So the Japs were quite prepared to do that.

So by now, your emotional and psychological experience would be sort of growing and changing?

Well most of our group didn't seem to turn a hair at anything, I'm afraid. Nothing put them off and some even

38:00 collected a few body parts, which was a pretty horrible sort of thing to do. Most of the Japanese had golden teeth and some of our characters were quite prepared to knock them out and keep them as souvenirs, after they'd died of course. It was a bit risky to try and do it beforehand.

Were there other things that were souvenirs from the bodies?

Well you checked them carefully because often bodies were booby-trapped.

38:30 As soon as you touched them a grenade would explode and you'd cop it. That was supposed to be the general practice I think. You looked for, I've got some money and some postcards and things like that that were taken off like this. But I preferred not to do it. I preferred to pick up things that were away from bodies. I think I was probably a little frightened of the booby trap idea because I nearly got caught a couple of times

39:00 with booby traps; just found out in time what they were.

So what were your official instructions in regards searching bodies?

Not to go anywhere near them so that's what we did. No we, I myself was never, ever told by anybody in authority not to do the sort of thing I was doing; going out searching to see what I could find. It was an illegal pursuit probably. And I found out much later,

39:30 that if you did that sort of thing and got killed a different excuse was going to be put out for what happened to you. It was going to be classed as an unfortunate accident, generally to do with aircraft and I know that for absolute truth that that's what happened because some of our blokes did get caught and the excuse put out had nothing to do with what really happened. But why they didn't try to stop us from keeping doing this thing, wandering around

40:00 looking for, well it was souvenirs for a start. You wanted something to have after the war to show you'd been pretty close to the enemy but mine turned to intelligence gathering and I got some very useful stuff. Such as there's a map hanging on the wall up the front was one of a number of things I got with all sorts of things marked on it which amazed the Americans but that's for a little bit later on.

Oh no explain that one. What's some of the intelligence. This wasn't in New Britain was it?

40:30 No this was later along. Um, I can tell you about how it happened I suppose. We were on an island called Biak Island. There'd been a hell of a fight by the American aArmy – no American mMarines in this one, American aArmy. The marines were on the other side. They were Japanese marines from the 222nd Regiment. They were a particularly nasty lot.

- 41:00 They'd been the ones that were involved in the rape of Nanking in China before the Pacific War started. They just about wiped out the local population there and the Yanks knew that they held this island in particular but decided that they'd take it anyway. It had good airstrips on it, this particular island, Biak. Beautiful airstrips. It's a coral island and coral islands are like cakes that are,
- 41:30 wedding cakes that are set one, each one getting smaller. The bottom part, the sea level is quite a large island. The next level, you move inland and up a cliff and there's another one a bit smaller and another one a bit smaller as you go inland. And that's what this island was like. Anyway, the Yanks had had a helluva fight; much more than they'd ever expected. They'd belted the hell out of the place with everything they had, big warships and aerial attack and they thought, "Right..."

Tape 6

- 00:32 The day after we'd established ourselves in our camp we were put to work on the airstrip and loading American planes with all sorts of odds and ends and we worked on one particular one day. There were all sorts of odd shaped cargo to go on board and we were very happy with ourselves that we'd fitted the whole load in and it looked terrific. The only thing was that the crew were going to be stuck in the cabin area and not be able to come back
- 01:00 through the plane through the big double doors so they could get out if they wanted to. They'd have to hop out the small door that's part of the cabin complex. Anyhow, they take off. The crew arrives and we chatted to them and they hopped on board, headed off down this metal strip with all interlocked metal pieces so that it doesn't sink into the mud underneath. It got about halfway down the strip and we're watching it and all of a sudden, one side dropped.
- 01:30 It spun around and headed up an embankment, turned right over, around completely and burst into flames. And I don't know whether we were more concerned with the crew or with the cargo that we'd fitted into it. Because when a plane started to burn, they let it burn. They wouldn't bother to try to put it out. So we were worried about the crew. We saw the door open on the side and the two of them jumped out
- 02:00 through the flames because the wing tanks were ruptured and the tanks were burning fuel and they rolled down onto the side of the strip. We hopped onto a fire tender. There was always fire tenders waiting to race to these sort of things, mainly to try and rescue the crew, not the plane. We hurtled down the strip and the two of them, two of the crew are laying, burnt terribly because they'd come straight through petrol flames and they're laying
- 02:30 on the side of the strip. Anyhow the ambulance arrived at virtually the same time and they ripped the clothes off them and there was skin coming with the clothes and it was our first close encounter with what can happen in a situation like that. We'd seen planes crash. Back at Nadzab they crashed every day but we usually were distanced from them but we were right up alongside this one. And someone sings out, "Keep away from the plane. It'll explode. It's full of fuel."
- 03:00 And we ignored it and helped drag the blokes back out of danger in case the thing did explode but they were both in shock, shaking all over and looked pretty awful. They managed to get them both onto the ambulance and the Yanks, the Yanks whizzed them away. We heard later that one of them died and the other one was pretty uncertain. He was still in hospital at Cape Gloucester.
- 03:30 But that was a bit of a shock because you had something happen right in front of your eyes and you saw what could happen and it wasn't on film or anything like that. It was real. Not only that but the shocking smell from the plane burning. We hadn't - well we'd seen planes burn but not been that close and sort of burning fuel, oil and petrol - it makes a real, real stink.
- 04:00 And I think the burns smelt a bit too but we didn't go into that. But they would've.

So was it something in the construction of the airstrip that caused the accident?

No, they'd blown a tyre. There was another Yank turned up puffing and panting: "Just missed me," he said. "Just missed me." He saw the tyre blow as it was heading down the strip and it was just ready to take off and of course when the tyre blew it went down on one side. One wing got caught and spun the whole thing around. And that was the end of it.

- 04:30 **And because they were carrying a whole lot of fuel, it exploded?**

Oh, a full load of fuel. No time for the cap to come off the petrol tank or anything like that. Within a few days, we found we had a little bit of time on our hands and a chap called Bill Simon and myself, we decided we'd walk to the far extent of what the Americans held of Cape Gloucester. We'd just keep walking - hitch a ride and

- 05:00 keep walking and we knew there was a hill called Hill 220 at the end of the very held area that there'd been a hell of a fight to get it and we thought, well if there's any souvenirs laying around, either

Japanese or American there might be some left there. We eventually reached it after stumbling through swamps and we climbed the hill. We nearly reached the top getting through barbed wire nearly all the way and

- 05:30 exploring the whole place as we went and a voice comes from down below us: "What the hell are you two doing up there?" and it was a Yankee lieutenant from the mMarines standing out in the open with us in his full gaze. We just stopped and waited for him to say some more. "The whole hill is mined," he said. We said, "Well there was nothing to show us." "Of course there wasn't," he said. "We all know it's mined."
- 06:00 He was getting quite irritated. He said, "Look, don't move from where you are. Turn exactly around 360 degrees and walk back in your own footsteps to where you came in." He said, he yelled out, "I don't know how you managed it." We'd walked through a minefield and managed to reach the top. Anyhow, we were particularly careful walking back down trying to find our footsteps in mud, which was not easy.
- 06:30 When we got to the bottom, he said, "You goddamn Aussies are a..." He used some American term which wasn't praising us up at all. And we said, "We're sorry." "You should have been destroyed," he says. We parted on fairly pleasant terms and we walked further along the beach. This bloke I'm with was even more senseless than me I suppose.
- 07:00 We could see little islands just off the coast before you come to the reef, which is the furthest out that you could get. And he said, "Look I reckon there'd be good things on those little islands." And I said, "Not a chance. Not a chance. I can't swim." "That's bad luck," he said. He said, "I still think we could walk." I could see a shark swimming
- 07:30 around inside the reef, which was pretty unusual, and I could see it's top of its fin. And he looked at it and he said, "They don't bite." He was from Sydney of course.

Could I just ask you something?

Yeah.

I don't understand why, or were you briefed at all by the Americans when you arrived there?

No.

I mean wouldn't there have been some...

There was no communication between the Americans and the Australians at all.

- 08:00 No, they sort of - I think the Americans quite frankly assumed we were all nutters of some sort. And we would get into trouble sooner or later whether they told us what to avoid or not and it wasn't the only time we were going to end up in a minefield. They withdrew from the hill in a body and left the mines behind them and hoped that the Japs would try to retake the hill and walk into the minefield. That's as it turned out
- 08:30 when we got more information but we didn't venture into the water where the shark was. We came back to camp. Just off the beach from where we were on the reef there was the remains of a Japanese destroyer that had been damaged in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. And it was laying at a crazy sort of angle and apparently the crew, all dead, was still on board. And every now and then one of them would
- 09:00 depart by the waves from the carcass of the ships and the sharks were all waiting in a swarm, ready to grab them as they were, as they became free of the wreck. It was, as a fellow said, we'll get a native canoe and go out there and have a look and look at the wreck. There's bound to be lots of interesting things on it. It should have been demolished I suppose. It was even talked about at one time.
- 09:30 It was going to be a navigation hazard but no sensible ship would get anywhere near that reef. Anyhow, our term at Cape Gloucester came to an end with a talk in the mess one night that explained to us that the role of the RAAF in war was going to be totally different to what it had ever been before. Bases were not going to be set up well behind the lines where you just worked on aircraft in complete safety. From there on,
- 10:00 that point on you will be part of a landing force. Whenever a landing is made the RAAF will go ashore with the assault troops and make themselves useful and seize the airstrip and operate it as soon as possible, even within days if that could be done. The pilots will be waiting back at the last base with the aircraft ready to fly in as soon as they're told it's okay.
- 10:30 And within a short time the whole lot were, you know, given hints on how to behave in a landing on a strange, strange place. Handed out shell dressing and so on for wounds you'd probably incur at some time or other during the assault. There were some very strange looks around the mess when they found that they were going to adopt a different role entirely to what they'd anticipated; that they'd always be
- 11:00 well behind the lines, just maintaining and operating the aircraft. This was a reversal. They were going to be out in front. We were warned that there was going to be another landing very shortly on the New Guinea mainland this time. We had to go back in barges and landing ships and all that sort of thing. But at this time, strangely enough, I developed something that put me into hospital.

- 11:30 It was sebaceous cysts. You get them under the armpit. It can be very nasty in the tropics because they have to be opened and kept open and that leaves it open to infection and I spent a lot of time in the medical section with my arms propped apart just about with the dressings for these cysts. I had 'em under both arms. And as the time for departure for the next landing came I was informed that it would be impossible
- 12:00 to take me with the assault force; that they'd have enough problems on their hands without somebody with this sort of a complaint and that I'd have to go into hospital. Well in Cape Gloucester, the hospital a tin, a large, no, it was two tin sheds halfway up the mountain and the volcano and the Japanese were near the volcano exit. It rumbled and rumbled and belched and went on but the Japs had
- 12:30 an observation post just a little bit below it so off I trot to the so-called hospital. Their staff was well down. It was down to one medical orderly, no doctor, because everybody was going on this next attack. And they'd taken all, all the best equipment with them because they expected casualties. They were bolting to the - they dumped, a jeep dumped me off at the hospital.
- 13:00 I couldn't find anybody there at all for some time. And then the orderly turns up. "Oh I didn't expect to have any patients," he said. He was a bit nonplussed there. He thought he'd just have to look after the empty hospital I think. And then another bloke turned up. He'd had treatment but it hadn't worked too well. So there was going to be two patients and an orderly there. And he said, "Have you seen what's down below us yet?"
- 13:30 and I looked down and there was an artillery battery. The marines artillery battery of all things - I think four, six, about half a dozen guns, artillery pieces pointed up the mountain. And I said, "Why are they pointed this way? Shouldn't they be pointed the other way?" "No, they fire right over here," he says, "at the Japs that are further up the hill." So there was an artillery position, the hospital and then the Japs and then the volcano itself,
- 14:00 which kept grumbling all the time and after a couple of days of doing absolutely nothing I saw the rest of the them sail. The landing ships came in and picked up all the rest of our crowd; sailed away with them and the next day a big navy unit of the United States sailed right past. Two big heavy cruisers with destroyers zigzagging around them. Looked very impressive. They were heading in the opposite direction to what the others had gone.
- 14:30 This was to try and fool the Japs further up the hill I suppose. You could almost see the band playing it looked so staged. That, yeah it wasn't till the next day that the orderly said, "I'm going to have to do something about the cysts. I'm going to have to cut them out." I said, "Have you done much of that sort of thing?" He said, "No, no never done that sort of thing at all." Right next day, they had an operating table and they laid me on that.
- 15:00 He said, "I'll never be able to do it like this." He said, "We've got a dentist's chair. We'll put you in that but somebody will have to hold your arm up." So this other patient, he said, "I'll do it." He was a pretty keen sort of a character. I'll never forget him. And so after sliding off the operating table and getting myself set in the dentist's chair, the fella brings out the instruments he was going to use and
- 15:30 lays them on the little table. They were old looking things. Look you really wouldn't attempt to use them seriously I thought. And they said, I said, "Are you going to have an anaesthetic?" I didn't fancy getting cut up with these old tools without an anaesthetic. "Yes, got some, got some," he said. And he had a little spray pack thing with ethyl alcohol in it. I remember what the label said. And he said, "I'll use this."
- 16:00 It was used quite a bit so he said, "Right, hold still." And he sprayed this stuff on and he had no idea of how much to spray on. It turned out to be far too much. The whole area froze absolutely solid. You could feel it. And he said, "It's not supposed to do that at all." He picks up a scalpel and it was the dirtiest looking thing you'd ever seen and the blade was much bigger than I'd usually imagine that they use. And he said, "Oh I'll have a go at it,"
- 16:30 and he slashed at the area that was frozen stiff and it had no effect on it whatsoever and just at this stage the artillery opens up from down below us and the shells go whistling over and explode on the hill further up. And I started to laugh and we ended up all laughing just as though we were all drunk. And he said, "Look, go around for a walk outside and it'll thaw out a bit," which I did,
- 17:00 and it did thaw out a bit and after us laughing and carrying on for what seemed like ages he finally got both of them out. And he said, "How does it feel?" and I said, "I can't feel a thing." Anyhow, strangely enough within a couple of days it did heal up and became as good as gold and there was never any trouble later on. Mind you I think he took a little bit more than he need to have taken out.
- 17:30 Well that fixed Cape Gloucester. We were told that we had to move back to the Markham Valley, the Nadzab again. We had - oh it wasn't the end of things at all. There was an entire fighter wing involved. There were three squadrons, 75, 78 and 80 and it turned out that they'd left flight mechanics
- 18:00 and riggers to look after that many planes. There was over 70 aircraft and but they'd only left one armourer and that happened to be me. And I don't know whether that was deliberate or an oversight. I can imagine it being an oversight and I would have to be responsible for the entire armament of a fighter wing that was going to go into action. I had to sign all the inspection sheets, test all the guns in theory to make sure they worked

- 18:30 and then sign for each individual aircraft. I complained to the Engineering Officer who had stayed behind to keep, to see that all the engines and air frames were serviced. He said, "I know nothing about armament." And I said, "But I haven't been, I've just been told that I'm the only armourer here and I'll have to sign for the whole fighter wing." "Yes," he said, "why not? Why not?" He lived in the Ballarat area actually.
- 19:00 I didn't know it at the time. He said, 'You will sign for them.' He said, "I'll have them all here together. You do 80 Squadrons because you'll want to make sure it's right at least. The pilots are all available from the three squadrons. They're supposed to be able to do that sort of thing too. They learn about it when they're learning the later stages
- 19:30 of flying and you'll just have to take the risk that, whether they've done it properly or not. He said, "Aafter all they're going to be flying so they'll want to make sure that the guns work, won't they?" And the next couple of days were full of fun and games. Every now and then you'd hear a burst of firing from one of the other aircraft but they'd left one gun loaded, thought they'd unloaded the lot and of course they'd hop up into the cockpit, press the trigger and you can imagine pilots were
- 20:00 very nonchalant about this part of the game: pressing the trigger, and there's a burst of flame and traces go streaming out across the airstrip and out over the sea and eventually I was faced with this pile of daily inspection sheets and I had to wade through and sign each one, whether I knew it was right or not. We got through that and we escaped from Cape Gloucester leaving aircraft behind us. We were flown back to Nadzab.
- 20:30 **How do (UNCLEAR)**
- After doing all that I was anxious to get as far from the aircraft as I possibly could. That sort of thing had to be done every day and you just couldn't manage it to inspect that many aircraft, 70 aircraft every day and take the responsibility of them. Anyway, we arrived ...
- So did you have any concerns about (UNCLEAR)**
- Yes, I had lots of concerns. I thought, "Half of them won't work." Whether they reloaded the guns properly again.
- 21:00 That was what I was worried about. It's all very well to unload them and press the trigger and see, and hope that they don't work at that stage but then reload them all. Somebody's not going to reload some of them for sure and they'll have perhaps three guns working on one side. There's six guns altogether and perhaps only one working on the other side and when they'd fire it it's going to put them off course completely. It kicks the plane backwards almost, the force of the guns firing slows them up.
- 21:30 And if they're only firing on one side, it could pull them off course and they might crash.
- So normally they all fire together?**
- They all fired, must fire together, yeah and that evens it up. Even if one misses fire on one side they've got a corrector bit for it but in this sort of expecting it they'll have one sort of stop firing while they've got the trigger pressed and they know it's not going to start on it's own. So that was a worry. Yeah they done...
- Did you get any feedback?**
- 22:00 No I'd never asked any questions either. No I was expecting problems for months after it. I thought it something goes wrong I'll get the blame for it and I was legally entitled to get blamed for it because I'd signed that they were all all right but I had no, I had no, I'd just claimed that I was in such a position that I couldn't do anything else about it. Not that they would have accepted that, no. That wouldn't have come into it. You were supposed to be ahead of things all the time.
- 22:30 **Okay I understand why you call it an escape.**
- Yes it was an escape. I didn't want to see any of them again but of course, especially with our own, I was surrounded with them every now and then from there on and the other squadrons followed us as well - 75 and 78 but nobody ever approached me. It was terrific really. One of those things that happened in wartime I suppose. Fortunes of war they call it.
- 23:00 Well we got...they put us into a little camp right on the edge of the Markham River which flows the full length of the Markham Valley through Nadzab and then up through Lae into the sea. The Markham River is not like any of our rivers at all. It's a number of narrow streams that run alongside one another at a shocking pace and the river itself is composed entirely of gravels
- 23:30 of various grades and our camp was right on the edge of the river. You could hear the river rushing past all the time. The area had been bombed severely, mainly by our forces before they landed in the vValley by parachute earlier in the piece. All the Australian AArmy landed by parachute into the Markham Valley. I've got a photo of that too.
- 24:00 Earlier, when we were at the place earlier, we'd been taken to the edge of the river to gather gravel for around our camp. It was going to be nice and pretty but when we reached the edge of the river there

were some Australian aArmy blokes there and they said, "Don't go to the edge of the river. It's too dangerous. It crumbles away every now and then and nobody has ever been rescued out of it," they said., B"because it was a swift flowing river. They drown in no time."

- 24:30 Anyway, we're in this little camp; a holding camp waiting to be forwarded on to where the last, the new landing had been made and where a bit of land had been secured at that landing, that we had to wait till an airstrip was constructed properly there to be able to be flow in to the new place. So we're back in the Markham Valley and we were there for day after day. We'd be taken to an aircraft ready to board it to be flow into the new place.
- 25:00 We'd get all our gear on sometimes even and they'd say, "No it's not ready to accept the new aircraft." They were the words that they used. You'll just have to unload the plane and take it all back to the holding. And we were getting thoroughly si - sometimes in the night even they'd call out so that at dawn you'd be able to take off. It'd vary. But it never came. Never got that far. One night we were all sitting around, talking,
- 25:30 telling yarns actually and one chap with us could tell yarns without telling the same one twice for hour after hour. They were all pretty rough ones too I can tell you and I don't remember any of them. Anyhow, I, the toilet block was a fair distance from where the tent was that we occupied and I wanted to go to the toilet and I thought, "Nnow there's got to be a shorter way than the one we usually take." The path leads to it right from our tent. If you keep following the path,
- 26:00 you come to the toilets. Anyhow, I thought, "I'll try another way." So off I head in a different direction and the place was bomb crated almost edge to edge right through to the coconut palms and a certain amount of shrubbery had grown up even since the place was bombed even. Well shrubs grow while you watch them. Anyhow I heads off and I realised after a while, I was lost.
- 26:30 It was a dark night, very very dark. I could hear traffic on one side and I thought, "Now if I can head towards that, that's the main road," but every time I tried to get towards it I'd find I was on the edge of water-filled bomb crater and there was no way of simply following the edge of it around because there was all thorny bushes and things growing right to the very edge of it and I'd have to turn back. And after a while I was getting more and more lost and I could hear the river getting louder and louder.
- 27:00 And I thought, "I don't want to get anywhere near the edge of that river. I might fall in and that would be the end of me and they'll never know what happened to me. They'll assume I'd vanished," which I would've. And anyhow, I spent no end of time virtually going in circles, trying to work my way back to where the traffic noise was coming from and then the traffic noise stopped. It must have been too late at night or something. I had nothing to guide me whatsoever. No lights anywhere. I couldn't see a light of any sort.
- 27:30 And it wasn't exactly pitch dark but it was dark enough to be a big nuisance and I had just about reached the stage where I thought, "I'll sit down here and I'll stay here until the sun comes up." And then I thought, "What if they get the call to go onto the next place some time through the night and I'm not there? They'll leave without me. I'll be marooned here. I'll be able to find help but I won't reach the new place where the landing's being made."
- 28:00 So I made one more extra effort and finally stumbled into the tent and they all looked at me and said, "Where the hell have you been?" I was scratched all over and especially around the ankles where all these tangly creepers grab you. I reckon they reach out and grab you. And I didn't give a detailed explanation. I told them I took the wrong track. I didn't like to let on that I'd been lost in such a situation. The next day we got the right sort of call and off, we got on an aircraft.
- 28:30 We'd got on and were sitting around. We'd got all our gear stacked up towards the nose of the aircraft and we're sitting down near the tail, which we'd sort of ended up on because there was nowhere else to sit anyhow. A distinguished looking person comes on board; an aAir fForce person and he's got not badges of rank on but he's obviously an oOfficer because of the way that sort of - he wore a slouch hat
- 29:00 but the badge on it was different for them but he had no other rank badges whatsoever, which was a common practice during the war in case they were forced down somewhere they could claim they were an officer but they needn't say just how high up the scale they were because they'd really be put through the mill if they were thought to be fairly high. Anyhow, he just glanced down at us from beneath his eyebrows. He put his satchel down alongside of where I was and strolled
- 29:30 off up the front dodging in and out amongst all the gear we had up there. I think he was a bit disgusted about the way we'd packed the stuff on and he disappeared into the cabin up the front. Anyhow, eventually took off and circled down the vValley a bit and came back to a place, a Yankee base. There was four Thunderbolt
- 30:00 fighters sitting out on this airstrip with their engines turning over. They were just turning over slowly. We looked down at them. We were very impressed. We'd seen fighter aircraft out on the strips before and as we went over they all turned and took off and followed us. Came up past us and, and were sitting above us - an escort of four Thunderbolts. I thought, "Hullo, this is something. We're not that important." We're certainly going to a new area,
- 30:30 and we'd be the first aircraft into that area and we went up the Markham Valley and down the Ramon

Valley, past Shaggy Ridge. Now Shaggy Ridge is a place where a horrible fight took part between the Australian troops and the Japs. The area is unbelievable. All the vegetation has been blown clear of it and the Aussies were sitting in their foxtails waving and that as we come past at a very low altitude

- 31:00 and we thought 'that's it', and all of a sudden we turned around and flew back, flew back over it again and this time we got some opposition from the Japs. Traces started coming up out of the bush towards us. They objected to us hanging around too much. They were no doubt worried about what was going to happen, whether we were going to drop paratroopers on them or something like that I suppose. Anyway, we were glad to leave that behind and still, the penny still didn't drop
- 31:30 that it was something more than an ordinary flight. The aircraft had no special markings or anything like that. We flew down the Valley and out over the sea and followed the coastline up towards Wewak which was a big Jap base at the time and when we arrived inside of it the smoke and the fires there, they'd been done over that morning, apparently by Thunderbolts as well apparently and they must have seen the escort above us and out a bit
- 32:00 and we edged in towards the coast within firing range and their anti-aircraft batteries opened up on us and a trace was just drifting out past us and 'oh very nice as long as they keep drifting and don't stop' and we moved slowly on from there. We got sight of the four Thunderbolts in formation above us a couple of times and then we arrived at where the new place it was called Taji.
- 32:30 The landing had gone fairly well. The Japs fell back as they were supposed to do. They fell back to fortified areas generally. And we circled around over the airstrip and one of the, one of the Yanks in the cabin he come back and said, "We'll never get in down there. It's not finished yet." And they weren't. They were still working on the end of the strip laying down the steel matting.
- 33:00 And he said, "It's far too short." But we'd been told this before and we thought, "Hhe's talking off the top of his head." Anyhow, we came down and we made the most amazing landing you ever heard of. We hit the brakes as soon as we hit the strip and we skidded along the strip until we reached the unmade part and went off it a bit and the Yank comes back and he says, "Right," - this is afternoon by now; we'd been flying all day - "Right," he says, "we're not staying here tonight. It's a dangerous place," he says.
- 33:30 "Throw everything off." That's what he said and the doors were flung open and we threw all the luggage and everything off the aircraft onto what was a semi-dry swamp. I grabbed the satchel and slung it out. I happened to know where it landed and we were all standing in a little group there. The aircraft's getting ready to move off and all of a sudden this gentleman steps off the plane and comes straight towards us, looking um,
- 34:00 oh I can't describe his look. It was pretty savage. And he said, "Where is the satchel?" And I said, "It's over there." "Go and get it," he said. I thought, "Gee, he must be something, this one." "I am Group Captain Shirger." He was the head of the whole operation and he'd flown with us. That's what the escort was for. He'd flown with us from Nad...
- 34:30 Yeah, Nadzab. I rush over and grab the satchel, knock a bit of dirt off and hand it back to him. "All the plans for this operation and other operations are in that satchel." And he strode off. There was a jeep waiting for him and off he went. I'd met the head of the whole caboose and under unfavourable circumstances
- 35:00 you could say. I'll never forget him. He was also involved in a jeep accident later on. I was very happy to hear that something didn't go his way but we thought we were very important having an escort and it wasn't us at all. Anyhow, just, just as our aircraft were taking off the Thunderbolts turned around and headed back, dropped their belly tanks along the beach and were going to be escorts for the plane all the way back to oh I suppose Dumpu or one of those airfields,
- 35:30 not as far as they'd come in the first place. But that was our introduction to a new place. The place had been bombed. The Japs hadn't realised that it would be the place to be attacked. They'd defended other places much better further along the line. This, the American idea to attack Taji was something brilliant really because it wasn't expected. They were able to get ashore
- 36:00 and seize the place and only push the Japs back, as I said, to a certain level and then said, "Tthis'll do," while the airstrip's finished completely and they ended up with two airstrips. And we all, we'd make another landing somewhere.
- At what stage were you coming into that landing in that attack on Taji. The Americans had already been there?**
- 36:30 They'd been there about a week or so to secure the place as they called it but they hadn't been able to get the airstrip ready for an aircraft to land any quicker than when we got there. We were put to work straightaway extending the airstrip to make sure it was bigger. But it was an emergency strip. The Yanks were bombing anything and everything with fFlying fFortresses in particular and we were still working on the airstrip standing right alongside it when the word went around - and it was amazing how the word
- 37:00 could get around - that a fFortress was coming in to make an emergency landing. It was running out of fuel and it would have to come down somewhere and it may as well come down there. And we were all

standing on the edge of the strip and it comes in. The waste gunners in it – there's two open spaces. They're not turrets. They just stand there with a heavy calibre machine gun and defend it from that position and they're standing – it's gonna be a crash landing and they're standing in these openings looking quite nonchalant

37:30 and all of a sudden it lost flying speed and dropped straight and hit the strip in front of us with an awful noise, metal against metal and slithered. One wing hit a pile of bombs that we had already fused up lying, laying along the edge of the strip ready to be loaded onto our aircraft. It sliced all the nose fuses off the bombs without one exploding. That was a bit of a miracle in itself and then the aircraft slithered off the strip into the jungle.

38:00 It didn't catch fire because it was out of fuel they said. That was a Godsend, that we had to have fitter armourers remove the remains of the fuses from the bombs that it had hit. It was a pretty tricky job. It took them a couple of days to dig the things out. They couldn't leave them half fused and they were all 250lb bombs.

38:30 **That would have been a dangerous thing, defusing them?**

If one had exploded it would have set all the others off. It would have been an absolute catastrophe because all of our maintenance tents and that were clustered around the strip in that particular part. It would have wiped them all out including us because we were on the edge of the airstrip. It had just missed us. That was another thing that sort of went into my mind. You were immune from all those sort of things but there were a few others standing there at that time that weren't immune. It got them sooner or later.

39:00 **So in terms of the war and the Japanese at Taji, what happened next?**

On our part?

Yeah,

The next, our next move...

The operation – what was the operation to be?

Well it was to gradually surprise the Japs at all the bases. They'd established bases all the way up the New Guinea coast and some of them a bit inland and to protect

39:30 them, they'd sort of made a ring they thought we couldn't penetrate. But they'd underestimated the Americans' strength, material strength in particular and they thought they'd just be able to sit behind that line and defend it until they could get enough strength to have another go at Australia. We, the camp at Taji was an absolute horror. It was an old mission and airstrip – see the missionaries had been in New Guinea for

40:00 ages and used aeroplanes as well. And they said, "You're out on the mission strip." So we took the coast road and drove inland a little bit and here's this mission strip. It had two hills in it. It went up and down and then it went up and down again. And it had been built out of what was called, what is a sago swamp. If you've got enough patience you can use

40:30 the Sago but it's a stinking sort of a process. Anyhow, and the Sago swamp was full of crocodiles. They seemed to favour it quite a bit. First, a few tents had been already put up by the ones who'd made the original landing, they'd put up a few tents. But there was water everywhere and everywhere was soggy. There was not a bit of solid ground anywhere. And they said, "Find a bed somewhere." It was much easier said than done.

41:00 We went in and um, they said, "Wait till night comes. Wait till night comes. We won't tell you what happens but wait till night comes." It wasn't long before night came and suddenly as though somebody had switched the light off sort of thing, it became dark. The place was quiet – we used to have a PA [Public Announcement] system that if we were in any place for any time, we'd set it up and they'd play records over it but there was none of that in this place at all. It was dead quiet at night. There were lights in the tents and I said to somebody, "Aren't you frightened?" That was one of the things that you should avoid really with the enemy so close. I said, "Aren't you frightened that the Japs will see them?" "Won't get any bloody Japs around here. No room for them, there's too many crocodiles," which was true. You could hear the things slithering around and barking. Crocodiles bark and it's an awful sound when it's so close to you. And I wasn't, didn't think I was going to get to sleep.

Tape 7

00:34 **Okay, so you were in the camp with the crocodiles. Did they really pose a danger to anybody?**

Yeah. It was found that they'd taken a lot of Japanese. They'd go bathing in the creek that ran through there not worrying about crocodiles and the crocodiles wouldn't be seen when they went in. He'd be submerged completely and as soon as they got in the croc would have 'em.

01:00 And there was oh the number of crocodiles it's hard to imagine. You looked at certain places and it squirmed with crocodiles. What they lived on other than Japanese I don't know. But the natives were scared stiff of them, which was reasonable enough too. Because they would come into native villages when they were hungry and grab kids in particular. They were the easiest things to get I suppose, but they had a horror of crocodiles.

01:30 We gave them a wide berth.

But they would never come into the camp?

Never, no. The food, we, the food were there just about all the time for them but they never came out of their, out of the Sago fFarm sSwamp which was good. That was good. Anyhow, after a hectic time on the strip carrying out operations – we were actually fighting a war as well as dodging things, they attacked various – our aircraft attacked various things on the coast.

02:00 One day they had a bad day. They lost a couple of pilots. One of them was Squadron Leader McKinney that I'd been his first armourer back in Townsville. He never returned. They saw him hit by gunfire from a small island that he flew over and he went down in flames. He was lost. And there was another pilot lost the same day. The area was heavily defended. We weren't all that far from the big base at Wewak.

02:30 And so that they put anti-aircraft defences, very effective ones on just about every place they could get. Lots of pilots would fly over unsuspecting that there was any anti-aircraft guns on an island and all of a sudden they'd open up on them and often catch somebody. A lot of them got back with damage to their aircraft. But it was a pretty hectic program and then word come through and we were all extremely happy that

03:00 we were going to move to Hollandia, the next place up the coast, a very different place to Taji. There's a huge lake in Hollandia. It's in a big open valley, Lake Santani. It's a beautiful sight from the air. There's little islands on the lake and the lake sparkles. It's a freshwater lake. The township of Hollandia that had been on the coast had been completely destroyed but what attracted us as we flew over the area, there was one, two, about four

03:30 airstrips in the one complex with all wrecked Japanese aircraft. Hundreds of them laying on the ground. The Yanks had attacked it several times from the carrier force. They'd swooped in on them and caught them on the ground and there was all these wrecked aircraft and before we even hit the ground you can imagine a favourite pastime of examining the wrecked aircraft and seeing if there was anything worthwhile

04:00 salvaging from them. And there was nowhere that you could get away from wrecked aircraft in the whole complex. They were just scattered everywhere. Fighter aircraft, bomber aircraft – there'd been a terrible loss for the Japanese. And when we landed there we had a good spot for a camp on the hill that you could see the lake from. It was a beautiful freshwater stream came down past where you could bathe in.

04:30 It seemed almost too good to be true. Well we explored the area around it. Pulled many Japanese aircraft to pieces to get bits of them that we could use. Not for our own aircraft, for our own purpose. When I say for our own purpose, I've got to explain that.

Yes you do.

We built a thing to brew an evening cup of tea or coffee from. It was called a choofer.

05:00 It was made up from parts from enemy aircraft or one of your own if you managed to get hold of bits – valves and one thing or another. It was fuelled by aircraft fuel. You poured it in a tank at a high level. It found its way down through a system of pipes and valves into a coil at the bottom with a little jet in the middle. It fed out unadulterated fuel. You lit it and the

05:30 flame from the little point that you'd lit heated the coil. After a short time, it would go 'choof, choof' and a burst of flame at high temperature would emerge from it. You made a little frame and you put a – well we didn't have billies because – empty tins and rations would come in and you'd fill it with water and it was good water there for a change – not chlorinated. And you put, you boiled your billy and you sprinkled your tea in it or coffee or whatever you'd been able to scrounge around.

06:00 The Yanks only drank coffee so it was often coffee rather than tea. And you boiled a billy and you had a cup of tea or something just before bed time. The big problem was you were hardly ever allowed to complete a proper process, complete process of putting the water in, lighting the choofer, because of the air raids.

06:30 They raided us every night. And of course as soon as the air raid warning went the shots went up in traces. All fires and lights had to be put out so the choofer had to be put out with its lukewarm brew above it and they didn't always go out quietly. Something the things exploded and an enormous fire started which upset the American gunners that were close to us quite a lot.

07:00 We can't have a blackout with you lighting fires. It was quite accidental. We were trying to put the choofer out. The Yanks hadn't thought of things, ingenious things like a choofer.

So just on that subject of ingenuity, you said before that one thing about serving in the war is

that it just challenged one's imagination and engineering. So can you give other examples?

So far as equipment to be used...

07:30 **Yes.**

...like for loading bombs. We never found an idea that saved us the hard work of re-arming; putting the ammunition back into the bins in the wings – never found an easy way out of that. It was all hard work. But gadgets for loading bombs on, hydraulically powered with bits from wrecked aircraft. The hydraulic system was adapted to lift the bomb up just by working a little hand pump

08:00 rather than struggling with it. Oh some amazing things developed from that and once somebody saw a new idea they'd be able to improve on it almost straight away. A lot of them had been farmers and farmers are great innovators, extremely so in some cases and there was a couple of other blokes that had worked in engineering works and their ideas were sometimes more practical than the rough ideas that

08:30 somebody else would come up with but they all worked in together. Once somebody made something, somebody could do it better and they were an ingenious lot really when you come to think of it.

And so was that partly because there just wasn't the stuff that you needed?

Yeah well Americans wouldn't think of making something up. They'd say it must be bought somewhere. It must be available somewhere and they'd wait for it to turn up. Not that they wanted for much. They had an enormous supply

09:00 of ready-made things to do each job that had to be done but it had been worked out a long time before whereas Australians had never had sophisticated stuff that you needed for a war or World War II. You had to have all the gadgets to save you, to do things quicker, of which we were surprisingly slow loading bombs for a start off. We struggled with the things and dropped them on the ground and ...

09:30 did all sorts of things wrong but we got better and we could see where we got better as we went along. The big, the big – we weren't supposed to be bombers actually but we became diver bombers. But the big bombing aircraft that were designed to drop bombs had hoists built into them to hook onto the bomb and lift it up into position to hook it on. This was unheard of.

Like the ?

They had everything in them.

10:00 Yes. Yes everything was installed to work quickly and easily. They'd be able to wheel the – and not only that they had a lot of room under the bomber and we were right down crushed to the ground by the wing span of a Fighter. It wasn't reasonable at all.

Were you able to learn things from the US [United States]?

Yes. We had our WO armament and the sSergeant

10:30 were always out looking around the Americans' units seeing how they did things and that was pretty sensible but the ideas they came back with were far too complicated for us to duplicate generally. They generally came back loaded with some sort of new method of killing; a new type of bomb that had come out or bomb clusters were invented at that time and they brought those things back and they said, "We'll try these out."

11:00 We were continually trying out killing weapons. Even napalm, we tested it. One of the first ones in the Pacific to try it. It was a horrible thing but the Americans were using it so we would have to sooner or later.

Were you involved in one of those operations using napalm?

Oh yes, yeah, yeah. We never reached – well fortunately the Japs hadn't dropped to anything like that. They had phosphorous with them and so did we.

11:30 That was a nasty thing to drop on people because it exploded and everywhere where it landed it continued burning. You couldn't put it out. If it landed on your skin it kept burning until it burnt right through and the gas from phosphorous was choking and they reckoned it killed too. I can't say for sure whether it did. But there was a continual stream of new methods to kill. It became sickening. I can't say for the others

12:00 but it did to me. That we should go to so much trouble just simply to kill the other side. But some of the blokes would say they deserved to be killed anyway and that was that. You couldn't get anywhere. There was no ethics whatsoever in war. The more people you could kill the better – and the Americans we know felt better the more they killed. Well they got the atom bomb didn't they? That was the ultimate as far as

12:30 they were concerned.

Did you come across people though that had a strong sense of ethics about what they were

doing?

No. I never met anybody who felt the exact same way that I did. And I can't say that to be definite because a lot of my mates, we never discussed the war at all. We discussed the sort of things that perhaps we could find when we were out roaming around but never actually discussed the rights

13:00 and wrongs of war at all. We did have a few characters, NMCOs in the squadron, who were politically minded and they had some pretty rough ideas about what war should consist of. You killed or you were killed. That was what they usually quoted between one another. I really think that -

13:30 I was fascinated with the Japanese with the way they lived, the way they thought. I'd read about them right, well from before the time. I used to read about them when they were in China and the sort of things they did then so I was ready for some rough stuff and but when you looked at them when they were taken prisoner, you thought, "Oh they're just a bunch of kids." A lot of them looked terribly young and a lot of them were in poor medical condition

14:00 because they'd been starved. They hadn't been able to get supplies through to them. And it made you think just for a short - and then you put it out of your mind. And you thought, "They're the enemy. I shouldn't feel sorry for them at all even though they've picked up a disease of some sort." You shouldn't feel sorry for them but it was there at the back of my mind that they're people, people too. And when

14:30 you had to wade through bodies as we had to when we come to bag you became numb to that piece of practicality really. They had to be killed or we wouldn't have been there at all.

But when you came across things, I don't know maybe a wallet, a photograph, personal items - that's what brings it home though isn't it?

15:00 Yeah. I've got, see a bag I've collected, somebody's collection of photos from home, Japanese home photos and, and postcards from their kids with drawings that the kids had done and sent out to their parent and well I got a rough idea of who the parent was from the photos. The American intelligence told me who they were, a pretty ruthless sort of a character and that the children were probably grandchildren

15:30 - and not his they knew a bit about him and it was just the sort of collection you might have at home yourself. There was grandma and grandpa and uncle so and so and aunty so and so sort of thing and when you looked at them they were taken at home conditions in Japan and there was a lot of writing on the back and I couldn't read it but the intelligence officer could and they were just about

16:00 everyday doings back at home; what they'd done, what the kids had done and he'd kept 'em but he'd dumped them and that's a different story and he'd dumped them all in a heap because he'd withdrawn from the position he was in and I'd better tell that from the start I think. Anyhow, I can move on rather rapidly. We were at Hollandia...

16:30 **That was on Biak was it?**

Yes, yeah, yeah. They'd established - oh I can move on from Hollandia. It was the next place anyhow. We were told, we were told that after we'd been operating from Hollandia for some time enjoying nice - it was beautiful climate. It was even and not tropical although it was in the tropics and there was a breeze off the lake at night and it was all too good to last - that we'd go as an advance party to Biak.

17:00 We loaded into the C-47; put all our equipment in. We were an advance party so we had to take everything we needed to operate from. And we were just about ready to take off and there was a hammering on the big double doors and they were pulled open and there was a truck there with the nose section of a P-38 complete. It's got to go to Biak. And we said, "There's no room."

17:30 "Oh yes there is," says the Yank officer. "Oh yes there is." And they proceed to jam it in on top of us and we're sandwiched between the nose of a Lightning fighter and all our gear and we couldn't move anywhere at all. We were stuck there. And they're starting to run the engines up as they usually do especially before a long flight over enemy territory and they, one had run up perfectly. The note was just even all the time but the other one didn't seem right for some reason.

18:00 He was just giving it its last burst and "Bang!" the oil line blew out and of course oil went everywhere. "Oh dear," the Yank crew chief said, "we're lucky that didn't happen halfway up to Biak." He said, "We would have had to come down in enemy territory somewhere." And I thought, "Yeah and we wouldn't have been able to get out either. We were jammed in behind all this stuff." "We'll fix it," he said. "We'll fix it. Just fill in time. It'll take about half an hour or so. Better for it to happen here than on the way up there."

18:30 So we just sat and it was stinking hot being in an enclosed plane. No airconditioning. Never heard of airconditioning in those days. And you couldn't open windows or anything. They were all sealed. Anyhow, eventually they got it mended and taxied out onto the strip, overloaded, terribly overloaded because of the weight of our stuff and we were taking a few bombs with us as well just for good luck.

19:00 And we'd just cleared the mountains that surrounded the Hollandia complex and off we went. We flew for hour after hour, up the coast, over enemy territory all the time. You'd see barges, Jap barges on the beaches here and there. Nobody fired at us anyway. And when we arrived over Biak it was such an

amazing sight. The, where the landing had taken place, the Yanks had bombed it so much that every scrap of

- 19:30 vegetation had gone. It was just bare coral but with this curious glinting parts amongst the coral. Some parts were greyer than others. Anyhow, it was obvious there'd been a shocking sort of a battle there. We came in - it was a beautiful airstrip. We pulled up. We were sitting there getting hotter and hotter and then somebody opened the doors. Well it rocked us. The smell that came in.
- 20:00 The smell of rotting bodies. It just came in honestly and we all just scrambled out but it was worse when you got out because the smell was everywhere. They just hadn't had time to bury anybody and they were just rotting, just rotting in the sunshine. And then we looked down and the ground was covered with metal fragments from bombs, shells, water bombs. They hit the coral and explode above ground level and because of that,
- 20:30 they can't penetrate all these weapons and they leave a covering of metal fragments, all jagged and some of them even overlapping one another. We couldn't believe it. We were getting around shuffling through them seeing, seeing when you did that of course they piled up one bit on top of another. Anyhow, we tried desperately to adjust ourselves to a new place. The Yanks were getting around holding their noses. Even that didn't seem to help.
- 21:00 They said, "We've got a place for you to camp." They bundled us onto a truck. Another truck was loaded with our gear. I don't think we ever saw it again, come to think of it. Anyhow, we headed for where the camp was to be, right on the coast and we only got a short distance and we were pulled - a bloke jumps out, a Yank jumps out waving a red flag in front of us. We screeched to a stop and we're all up the front
- 21:30 of the truck. We could see everything in front of us and we realised where we were. It was an artillery battery lined up with five guns, five 75mm artillery pieces all facing inland. In between them, there's a Japanese skull sitting on a stick in the ground facing inland as well and with the mMarine's cap. It's rather like a sailor's cap, the Jap marine's cap. All grinning and facing inland and then the first one fires.
- 22:00 The shell goes screaming past in front of us and heads inland and explodes not a very long way inland. The next one fires and so on. This is repeated time after time while we're sitting there in the truck. Couldn't get past them because the shells were at such an angle they would have probably hit us rather than the Japs inland. It eventually came to an end. The fella comes out waves the flag again and disappears and we'd drive past the artillery. Not far and we turn in
- 22:30 and there's a camp all ready for us. Yankee tents; a bulldozer parked right in the middle where it had been levelling out the ground and then they'd surrounded it with tents and we all had a laugh: how the devil were they going to get the bulldozer out. And somebody said, "Yyou know what the Yanks are like. They'll drive over the tents." Anyhow, we were going to be in for a lot of trouble. There were several air raids the first night and they were pretty savage ones.
- 23:00 **First your arrival in the camp. What were you sensing, what were your impressions. I mean you'd seen the worst...**
- Well we hadn't seen the worst...
- You smelt the dead - was it all a bit crazy?**
- Going by that alone we were going to have a look around and see where the smell was really coming from and within a couple of days we got a free day and we headed towards the second level of the island. A narrow road led up to it and we had to walk through a Yank camp
- 23:30 to get that far and they had a go at us. They said, "Hey you goddamn Aussies. You going up to have a look at the patch?" And we said, "What's the patch?" and they said, "You'll find out. It's on the top there." And they said, "Englishmen fight for their King. The Japanese fight for their Emperor and the Americans and Aussies fight for the souvenirs." I can remember a Yank saying that and in a way that was
- 24:00 sort of the way it was too. We kept walking up this little track wide enough to take a vehicle and we'd get near the top and there's this huge gun mounted just at the top of it. It's been hit by a direct hit and the crew are laying around it, some of them in pieces and we examine the gun and it's an English gun. We found out later it had been taken in Singapore, uprooted, brought out and mounted
- 24:30 at a place like Biak on the other side of the Indies. It faced sea. It was supposed to protect something and then we looked inland and there was nothing as far as you could see that was more than about six inches high. Everything had been mown down completely. There'd been buildings there cause the stumps of them were still there. The Japs had created a small community there. They'd been living in a town on the second level of the island and it had been wiped out completely.
- 25:00 And what hadn't been blown up had been burnt because there was ash everywhere. And the bodies, they were everywhere. It was appalling and no sign of any other habitation. There was no sign of Yanks at all. The area was completely deserted. That was the patch. And the fighting had been so desperate that everything had been reduced to, almost to ground level. And then there was something very strange

- 25:30 and I mean strange. One of the buildings had been a brothel. The Japs couldn't do without their ...and it had been fairly elaborate apparently. It had been hit by a direct hit from a shell or a bomb and the ground as far as you could see around was covered with condoms and just everywhere. Some, a lot still in their packets and none of them seemed to be damaged and somebody come up with the bright idea,
- 26:00 a scientific angle that once they were hit they would just simply float free and all come down again and they wouldn't actually be damaged unless there was much heat there. There was always some character like that and we got the sudden brilliant idea that we'd collect some of them and this wasn't because we'd expected to be able to use them but there was another reason, a very good reason. On the aircraft, the gun itself is inside what's called
- 26:30 a blast tube. It projects from the leading, it projects from the leading edge of the wing and the blast from the gun which is quite considerable from a 50 calibre machine gun is directed through that so it doesn't damage the fabric of the wing. It's contained by this tube and it projects about that far outside the leading edge. We were supposed to, every chance we got, cover that tube up because it's inclined to suck dirt in while the aircraft's on the ground
- 27:00 and grit around a gun is the worst thing you can have. And some - we all realised at the same moment that we could cover the blast tubes with condoms. Which seemed a marvellous idea at the time. They were so easy to put on. You slipped them on and the aircraft were pretty dangerous with them on too actually. So we carried back as many of them as we could and used them the next day.
- 27:30 The C.O. wasn't all that pleased with the idea. He thought there must have been something better but he said, "If it works, it's all right. Keep using them." There was a tendency for them to be sucked in through the blast tube while it was still on the ground. They'd wrap around the muzzle of the gun and then they'd catch fire when it was fired. But there was also an embarrassing thing that one of the pilots had to take one of the aircraft back nearly to Lae I think and he landed
- 28:00 with these condoms and there was Mercer standing on the side of the airstrip. I doubt whether it would have worried them at all but he felt embarrassed that he had all the guns covered up with condoms. We used them for quite a while, even carried some of them on to the next place.

Was there any the Emperor's cCondom, the Number 1 condom?

They were aArmy issue. They were clearly marked.

Yeah, I think they were called Number 1.

But, but...

Anything else?

In that particular area? No.

- 28:30 **Because it's peculiar that the condoms survived the blast. There must have been other things.**

Well they were just so light I suppose. I'd like to have seen it happen. It must have been amazing to see a shower of them go into the air at one time. We voyaged a little bit further inland and there was an island on the second layer was honeycombed with huge caves. You could look down into them and they were terrible looking places. And we reached one that

- 29:00 was particularly awful. The Japs had retreated into it. Well they were safe from the bombs almost down in these things and then they started committing suicide in huge numbers. In the one we looked into there was a platform at one end where we were told later that their commanding officer had ritually committed hari kari with the cutting the gut for
- 29:30 a start and then having his head severed with a Samurai sword and with all the ceremony. But most of the men had committed suicide with grenades just simply by setting the grenades off - I've got one of the grenades - and holding it to them and letting it explode which made a shocking mess. It blew bits of them everywhere and the bottom of the cave was covered with bodies all in parts. The, somebody had got in there
- 30:00 and the Americans I imagine had removed the C.O. of the particular unit. He would have had a Samurai sword with him for one thing and it would have been worth getting in there to get a hold of it. So some Americans had removed it but they hadn't done anything about all the other bodies that were there. And that was weeks later to when the event had happened.

And where they just left there?

No. No. There was supposed to be a special effort made. They sprinkled lime over them first and left them for a few days and then poured fuel,

- 30:30 generally petrol or oil over them and said 'bye' to them and burnt them on the spot. It wasn't practical to try and remove them from the caves. If they were up on top, they'd try and bulldoze them into heaps. There were no niceties about war and funeral practices at all. Do you want me to keep going?

I've got a question. Were Australian servicemen and women for that matter

31:00 **issued with condoms?**

Yes. No you had to buy them. No. And the aAir fForce ones were horrible. Some blue. Heavy duty of course and they were not avail - well nobody asked for them up there. There was nowhere to use them. But it was a big thing with the Japs and with their literature that you often came across, the pornographic literature

31:30 that they had. They were big on that because their religion doesn't touch on sex at all. Neither the Shinto religion or Buddhism or any of those religions. No they had to have their way. And it was always two separate buildings. One for the officers which often contained bathing facilities as well. The ordinary ranks didn't. They had theirs a bit away which wasn't much chop as a rule.

32:00 They often murdered the girls that they had there before we caught up with them. Not caught up - we weren't chasing the girls. That sounds a bit wrong. They, when they found they were going to lose control of an area they killed off all the females they had and just left them laying there. Killed them in a pretty nasty way often too.

Is that something that you personally came across?

32:30 Yes, yes I've seen them. We all saw them and we were all disgusted with what the Japs had done. The first one was at Taji. There was a brothel right on the beach; a couple of huts, palm straw huts and they just sliced the girls up in a very barbarous sort of way and just left them. Some of the blokes weren't surprised at all. They looked at 'em and said that's what you expected them to do.

33:00 They - we didn't see - there was no Japanese girls. They were all from Indonesia. And um well it's part of the way they operated I suppose. They'd been there for years of course. They hadn't just established themselves. They'd been there for years and we'd interrupted the whole thing by coming back through what they considered to be their territory by that time.

33:30 Anyhow, within a couple of days we found we couldn't use our aircraft because the Americans wanted every inch of the strip available to them. They were bringing in huge numbers of aircraft to bomb targets right up on the northern or the western tip of New Guinea and we'd have to keep our aircraft out of the way. So we had nothing to do for a couple of days at a time. There wasn't anything we could do if they wanted the strip. But then we set off

34:00 one day, hitchhiked along the coast road and by pure chance studying the cliffs that were just inland a short distance and decided this was the spot to have a look; to head inland and sound, sound it out. We walked through an American camp and they didn't say anything at all. They looked at us but didn't say anything. We kept going. We came to unexploded ammunition laying on the ground.

34:30 All American. No sign of the Japanese which was a bit of a worry. You generally found trails that they left behind them. And then we stopped at a particular point where there was a few objects on the ground that we wanted to examine and I happened to glance up at the cliff face and there's an observation post halfway up the cliff. A roughly made thing mainly from logs and things and there happened to be a jutting

35:00 log sticking out and they'd anchored everything to this jutting rock. And I thought, "Oh we've seen these observation posts before." They pull out of an area and they go inland and just desert these things and just for one moment it came to me, "It might be worth having a look at it." So, two of us scrambled on up the cliff and when we got to it and looked in, it was unbelievable. Everything was scattered all over the floor.

35:30 All these photos and maps, bank books, cheque books, you name it they're all just laying scattered around as though there'd been a cyclone inside. And then I spotted a wine bottle laying on its side and the wine was still trickling out of it. There was a couple of plates with half-eaten meals on. That gave me a bit of a nasty turn. "We're not far behind them here. They've just nicked off. They've let us come in."

36:00 We weren't armed. I never ever carried a rifle and neither did my mate. I thought it was provocative to go prowling around with a rifle; that if you were unarmed they'd probably take you prisoner but that wasn't what they had in mind either. Anyhow, we started gathering up stuff as fast as we could; raked it up and put it into containers of any sort. There were some cardboard boxes and we loaded everything up and there was a back door

36:30 to the thing which led onto a little trail which led half way along the cliff face and into what we called a defile. It's a gap in the cliff that you can retreat into and hold it securely where holding an open space was almost impossible. I went a couple of steps along and something told me, "Don't go any further," and I turned around and came back and right at the back door

37:00 of the observation post there's two rolls of silk material; bolts. I don't know if you know how they used to sell material, wound over tightly. Beautiful silk material with patterns, complicated patterns on them. Oh traditional patterns. They weren't really complicated I suppose. They looked a bit complicated when they were rolled up. And I thought, "Now I'd like to take them but I couldn't possibly carry them."

37:30 So I made a note in my mind that I'd come back and get them which was terribly optimistic of me. Anyhow, off we headed with our, our booty; found our way back to the road again and with the idea of

coming back as soon as we possibly could but we stopped at the control tower on the strip and we knew the American intelligence had an office there.

- 38:00 And some of the things we picked up we were pretty sure were intelligence material. They were photographs of aircraft, new aircraft in Japan that they hadn't actually used at that stage and photographic negatives, packets of them. I thought, "Gee, the Yanks would be interested in them." There was nothing we could do with them except hand onto them for the rest of the war and then it could be too late. And I had this big paper map - huge thing - so we goes into the Yanks
- 38:30 and said to this guy, "Is the cCommanding oOfficer here?" They looked at us as if to say, "You got a cheek asking for an American cCommanding oOfficer haven't you?" Anyhow, a lieutenant came out and said, "What have you blokes got?" Anyhow they could see we were loaded with stuff. He said, "Where have you been?" I said, "Down near the defile." He said, "Oh, what were you doing down there?" We said, "Oh you know, searching around."
- 39:00 He said, "That's an awful dangerous place to go." He said, "Our blokes haven't been in there for a long time. It's defended," he said. I pretended I didn't know what he was talking about. Anyhow, he said, "Pput it down." We dropped all the stuff on the counter thing that they had. He fished through and separated all the negatives and photographs of aircraft and a crowd of officers
- 39:30 in front of a big map of the Pacific taken in Tokyo. He weeded it out. He said, "Look we've got tons of material from this place. We really scooped the pool." Anyhow he said, "Yyou'll get these back some time," he said. You know I thought, "We'll never see any of those again." And then I produced the map. He spread it out. "Oh there's a few of these around," he said. And I said, "Tthis one's got markings on it."
- 40:00 "Hmm, so it has." It was chalk marks, double hatch every here and there. They'd marked airfields. He looked at it carefully and said, "Hmm, very much the same as the others we've got except for this," he said. And there was an airfield that they didn't know about at the bottom of the Bay where these islands are marked with chalk. "Oh," he said. "I'll make a note of that one," he said.
- 40:30 He gets out a map of his, an American map, marks the airfield; puts a couple of rings around it. It would have got attention within a short time no doubt. He said, "Kknow what, their maps are amazingly accurate compared with ours. Ours are just crude. They've got every fine detail." He said, "Tthey must have been working on compiling these maps for years." Cause they used to go fussing
- 41:00 around in little boats and things like that with a camera strapped to them and their thick-rimmed glasses and nobody gave them any attention. They were just supposed to have been tourists before the war and they were collecting all these, taking bearings and making up these marvellous maps. Anyhow, I thought, "He's not going to give me the map back, I suppose." Anyhow, eventually he said, "Rright, you can keep the map," he said. And I've still got it. Anyhow, we did go back the next day...

Tape 8

- 00:32 **Well we hadn't finished the map, the map story.**

Oh yes, yes. Not a lot more to the map one. Oh yes there is. Oh yes there's a sequel. Yes mm.

When you're ready.

The day after we'd handed the intelligence material in, we felt very good. We'd done something useful for a change and we get back to camp

- 01:00 with all we'd salvaged and been allowed to keep and we had quite a few of the blokes around us: "Where did you get it? How did you get to it?" I gave them a fairly rough description of how to get to the place. It wasn't too exacting and this was something that I worried about afterwards because I knew some of them would try to get there sooner or later. Anyhow, we suddenly found out
- 01:30 that we had the next day free as well. The Americans were carrying out another massive raid. We weren't being able to use our aircraft. I thought some of them were in a hurry to get away early in the morning. They had breakfast in a hurry and were out on the road hitching a ride on the road which takes them down to where the de ffile is. We took our time because we knew exactly where to go. They didn't know where to go.
- 02:00 Anyhow, in good time, a couple of us caught a lift along the coast road and when I thought that we were in the right spot - it was very hard to pick the right spot. You could see roughly where the entrance to this defile was. It was sort of a cleft in the rock surface but it had a terrible lot of bush around it as well. Anyhow, we thumped on the
- 02:30 roof of the cab and the Yank says, "Wwhere do you think you're going?" And we said, "We had some luck down here yesterday." He gave us a very strange look, which sort of said, without him actually saying anything, "You shouldn't go in there." He was probably one of the ones that had tried to get in

there or driven the Japs back into that area. Anyhow, he shook his head and off we went and we hit the bush. The bush was a little bit different to what we'd noticed the day before.

- 03:00 We weren't on exactly the same track. All the scrubby bushes were covered with redback spiders as though they were covered with berries. We thought they were berries for the start and then we examined them and they were all spiders as thick as you could imagine over these half dead bushes. We avoided the bushes as much as we could, naturally and found that we were just a little bit off the proper track. So we edged over a little bit further and picked up the track we'd picked up the day before.
- 03:30 We were more cautious this time because we thought they might have moved back in there again and be waiting for us. Dodged around a bit remembering the instructions that we'd been given by the commandos back in Townsville: "Don't walk straight towards anything. Walk as though you were going to walk away from it and then double back." Yeah, we reached it and there was an uneasy air about the place. It
- 04:00 wasn't occupied certainly. When we went in everything that had been left had gone. It was completely cleared out. The Japs had been back and scoured the place for anything that we'd missed the first time. This was a bit of a worry because how far away were they? Were they just waiting for us to go in there and then they'd grab us or what? Then I walked through and out what we called the 'back door' onto the track and I looked down and the two bolts
- 04:30 of silk had gone. This left a very strange taste in the mouth. They had been back and they'd removed every single thing that we'd left. And I thought, "I'll go along the track a bit," just to see just how far you could get along there. I was cautiously treading along. I come to a very thick patch of bushes and there was a burst of machine gun fire from the left hand side, from the cliff side and I knew it was a Jap machine gun
- 05:00 because they sound different to ours. They're a little bit slower and they make a funny noise and the stream of bullets from it disappeared down below the level where I was standing. I had nearly walked into the thing. I stopped dead. I don't know how long I stood there. It was for quite a long time without making any noise. I was listening. I thought, "Something's got to make a noise. Either the crew of the gun or other Japanese that were around it or
- 05:30 whoever they fired at is going to do something." They'd go crashing away through the scrub or something like that. Anyhow, I gave up eventually, turned around, walked back through the observation post and I said to Bill, "We'll go somewhere else today." "Yeah," he said. He was a terrible dull sort of character. So off we head in the opposite direction back towards the airstrip. Not going to go into the details at all.
- 06:00 We found other caves along the cliff face; explored them. They had um, the Japs had been driven out some time before. They'd been living in there. There was beds made in - well not proper beds made up, frames for beds every here and there. I took one track and Bill took the other one and there was a clattering noise and I sang out to him, "What are you up to?"
- 06:30 "I've just walked over a landmine," he said, "and it didn't go off!" I said, "Are you disappointed?" I don't think there was any further conversation on there. And I hear he picks the thing up and clanks it down on top of the bed frames that were there and I went around to have a look and here's this huge landmine plate type thing. It's alive and there's no pin through the detonator on it. I said, "Why didn't it go off?"
- 07:00 "Ooh, I dunno. Careless people to leave things like that laying around." It was just the sort of return you'd get from him. And we worked our way back all the way to the strip going in and out of these caves. The whole cliff face was riddled with where the Japs had been living. No more excitement - oh there was one bit of excitement. I came out to walk along the cliff itself and an American came out of a camp with a Tommy gun and he looked up at me and
- 07:30 fired the Tommy gun at me. But I was out of range and I knew it because they've only got a short range. The bullets belted into the cliff down below me. He just - I stood stock still. I thought if I run he'll have another go at me for sure. He must have realised I wasn't a Jap surely. They wouldn't - yes, they might expose themselves in that way. Anyhow, he gave up;
- 08:00 dropped the gun alongside and walked back into his tent. I continued the journey but it's a big shock to have a Tommy gun fired at you. You're on the wrong end of the thing altogether. Anyhow, we got back to the strip and the Yanks were flat out flying their mission for that particular day. And we got back to camp and the day gradually ground away and the news come out that four of our blokes were missing.
- 08:30 And, they'd probably got lost somewhere. And then more news come in that another one of our blokes had been picked up by an American medical unit with a bullet right through him. He was alive but it was a sniper's bullet and they're small calibre things that had gone right through him; Col Toohey his name was. They put him in hospital and he had an interesting story to tell. He'd been walking up one of the many tracks that lead
- 09:00 into the cliff face and he'd come across our blokes lying on the track all dead. A machine gun had got them and we wouldn't have known about them for a long time if it hadn't been for him escaping with this bullet through him. They didn't use the machine gun on him. The sniper picked him off before

they'd used the machine gun. So that meant an effort to go and reclaim the bodies.

- 09:30 A group went out to try and get them including some armed Yanks and as soon as they got within range near the bodies, the Japs opened up on them. It was sniper fire and they, well one of the group was our WO armament and he had all his gear on, heavy webbing gear and a pistol, which he must have looked a real sitter for the snipers.
- 10:00 Anyhow, a sniper hit him and the bullet penetrated through the heavy webbing gear and stopped, but punctured his stomach and they managed to get him out. There was more fire going on and they took him straight to hospital of course. And they were still left with the problem of reclaiming the bodies that were laying on the track. So the Yanks said, "We can fix it." They brought in a tank, a Sherman tank; took it right up to where
- 10:30 the bodies were and opened fire with a heavy gun on it at the Jap positions. That shut 'em up. There was no more trouble from them and the bodies were reclaimed. An American chaplain went in with them. Apparently with the Americans if they're reclaiming bodies they like to have a chaplain with them. Probably something to do with the Catholic religion possibly, I don't know.
- 11:00 Anyhow, they were able to pick them up and bring them out. They'd thought they'd all been killed instantly with the burst of the machine gun fire. Those blokes were the ones that were standing on the stern of the Anson Burlingame as we sailed through the Coral Sea and they looked back at Australia and one of them said, "I wonder if we'll ever see Australia again?" It was just a remarkable sort of coincidence that
- 11:30 that prophecy sort of thing had come true at a later stage at an island thousands of miles away from where we were then. The excuse given by the authorities wasn't a true one. They didn't notify their relatives immediately. When they did get notified months later it was that there'd been an aircraft accident whereas they were actually doing something that we shouldn't have been doing. But they couldn't admit that that they'd been so lax,
- 12:00 and the cover up started from there. Many years later, we had a reunion in Canberra at the WWar Memorial and we were just about to go in and look around and Jim, the chap who was editing my story said, "This chap here wants to meet you. It's
- 12:30 about the blokes that were killed on Biak." I thought, "Gee whiz." "He says that he's a relative of one of them." And I looked, I went over to this chap and his wife and the friend that was standing there and he said, "My name is Wattison. Kenny Wattison who was killed on Biak was my brother." I thought, "'Gee whiz, is he gonna blame me for what happened or what does he know?'" He said,
- 13:00 , "What was the true story?" He said, "Jim just said that you were actually there and you'd know what happened." And I said, "Yes, I'll tell you," and I told him the exact story. And he says, "The lying b's [bastards]. They put a different story altogether over to us; that it was an aircraft accident that Kenny was lost in." And I said, "It wasn't." He said,
- 13:30 "By the way, I should introduce myself properly. I'm something Wattison, a criminal lawyer." He was a well-known criminal lawyer in New South Wales and he'd been making all these investigations trying to find out what happened to his brother all that time ago and come to a dead end every time. He said, "Well now I know. It's terrific," he said. And he said, "You'll say yourself that you were doing something outside of orders?"
- 14:00 and I said, "Yeah, very much outside of orders." "Well that puts me at rest." He'd finally found out what happened to his brother after all that time. They'd deliberately fobbed him off with all sorts of stories about terrible accidents.

Is that because they didn't want to cause a stir?

There could have been compensation possibly. Well there certainly would have been a stir from their top command over who was the C.O. of the SSquadron at the time.

- 14:30 He'd have been raked over the coals for not warning us not to do that sort of thing. But nobody did up to that time or afterwards. They let us go, still let us go roaming around, even though we sort of felt we had an excuse from thereon because we'd collected intelligence material. But it was still terribly dangerous. Well we were sticky beaks I suppose. We were curious about what the other side did more so than what our side did.
- 15:00 What our side did wasn't exciting at all.

What did you learn about what the other side did. What sort of opinion did you form?

Well there were the stories about all the - what the Yanks deduced from all the photographs and they were continually putting out stories about what made the Japanese tick. Like there was service magazines coming out from America and they were picking up these little bits;

- 15:30 generally pretty nasty about what the Japanese were really like. Some of it was absolutely false about how they behaved in their home life for instance but they were pretty nice at home. Well so nice that we went back to Japan at a later time to check to see many years, well quite a few years after the war and

they acted as pretty homely sort of people. But there's still a few ex-servicemen wandering around in Japan even

16:00 at that time and you felt uncomfortable with them and occasionally they showed hatred, particularly because they'd lost the war I imagine. Their um, shocking damage had been done to their island. Tokyo had been just about razed to the ground and thousands, well over a hundred thousand had been burned alive in the fire raids that

16:30 they carried out so it was tricky ground. We can move on from there?

Yeah like we've..

Is that it?

Hopefully two tapes and then some. Um it would be good to get...the next stage.

Yeah, just going through. We moved from Biak across to Ninfa. Those islands were so close together that we could actually see the landing taking place

17:00 from Biak. They were dropping parachutists on Ninfa. The sun was glinting on the parachutes. They weren't camouflaged so it was brilliant and we moved across within a very short time to operate from Ninfa. It was a fairly pleasant place - another coral island, of course - and we carried out an enormous array of attacks on land targets. They were everywhere. The Japanese were thick on that end of New Guinea in particular

17:30 and some of the targets were unnecessarily dangerous ones and yielded nothing.. They dropped bombs on them time after time and probably didn't kill anybody but just destroyed the building that were there sort of thing.

Sorry at this time did the Japanese have any power in the sky?

No, no. They were wiped out in the sky. We still got night raids. They managed to fly an aircraft to countless airstrips late on each day.

18:00 They'd fly them in from safe places further into the Indies and at night they'd bring them out and raid us. They'd raid us every night. Perhaps every couple of hours they'd be over but you never got more than about four or five in the air at the one time. And they were up to all the modern tactics of dropping 'window' as it was called; metal strips that would foil the radar direction that the Yanks had on their heavy anti-aircraft guns. They didn't know what to fire on. They were up to it there

18:30 and yes, it was, you could tell the end was coming. It was just a matter of how long it would be. Keeping you awake all night and they virtually did was a bit of a strain because you had to work flat out the next day in the blistering sun. Um, we did something there that I really objected to. We were issued with British

19:00 bombs and time fuses. They were a special fuse that were inserted into the tail part of the bomb; all British production it was. I thought only the Yanks would do things like this and they were delay fuses. When the bomb hit the ground the fuse was activated for a few hours. Later on it would explode. They were dropped on the airstrips in particular that the Japs occupied and when the Japs

19:30 would be trying to mend the airstrip they had a habit of just filling in a hole and not wondering about a bomb if it happened to be down below and a bit later the bomb would explode. Now we said when these things arrived, "Aall they've got to do is screw the thing out." If you tried to screw the thing out the bomb exploded then and there on the spot. Very cunning. They'd used them over Europe so it was all right. Yes, 'the Germans used them,' so yes, why not use them against the Japanese.

20:00 **Did you have any qualms morally with that sort of thing?**

I hated handling them. When you screwed that fuse into the tail of the bomb when it was loaded onto the plane, you'd think now we're not going to be able to take that out again. There's no way of getting it out. It's got to be dropped on the enemy from there on. And you always thought, "If something goes..." There's a little capsule of acid inside it and if you turned it the wrong way it broke that little capsule and the acid detonated

20:30 the whole bomb. I always felt a bit dicey about using them. And another thing we did - I'm not going anywhere there - another thing that we did on Ninfa is drop Japanese bombs on the Japs. They'd left a whole heap of bombs behind them when they retreated into the interior of the island and they were beautiful bombs. They looked nice. They were black with Japanese writing on;

21:00 the red band around the end which showed they were high explosive and they even left the fuses for them as well. Very much like our own fuses but it was good of them to leave them or we wouldn't have been able to use things. We loaded up all our aircraft with Japanese bombs. They were lighter than ours so we liked using them. And off the whole squadron went with Japanese bombs to belt the Japs with them. There was an evil thought behind this and when the pilots came back they said,

21:30 "They're terrific. Is there any more of them?" They were highly explosive. They were sort of anti-personnel bombs really. They said the area covered by the explosion was bigger than the Yank bombs.

So we got a hold of some more and loaded them up and they went off again; dropped the Japanese bombs on the Japs. We soon got tired of that. Ran out of fuses or something I suppose anyhow. Then we continued the attack with a more regular sort of armament.

22:00 And we moved up to Morotai, across the Equator. As we were flying across the Equator, lying on top of all our equipment in the aircraft so we could touch the roof of the aircraft, the crew chief sang out, "We're crossing the Equator," and I reached up to touch the metal and it was frozen, absolutely. Had to pull my hand away from it.

22:30 And we were gradually freezing. They kept a pretty high altitude all the time. We flew over countless little islands and eventually we landed on Morotai. We were surprised. There's been a - the Japs had been attacking it from the air from all their bases in the Halmaheras, the old Spice Islands. They had countless islands there and they'd been belting the new base. The Yanks had gone on. They were in Philippines and all they were interested in was getting to Tokyo.

23:00 Grabbing the Philippines the way they did was a great boost for them. MacArthur was able to go back, wade ashore, say, "I have returned!" and all this sort of thing. But we were copping it. All our supplies were being cut out. We were not even getting food at times. It was all going straight to the Philippines once the Yanks got there. Why stage it through Morotai? Then gradually the Australian authorities took over Morotai.

23:30 We had Australian aArmy rations which left a little bit to be desired; very basic but able to keep you alive under all sorts of conditions.

What did that consist of?

Bully beef and biscuits (laughs). Or biscuits and bully beef, one way or the other. Synthetic butter that we called axle grease. It looked like axle grease, tasted like axle grease and would have been marvellous for axle grease, I'm sure.

24:00 The Australian AArmy started to build up on Morotai. More and more 9th Division uUnits started arriving and settling and we knew something was going to be cooking but the next move was probably going to be an Australian, all-Australian affair. No more chance of American - the nNavy, the American nNavy stayed around but all their other forces disappeared. All their aAir fForce units went up to the Philippines. We were getting left behind.

24:30 Anyhow, late in August, no, April of '45 we were told straight out that a new phase was going to start. It would be all Australian from now on and the first target would be Obo One. And then the whisper went around. It took a while to get around that that was Tarakan. And we arrived at, we sailed from Morotai. It was a pleasant trip. I liked sea travel even in wartime.

25:00 It was quite pleasant to be at sea. It wasn't too hot. There was a breeze and night- time was mild. We arrived off Tarakan at the end of April. We moved in through the darkness and this gave me a bit of a shock. We were cruising along level with the shore. It was dark but you could see where the shore was. There was a few little fires going -

25:30 must have been natives huts or something like that. And I'm looking towards the shore all the time and I see something coming towards us through the water fast, leaving a trail of bubbles behind it and it went right under us. It was a torpedo. It had been launched from the shore. The Japs were good at this. They'd had success at other landings. They had torpedo ships from the shore. Of course they didn't have any ships left that they could use so they operated the things from the land. It went right through it,

26:00 and I'm there looking fascinated at the water because the ship was loaded with explosives of all sorts because the airfield construction unit was on the same ship with us and they had dynamite, TNT [Trinitrotoluene] and you name it in huge quantities and I thought, "Gee, if that had hit that would have been the end of us completely." Later on we found out that the same torpedo passed several ships on the way out and was lost outside somewhere.

26:30 But landing ships - LSTs that we were on - a landing ship tank - they're so shallow drafted that even when they are fully loaded, torpedoes can go underneath them without ever touching them unless they're fired right along the surface and the Japs knew it was a ship that they had fired at but they didn't know what sort of a ship it was. And we arrived just off shore early in the morning. The nNavy's all lined up and there was hell to pay. They'd plastered the shore and everybody - all of us were very happy about that of course.

27:00 See the bullies disappear in clouds of smoke, flames and dust. We didn't give a thought to the local population who were probably trying to dodge all this fire. The Yanks sent in all sorts of things: rocket ships as they call them; ships, barges that had rockets mounted all over them. They'd get close to the shore and they'd blast them into the shore. But the shoreline didn't look too good. It looked awful muddy. It was black mud and all coated with oil

27:30 that had leaked from punctured tanks on shore. Because the place had been bombed for weeks and weeks beforehand. Our liberators, our own liberators had done a lot of the damage. And we thought this is going to be a bit dicey. How are they going to get ashore? And after a while one of the gunners in the position just above us turned around and said, "Here come your boys." And we thought, "Oh yeah?" And

we looked around and here comes the 9th Division in all sorts of amphibious vehicles and barges and oh it was a great moment.

28:00 The bloke with the guns says, "Gee they're great aren't they?" he says. And they sailed past. We were the closest into the shore. I thought it was a bit closer than we need be. But they all passed us, hit the shore and the amphibious vehicles were supposed to crawl up on the shore no matter what it was, especially over the mud. But they'd pulled up in the mud. The tracks kept turning but they stayed in the one position. That didn't stop the Aussies. Over the side they went

28:30 and waded through the mud and up the bank. There was no fire coming from the positions on the shore because they'd all been knocked out but it wasn't long before the Japs got back into some of them and had started to fire on the first ones that got ashore. It was chaos for the rest of the day. They were storming ashore certainly and spreading themselves out but there'd be sudden explosions and all sorts of stuff would fly into the sky. The Japs got into a barge and tried to get to us.

29:00 And then a cCorvette came in, an Australian cCorvette and blew them out of the water and um, quite an exciting day really. We had a Yank destroyer that stuck behind us on the seaward side, backwards and forwards, firing just over the top of us at targets on the shore. It was a Yank destroyer, USS O'Bannon. I remember it's name. It was hitting targets on the shore but the shells were just clearing our, the rigging on the LST,

29:30 and he was protected from any return fire that might come from shore. I'm sure that's why he stayed right behind us.

How far offshore were you?

Oh a few hundred yards. But it seemed awful close. Well within gun range from the shore if they'd had something left. But the battering that they'd received kept them out of action for days but every time we'd go to try and beach the LST to get ashore,

30:00 they'd open up on us with mortars and they'd drop mortar bombs all around us because they were back in a protected area and we came within their range was our lookout really. But it was a strange sort of situation in the way they, the Japs knew exactly. They had the advantage. They'd been there for years. They'd established positions and no doubt

30:30 rehearsed what they would do if they were invaded at any time. They'd fall back to a certain point. If they were driven from it they would congregate somewhere else. Whereas our blokes had no idea what was going to happen next. Didn't deter the Aussies though. They threw themselves into the fight. A lot were killed; an unnecessary loss, heavy loss of life amongst the army.

Why was the LST - seems like it was up there early before the amphibious landing vehicles came, yet you're not landing.

31:00 **Why were you up there so early?**

You might well ask. I think something went wrong with the arrangement of the shipping. Why should be so close to the shore and the ones - all the ships with the troops on were further out to sea and they all had to come past us to get in. The thought was I think that we could get ashore perhaps even on the first day. That we'd be nice and handy.

31:30 We'd be the first one ashore. We had the airfield construction unit on us, with us. And they would rush along the area that was taken, along the beach area and start work on the airstrip. But some of the blokes from the airfield construction unit had seen the aerial photographs that had been taken just a short time before we left Ninfa and they said, "Wwe're not going to fix that place in a hurry at all."

32:00 There were overlapping bomb craters all over the airfield all full of water and there was no filling available to fill the holes in and that's what the intelligence must have known surely. Men went ashore days before the actual landing and reconnoitred around a bit and only occasionally came under fire from the Japs that were defending the place even.

32:30 But they didn't get as far as the airfield. They didn't know how bad it was.

What was the intention for you?

We were supposed to help mend the airfield. Our aircraft weren't going to arrive until the airfield was constructed so there was nothing for us to do in particular. We filled in time by wrecking houses. Anything made of concrete, carting it to the airfield and throwing it into these craters.

33:00 We spent week after week after week doing that. Threw in anything we could find. Bits of machinery even were thrown in. Of course they disappeared. Of course they disappeared quick smart - even quicker than the lumps of concrete. They tried filling 44-gallon drums with all sorts of odd things and dropping them into the craters. They just vanished as well. God knows where they ended up, probably still sinking somewhere. But the whole area was just a great bog.

33:30 And somebody had told them in the intelligence report that there was quarries on the island where they could get sandstone. Well there wasn't a stone on the whole island, not a stone. It was just soft mud with oil oozing up through it out of the ground. So it was a horrible mess and the poor army blokes are

trying to drive the Japs back into the centre of the island where they knew the Japs were going to make a stand but up ridiculous

- 34:00 hilly country that was covered with jungle; losing men all the time. We even lost a V.C. [Victoria Cross] Derekek, 'Diver' Derek. He was killed. That hit the aArmy blokes quite a bit. He got the V.C. for doing something absolutely amazing back in New Guinea; charging machine guns there. They thought he was immortal after surviving something like that but the Japs got him.
- 34:30 Anyhow, quite a lot of officers were killed leading platoons and it got to the stage where we couldn't fix the airstrip and it affected the aArmy because they thought we're fighting for nothing. There was even rumours went around that we were all going to be withdrawn from Tarakan and landed somewhere else, which possibly would have been sensible. But the other landings all went ahead, one after the other. And they built their airstrips quickly.
- 35:00 They had different, different land to work on and , we eventually got something that resembled an airstrip. It was a lot of soft areas joined together and covered with steel matting, the Marsden, famous Marsden matting. Each steel - don't know if you've ever seen any but there's a bit of it around Australia. They always steel strips perforated, all joined together, bit like a Meccano set or Leggo or something like that.
- 35:30 Anyhow, we got it and it looked like an airstrip and they flew our aircraft in. They managed to bounce up and down along this flexible airstrip. Some of 'em had accidents on it because the wheels didn't grip properly. If it was wet, particularly on smooth steel. All the perforations went right through and the rough side was underneath, not on top where you could have got a grip but it wasn't meant to do that they said.
- 36:00 We operated - carried out operations; bombed various places, provided top cover for the each landing that comes - well some of them around the top of Sandakan. Our aircraft flew over Sandakan soon after they'd arrived and one day there was plenty of prisoners there. The next day they flew around and there was no one there.
- 36:30 It was a very bad sign. The death march had started. And it was our aircraft probably flying over that made the Japs make the decision that they weren't going to give up the POWs [Prisoners of War]. Even if they killed them in the meantime. Now we know that the death started later the same day as our aircraft flew over. And the blokes would come back elated: "They're still there. They're still there." But they weren't going to stay there.
- 37:00 And it wasn't long before they started running out of targets. The Japanese were driven right back into the centre of Tarakan and a few surrendered which was a bit of a surprise, but the war was over. It was virtually over for them well and truly and then, we got the surprising news one day. A couple of small - a small bomb has been dropped on Hiroshima. Only a small one but it has destroyed the whole town. And that's what, that's exactly what the news said.
- 37:30 It didn't mention anything nuclear at all. We all as armourers looked at one another and thought, "What the hell have they come up with this time? A small bomb that will destroy a town in one go?" And more news followed it up. And then there was Nagasaki. And then, a great surprise, the war was over. And I can remember the scene vividly. It came over our PA [public address] system late one day.
- 38:00 We were all out enjoying the evening air waiting for an air raid probably and the news come through: the war is over. Well everybody just stood and looked at one another. They - I remember looking at some of my mates and just simply - we didn't say anything. We just looked at one another. Because we'd expected at least two more years. We'd expected to be sent home, re-equip ourselves with Mustangs and go back and continue fighting for another couple of years.
- 38:30 We lost a pilot unfortunately on the last day of the war. He got shot down. So that was the bad news that sort of balanced up the good news that the war was over. But we were all puzzled. We didn't know what was going to happen with us. Some of our blokes had already left for home. A small ship called in one day and some from the front of the alphabet were selected and some from the tail of the alphabet were selected
- 39:00 and we were in the middle so we stayed and they sent some of them off home. They actually arrived in Australia just before the war ended and were able to celebrate back here. We had to wait for a while. Um, air transport virtually vanished, especially American. We had to rely on our own transport squadrons such as 36th Squadron. And one day they said, "Right, there's a bunch of you going today if you can get ready in a hurry." And did we get ready in a hurry.
- 39:30 Get down to the airstrip - that airstrip that we'd fought to establish. There's a DC-3 there waiting and scramble on board. You've never seen such a scramble to get on board something that was heading for home. And we travelled back towards Morotai. We'd been travelling for oh probably a couple of hours and we came to an island that we had spotted on the way to Tarakan...

- 00:34 Yeah we approached a small tiny island that consists mainly of a perfectly shaped volcano. The only space at the base of the volcano was enough to hold a native village. They'd be Indonesians of some kind of course who lived there. We'd noticed it on the way to Tarakan and as we sailed past it we thought what a perfect sight it was.
- 01:00 There was a little trail of smoke coming out of the volcano and you could see the little village on sea level. A few little boats at sea even. But coming back, we looked as though we were just going to fly past but we were all on one side of the aircraft looking at it because it was such a beautiful sight. And all of a sudden the wing drops down and we turn and head towards the island. We thought, "Ooh that's nice. We'll be able to have a look at it at close quarters."
- 01:30 Anyhow, we get down. We keep going and going and the volcano looms up in front of us closer and closer until you could see the individual rocks on the surface of it and then, we start climbing up, up and up and we reach the rim. We were in an Australian aircraft mind you. And we go over the rim and down into the crater itself and if hell is like that I don't want to go there.
- 02:00 It was a seething mass of sulphur burning and lava bubbling and we kept going down and down and then we started to turn around. We do a complete circuit inside the volcano. We're nearly choking by this stage because the vapour coming in and I feverishly tried to remember what happens to an engine when the only intake is sulphurous air and there's some horrible thoughts flicked through my mind very quickly and then we started to climb up out of the volcano,
- 02:30 over the rim and away. And we're all sitting there a full plane load looking at one another, speechless and our eyes streaming because of the vapour that was there. And it was hot too. The heat coming up was amazing and somebody says, "Mad bloody pilot." I can remember those. Apparently, the bloke had flown past it a few times I suppose
- 03:00 but with a load on board he thought I'll have a look inside or - Australian pilots were like this - or at least I can say I've flown around. I've flown around - we'd all flown around with him of course - inside a crater and off we head back to Morotai. When we landed at Morotai a few of the blokes went up to the pilot as he left the aircraft and they said something that sounded like,
- 03:30 "What on earth did you do that for?" It probably wasn't those words. He just waved his hand and walked off. We were all flabbergasted to use a term. Yeah. Anyhow, they treated us marvellously at Morotai. The war was over. There was endless food supplies suddenly. Fresh butter, fresh meat. Oh all the things we'd longed for for all those months and never even seen. The air crew had seen it. They were supplied with fresh food all the time.
- 04:00 I think they were kept separate from us because of the different food supply. They were supposed to be at their absolute peak and having fresh food and fruit and things like that was going to help them. It wasn't going to help us. We just did the hard work and it's been mentioned to us in more recent times that the pilots had no idea of the way we were treated. They'd never been near our mess of course. And it was a mess in more ways than one.
- 04:30 They thought we got much the same sort of food. They really thought they got much the same sort of - or we got much the same sort of food as they got; fresh food every now and again. We never even saw fresh food.

So you only knew them in passing?

Yeah, yeah. You got to talk to them sometimes at the strip when they were about to take off for a raid. You'd get a few words. You got a lot of words from them sometimes when they came back and found out that one of the guns hadn't functioned properly. They had a lot to say then.

- 05:00 But, but the ones that we knew for a start off were a different sort of person to the ones we finished with. For a start off they were a nicer sort of bloke, often experienced but towards the end they were students that had just graduated enough to be able to fly a P-40 and they knew it. And they had very little to do with us. We were a different class of person. And some of the ground staff found out the background to some of the ones that were doing the flying
- 05:30 and actually knew them. They had known them in civil life and knew the families and they said it was no wonder that they'd act like that. We're not all in the same boat at all.

So they were obviously they were the educated elite?

Yes, they'd been through college at least and most of us had only had state educations. Only a couple of our blokes had got to college.

- 06:00 We were just the sort of turnout from the state school system. Good enough to do the rough work; learn what we were supposed to do but it was assume that we knew nothing else besides that particular job.

But they depended on you?

They certainly did. And some of them got it rammed home to them especially so far as engine function went. The mechanics would work like hell to get engines running absolutely perfectly.

- 06:30 It was a thing with them that, it was a pride the big 12 cylinder engine worked perfectly for the whole

trip even if it had been hit by ground fire it was still supposed, still supposed to work properly and the riggers had pride in their work; that all the controls worked properly and were adjusted properly.

07:00 So attacking targets the planes got badly damaged sometimes and they'd come back – the hydraulic system would get hit nearly every time and they'd have no brakes when they arrived; no flaps and they'd go hurtling along the strip and end up crashing into something. It was the only way to stop and they'd blame, or try to, try to blame the mechanical people. It wasn't their fault at all.

So did they proffer advice?

07:30 **The pilots suggest changes and would it work the other way as well?**

Often they didn't have a clue as to what had gone wrong. They'd suddenly lost control. But it was a bullet or a fragment of a shell that had cut a line somewhere and some...unless they got actually hit themselves they'd blame the mechanics. If they got some of the fragments in their bodies somewhere they'd only blame themselves then. They'd been too slow over the targets or something like that.

08:00 But it was always somebody's fault.

Did you and the other members of the ground staff, the mechanics and so on feel perhaps that you could fly the planes as well?

Well we could just about we reckoned. We'd seen it happen so much and we used to have to sit in the cockpit to do the daily inspection and sometimes mechanics would be working on the engine at the same time and they'd say, "Oopen up the throttle to so and so," they'd say and

08:30 you had control of the aircraft for quite some time. It was great to sit behind an engine of that size. And they'd say, "Rev her up a bit," and they'd rev her up a bit. "Ooperate some of the outer controls," and something like that. "Yyes, yes." You knew exactly what to do. And the thought did come to you sometimes: "I'm sure I could get this up in the air." It wasn't a matter – getting up in the air was one thing but getting it down was going to be a bit of a problem. And I don't know if anybody had ever tried it really.

09:00 You see in films sometimes the prisoners, POWs escape and they run onto an airfield, hop into a plane and take off, you know. Well there's no such thing as a key for a military aircraft but to be able to do it really especially from the other side and know exactly what to do is stretching a bit. Anyway, we sat around on Morotai enjoying ourselves; overfeeding ourselves which was a terrific thing to be able to do.

09:30 We all started to get fatter I'm sure in the time we were there. But getting back to Australia was a matter of waiting for the Liberator sSquadrons to become available. They'd stopped bombing as soon as the war ended of course and the gun turrets had been taken out of most of them and the inside had been opened up to a shell of an aircraft and they were flying people back to Australia as quickly as they could

10:00 and bringing up more replacements. They couldn't desert the area altogether. They had all these islands to control and the Japs were playing up and the natives were playing up. Anyhow, one morning they said, "Right, you're all going back today. You've got to be on the Morotai flight back to Australia." We couldn't get there quick enough. We all lined up alongside the Liberator and the bloke

10:30 that was flying ours was a wWing cCommander. He looked a very serious sort of bloke and he says in a very loud voice: "One kitbag each." I had two kitbags. I thought, "Hello." One had all my souvenirs in it. I thought, "Well I'm not leaving this behind. I'm going to try and bluff it out." All the others only had one kitbag. They weren't carrying a lot of stuff back like I was. He inspected the whole crowd of us that were going to fly this particular aircraft.

11:00 He walked along and I was at one end and he looked down and he said, "Are those kitbags both yours?" and I said, "Yes." "Oh all right," he says. "All rRight." But gee if I'd been in the middle I think he would have really kicked up but I was the last one in the line and all the others only had one kitbag. So, "Tthrow them on," and we had to throw them into the aircraft through the side window that doesn't have any glass in it. Piled all our stuff inside.

11:30 "Now hop in!" and we all scrambled inside and distributed ourselves around this great cavernous space. Most of them stayed in the tail section. Bill and me went forward into the bomb area where the bombs were usually carried in the bomb bay and there was bins in there. They carried something, certainly not people. They weren't shaped for people at all. We squeezed ourselves into these bins.

12:00 It was going to be an uncomfortable ride because it was open to – the bomb bay doors don't close exactly too. There's a little gap between them and the air circulates around. And it was great to hurtle down the strip and into the air and heading in the right direction. We flew for hours and hours. We flew over Timor at one time. And North Timor or East Timor doesn't look very nice I can tell you. We flew over a couple of other islands where prisoners

12:30 were supposed – like Ambon – we didn't fly over Ambon but some of the smaller islands where prisoners were being held. The pilot had to check what was happening to them; that the Japs hadn't started to execute them or something and of course the prisoners all came out apparently. It was hard for us to see but one of the pilots said all the prisoners ran outside as soon as we fly over. And we reached

Darwin late in the day and flying down Arnhem Land and we'd been looking

13:00 into the sea most of the time with little islands scattered here and there. This was solid land and an amazing sight, the escarpment on Arnhem Land. And we were looking at it and the navigator came back and said, "You're home!" Never forget what that meant. (laughs) And we said, "How far away from the mainland are we?" and he said, "That is the mainland," he said. "We're going to land at

13:30 Darwin. We'll have some tea there and then we'll continue the journey through the night." I thought, "Gee, that's going to be fun."

What did that mean when he said, "You're home"?

We'd reached Australia after all that time.

But I mean, thinking that you were saying when the end of the war was announced you said you were puzzled mainly...

Yes.

...for some time.

Yes.

Was there ever a time when you were able to celebrate between Tarakan and Darwin or was it only coming home?

14:00 Well we were heading in the right direction all the time. We were heading south where before for a year and seven months we'd be heading north all the time from one place to the next. It was always nearer Japan. Whereas on this flight we were heading in the opposite direction and we were heading back towards home. And it was quite a sight. A very rugged place but it was home. Well it was Australia.

14:30 Long, still a long way from actual home of course but it was the mainland, not just another separate island. There'd been that many islands that seemed a bit hopeless. Anyhow, we landed at Darwin and they gave us tea and there were all sorts of strange things on the menu that we hadn't seen for quite a long time. Fresh food of various kinds, and somebody said, "But no beer!" I don't know what they expected really.

15:00 We were only going to be there for a couple of hours. Anyhow, they refuelled and when we came out to take off. We were getting on board again and the pilot came up to us and said I'd better tell you now, we're going to make fast time tonight. I'm going to climb to 17,000 feet and fly in a straight line from here to Laverton. And we sort of looked at him, 17,000 feet it's freezing especially

15:30 at night over the continent at that height and most of the air crews would use oxygen. He said, "It's the safest way to go. Nothing at that height I can fly into," he said and walked off and left us. We grumbled amongst ourselves at having to fly at that height and we did fly at that height all through the night in one straight line. We were not sorry that we'd be home the next morning

16:00 mind you. But we arrived at Laverton and there'd been a heavy white frost that looked like snow on the ground but we didn't mind that either. We all piled out. There was no guard anywhere at Laverton airbase. Not a sign of a person at all. We just unloaded our aircraft and headed towards the station which is called 'Aircraft' as well. We lines up on the station and in no time

16:30 a train comes out with a couple of carriages on it heading towards Geelong; pulls up at the station and says, "Where are you guys going?" And we said, "We want to go back into town. There's no way of getting there. There's nobody anywhere." And he says, "I'm supposed to go to Geelong." He was a funny old bloke. He'd been retired from the railways for years before probably and been put back because of the war. He said, "I'll take you in." We said, "What? Back into Melbourne?" and he said, "Yes there won't be anyone waiting at Geelong anyhow."

17:00 And that's what the railway system had deteriorated into. So we went backwards into Spencer Street. We said, "What will you do now?" "Oh wait for somebody to tell me what to do," he said. He was well past retiring age so I don't suppose he'd give a damn about what would happen. We booked our baggage into Spencer Street Station and into the cloakroom there. Very happy at doing that sort of thing.

17:30 The bloke behind the counter sort of stared at us. We all looked a funny colour. We'd been on Atebrin for two years, supposedly to prevent malaria and we'd got a good tan and we all looked very strange. And we walked up Collins Street. It was tremendous to be able to walk up a city street with something firm under your feet and a few people around.

18:00 Office workers no doubt going to the jobs. And there were sheilas in the street. We hadn't seen girls in the street for - well we saw a few in Townsville but from there on there was nothing like that at all. Bill turned to me and he said, "You like being home?" and I said, "Ooh yes." We went to the nearest accommodation place for servicemen and there were a few of them spread through a place the size of Melbourne.

18:30 You booked yourself in so you could be sure of a bed that night. Otherwise, you could be roaming

around all night. A lot of servicemen and ex-servicemen wandering around and then we just went out and we walked around Melbourne for the whole day. We strolled out to the cricket ground and had a look at it. Walked over the bridges over the Yarra. It was amazing. It was all so strange after a couple of years and no

- 19:00 no rush like there had been during the war. It was all sort of been switched off. There wasn't the number of vehicles moving as quickly as they could to get from one place to another. People looked different. The strain that they'd probably shown unconsciously during the war had gone. But there were some anxious looking people because the POWs were starting to arrive back. They'd arrive at a certain time during the day and they'd all
- 19:30 be transferred into vehicles with volunteers driving them. And driven through town to mainly to the cricket ground, to be sort of checked on to see what sort of diseases they brought back with them and so on. Some of them they'd brought everything back with them. Some were in a shocking state and thin. The next day, Day 2 we went out - we were told we should report to Melbourne Cricket Ground.
- 20:00 The RAAF had one of the stands just about entirely where you had to check in when you came back from service overseas. They didn't examine you to see if you'd brought back any nasty diseases at all but they asked you an awful lot of questions and at one stage, two or three of us that had just come back lined up and a girl came along, a WAAAF [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] and said, "You're all ex-POWs by the look of you. Over there."
- 20:30 It gave us all such a shock that apparently we looked so crook. Anyhow, we convinced her that we weren't all ex-POWs and she redirected us to another place where they gave us ration cards and leave passes for a month I think it was. We were a real problem because they didn't know where to put all these people that were coming back. You could tell they were worried because the people
- 21:00 behind the desks sort of looked at you and frowned on you as much to say, "Wwell you're another one. You're adding to our problem." "Report back here at such and such a date." And it was usually at least a month that you got off and now this is an awkward bit. I'd contacted my family at home and said I'd be home that particular night. Well I didn't get home that particular night at all.
- 21:30 We got celebrating in Melbourne, the two of us and it was much too late to get back to Ballarat that night. They waited for me apparently back here on the station and so I got back the next day. I think my parents were a bit horrified that I'd deteriorated to such an extent over the time. Because I certainly, I know I certainly looked different to what I was when I left to go there. But an awful lot had happened
- 22:00 during that time. They didn't ask a lot of questions. I didn't know what to tell them. I produced the souvenirs that I brought back. I thought that might impress them. It didn't mean a lot to them. It was from a different world altogether and there was the story that went with the things that I didn't bother to explain. I just assumed that they'd be happy to see me back.
- 22:30 It was mentioned how soon would I be getting back to work again (laughs) which I thought was a little bit rough. Anyhow, things went from one thing to another. They decided to take me down to Healesville for a holiday. It was sort of a guesthouse sort of thing that existed in those days; private houses that operated as a guesthouse.
- 23:00 It wasn't a very lively place at all; visited various things around. There was the daughter of the house which I was quite friendly with. She was quite pleasant. Played piano nicely and that.

Sorry were you going to say something?

We visited various things in the region of course.

- 23:30 And then, something that didn't please me a great deal. We were joined by another girl. She had been associated with a Yank and had a small child and she joined up to us very, very closely. I couldn't get rid of her. I tried all sorts of things to shake her off. I suppose that was a bit mean when you come to think of it but two's a crowd and her and her young child were just too much although she managed to shelve the child off and there was two girls and a bloke together,
- 24:00 which was an unnecessary complication. So everywhere we went for a while there was three of us. I used all my ingenuity to try and change the situation and managed it a few times but not enough. So when we went back to Melbourne I left a message with the daughter of the house that she should catch up with me in Melbourne and she did. That was a victory I thought.
- 24:30 Even more so than against the Japanese.

Well it had been a long time since you'd had female companionship?

Too long altogether. And you don't realise it till you get back. And there was one thought come to me while I was writing the book and while we had time at Tarakan in particular, there were days and days where there was absolutely nothing for us to do. I filled in most of the time by studying the Japanese language, the characters and I've still got the dictionary that I had to copy out

- 25:00 useful characters. A thought came to me, how did we all manage without any female company for all that length of time? We didn't talk about it much at all. A certain amount of pornography circulated

around which only reminded the blokes of what they were missing I'm sure

- 25:30 and a few people that today would be called queer congregated together and lived separate from the main squadron, including a padre at one time. It puzzled me. I knew nothing much about that kind of sexual activity. So it didn't worry me at all. Nobody talked about it much
- 26:00 other than 'them' being a separate lot from 'us'. And that went on for quite a length of time. The authorities apparently approved of it that they lived together. But there was no - oh we had another padre at another stage and he didn't approve of it and he let some of his flock know about it too but we thought it was mainly a bit of a joke.
- 26:30 People who had lived in the city had come into contact, especially from Sydney, quite a lot. They sort of accepted that there was a third sex, as they put it in those days. And they um, they thought it was all right. But we who had lived in the country areas were isolated from that sort of thing at all. It certainly wasn't talked about - well not in our circles. It may have in extremely common circles but we weren't prepared
- 27:00 for it but we weren't surprised. We had one member of the medical section even who was one of them. We all kept an eye on him very carefully. I had to particularly because when I was back in Cape Gloucester when I had to stay in the mMedical sSection all day long because of my complaint and I watched him very carefully.
- 27:30 He manoeuvred quite well but um, didn't achieve anything.

How did you manage to fend off the advances?

I was awake up to him. He prowled around. I can still picture him very very clearly. He had this prowling. Because there was often only the two of us left there during the day when the operations were being - not their operations - military operations or air operations being carried out.

- 28:00 There was only the two of us left there and , he'd act in well what was to me, very strange ways. And I often wondered what happened to him. I suppose he went back to the old ways. In peacet time I dare say he had his group of friends but in the services the rule was and it was in print, none of that sort of thing took place at all.
- 28:30 You could get kicked out almost straight away if you got caught. But it went on in the squadron for the whole length - yeah almost the whole length of the time that we were away.

Can I ask what sort of numbers?

About half a dozen. Mmm. We knew them all by sight. There was one bloke from Ballarat actually. I haven't seen him since we came back but I still remember his name and I won't mention it. It would be not proper at all.

- 29:00 But they were never openly scorned or anything like that and different, from our side of the fence we openly spoke to them but never went into their area that I know of. There was that. That just about covers the sex angle doesn't it? Not terribly...

Or lack thereof?

- 29:30 Yes, the lack. I don't know how all the blokes - especially the married ones. They went through torment being separated. A lot of them had got married just before or during their final leave even, which seemed a bit of a ridiculous sort of thing, but they complained all the time that they missed their partner; bitterly complained. But how they managed to - most of them when I come to think of it in later years had managed to be able to get back to home at an early stage.
- 30:00 I think that they complained that there were reasons for it; that it was playing on their minds too much; couldn't do the job properly. We had one of them in our tent at one time and I used to pity him. Well he was only 18 or 19 and he'd got married just a week before he was sent to Embarkation Depot. And the sort of letters -
- 30:30 I don't know what the content was but he'd write and write and write and you'd say, "Wwho are you writing to?" "Oh the missus, the missus," he'd call her even at that stage. He'd only known her a short time. And he must have poured his heart out to her. Whereas most of us had nothing much to write about. Most of us were being fairly careful not to commit ourselves to anything back at home through the mail because letters can be kept. A lot of them apparently were too.
- 31:00 **So who were you writing to? Your family?**

No, and to the girl down in Hamilton. We wrote the whole time to one another and I saw her. I went to see her when I come back. We spent Christmas together; the first Christmas back.

When you were writing was there a sense that the relationship was ?

I was keeping it at arms length sort of. I didn't want to commit myself at that stage. I thought, "No, I'll wait until I get back and see how things are." But by the time I got to see her I'd already met a few other people

- 31:30 and I sort of changed my mind. I sort of changed my mind a bit but I thought, "No, I'll stick with it. She wrote all this time." But when I went to see her, the first thing she started doing was showing me houses that were up for sale. I thought, "No, no, no, no, not yet." And it was all very good but she got married to somebody else
- 32:00 shortly afterwards so I didn't break her heart or anything like that. But she had a sister that I was terribly wary of and she came to see me some time later. Norma probably knows the date but I can't ask her now. It turns out that her and her sister -
- 32:30 there was only the two girls in the family - had been married in a double wedding. Heather, this one's name was, was quite happy to tell me all the details about what the wedding had been like but something happened to break up the conversation. She hadn't just come to Ballarat. She'd been on her way back from Melbourne and she'd broken her journey and come to see me where we had the shop. And
- 33:00 that was that. Everything had sort of settled down. Norma had turned up in the meantime and we had become very close and then went on to get engaged and then married and then the family arrived. It's an easy way of sliding through it like that.

How did you meet?

- 33:30 Hmm? How did we meet? Her father - her parents had a shop further up the same block as we had the shoe shop. So I saw her and sort of fancied her a bit, you know you could see her out of the front of the shop stacking fruit and things like that so I thought, "This'll... This is worth trying, this one." So I managed to visit the shop for drinks. They served drinks and I managed to get there quite often and chatted her up
- 34:00 as the term was in those days. She seemed to comply fairly well. Not that she didn't have any other friends. I was a little bit wary of the other people that she knew but I thought, "Well I've just been involved in a war that was won so I'll try and win this one." And I did. Yes, yes.

So did your experience in the war give you -

- 34:30 **I mean it sounds like you were a fairly confident sort of person but how did those experiences change you do you think?**

Yes. I've looked back on it many times and I thought it was terribly stupid things to do and wondered if I'd been older would I have been still inclined to take the sort of risks that continually presented themselves especially throwing yourself at the enemy the way we were and taking serious risks.

- 35:00 I think in a way it altered my future quite a bit. I found myself in a world that risk-taking didn't achieve anything much because of what we were up against. In the shop where we were it was a serious situation. Two families had lived off the income from the shop while I was away during the war.
- 35:30 Most of the stock had been sold and most of the income had been used up and there was not capital to work with and I could see that it was going to be a terrible struggle and the bank had already had an overdraft and we had the overdraft at the bank, pardon and they kept pressing to do something about it. And they kept saying, or the bank manager kept saying
- 36:00 "All you've got to do is borrow money and go out at it in a big way." I became immediately suspicious that that wasn't going to be the thing to do and I formed the opinion that banks are terribly ruthless people. They'll trap you if they possibly can. So we struggled on for a while and then it reached the stage where the bank became pretty firm and they said, "But you can still get out of it."
- 36:30 You're in a bad spot but you can still get out of it. You need the capital. You've got your own home?" "Yes." "We'll send somebody out to have a look to see what we can advance you using that as security and probably enough money for you to do what you want to do." There was lots of things that I wanted to do but the cash wasn't available and I didn't want to tie myself up too much.
- 37:00 So they sent their supposedly - and I've always been surprised about this - he did a survey and came back with good information. Yeah. I don't know how they would have assumed that a house on a hill completely on its own with nothing in that area at all, no neighbours at all could be such a good risk. And I went in to see the bank manager and I still remember the situation. He was sitting there behind his big desk
- 37:30 and he said, "We've investigated your case and how much money do you want?" and I thought, "No. No. No. I'm not having a bar of this." I said, "You mean you'll lend me whatever I want?" and he said, "Yes." And I thought, "No, no. If a bank says this it means no." So I decided there and then we'd get out of the business. Simple as that. I wasn't going to traipse around and try and get another deal.
- 38:00 I thought they could all be the same because in those days after the war it was only banks that were lending money. They'd done quite well during the war as well. And I thought, "No, we'll drop out of it. We'll sell what we've got in the way of stock and I'll find something else to do."

You say 'we', so are you talking about your family?

Yes. Mother owned the building. Dad had died and the building had been left to her.

38:30 But the stock had been left to me which was an awful sort of a tie-up and the stock was becoming worth less because it was getting out of date as time went on and I was threatened by the proprietor of the local Myers store that he would get me out in no time if he wanted to. They were the sort of words he used. "We can do it whenever we like." They were much bigger than you are.

39:00 And at the same time our sources of supply started to dry up one after the other. They put the pressure on. We were going to end up without any stock at all. They even bought out two manufacturing places in Melbourne and closed them down that we had been dealing with; closed them down. And I thought, "If you're that ruthless, I can't get out quick enough."

39:30 So we managed to divest ourselves of the situation and the building sold quite easily so Mum was quite happy. She had money to live on. I was left with extremely little because the stock didn't bring a great deal. We struggled on away from the original building for a while and then I knew a chap in Ballarat who was a photographer.

40:00 He'd inherited sort of this photography business. It was Thornton Richards, one of the oldest photographers in the business in Ballarat. I got to know this chap that had inherited this business and when he found out I got out of the footwear business he said, "Come and work for us." So I became a photographer quick smart.

Just like that?

40:30 Well I'd been doing photography freelance for some time. The young chap that worked with us in the footwear shop had a knowledge of photography and he said, while the shop was still operating, we'll work together as a couple doing freelance work. And we did. We did all sorts of photographic work and did quite well. He was

41:00 a very forward sort of person. He'd push himself in anywhere where I wouldn't. He gathered work from all over the place and then we got connected with another photographic firm in Ballarat. This is before I joined Thornton's of course and we did freelance work and it was amazing how much there was to do at that time. Hardly anyone had their own cameras or cameras that were any good.

41:30 They just started to filter through when Germany was reconstructed and cameras - good cameras started to come in from there. And then of course when the business folded up the other chap went off on his own; did all sorts of work, toured Europe at one stage and I started working for Thornton Richards. One of our jobs was stringer for the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] in the early days of television.

42:00 That was interesting.

INTERVIEW ENDS