

Australians at War Film Archive

George Riddel - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

01:13 **So tell us about where, when you grew up George.**

I grew up on the North Coast. I was born in Brisbane. We had a farm. My Dad was an ex-serviceman from the First World War,

01:30 and he bought this property between Yandina and Eumundi prior to the First World War, because his parents had the bridge, the gate house, the bridges which took the traffic across the railway line, and that's the start of that. And he

02:00 used to be on the length between the Nambour and Yennora and Cooroy. He's have to pull the pumper in those days - they check the lines. They don't do it any more now don't think, there's too many trains. In those days only a couple of trains a day, and war always made a big difference, and

02:30 they were there for several years and one of my uncles was born there, matter of fact. There was a woman come up to the gate and found it couldn't be opened, it wasn't opened for her, and she went into the house and my grandmother was having a baby on the floor, they were twins. One survived.

03:00 And then they went to Brisbane later on that's - he didn't work much after that. He had rheumatics in Scotland. He got very, a lot of rheumatics, and it was a real problem to him, but he survived it all right, and went to about 84. And,

03:30 then, on my mother's side, they come from Brisbane. And then Dad met my mother through, she used to have, she lived down the Valley [Fortitude Valley], and run an open house at the weekend for the boys. And she had six girls actually, and so, no, there was, you know, they had

04:00 jolly good, jolly good time. They were all members of the Valley Church. The old Methodist Church in the bottom. I think it's a mission or something now for darkies. And anyway, that's one, my origins, and when I was born in Brisbane, and took us up to the North Arm was the place. It doesn't exist now, it's on the

04:30 railway line. You go through it, but the station's gone. And, the main highway runs through it too, but it's only a small village. And it's slipping into the distance now. My father was a farmer, first of all a timber

05:00 cutter, on the property. He had 160 acres of which was virgin bush, which started him off, and he had ill health in the war, too. And we eventually went to Brisbane in 1935, '36, and so I was, that's after I finished school

05:30 I didn't, went to the Yandina school, not the Yandina, Fairrydale School to start with. And then, ...

Sorry John, there's just a little bit of noise coming, it's coming from you rubbing the leg of the chair there.

06:00 **Okay, continue on.**

When I started school, it was four and a half miles from our place, used to follow the bullock wagons up there, and a few incidences there. One day I was coming home, a couple of us, there was only 14 in the school actually, first year, but it was

06:30 interesting. In those days a provisional school, different than the schools today, only give them about a six week course and, and that was it and, that first year I had, first two years, I had one teacher and the next year, the third year, the chap next door to us, he got his eye on this lass and, the first one,

07:00 and he married her, so that's the way things went in those days, and then I spent that year there. A couple of incidences there was a bit of fire around there, only across the creek It was a very deepwater creek too, and the tree had fallen down and there was a bee hive in it, me only about this high.

- 07:30 I like honey, so, skipped over and grabbed a lump of honeycomb, dripping with honey, "This is beautiful," then took off. And of course I was late by then, and wanted to know why I was late. "I had a bit of a problem." So anyway, she said, "I can smell honey."
- 08:00 She says, "Give us a look at your bag." Opened up my bag and it's dripping with honey, all over everyone out of the honeycomb. That was that incident. Another incident was been a big storm coming home, this same crossing and there was a bridge across it, it was a pretty rough bridge, it was all made of round saplings and,
- 08:30 come across, it was up above my knees. And I come home. My mother was white with worry. I says, "I'm all right. I got home. You wouldn't want me to stay in the paddock with that bull, would you?" and she said, "No." I said, "That's why I come home." I used to go through the forest and ride brake-boy with the bullock wagon for the
- 09:00 different bullockies [bullock wagon drivers]. A lot of timber was cut in those days there, and it was taken to Eumundi, and we went from there and end of that year, ...

Sorry George, can you just describe a bit more the work you did with the bullocky drivers?

I only drove on the... I was the brake-boy.

- 09:30 **Just explain how those teams would work.**

Yes, yes, they loaded up with timber, big logs, some of there were up to six feet in diameter, depended on how many they could get on the wagon. The wagons had four wheels, and there was no rubber, this was before rubber, so it was wide bands up to about that wide, about

- 10:00 10 centimetres wide, and they were about so high and then rig was on top of that, and, it was all laced down with ropes and chains, mainly chains, because it was much stronger than rope. So, I used to get a ride home with them sometimes, halfway. I used to skip off at the end and,
- 10:30 I mean, go up the hill and over the top and that was our place. And, it was quite an adventure in itself actually. There was kangaroos and the odd darkie around the place. So going to school by myself, I was a bit scared down that dark dim area, but anyway I survived and that was that. And after that
- 11:00 year my sister was due to start school, and I was transferred from there to North Arm School, which was inland from the second one, and it was only three miles. And two and half to three mile and I said... She had been sick. I used to piggyback her most of the time, back and forwards, most of them, any more over the hill.
- 11:30 She couldn't walk up the hill, so I'd say, "All right, come on, hop on my back." Away we'd go. That was when I was eight, eight or nine.

What was she sick with?

Well, she'd had diphtheria and that sort of thing, and never properly recovered, actually. Not in her childhood days. And I was there. I used to go to

- 12:00 North Arm School, and when I was 11 I think it was, or 12, I used to do two and half days a week at the Rural School at Nambour, and that meant travelling from North Arm on the train, to Nambour and back to in the afternoon, when I was... Sometimes, one day of the week I had a full day.
- 12:30 And on that day I had to catch what we call 'the rattler', which was the freight train, which didn't get in till five o'clock into North Arm. It was all right in summer time; in winter time it was dark. And then two miles from there to our place, up over Woody Ridge, and there was one house on the way, on the
- 13:00 creek side, the same creek that was up further, too, and it's got to be getting bigger there, and, I used to get home about seven o'clock.

Can you describe the Rural School to me?

Yes, well, it was a combined school, it was a lower school of education and then it went, we did...

- 13:30 I did blacksmithing, woodwork, tinsmithing, there was a fourth one. I thought it was just woodwork, tinsmithing, blacksmithing, and one other, cabinetmaking I think it was. And I learnt a
- 14:00 lot there, especially the blacksmith.

What did you learn from him?

How to weld, all that, not weld with a... There was no electric welders then. This was into the fire until it got to the right heat, showed me how to temper things and that's the... give it the degree of hardness to whatever you're doing, and I found that very helpful later

- 14:30 during the war. In various things I'd learnt there. Matter of fact I think it was the best part of my education there. I survived out of that later on. And when I got to Brisbane I was 15, and lived at Milton

behind the brewery up on the hill. One side was the brewery and the other side was the Anglican Archbishop.

15:00 Used to say, "Between the devil and the deep blue sea." And I go to, in my room I could just look up. I didn't need a clock. I could see the clock on the town hall, city hall, which used to chime. We could hear the chimes, too, from our place in those days, but, you know things have changed now – city hall has sunk into one of the lower, lower buildings.

15:30 They're all up around it now. I don't know whether the old house is still there or not. But, I worked as a message boy for... First of all I couldn't get any work, and I went to a course down at it was the old university,

16:00 near the gardens, as part of the...

QUT [Queensland University of Technology] now?

QUT now?

Yes, it would be, yes. It had been part of the old university, and we did tinsmithing and wood work there. I was there six or eight months before I got a job, and the job was no good anyway.

What job did you get?

16:30 Message boy, ten shillings a week. And I had to carry heavy packages of clothing between the tailor shop at Adelaide Street and the worker in Little Roma Street, so it was quite a feat actually. And he always reckoned I didn't

17:00 work fast enough, couldn't carry enough. But I'd done me apprenticeship in the bananas before that, there on the farm. I used to, my Dad was took sick and that, and we had bananas, and I used to pack them and pick them and so forth, and prepare them. And, then, that's going back a bit beyond then.

17:30 Anyway, I then got another job in Cremon Radio. Assembling radios, but that job cut out after about two months and then got a job in the post office, as a postal mechanic.

What did that involve?

Repairs to telephones.

18:00 In those days telephones are recycled time and time again. If a phone was disconnected, it came through the workshops and it was refurbished. We used to pull it all apart and make sure everything was correct and then go out as a new phone. Well it was as good as a new phone anyway, everything was re-sprayed and that in the bakelite

18:30 phones, they were all polished and that sort of thing and new cords put on and that went on before the war. And, then I, before I was at that stage, I was about 18, 18 going on 19, and I joined the army, part time, CME, Citizens' Military Forces,

19:00 Tuesday nights. And we used to, of course the war broke out on, but before the war, they must have had an idea that there was going to be a war because nearly every Saturday night we'd have to march down Queen Street, for about four or five groups. They used to take it in turns. They were recruiting-drives for

19:30 for the services. There used to be army, navy and air force, not so much air force, because there wasn't much of an air force there then, but nevertheless. Then...

Do you recall how people reacted when you marched down Queen Street?

Beg your pardon?

Do you recall people's reactions when they saw you all marching down Queen Street?

No, no reaction in those days. That was before the war. That's after the war that happened.

20:00 But it was a recruiting-drive actually. And, when I go back, if I was in camp I'd go back to Lytton, which is, do you know where Lytton was? Up on the hill there near the convent. And we used to, we were in camp there, after the war started, we were in camp there, I was there permanently,

20:30 matter of fact, I was their wireless operator, and I used to teach the boys in the 6th and 7th Division, the signallers. I was in the Australian Corp of Signals and at night we used to have two hours of teaching them and bringing them up to speed. It was 28 words per minute was the normal speed. That

21:00 wasn't with a... that was with a buzzer, not an oscillator where you got clickety click. There's two sorts, they one they took the sound and then the post office they took the songs. But then, in the morse code, and so, that's they way we worked out then.

How did you come to be in that teaching position George?

21:30 I learnt, got myself up to scratch up to about 24 or 25, I got myself up to 28 and during the day, I used

to make myself a radio and telephones in them, field telephones. Course most of them were from the previous war, so you can imagine how they'd been thrown around, and we got to

22:00 refurbish them, for the second time, and the radios, there was three sorts: one oh one, one oh two, one oh three – that was the numbers on them, the types, and we got about half a dozen of those.

What was the difference between the radios?

One was bigger than the other, one was a smaller one, it was a field phone, a field radio.

22:30 You could set it up and two men, I have some pictures of it somewhere, but I can't find them now, they've gone with the rest of the lot of... I think I've thrown them out. And then, we used to have recruiting-drives, and then there was a little bit of feeling around,

23:00 clapping and so forth when we marched up and down Queen Street in our uniforms. That was a recruiting-drive actually So they brought in the compulsory training – the 18 year olds to start with, and they thought they were really badly done by, so they made the next lot 21-year-olds so they were 20-year-olds. And, we

23:30 taught all the boys the signals. Later, the ones that were allotted to us and we taught them too, how to go. And we used to go on weekend bivouacs and that sort of thing. It was quite entertaining, actually. I liked the army life, except that it was on the side of a hill like that and, you know, we woke up in the morning and we were out in the paddock.

24:00 That's happened before the day, and mosquitoes, you never seen anything like it. We had nets, but just imagine they weren't much good. And then I had enough of that and I said to the WOD [Warrant Officer Discipline], Regimental WO [Warrant Officer], a very nice chap, a permanent army fellow, I said to him, "Look,"

24:30 I said, "Look, how can I get out of this?" He says, "I'm sorry young fellow," he says, "ou're in for the duration." I said, "Where?" He says, "Here." And I said, "No," and I said "What can I do to get out of it?" He said, "you can join the navy or the air force." And I thought, "Met a bloke within the air force, and he says it's pretty good," and I said, "Right, well, I'll go and see if I can get into the air force."

25:00 And of course I had to get a clearance from the post office, too, but I managed that all right and there was a technical hitch that I got out on because I was already in the army. And I said to the post office, I said, "Well, I'm already in the army. I'm on full time in the army now, and in the signals," and I said, "Well, what's the difference? Can't I join the air force?"

25:30 He, the boss said, "I suppose so." I said "Good, I'm going to join the air force." So I joined the air force, sat for the examination and did all that, and the only problem was the day I earned my medical, I was at Lytton, I was five days after being stabbed, being vaccinated

26:00 from the smallpox. I don't know if you know anything about that, because you get awfully sick and matter of fact we lost two blokes – they died from it.

Can you tell me about that?

Can you tell me about the smallpox vaccination?

Look, it comes right up the, put it in a cork, about six needles, and then they take

26:30 the vaccine on your arm and they, to put it in, dab the skin, with the cork, like, the needles in the cork: there's three, one, two, three. And, anyway, I went up, going up to Brisbane. I didn't feel that good, and the recruiting place, it was in Freehill Street in the city

27:00 and, the recruit depot. And previously I had to do a medical for it, and also a trade test, which I did, and I went. I was a trainee technician, and because you got to strip right off for the medical, I was

27:30 shivering. Previously coming across from the railway station, down Isles Love Lane, it was between Adelaide Street and Queen Street, I'd passed out. Skidded on a set of steps there, the Irish Club or something it was, and across the lane there was a fruiterer, an old Greek fruiterer.

28:00 And he came over and give me a shake and he says, "Are you drunk?" and I says, "No, I'm not drunk." He says, "What's the matter with you." Showed him my arm, he raced over and got me a soft drink and a couple of bananas I think it was, and I scoffed those down, and I even felt a bit human after that. So I collected myself together after about 10 minutes, quarter of an hour, and went

28:30 down to the recruit depot and checked in there and had the medical first. There was the medical, strip off, I'm in intense fever by this time and the medical officer said, "Are you frightened or something?" and I said, "No." "Well, what's the matter?" I showed him my arm and, "Good God," he says, "Sit down, before you fall down." I said, "I have fallen down once,

29:00 and got away with it." I told him the episode in the Isles Love Lane and I passed anyway, the examination, even with a raging fever, and I then I got dressed and went downstairs into the trade school and then I was tested there for my trade, electrical,

29:30 and, obviously I passed; I went okay.

What did the testing involve?

Mainly oral, because they couldn't give you anything. It was on electrical circuits and that sort of thing and could I read the circuits and so forth, yes, and he said, hauled out a telephone circuit, that suits me, "Yeah, I know all that," and he says, "Good."

30:00 He said, "What are you like on power?" I said, "I haven't done very much on power," I said. "Well, we'll give you a traineeship as electrician, as an aircraft electrician." I said, "That suits me," and I was called up after about two months, something like that and

30:30 I finished up going to Sydney, to Ultimo. I did my first course, and that's where the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation] headquarters is in Sydney now. That's where the... Some photos over there of the barracks. They were an old woolstore, we were living in. They'd knocked down a couple of buildings down

31:00 beside us. They give them a bit of room for trade room and that, and it was very good and we used to work. We used to study at the School of Electrical Engineering. We did three months - in three months we did a five-year course, and on electricals and that.

Can you tell me about the

31:30 **intensity of that course, if you were cramming five years into three months?**

Very hard, we used to work during the day at the school and when we got home and do two hours at night, and then, about half past nine or nine o'clock, we'd go down to Central Station and have a cup of coffee, service canteen there. We used to get out of the place you know, about three hundred of us

32:00 in various trades there, and I remember one incident there, we all get called out one day on the parade ground and wondering what this is all about and up comes a woman and her daughter completely pregnant see, and they reckon it was one of our blokes.

32:30 It wasn't one of ours. He knew, that building wasn't taken over the last. She was about at least eight and a half months, a real pot belly, and so anyway up and down, up and down, picked a bloke about three, three from me

33:00 and, said, "That's him, that's him, I know him," she says. "Are you sure you know him?" "Yes, I'm sure." He says, "Well I'm sorry, where do you come from?" "Well, North Queensland," I think it was. And she said, "Yes that's him." He said, "No it couldn't be," he says -

33:30 he wasn't in the air force then. Out. And, course, a lot of, the women used to hang around the place, and on Saturday mornings we used to scrub the barracks out and get dressed and go, march over to the bridge, across the Harbour Bridge

34:00 and go and have a swim. And after we had our hour in the pool we were free for the weekend, which was good. And we used to do various things. You'd come back at night of course, had to be back by 10 o'clock, 11:30 on a Saturday night and Sunday was free, and so

34:30 that was the routine of the air force life there.

What sorts of things did you fellows get up to in your spare time?

Dancing mainly. We had a great time there, in the town, in the city. Get from word of mouth, there's a good dance on there, or here or somewhere. The city hall, town hall, that was a favourite place, and Bill

35:00 O'Smith used to play there, and that was quite a good dance. And then the Radio City was another place we used to go to, which is not far away from there and we used to walk home from after it. And then of course we were posted, our group were posted to Point Cook. Well, it was in July then. You can just imagine, Point Cook

35:30 in July with 80-mile-an-hour winds sometimes. And, it used to take us nearly half an hour to go across to the lecture rooms. It was on the edge of the beach and there was Geelong like, in the bay, and near Werribee, Point Cook is. And the winds were horrific, wrapped up in your overcoat, and we get over there and

36:00 they'd had the braziers in the lecture rooms fired up, they used to use coke, briquettes or something they used to call them I think it was, about that round. You'd throw several of those on the brazier and it was good. But when you went outside it was shocking. And of course you'd go out every hour, because you

36:30 had to be acclimatised to the wind because I came from up here, other blokes came from up North Queensland, Western Australia, everywhere, you know. How we were a good spattering. In fact, I still know a couple of them. One bloke I lost there, I missed him; he became a doctor and went to Sydney. He couldn't get through his final course in Brisbane because the

- 37:00 fellow in charge of the medicine was of German descent and he didn't like the air force because they belted the place up, you know belted Germany up. And so you know, it was prejudice more than... It was after the war of course, and it was prejudice, and he wouldn't pass any ex-servicemen going through there; they all had to go to Sydney to
- 37:30 to do their finishing year. That's beside the point. Well, from Point Cook we were issued with four blankets, and about six Melbourne Herald's whatever it was, whatever the paper was, you used to spread them up between the sheets. It used to rain every night and it'd freeze over
- 38:00 and we had tin huts, galvanised iron huts with shutters. And in the morning, you'd have to break the ice to open the shutters. Oh, it was shocking. And, we're not far from the cookhouse there, but trouble was that when they were preparing the meals and that, they'd cut the hot water
- 38:30 off from the barracks, and we finish up with a cold shower sometimes. Very often you'd be finishing off in the middle of soap down. The freezing water would come through, but anyway I mean, we got through it all right. We lived.

What sort of food did they feed you there?

It was good meals, good meals. When I was at Lytton in the army, that's another thing I didn't mention then. That was all

- 39:00 canned food and that from the First World War, and I tell you what, it wasn't very palatable. All in big tins, bully beef and that. That's one of the reasons I joined the air force. You get good meals in the air force. Well from there I passed out, the school passed out, and
- 39:30 we were scattered around the whole of Australia. I finished up at Evans Head, and I was there about three months, working on Fairey Battles; they were a very nice plane. I have a photograph of them there. And a big Rolls Royce engine, single engine, and they used them for training
- 40:00 bomb aimers and also gunnery, air-to-air gunnery. The plane did the towing of what they call the drogue. A drogue is a hollow piece of canvas about that wide and
- 40:30 about 10 feet, 20 feet long. And they used to fly backwards and forwards, and they come up on the other plane and the trainee gunners had to shoot the drogue. And some were very good and some weren't. And there was a bombing that I used to, matter of fact the bombing range is still there and it's still operational, at Evans Head, it's on the south side of the Evans River, and it was used by F1-11's and everything, so it's been well belted around. They used to use, 10, 12 pound, which is about three, three and half kilo or something, bombs about so long, and aim them at the target
- 41:00 and the gunner used to have to direct the pilot where to fly and how to fly, at what level, used to fly, used to go to about 1000 feet, sometimes they go down to about 300 depending on the type of bombs they had and that and their target practice. The target would be about as big as this room. Laying flat on the ground

Tape 2

- 00:31 **So you were just finishing off describing the bombing targets.**

Yeah, well, my job wasn't flying there, it was maintenance on the planes. So I went straight headfirst into doing the work on the electricals on Rolls Royce motors and it was... But, I had at Point Cook, all the circuits of different planes. We had to learn them

- 01:00 off by heart. And the colours of all the wires and all that, and so it was all theory, there was no practice up to this point. And there was a very strict code of time on planes. There still is, I would say, but a different story to what it was in those days, because maintenance was very high on them. Well these planes had been
- 01:30 in the African desert and they got into trouble there. They bring them down to Evans Head, which is nearly as bad as the desert because it was being newly bulldozed and a tarmac been laid in a hurry and when the dust storms, the sand storms used to come across there too, so... But they had put oil
- 02:00 coolers on them, so it was, more or less all right, because they were cleaned every day. But my job was electricals, so I didn't have to do that sort of work. But, I did mainly charge batteries and that sort of thing for the plane. The batteries are fairly small and
- 02:30 they wouldn't last travelling, working the whole day, so I had to put different batteries in, so they were charged. But we used to charge them overnight and bring them all up to scratch and used to put them back into the planes each morning. So that was that, and maintenance on, there was daily inspections, they...

03:00 No plane went up into the air without having the ground staff inspect the plane and pass it and sign your life away.

Can you talk me through an inspection?

Not really, there was nothing to that. It was just to make sure that the electricals were in order and quite okay at that time. And if they weren't, any lamps or lights were blown in the

03:30 navigation lights and that, they had to be changed. But it didn't happen too often because they had double filaments, but often enough. We used to run the motors up at, mechanics used to run the motors up. I used to stay beside the revs [revolutions] on the magnetos and make sure there was no

04:00 loss of power. And if there was any loss of power that one would be discarded for the day and we'd have to fix it up and go through it between us, the flight mechanics. And if they got a stone or something through them, through the metal, they were a metal plane they were,

04:30 they had to be patched before it went back in the air you know. The ground staff did all that work there, and then they had 40 hours, they used to do a major, a minor coverage of the plane and after, after six

05:00 40 hours, there was a 120 hours, was more involved, and a 240 hour, they had a complete overhaul, they were pulled right down. And I tell you what, getting into those Rolls Royce motors, they look nice and sleek, but what was underneath was a mass of pipes and wires and that, but yeah, but we coped.

05:30 **Did you have to adapt tools to work with those engines?**

Yes, we had kits of tools and that fortunately enough; they come with the planes. I think they had 20, 20 planes, Fairey Battles, there. And I was only there about three months and I got posted to Amberley, one of the old

06:00 Avro Ansons. They were pretty, being last in there. I was only there a couple of weeks when the barracks electrician went off sick, he had peritonitis or something and I got his job. Last in, first to be hired, shied

06:30 into another job and I used to look after all the ground installations and used to... Several times I had to climb the big tower and change the lights. All the lights were double filaments on the runways and all that, because if one went it'd be okay, but if the second one went you had to be smartly got out that was only in the evening,

07:00 for night flying of course. And another job that was mine there was to go down and check the motors on the sewerage and check the chlorine going, and that was down a 20 foot ladder, down under and that was a ladder all the way down and there was pumps down there.

07:30 And make sure they were working and in order and the right amount of chlorine was going out into the sewerage. And that went out, still there, a big lake there, in the southern side of the airport there. But I was there when the, Japs [Japanese] came into the war and, about

08:00 three days, two or three days after the Americans arrived and there was mayhem there for a while.

Can you describe those stories?

Well they all arrived about four o'clock, three o'clock in the afternoon. There was convoy after convoy. I never knew anything about them. Of course they were in full battle mode there, they were, and as soon as they got off their

08:30 trucks and that, they pull their scooters off, and look out you didn't get run down. And at night, that first night, after tea all was quiet. Scooters go around the perimeter. Next minute there was a great rattle of gun fire, and next morning our poor old pet

09:00 draughthorse used to rub his back against the fence, he shot him to smithereens. Must have thought it was the enemy, that's how trigger happy they were. A general feeling of them right through the war.

What was it like sort of working around people that were so trigger happy?

It was, don't take any notice of them.

Did you take precautions?

09:30 No.

...wandering around at night or ...?

No, we were never wandering around at night. The airfields, unless they're being used, are blacked out, especially at war time. If they were doing any night flying, which they did too at different times... And the chap came back, he'd had appendicitis or something. And I

10:00 went back on. And the station was pretty full then, and finished up I worked with Americans assembling planes for about two weeks until Canberra got the word and we got thrown off it.

Can you tell me more about that time, assembling planes?

Yes, there were Douglas Dorcas and Kittyhawks,

10:30 the early Kittyhawks. And they came in big parts, you know, two wings in crates and that. And we never pulled them out of the crates. On the assembly line they used to have a big toolkit around them with about 20 spanners and God knows what and they used to be around here

11:00 and this way and spent more time looking for a spanner. And we had a couple of crescent spanners and a couple of screwdrivers and that sort of thing and we used to assemble the planes quicker than half the time they did. And there was an inquiry into that in the end, you know they got too many tools. And then after that they sat down and laid out the tools for them,

11:30 not for us. I got taken off, and then just after Christmas I was posted to Bundaberg.

Can I just ask, how long does it take to assemble a Kittyhawk?

I think it was about four or five hours, then they had to tune it and all that, but that was only on the assembly line. That's not the

12:00 testing or anything like that, that comes afterwards. And, I went to Bundaberg early in the new year to another Service Flying Training School which had more Avro Ansons and we never had any tools to speak of.

12:30 By then I was doing the major overhauls on the plane and there was no tools to be had, specialist tools, the magnetos and that. They were the big tools for assembling the motors and that which I didn't; I wasn't involved in that. I was involved in the electrical generators and we used to do all the spark plugs,

13:00 had to reset those and the points. The points had to be honed that's... Have you ever seen a set of points? Operated all on a cam, on the alternator, not on the alternator, on the...

13:30 ... just turn it off for a minute, will you?

Okay George.

Yes well, the work on the magnetos, on a 240 run, we had to strip it right down, clean it up, clean all the bearings and all that and reset the points.

14:00 It was always two sets of points, one was an emergency, and they go from one to the other. It was two to every motor, and we have to set, there was four on every motor.

Did you have to make special tools if you didn't have tools?

I did.

Can you tell me about those tools you made?

Well, we got there, the planes had come from

14:30 various places. Stick and rag. They had metal planes, those planes, and one had crashed earlier than that and it was a write-off, and I got permission from the CO [Commanding Officer] to rat [scavenge] them for some metal

15:00 tubing. And I went over to the blacksmith and so I've got the various sizes and I had screws that bold heads to fit it in and I got him to run up. He was pretty busy; matter of fact I did half of it, making the set of tools for myself, and he tempered them for me, and matter of fact I still got a couple of them

15:30 still out on the bench; I've used them ever since. The threads in them on the screws, like, you know, were a BA, British Association I think it was called and they're not a

16:00 well-known type, they're not in use today. Not out here anyway. Because we got nearly all American stuff now. It's all American, fine, and that sort of stuff now. But of course, they don't have the same sort of set-up today as what we did, because we had trainee pilots and all that sort of thing and we used to be strictly scheduled for every 20

16:30 hours, 40 hours, 60 hours, and 120 and then 240, so with the other ones in between, so they were down as much as they were in the air, I think. But we had them very finely tuned and we did very well in them. And it was about six of us in the electrical, and I was only there about four months I think it was, and I was

17:00 sent to Melbourne to do an engineering course, which was fitting and turning, etc. At Ascot Vale I lived at. And half of our training was done at the exhibition

17:30 place [Exhibition Buildings]. They put a false floor on the, you know where the... I didn't know it at the time - it's where the first parliament was held. And so I had to be very careful, we were read the riot act when we went in there. "You're not to put a nail or a screw or anything in the floor," or anything around and everything was on floating decks more or less. And anyway

- 18:00 there were lathes there and we did fitting and turning and armature winding and all that sort of thing and had three months at that. And I thought, "All right, where am I going to go now?" Went back to Bundaberg. And then I was only back there a while and I was, can I reverse back again to
- 18:30 to Amberley? I was lined up to go to place called Chilarcki over in the Pacific, which was a signal station, and I was lucky that the post office fellows got the job instead of me because it was a civilian job so we didn't get it. They were both killed - Japs got them. They missed the submarine, the submarine
- 19:00 missed them, was to bring them off in typical American fashion - they went to the wrong island. So that's beside the point, that's one of my lives gone. And then, shortly after that, I was called up in the full inspection, a physical and teeth and that. I'd only been to the dentist about a fortnight before.
- 19:30 He pulls me up, he says, "It's 26." I said, "I don't think much of your workmanship if you can find 26 holes," and he says, "No, no they're not holes. And you, when I'm finished with you, you'll never go near a dentist again for the next 10 years." I didn't, either. It was amazing, he'd filled everything, absolutely everything, anything that was... I was on draught to go
- 20:00 to Singapore when it fell and I didn't get there. I came back and I went back to Bundaberg and I was there about eight, 10 months, something like that, working on the Avalanches
- 20:30 and we had a flood in that time, too which flooded the whole place out. The whole of the town, the air force was mobilised to [provide] flood relief.

Can you describe that for me?

Yes I can. Do you know Bundaberg?

Little bit.

Well, the big bridge in the town there, it was that far off the decking. And, it was, a lot of them were...

- 21:00 The electric light poles were more or less inundated along where the aerodrome is. I don't know if you know where that is. It was out of town a bit, two mile, out past the hospital on the way in. And, we had to down tools and do a bit of rescue work. We managed to get a piano
- 21:30 onto a dinghy, and that was pretty. And because it was flooded and we managed to hoist it up into this dinghy and there was two dinghies, and the other one had our boys on it plus the bloke rowing, and we went over to the hotel and we put it on the, not the verandah on the hotel, on the first floor. It was down at the gasworks
- 22:00 near the creek there in the town. And we got it out and on the verandah and left it there. It was safe and sound. Boy, I don't know how we got it off. Few ropes and that, and anyway that was beside the point. So a week went past, we saved a few people, chased them up and got them out and... Dreadful week, oh yeah.
- 22:30 All the wharves and all that down there were flooded.

Do you remember what year that was roughly?

1942, yes '42 I think it was. Late 1942, '41, '42, I'm a bit hazy on dates there. Anyway it was '41, '42. And then in '43 I left there and I was

- 23:00 sent to the embarkation depot first, down in Sandgate, and got all kitted out to go to London I thought, "This is good." But anyway they found a job for me in the meantime, just putting teleprinters in a block of offices in Edward Street, just down from Elizabeth street, and I think it was 24 or
- 23:30 25 I put in. I think we did the electrical and I did all the telephone, all the teleprinters, hooked them all up and set them up for them and, that became one of the hush-hush spots in the town. And we went back into the... We'd finished the job. And, "How long are we going to be here?" "Oh, you got to go back to Bundaberg."

24:00 Why didn't you want to go back to Bundaberg?

I wanted to go overseas. But that had been cancelled or something, but no questions asked, no answers are given. And then I went back to Bundaberg and I was there for a while and I was called up by embarkation leave again, and

- 24:30 I was back down at Sandgate. This time and I was there, and I went to the personnel pool at Townsville and we boarded the train on Monday morning, about
- 25:00 six o'clock or something like that, and off we went on suburban trains, suburban carriages, with the old seats right across, no toilets, nothing - out the window, or if it stopped you dived out. And so, it took six and a half days to get to Townsville, we were going like this.

25:30 It was in the thick of it then and we eventually got to Townsville on Saturday afternoon and went down to the personnel pool, in Mango Grove it was at Aitkenvale. It was all camouflaged, all camouflaged under the mango trees. Of course it was mango season

26:00 and there were mangoes everywhere, and flying foxes too, everywhere. Every dusk you got to be very careful. And I was there for about a month and did various jobs about the place.

Can you describe the jobs you did?

Not really, they weren't really of any consequence then. And then I was sent up to, they used to get you out at four o'clock,

26:30 three o'clock in the morning. You're gone, you're off, they give you your papers, hop on the truck, out to Garbutt, to the aerodrome. You never know where you were going, it was all in sealed packets. And, there was a number on it, that didn't mean anything to me. And I report to the transport movement

27:00 office there. I showed them and they opened it, and then sealed it again. They give me a plane to fly on, an American plane, a DC-3, and the next minute we took off. I didn't know where we were going, wouldn't have a clue.

What was that like, not knowing where you were going?

I done a lot of that. But, we got

27:30 matter of fact, by the time we got to... I'll describe the interior of the plane. They were bucket seats down each side and in the middle was all tyres and crates and God knows. Nothing was tied down. And, anyway, our first port of call was Cooktown. And it was

28:00 pretty bumpy that morning, that day, and I was asleep. I remember waking up with a big aircraft tyre around me neck, in the middle. Oh, jeez, it was a frightening feeling. And then I looked around and everything was scattered everywhere, including about 20 of us. And it landed and I had to sort all the crates and that

28:30 out. And we refuelled then and up and off again. And next time we landed at Cooktown... No that was Cooktown, wasn't it? Yeah. We landed at a range out in the bush and the bloke, the load master, says to me, "Right, you're off here." And I looked out and I couldn't see anything.

29:00 "Well, this is where you're posted to." I get out and one bloke came, like with the refuelling crew was there and I seen the air force pilot, and I said, "What, where am I?" And he said, "You're at Iron Range." "Doesn't mean anything to me." And he said, "It will."

29:30 He says, "You'll be here for six months," he says, "that's the period of time here."

Can you tell me what Iron Range was?

A bomber strip. That's where a lot of the American bombers, big four-engine bombers, went off to the Japanese. That was about the time when the Japanese were still floating around and there was

30:00 fighters flying in and out and we used to do all the refuelling for them, which is no mean feat. Only six of us. And on the strip and then there was the CO up, half a mile away. He was a good bloke to stay there, but. And the mess area was up there. But we only had a tattered old

30:30 tent. Up in the wet season and that. The tents and that are stripped to ribbons in a short time, especially when you had the planes turning in the revetment area. You get shot with all the rocks, small gravel and that; they used to get blown to bits. That was our only protection.

31:00 And I used to... And over the road and next to us, there was two Americans. They were transport command fellows, two sergeants. One chap was from San Francisco, and the other chap was from New York and

31:30 they were as far apart as that. The bloke from New York, he was a terrible bloke, and the other fellow, his name was a Bob Homer, and he had been in the air force since 1936. And this other bloke hadn't been there as long, but he was there before the war in the air force. They were in the transport

32:00 command. They used have to check all the transports through. And we used to give all the running sheets to them of American planes, and our fellows kept the logs for the local plane, our planes. And we'd service up to 40

32:30 or 50 planes sometimes, mainly transport planes.

40 or 50 planes in what time?

A matter of 8 daylight hours. No night facilities. Just a cutting through the jungle and, we, we managed all right. The CO was a shocker.

33:00 And the night I got there, I got off the plane, was one of the first blokes I spoke to, he says, "My name's Park, P A R K, and don't you forget it," and I said, "No, I won't. I'll remember it very well." Of course he

blew his top then. I said, "Be respectful, please." And, anyway, he's had second thoughts about me then and

33:30 and I said to a couple of fellows there, they'd come off sending a plane off, and I said to them, "What's my job?" and he said, "Well, you're, you're the electrical fitter, electrician, armour, and instrument mechanic," and I said, "What do you blokes do?" There was one bloke was the airframe fitter

34:00 and another bloke was an engine fitter. And we had to maintain all the planes that went through there that needed these requirements. Had some interesting things there.

Was safety compromised there because you were so understaffed?

Beg your pardon?

Was safety compromised there because you were so understaffed?

No, no we used to get up at half past four in the morning and fill the tankers and we had a big 6000 gallon tanker which is an enormous tanker for those days.

34:30 The air force tankers were only small. We had one of those we used to fill with the, 90, 75 octane, and that was for the old piston engines which we used to have a weekly, a daily plane by Ansett, or

35:00 whatever they were then, from Townsville. He used to come through and he used to drop all the mail off and that, and he'd fly back the next day, from Higginsville, up in the Top End. And anyway, while I was there there was an incident that was a bad one. There was a squadron come in

35:30 and the first bloke... The rule of law on aircraft landing, they had to go to the end of the runway, and then go into an area there off the runway and wait. But this day the first bloke came in and he landed and stopped right near our

36:00 revetment. Revetment is an area there which you fill the planes with petrol and do maintenance on them. And he landed on the other side. Now the next plane came in, no there was half a dozen came in before this one came in, and this fellow came in in a Thunderbolt plane, single engines, it was. All fighter aircraft mixed

36:30 and they come in on the... He landed. I watched him coming down, and he didn't appear to be parallel with the runway. And either us or the bloke across the road's going to cop this. But fortunately enough it wasn't us. And,

37:00 actually, he straightened it up. But he'd over-counted just by... Well, he only had about 20 feet on either side of the runway to come down on and, I suppose, about 50 feet wide be the runway. And he came down and I seen him coming and I thought, "I don't like the look of this." Anyway, he just went up the... This other bloke was

37:30 facing down the runway. He didn't see him. The blighter had his finger on his gun buttons. Not supposed to be cocked. He must have had it cocked, because the Yanks [Americans] used to panic. They didn't know where they were either. And he came down and then he come right in close to him

38:00 and the tip of the wing caught the wing of the Kittyhawk and just glanced off the canopy of the plane, of the Kittyhawk. It went up, just acted like a knife, cut about that much of his head.

38:30 And he became helpless, didn't he. But the fellow saw it was coming and he jammed the brakes on and it overturned. And we didn't have any gear there to do anything about it. The other chap with me, I said, "Bob, grab that

39:00 pick there, that mattock," and, there was something else, I forget what it was now, or a shovel, that's right a shovel. And we tore across the runway because they stopped the planes coming in then after that happened; they were circling. And we raced over. We assumed we couldn't help the fellow in the Kittyhawk, but the chap in the

39:30 Thunderbolt, he was pinned in underneath the plane and we started digging. He was just off the edge of the runway. We started digging and we managed to dig him out. But I didn't realise there was nobody else came around, was coming around near us, but the Kittyhawk was flying straight over us.

40:00 It must have been about, just above our height. Of course there was so much noise you weren't aware of it. We got this bloke dug out, and by that time, I thought, "What's that noise? I think those guns are going. That accounts for why we got nobody else around here." There was other people around, and we

40:30 hauled him out, got him out, unhurt, and it was very good. That was the save for the day. And anyway they resumed landing and the rest of them came in and so we went on to our duties again. And, there were, finished, but it rocked me for a while. But in ten minutes we were back in business again.

41:00 Planes come down and we were filling them.

Good place to stop there George.

All right.

41:30 End of tape

Tape 3

00:37 We fiddled around with the... When this chap came in, with this plane that was full of oil, I said, "Well, it had no heating in the motor itself," I said, "So it's not the motor, it's got to be something in the oil side of it." It turned out to be

01:00 a little pipe up to the cockpit which runs, gives you your oil pressure. It's a pressure indicator which gives you what pressure you've got. And it was cracked and it's a brand new plane. Got as far as there and it was cracked up. I soldered a sleeve over it and rejoined it

01:30 and off, sent him on his way.

Can you describe the different types of planes you worked on and maybe what were some of the common problems for each plane?

Not in general. But, I was back at Bundaberg. The CO come to us, and he says, well he says, "I know, and you know that these planes

02:00 will only fly to 8000 feet." I said, "Yes." He says, "Well, we got to get them to go over 10,000. I said, "That's a hard way to do things," and I said, "Oh well, we'll see what we can do." And he said, "Because well, they got to go up to Owen Stanleys [Owen Stanley Ranges] when they're going home from Stanleys." That's going back in

02:30 time. Now, we had this plane that had been ratted for parts. Actually, we used quite a bit of the gear off it and that. And I said, "Well, they all have a ceiling of 8000 but, because there's a gap which allows, in the magneto,

03:00 an air gap," I said, "if I increase that in the magneto, it's a safety gap. If we cut it away and get a little bit more and a little bit more and a little bit more, see if we can get it up to flying over 10,000 feet." We got 11,000 out of it and so they all done it then. And he went off, not when I was there but later on, he went off

03:30 in that plane together with about six others, I think he had. Modified. And, and flew to Owen Stanleys. Unfortunately he was lost; it was two years before they found him.

Can you tell me how long it took you to be able to get it up to 11,000 feet in terms of your testing and that sort of thing?

Well we had a

04:00 test box for testing plugs and that and the magnetos, and we take the air out of it; it was airtight. We take the air out of it to what would be at 10,000 feet, 12,000 feet; that's where we worked it out from. It was quite efficient and that, and we ran the magneto all day. It didn't

04:30 overheat or anything or it didn't bust up and away she went.

Did you get good brownie points for coming up with that?

No, it's all part of the job. No brownie points in my life.

Might just ask you about animals that pilots had on board with them?

Never saw any of them.

What about that story you told me about the, the American pilot with his dog?

05:00 Yeah, well he just gave it to me. He said, "I'll be back in a fortnight." He never come back so I kept the dog and then just before I left there, a chap came in. He was going to America and I gave him the dog. They give him a good home. Because I didn't want to take him out of the area.

05:30 No other dogs are there, no dingoes. I thought the best thing to do is export him. I was conscious of those things in those days then.

So what other testing or innovations were you asked to explore as far as aircraft are concerned to make them

06:00 **more efficient?**

Well shortly after that I came back to Townsville, and I was taken off aircraft and put in the communications flight, that's right, when I came back from up there. And I had about four or five

months in that.

What did that involve?

- 06:30 Major overhauls on planes. They were American planes, mainly. Which were ours, under the lease, and do the maintenance on them. One day we had caused... I had previously met a sergeant - he was a stores chap. We were waiting to come back from Townsville,
- 07:00 to go, and he said, "I'm fed up." "What's your problem?" "Oh. it's the old man," he says. He's losing 99 cents in the dollar in tax. He's a big Idaho potato farmer, and he says, "We're only working for the crown, for the President." And,
- 07:30 he was very concerned about the way the Yanks carried on around. And he says, "Look," he says, "they carry on as though they own the place here," and he says, "and it's just not on." A really logical fellow he was. Anyway he says, "Never mind, if there's anything you want, any time, give us a ring." He give me his telephone number.
- 08:00 I said, "Right." About a fortnight later we did a motor in the valley [UNCLEAR] engines, which was an American plane, so I said to him, "Oh, how far does the friendship go to?" He said, "Well, what do you want, a plane? "No, not a plane. I only want a motor." "Yeah, right."
- 08:30 Being the odd one out he said, "I'll give you another one." We got it out of the... Our CO was away that day and so it was somewhere else. So and I said to the engineering bloke, "I can get a plane. I can get an engine. He said it won't cost you anything." I go out there I had the old motor strapped onto the back of the tender and, and he says,
- 09:00 "Pull up," this bloke. Big store, it was a stores depot and things there, miles and miles and miles of it, you got no idea. I was flat out finding him. And anyway, I said to him about it. He says, "Yes, what model is it?" I said, "So and so and such and such," and he says, "All right," he says, "just go around the corner there and I'll get a bloke to unload
- 09:30 that motor off." "Okay." And he give us a brand new motor, still all done up. He said, "You'll have to sign for it." He said, "I don't want you to take the responsibility," so I signed 'Joe Blow'. He said, "That'll do me." Back I go. The CO was back then. "What have you got here?"
- 10:00 I said, "Listen, my lips are sealed, but you got a new motor." "How did that come about? Can't do things like that." And I said, "I know you can't, but I did and I have and there it is." So he mounted it up and away it went. One of my highlights of my escapades of the aircraft.
- 10:30 I worked there for about six months in the communications flights. We had only two planes of each sort, because the reason being, for a pilot to keep his license, he had to fly 10 hours a month. I don't know what it is now. In those days they'd had to have 10 hours in their log book a month and our...
- 11:00 We had planes of all types, not big ones. And we did have a Liberator. That was one that got smashed up; that's another story. I had couple of Tiger Moths, we had four Canadian Norsemen; they were a smallish planes
- 11:30 and the noisiest thing you ever seen. There's a photograph of part of it. Valley Vengeance, two Valley Vengeance, couple of Kittyhawks, and something like that. And we didn't have the four-engine job, but we did have a Liberator,
- 12:00 which a controversy about that one. It landed up in...took a load of whisky up to the Yanks in the [Port] Moresby. I don't think you better put that in. So, and when they were coming back, he missed the landing properly at Garbutt and tore half of the wing off. It stood
- 12:30 there for quite a while, matter of weeks of course. Life was only short in those days. And the CO says, "Do you blokes reckon you could put a wing on that?" I said, "Yeah, why not?" Found a lump of wing, Boeing wing that was. I didn't get from this bloke out there.
- 13:00 That was organised somewhere else. And we pulled the old one off and put it back on. And the Liberators had an inherent fault that the one on that side, which is the port side, on the port side, yeah, the,
- 13:30 one motor was set about five degrees out; it was the only way it'd fly they reckon. And blokes in our squadron, they were pretty cluey in the maintenance squadron we were with, and he says, "I know why that didn't fly. Wouldn't fly without this. We'll correct it." I said, "Right." We corrected it. So they sent that plane back. Oh, it wasn't too long before the end of the war, 12 months to the end of the war
- 14:00 and that went back to America.

What did you do to change it?

Some rigging off the motor and that and found out the reason for it. And in their haste and hurry to bring out these planes, they worked on, that's the only thing you do to make them fly make them five or 10 degrees out of centre. But anyway it was fixed and sent back. I never heard anything

14:30 more about it.

Did you have a favourite plane and if so why was it your favourite?

No, never I flew on many planes, like, not so much then. Afterward when I was transferred to Air Defence Headquarters, and Fighter Control, I was in Fighter Control to start with in Townsville and I never knew what I was doing there.

15:00 And I knew what I was doing, maintenance on the boards and that. I had them all set up, where the planes were the shipping was and all that. And I maintained the communications for it.

What do you mean the boards, can you describe that a bit more for me?

Well I had a big map of Queensland and Pacific New Guinea, and any plane that was

15:30 flying, they were supposed to know where they were and it was on the board. I don't know where it got to after that, none of my business. I had to keep the communications right. And then I went to... They opened up the, Air Defence Headquarters at Stewart on the Stewart Road.

16:00 It was a block house in the range there, just off the road, and it was camping there with, I think it was 95 women, and five or 10 blokes. They had a hard job keeping the Yanks out. The CO, adjutant

16:30 and a doctor. As far as myself, and sergeant transport, and a couple of other blokes, there for drivers. That was before the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] come in more or less. And we did all of the maintenance up in the

17:00 control room and nothing was... But all the lines south from the post office came through our place. The trunk lines came through our place at Stewart there and went out and down to all point south. And, and they had, up there, in those days, on the post office side...

17:30 It was all run by fellows that didn't know where they were. And they were, no idea, from Melbourne and Sydney and those places, like civil fellows, and they had rewired half of Townsville. And the Yanks fashioned this, you run a cable out to a post, you send it out to another post, and

18:00 like the cable, phone cables underground mainly from there in, it was all underground. Have you got dial tone? And they go and ting, ting and they go and find out, that one, we'll go and take that one. it was an absolute shambles that exchange. And going

18:30 south, I think it was 24 carrier lines, a lot of them carriers, over there, all aerial. A bloke come up to me one day in desperation and he said, "I don't know," he says, "I spent all my time," he says, "walking down this line at Bowen." I said, "You got a long walk there." And he says, "It's not necessarily a walk," he said,

19:00 "I go in my cable truck," and that. And he said, "I go from point to point from where the cables are strung up," he said, "and sometimes I go too far and other times I don't go far enough to where the fault is." And I said, "You got a good megger [hand-driven generator] in the exchange?" He says, "Yeah, there is a good one in there." I said, "Well, you grab it tomorrow and bring it out to me," I said, "and I'll fix you up and I'll sort you out from there

19:30 and you can get a day off and come with me and we'll go with every line heading south." And I measured between points in the resistance, so when there was a short on it, all I had to do was take a mega reading. You know what a mega is do you? It's a bridge, mega, and it's called a mega.

20:00 It generates about a thousand volts. Low energy, but you can pinpoint a thing down to about three feet, a fault. And so we go and I sent him out, right down to Bowen. I had all the sheets there, put them all on, and when he come back in the afternoon, file them.

20:30 "They're all yours, now. You know where you're going," I said. "You get the boys," I said. "Everything's got to be X amount of ohms, that's the resistances in ohms, that's between the exchange and here. You know that because that's right. Now anything beyond that is so much a mile, till you get to Bowen. He said, "I think I get it, I'll figure it." He's not a bad sort of a bloke. Then, anyway

21:00 he come out, couple of days later. He says, "got a fault down somewhere." I says, "Right, you know where this is. You know it's X amount of resistance between here and the exchange." He says, "Yeah." "Now what's the resistance beyond there?" He says, "I don't know." I said, "Well, right. Is it short?" He says, "Yes." We got the old mega and wound it up and got

21:30 the resistance of it, divided by whatever it was to the mile - cable to the mile is resistance of so much - and he went down he put it right on the pole. I said, "There you are. Now you know. You're right now." So anytime he wanted to see me, I said, "Its between here and the exchange." So he, he caught on quick.

22:00 Can you tell me any more stories about that job?

Yes, I went from there to radio maintenance installation unit after I'd been there about seven months.

And, incidentally, I was there when MacArthur went into the Philippines.

22:30 The whole thing was a set-up, talk about stage show, I won't go into it any more.

Your sure you can't describe it?

Not on there.

Okay, keep going.

Take it off.

No you can keep going with your other story.

And I went over to 2 RIMU [Radio Installation Maintenance Unit] then, and that's where they did all the maintenance on power plants.

23:00 So the whole of North Queensland around the islands associated and only there about a couple of weeks and they formed a party. And myself and a radio mechanic they were called in those days, and a diesel mechanic and I had...

23:30 The whole three of us had a pass signed by Air Marshal Williams. It was renewable. We didn't know where we were. On the 28th of the month or the 25th of the month or the 29th of the month we'd be sent to where we would be, so the end of the month...

24:00 And at that time I was doing maintenance work on all the diesels and power points and power stations and all that, all the radars and all, and the camps and that if anything broke down we were called out to repair them. That took us to quire a few places around the north.

24:30 And if it was only electrical I might fly in myself, and to the nearest point to, like the radar station, it was only the local power I'd go around and check it. And a lot of times on the power plants there was always two, an alternate, one was say here

25:00 the other one was a quarter of a mile away. So if it was ever bombed, it always could still operate. Normally we changed them over, they changed them over every 24 hours so ordinary, like cut their running time down, and many times it would be mainly the alternator. There's an

25:30 alternator, but you got to have DC [direct current] power to power the alternator to generate the AC [alternating current], 240 volt AC and this was a 24 volt extension on the end of the power plant and they had problems with the commutators

26:00 on them. It's a DC motor. I worked out I could undercut... The carbons used to wear. I'd be changing the carbons, or sometimes they put too much pressure on them and

26:30 I went around and had a go and set them all up and what I did, I undercut the commutators. That's between the segments, and go around and cleaned the bed. Bed them in, the new brushes, you got to bed them in, and let them go, then that's all right, okay, which you did. And we

27:00 went around to various places. Another time I was out at Palmoi, that was a gas dump, gas bomb dump, and that was at the end of the war, just at the end of the war thereabouts. I think it had been declared then, but there was no way they'd be using gas. And they let it all off

27:30 into the atmosphere. They chose to do it on the day that I was there and they burnt the mustard gas up near the railway station, the railhead. Actually it was a wool scourer before the war, and they burnt the timber from everywhere. There was no timber around there; it had to be brought by the railway department, and

28:00 and they'd been dropped off there. And so we could burn it. And the lackeys there had to sneak it over away from the line, and they burnt the mustard gas. The only trouble was one day when I was there, they used to carry... When the train, when the wind was going the

28:30 other way, that was all right, they didn't worry about it. The train would chuff, chuff, chuff right through to Maxwell and out to Judy Creek. And the wind changed. Always, a chap was alerted to go up and make sure that there was nothing. He'd telegraph down to Maxwell, but he could smell gas,

29:00 so I sent this bloke in the truck up and give the crew gas masks. Oh, it was funny. I missed him. This bloke, he went through Palmoi at such a great rate of knots, it took him three stations down the line before he could pull up, and then we got him on the way back

29:30 and say, "Hey, listen sport, do you know where we are?" "Yeah," but he says, "I thought I could still smell it." It's phosgene, it's phosgene gas too, as well as mustard gas there, they were in canisters. They used to let them off. I spent one night in bed asleep in a gas mask; slept all night in it.

30:00 It was still air that night.

Can you just describe what the gas dump looked like, how big an area it was?

Well, it was the wool scourer's; the wool scourer's was ideal for them. No wool being scoured there then. And they used to put all the wool

30:30 up on these racks, and about half a mile I suppose until the army, the air force took it over, and they put all these phosgene bombs in there, and mustard gas. They had to keep checking on the mustard gas and that and make sure it didn't leak; same with the phosgene, 24 hours a day they checked and

31:00 monitored them. I was there. I had a fault on the power which I had to fix up and that ended that one.

Were you a bit worried for your health being there at that time?

I carried a gas mask, that's all. They give me one when I got there. I had a gas mask mostly through the war,

31:30 but this was like later in the war when they took them all off us then. Give them to the troops up further. And it was interesting. And I was there about five or six days, wiring, doing, altering the wiring in the, in the huts, starting to deteriorate, the wiring, because they'd been there a couple of years.

32:00 They were right out in the western plains. Another place I went to was, can't think of it. Anyway, Mount Surprise. I went out to Mount Surprise by train, a day and a half getting there, never mind.

32:30 That was the way things were in those days. Public transport wasn't too good, and I flew to Cairns. I used to get a plane from Cairns to Townsville to Cairns, and then get the train out to the back there.

33:00 And Mount Surprise, I think Mount Surprise was on that route, it might have been on the Hughenden route. And anyway, I pull up that night... We only travelled by day. And rail motor took us from there, out... What do they call it - tin hares, in those days. And

33:30 this night, this day we were out. We got to Mount Surprise, to Alberton, that's right, the name of the place just on dark, just last bit of light and I said, "Oh, where's...?" I couldn't see past the end of my nose you know. And anyway he, a couple of blokes there, I see a station fellow there. I said, "Tell me where the

34:00 guesthouse is and the pub is." "Well, they're side by side," he says. "You follow the fellows carrying the kegs of beer. You follow them. You'll be right." So I go up there. I see the bloke in the pub. I couldn't see the blooming guest house then. I thought, "The pub will do us," and went

34:30 inside, and there is Ken Reid just happened ahead of him. That's right, and the bloke says, "Righto boys, bring the kegs in," waving a wet bag, went over the top, let it cool down a bit, of course they're all as dry as a bone, of course they started chanting at him then, I got out of it.

35:00 And another chap that was with me and I said, "I want accommodation." He said, "Right, I'll just go next door there off the end of the verandah and there's accommodation there." "Okay," I said "There'll be one problem," he says, "I'm having trouble with the light in that room."

35:30 I said, "Why? What's the matter." He said, "Bloke was here about three months ago," he said, "and he threw his boot at the switch." "Oh," I said, "I got a switch, a power point 240 and I got a couple of spares in my kitbag in my box." So I replaced it. It wasn't 240 it was 24 I think that part, and 24 volt.

36:00 And he says, "Crikey," he says, "that'll do me," he says. And, it was, we fixed it up and when the light came on everything was pink. The ceiling was pink, the mosquito net was pink, there was pink on the floor - I was going mad. And I used to... "That's all the paint we could get."

36:30 And then anyway I went out, there was a rabble in the pub and by that time they had thrown the bag back and tapped the keg and of course, because it'd been rolling around the truck all day in the hot sun, the railway truck slammed from one end of the car to the other. And the boys only got about

37:00 one per cent of beer and 98 per cent of froth. And, they were all around the twist in about 10 minutes. And I come up to the fellow behind the counter and I said, "Can I get a bit of tea?" And he said, "Not for a while yet." I said, "That's all right then," I said, "as long as I get it before I go to bed." And he said, "You like a beer?" "I don't

37:30 drink beer," I said. "Have you got a bottle of wine or something like that then?" He says, "I got half a bottle here on the shelf." he says, "You can have that for fixing my switch." So, this other chap and myself, Murph, he was a great bloke, I travelled with him a lot, and we sat up the end of the bar and had a couple and

38:00 the noise seemed to settle down a bit. Then a couple of girls come in. "Oh," she says, "some new blood in town." She says, "What about we have a dance?" I said, "Okay." And one plays the piano and somebody else there plays the drums; that's good, right do you know what?

38:30 There's 24 of them, 24 fellows out there, there's no way in the world will they come inside. They're ringers you know, what they call them in those days, you know, cow hands, you know. It was as funny as

a circus. We had a great old night, with the drums and the piano, about three or four girls.

- 39:00 Local girls around the town, not very big, there's only about a, a dozen houses around. Then the next morning I looked up and I got up and, leaned over the side and everything. Oh God, that pink. And, I swore off pink things ever since. And what woke us up was whop, whop, whop
- 39:30 through the room. It was geese. He had geese, whop, whop. Oh, couldn't get out of the place fast enough. We had to catch a rail motor then, just after eight o'clock, to go out to Mount Surprise and, that was, I don't know if you ever went out in the south in the north-west there, have you?
- 40:00 It's very interesting out there. It's now a tourist town out there now. You know the lava tubes, you heard of them? It's just behind that, just past the lava tubes a few miles. And I was there for a week or more, doing both the motors up. I had the diesel mechanic with me and the radio mechanic and myself, the
- 40:30 three of us on that trip. And we had very good meals. They used to give us half a bullock from a station out there, and we used to... He says, "You like to come out this Saturday," he says, because we're going to pick our meat supply?"
- 41:00 "Yeah, righto." Go out there only about an hour and half through the bush, and you got to bring it back. It was magnificent meat, beautiful. He says, "I kill only when they're asleep. I don't disturb them."
- 41:30 He says, "I just bump them on the head, knock them out. And then we string them up and dress it." It was beautiful, every bit, every bit was the tastiest bit you ever tasted. Of course, too much wouldn't be very good for us...

Stop there George.

Tape 4

- 00:33 **So, where did you get to after that George?**
- Well I'm still there at this point. In town there was one shop. It was run by a lady of immense proportions. It was only about that high off the ground and she used to give the boys soft drinks
- 01:00 when they went into town, on the house. And so, "How can I repay you, you know, for the boys, how can I repay?" She says, "I've never seen a movie. Yeah," she says, "never seen a movie. I've lived here all my life." And I said to her, "Well, I've got to come back here in another few weeks
- 01:30 do a job here. If you like, I'll bring out, 16 millimetre, or 18 millimetre, 16 millimetre wasn't it? 16 millimetre set up and a blind and what have you." And so, in due course I come back and I got, we got the boys to, we'll see it
- 02:00 with this we'll go in. I said, "Look, set it up and I'll go and pick her up after tea, after dinner at night." So we went back out, pick her up. She couldn't walk down the steps, she was that big. So we loaded her onto the back of the truck on a big settee sort of thing. It wasn't a settee, it was a box actually. She sat on that and she overhung both sides.
- 02:30 God, she was immense. Must have been about 30 stone. And she used to get around this shop. It was not very big. It was a wonder things didn't fall around her. But, then when we got her out to the camp, we couldn't get her off the truck. We were going show it in the recreation room. So we had to cart it all outside, set it up in the bush which we did.
- 03:00 Oh, she was absolutely amazed. "Oh," she says, "You know, I've heard about this and now I've seen it." And she was about 30 I suppose at that time, but enormous, she must have had some disease or something. And she had an old chap who looked after her, I don't know if it was her father or what, but he used to do all her chores for the shop and she used to make the drinks for
- 03:30 the boys. But anyway, she enjoyed it, and I took her back and told the people at the cinema place in town. He said, "Well, that's a breakthrough that is, showing her her first movies." I did my job there of course I went back and that and next time I was somewhere else. I think I was...
- 04:00 I don't know where I went there. There was various places. One other place I went over to, Karumba, went out there, and went out by train. There was no planes heading over there and I went out to, no, where the trains started from, Croydon.
- 04:30 From Croydon, and got the train, the old rattler which still runs today to Normanton and from Normanton by truck to Karumba and it was a funny place. You didn't go down the stairs after dark because of the snappers, crocodiles. They're
- 05:00 everywhere. They used to roam around here and scratching through the camp. The camp was built up about five or six feet, and we all had rooms there.

Did you hear of any close calls with men and crocodiles?

No, not really. I can tell you one story about the crocodile. I was up in Cape York. We decided to go and do a bit of crocodile shooting,

- 05:30 and, we go up on the, it was low tide, we got onto the mangroves. I'm sure there's a croc over there on the side of the river, big creek you know, up there, all quiet and waiting, put his head up a bit and go down. They just put their nostril up, get their air and then they go down, I'll get him when he's up you see. Well, trouble is next minute, something goes whop
- 06:00 down beside us. Well my instinct was to go up the tree, my mate's instinct was to go for his life. I reckon it was safer up the tree than what it was going through over the mudflats. You ought to see, he fell down, in the, you know the mangroves, how they grow three, about five or six feet out of the water, and wasn't he a mess. I come down and I laughed and laughed.
- 06:30 It was a mud skip, they climb the trees, and it had whopped down right, it was about that size, about a foot long, and it had whopped down behind us. Tell you what, frightened the daylight out of us, because Murph my mate, he went for his life, and I went up. I don't know who laughed the most, him or me. What an instance
- 07:00 it happened. Incidentally the time I went to Karumba, I came back by flying boat to Townsville. In one of the old, big flying boats; the air force had them. Were bombers and that, and I came back to Townsville in that, and I'll never forget the first time. I went up to, on
- 07:30 that trip, I did a trip to Cairns. The first time I did a trip to Cairns, we called in at Port Douglas. See the railway is right at the beach at Port Douglas. And, and the bloke says to me, "Oh," he says, "you want to go across the way to the fish shop. Good fish there and that." I said, "My meals are provided."
- 08:00 And I go up to the tea rooms and, boy, didn't I have a meal, it was a first class, first class, I was like a goat in a china shop. And lace table cloths and everything and serviettes. There I was, first time in years I'd seen a thing like that, and
- 08:30 it was good. That was the first time we knew what was going on after that. Another time was in Cairns and I'd been up to Atherton and I came down on the truck and I only had my overalls on and I was wanting to buy parts for the job I was doing. And I
- 09:00 got a lift with a jeep into town and I got hauled up by an MP [Military Police]. Two MPs grabbed me in overalls, "You're not supposed to be in overalls in public, you know. Supposed to be dressed." And they said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm going to a hardware place. I've got to get some gear."
- 09:30 He says, "That's a ripe old story." I said, "No, it's not." He said, "Have you got a leave pass?" I said, "I have a pass, I don't have a leave pass." And he says, "What sort of a pass?" And I said, "A special pass." "So, who do you think you are?" I said, "I'm the..." And he said, "Well, give us the pass." I said, "No,
- 10:00 you take me to your commanding officer." And he looked at me and looked at my mate. and he says to my mate, "You're very quiet. What about you?" He says, "I'm with him." Didn't give any names, we don't allow names sort of thing when we were like that like that and I says. "You take me to your boss."
- 10:30 Oh, so very indignantly took us in and I said you the fellow in charge, I said, "Would you mind getting the reference library and find the Air Board order number so and so?" "Who do you think you are." I said, "Never mind who we are." I said, "I'm asking you to do that." He says, "Yes, our pass was
- 11:00 like about that size was only good for 28 days for the month, and I never let it off our body, because it was, there was only six in the whole of north Queensland and we had three of them. And, this officer said, "You're right." "I'll show them to you but I won't give them to you." He said, "Can I see it over here?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I've
- 11:30 never seen one of these before." "No, sir, I don't suppose you would," I said, "because there's only six of them in the whole of Northern Command. "Oh." And he said "Oh well, I'll have to let you go." So we went off on our merry way, got what we wanted, and went back up to Atherton and put the part in and caught the train back down and went to Cairns and I got a plane
- 12:00 to Townsville. Had a few hairy trips with the Yanks and bad landings and what have you. And that time, I think it was a bit wet and he circled around out to see and come back and I said, "You know, you're not flying high enough,"
- 12:30 I said, "because you're about over land now." And he says, "I've only been out here once before." I said, "You better let me guide you," I said. And I knew where we were. You know the ranges out behind the airfield there? We were up in there. I said, "Stick the nose up as fast as you can, keep going until
- 13:00 it changes tune and it'll come clear then." Well, just come over the top of the range. Oh boy, we were lucky. And another experience I had there, in Cairns, I was flying down in a Liberator, I think, yeah, it was a Liberator, and,
- 13:30 he was coming into land, normal landing and I was, I was down in the tail having a look around, you

know seeing the beauty of the place, and all of a sudden he said, "We've got to go up," he said, "there's a

14:00 a Dakota," - a C-47 they call them - "cutting across the runway." Oh God, we were nearly minced meat. And he dropped it, and he bounced over the top of the plane and of course sprung all the hydraulics and that and we finished up in the heap down the end of the runway. Got myself up and got out of the plane and one other bloke says,

14:30 "Oh," he says, "bloody pilots," he says, "they can't fly," he says. I said, "We're very lucky to be alive." I said, "Don't be too hard on your pilot, because I saw what happened in the side gunner position at that stage." I said, "It was the C-47 cut across underneath us and he just dropped it, about 20 feet."

15:00 Oh gosh, it was, whomp, up and just missed it on the other side. Of course it did his brakes and everything. He tried to cut the motors but he couldn't. There was no reverse on motors in those days, pull them up and he just had to guide it and no brakes and we finished up in the mangroves more

15:30 or less at the side of the strip. I decided to go by train then back to Townsville. I said, "I've had enough for the day."

Did you ever have much trouble getting parts during that time?

Well I didn't have to have much parts; it was mainly maintenance. And I carried what was required, I had a tool box and used to carry my spares

16:00 and that. Another time coming down from Cardwell... You know Cardwell? And we had a problem there. One motor cut. He didn't know what to do. See, half those pilots should never have been pilots. And

16:30 we was coming towards Palm Island and he said, the load master pulled out a 45, I said, "What are you going to do with that?" He said, "I might have to lighten the load." I said, "Your blokes first." I said, "Not me." I said, "I'm on an important mission."

17:00 And he said, "Well," he said, "all right, kick your tool box out the side." I said, "I'll do that then, but no more." And we were down, one had cut out and the other one was smoking like this and we come and landed right on the end of the runway. There was some bum planes in them Yanks. I reckon they lost half their planes through

17:30 negligence and inability to fly and all that. They seem to have changed now, haven't they? They used to go much faster. It's all automatic now that's why.

When you were doing maintenance on planes, how much dialogue did you have with the pilots in terms of trying to ascertain how planes were handling and so forth?

Well, I was only concerned with the electricals.

18:00 When I was flying, when I was in maintenance on the planes and I knew all the planes, we had about a dozen or so planes and, they'd say it's... They'd enter it in their log book, 'engine missing, port side', something like that, and we'd have to ascertain where it was, what it was, and it might be in the magnetos or it could have been plug trouble or something like that or fuel.

18:30 And I wasn't interested in the fuel side of it, that was the fitter 2Es [Engine Fitter]. I was only interested in the electrical. And I used to take them off, we'd check it out anyway, in case it was dirty plugs and that sort of thing, take the plugs out clean them and sand blast them and reset them and put them back, and away they'd go all right. But

19:00 the [UNCLEAR] ranger couldn't do any of that. All I can do is clean the plugs and send them off, hope for the best. They lost a few of them on the way out from there, around there between there and Cape York. And, at the end of the war, I was at

19:30 a place called Higgins Field at the top of Cape York. We'd been there for about a month doing the maintenance on all the camps and that around there, power mainly. And on the day leading up to the end of the war, we had the main motor at the camp.

20:00 It was overdue to be pulled down, so I said, "What are we going to do?" "Oh," he says, "Tojo won't give in today." He reckoned he wasn't going to give in till tomorrow. But he did, and we were stuck there with a motor all in pieces - a diesel, a big diesel - and we worked all night on it and into the middle of

20:30 the next day. Because the boys all had the day off and we didn't because we were working still on this motor and we had the next day off. And the photo of that little bloke with the rifle, he's the little islander boy. We used to call them all boys. That was at Somerset. We went up to Somerset the next day and got ourselves a good feed

21:00 of oysters. And, the Jackie said to me, when we turned in to come in and he saw who we were -we'd been there before, oh - all over my place, he say, "Everybody happy." I said, "How do you know? Have you seen somebody since last Saturday when we were here?"

21:30 He says, "I know." "Then how do you know?" "I know," he says, "everybody's free in my country. The

war's over." Now work that one out. And he was a lone person. The Aboriginals there, they couldn't find him. They used to, you know, hunt him,

22:00 but he was too cunning.

Why were they hunting him?

Oh, devil, devil, devil. Half of them, the missions, there were missions there, two missions up there, and I got to know a few of them, the fellows up in the missions there, and I also got to know a couple of the stockmen there. And he told me a story of how, a couple of days previously...

22:30 In the top of Cape York, it's different. You know how - you wouldn't know now - around Kingaroy, the jungle encusters. "It's not subject to torrential rains like you get on the coast, so therefore the vegetation is different. The vegetations on the jungle was on the high parts, and on the low parts it's poor country because

23:00 of the nutrients never washed down. And this chap on the horses, he says, "Well," he says, "I saw everything." Then he says, "This bloke come out," he says, "in the jungle there, at the top there, and," he says, "fired my rifle off a couple of times." He says, "Next minute I see one."

23:30 "Oh," he says, "you killed my brother." He didn't say anything to him. He says, "Why? Why you killed?" So anyways, this chap said to me, "I'm fed up. You shoot an animal and they skin it and take everything else bar the hide and the head, and

24:00 like you know, take it back to the mission where they were." We went down there this day, one day that it had happened, and the, we were in the jeep, we were following it down and this will be a real pantomime.

24:30 So, he went back - it was about five miles he wanted to go. He cantered his horse down this... We knew where this place was and we got down there and he came in on the horse, and he says, "Oh devil, that red headed bloke," he says, "he shoot my mate. And about 10 minutes later the other bloke comes and he killed my mate, and he fired a couple of blanks up in the air."

25:00 It was funny. That was life up there in those days. There was no, or very few civilians there. While was on the Iron Range there was another fatality there. A couple, they used to drove cattle across from somewhere down, about 20-30 mile down, the Iron Range,

25:30 over to the gulf [Gulf of Carpentaria] and back, and bring the others back. And pretty good country just around from us about 20 mile. And there's, what happened, he picked up a can of petrol instead of water to put the fire out. He got burnt, very badly burnt.

26:00 And she came up, she was only a young lass, I suppose be about 23, 24, if that, and she had a little baby. I'd met them before, just about, used to be away for about a week and then come back and pick up another lot and take them down and drove, drove them through you know, bring them in for fattening. And this time she came tearing out

26:30 and she said, "Oh, John's been burnt, been badly burnt and we'd like to get an ambulance." "We haven't got an ambulance but we'll take our truck down for you." And we picked him up and we had the medical orderly with us, but oh he was in a bad way. And I think he died on the plane, when they got a plane up very early. It was in the early hours of the morning.

27:00 But I think he died anyway. She was back a week later. I said, "What are you going to do?" and she said, "I'm carrying on." She was a Brisbane girl; she come from the West End. She said, "I'll carry on, so no gain no pain." I said, "You've got a lot of heart, girl."

27:30 I don't know how long she did it for after that, but that was one of the bad things I come across. Anyway we'll carry on from there. We were back up, Cape York, Higgins Field and where I was later, and we used to do a full service on

28:00 on the motors and we had one down, one motor down, in little tin sheds, and you can just imagine a tin shed about this big with a great big diesel, not all diesel, some were diesel and the others were hooked up to the V8 motors,

28:30 big Ford petrol motors. I don't know which was the worst, diesel or petrol. Anyway I had to work on them both. I used to do all the electrics on them and the other two fellows used to do the, one bloke did the diesel, we used to help each other and, another fellow there, did the radio, and that sort of thing.

29:00 So between the three of us we sorted it all out - communications and the power.

Was it a big job?

Pulling them down? Yes, the motors, it was a big job. We used to have a...depending upon how many hours it had been running. And another place we went to up there, somewhere, I can't remember where it was now,

29:30 it was an atmospheric station registering area. They had a camera hooked to a screen; used to take a

photo every five or 10 minutes. It would record and the chap used to send the recording thing, 35 millimetre film, down to...

- 30:00 I think it finished up at the astronomy in Canberra, somewhere like that. And it used to measure the heavy side layer. You ever heard of the heavy side layer? The heavy side layer lays about 600 miles up in the air during the day and at night-time. No, reverse,
- 30:30 night-time it goes up. And that's why your radio worked better at night than they do during the day. The earlier ones did, that was before the days of FM [Frequency Modulation] radios, FM radios just go straight through. But, all the earlier, or even today, they were all on FM now, I think. No they're not.
- 31:00 Some of them are AM [Amplitude Modulation]. On long distance, the cabinets, the transmitters in the cabinets used to be one cabinet with, used the communications in FM and the other one was in AM and if communications got too bad we used to switch over to the FM. The FM was only just in its infancy then; it used to give
- 31:30 a bit of trouble. Of course the static with the AM was something horrific sometimes. I remember being in a place, it was the Iron Range; they're all ironstone around there and I went down to the bloke on the communications, the switch board, and I said, "What's all those lights coming in? Somebody coming in on the light?" He says, "No, it's only surges from the
- 32:00 lightning." Network went out in different places. There was one spot, out in Rosemond, and the ack-ack right around. I don't know what they were. I never found out until after the war that one chap, he was in the ack-ack, he was there for 12 months at Iron Range. Never ever saw him. He was only about a mile away, and
- 32:30 they had to keep to themselves. And I think that was, you know, rather strange a thing. Another thing happened too, at the end of the war. I was up at Higgins Field, up in Cape York,
- 33:00 and there was about the second day after the war finished, and the troops were coming back, the prisoners of war, and this bloke strided out of the plane and he says, "Where am I?" I says, "Why? Where are you?" I said, "at Higgins Field." "Where the hell's Higgins Field?" You see, I said, "Where are you from?"
- 33:30 "Oh," he said, "I'm a POW [prisoner of war] and I made the decision to come to Australia." And it turned out he was a major, Scottish. He lived about three or four doors from me at Southport. Seen him every... I say g'day to him
- 34:00 and all that and we had a party at Christmas and he come down and we had a few drinks and you know. He said, "There was a bloke out in Australia," he says, "a bit arrogant," he says. "What sort of tree's that?" I said, "A gum tree." He says, "That was you, wasn't it?" He says, "That was you wasn't it?" I said, "Yes." He played the
- 34:30 bagpipes at Surfers Paradise on the beach every Anzac Day because he was one of the Queen's pipers. He was a great fellow. His wife was one of the women who worked over in France, undercover. She died while we were there. She had strep [infection] like that, incredible.
- 35:00 She'd been in and out of... He says, "I didn't really know. Monte," he says. "I really didn't know where she'd been." He said she never said, of course, you know how quiet he was, and so anyway. Poor lass, she died while we were at South Brisbane, not South..., Southport. And that closed a chapter in our life then.
- 35:30 I've seen him since, but not for a long time now. I moved up other end of the coast, up at Paradise Point, got away from him, you know. He's never come up that way; we never went down there much.

How much news did you get of the war when you were travelling around so much?

Didn't, didn't have a clue. Sometimes you get

- 36:00 a copy of the Guinea Gold I think it was up there. Down in Townsville you could get a... I wasn't in Townsville. I wasn't there very much, but go and buy a newspaper, like. I knew where the boys were going to, like Morotai mainly, and there was Noemfoor and
- 36:30 there was [Port] Moresby and those places. That's New Guinea. You know we rarely had an idea where things were; you didn't speak to anybody about them. I had a case in Townsville, I had a cousin, living in Townsville,
- 37:00 he was married and had two children, and he joined up at the air force and he was over at Moresby, he was a transport driver. And I went to see her one day, I knew he'd gone up in New Guinea and I went over to see her, and she was crying. She said, "I haven't got anything to eat."
- 37:30 I said, "What," I said, "You get your coupons don't you?" She said, "Yes, but I have to give them to the grocer and he just gives me a here and a bit there, half a loaf of bread here and a bit of butter there and that sort of thing." And I said, "Who is it?" "Oh," she said, "one at Aitkenvale." I won't mention names; I understand they're still in the family. And I go over there and I said, "I want you to go in

- 38:00 first, you ask him for your full ration." And she went in and, oh, he put on a pantomime and that. He was Chinese. And so I went in and I said, "Young lady, are you having trouble?" She said, "I'm not getting my full rations." I said, "You give her her full rations."
- 38:30 He looked at me, "Oh, who are you?" I said, "I'm asking you to give her her full ration for the fortnight," or whatever it was. And he says, "That's all she gets, that's it." And I said, "No it's not, you got a book of coupons," I said, "and you're holding them. You're supposed to give her a certain amount of this and a certain amount of that." And with that I got a bit
- 39:00 irate and I jumped up on the counter and grabbed the knife, big knife there for cutting cheeses, and I swung it around in mid air. I said, "I'll cut your throat if you don't give her what she wants." "Oh, lady, I'll give you." And no worries after that. I said, "Any queries," I said, "you let me know. And if I'm in town," I said, "you let me know."
- 39:30 I said, "I'll soon sort him out. I only need to walk in there and you'll see him drop it." She got her full rations after that, no worries. Oh, the miserable coots.

Good place to stop

Tape 5

- 00:37 **Okay George, did you want to tell us about, how your hearing got affected by the planes?**

Oh yeah. Well in those, in the motors, they revved up the motor and there's no exhaust pipes on those, they go straight out, fighter planes.

- 01:00 And no dampeners the sound. As you might know when they rev up, I had my head up in the engine bay, absolutely screaming. And, that was par for the course I suppose.

Can you tell me...

I went to the repat [repatriation hospital] about it. They said, "Oh no, couldn't get that."

- 01:30 I said, "Well I did," and he said, "No, only artillery men get that." I said, "You're mistaken there," I says, "You go up to 110, 120 KC [kilocycle] underneath a plane." And, oh, he shut up then, wouldn't accept it; no can't get it in the air force.

- 02:00 Blanket cover, it's amazing isn't it.

Is that still to this day?

Oh I don't know, that was 40, 50 years ago, 60 years ago. 50 odd years ago. I did a circuit in the Wirraway on my own, and I sort of looked out and, 20 feet

- 02:30 off the ground, I thought, "Ground's getting a bit distant." Anyway, took her up, got a Very light across my bow from the control tower, and I come around and come down and right in front of the control tower. And I said, "Would you, if you were in my circumstances, what would you have done?"

- 03:00 I said, "I'd never had enough room to pull up, and I hit the fence." So, and I decided one thing to do, up and go. The old CO gave me a commendation. He said, "That was a very good job you did there."

What was one of the most challenging jobs you did?

- 03:30 I really couldn't say; they were pretty solid. One of the most challenging jobs I suppose would be when they dumped a motor, electric motor, on the bench at Townsville. I was in the

- 04:00 unit there, and that. He said, the engineering officer said to me, he said, "Well, it's got a fault somewhere in the gearing." He goes from, from, oh, screams, you know how they scream up, when they're starting the motors? It goes from 20,000, 30,000

- 04:30 and something, revs, down to four. Four revolutions to get the power and that little motor is only that size, and it turns the big Pratt & Whitney motors over. So I said, "Here goes," and I laid it all out, about 200 pieces in it, in gear and that

- 05:00 and I found what the problem was. And I fixed it, put it back together, I said, "Now try it," and it worked.

How do you go about finding which piece in 200 pieces is not working?

Well, strip down gears and what had happened it had slipped somehow or other, one of the gears and was just going nowhere, and I fixed it

- 05:30 and put it all together again. I laid it all out on a piece of white madaplin [good quality cotton], and because it was worth about, even in those days, thousands of dollars.

Is there a process to pulling things apart so that you don't lose track of where it all is?

No, you just got to be very careful and

06:00 remember, and don't talk to anybody, and just remember where you put it and where it goes and what's what and where's where. And be very thoughtful and remind, because once pulling it down you got to then bring it together, haven't you? It's no easy feat - took me all afternoon. I walked away like a stunned rabbit.

06:30 **How many men were in that special unit that went around fixing different things?**

Oh, that was only about five of us actually, four or five of us. But, four, at the maximum. Depending upon what was required, what job we were required to do.

Did you go around in groups of four?

07:00 No, no, no, not necessarily. Depended on what, and if it was a complete service, yes we would. There'd be, go around, chap, radio fellow would do the radio, and I'd do the electricals, on the motors on the rig and that. There's an interesting photo there of a

07:30 jungle rope bridge and that was at Mount Speck, North Queensland, up in the top of the range. And, it was all, oh it was wet, used to, when you, up there, in the tropical time, like in the wet season, the storms don't come from on top of you, they come from below you, from down the mountains.

08:00 And you're, and then all of a sudden, whoomph, it was eerie. Bloke said, "You'll get used to it." They had an interesting point about that radar station. They only had a coverage of 10 degrees, through the bush and jungle, and there only to cover

08:30 emergencies of Garbutt airport. Which was quite astounding actually. If the Castle Hill got knocked out, if the one at Cape Cleveland got knocked out, there was another one at Cape Palaranda. They all fell into a category which was part of a network, and

09:00 the one at Castle Hill, it wasn't right up on top, it was down on the lower positions, about half way up. And I remember when the Yanks took off there for the Philippines, there was a plane going off every three minutes for 36 hours, continuous. The majority of those planes, all

09:30 put together at Townsville. There was across the way from the aerodrome there, it was an enormous hangar, long hangar, crates come in one side and they wheel the planes out the other. It was amazing. We were never allowed in there, around there. But another thing too in Townsville, all the big naval guns were re-bored

10:00 there from the Pacific Fleet.

Did you see that done?

No. Big naval guns they used to get them, you know the real big ones. They have to re-bore them after a certain time because they wear. I don't know what they do now. I suppose there's something else.

In your work, how much interaction did you have with the Americans?

10:30 Oh, not that much really. Main interaction was with those two fellows at Iron Range. Across the strip from where we were was a weather station, American weather station, and down further on the going down the road to the Borland roads, there was an

11:00 American hospital there. They used to bring them in and put them up there - fix them up I suppose. They'd go in stretchers and fly them off, flew them out again, and there was something else there. Oh yeah, getting away from that, at Portland Road itself

11:30 there was a spring, up on the hill as you come down onto the big jetty, and that spring is the spring that Captain Cook refilled, rewatered himself out of. And the people that are there now knew a chap that was up there since then, in the '50s and

12:00 '60's, and he said, "Oh," he said, "they've dug that out." I said, "That's a historical site." "Oh," he said, "they got pumps out there, pumped the water out now." Full of veggie gardens, you know, hippies and all that. All around there, around Portland road's all

12:30 trees and that and they all been cut, all been gone now. So it must have been an intense wind at Iron Range there, at one stage, because a chap told me, you know he said, "We didn't have to cut the timber down." Oversee the approaches to the airstrip, which is nearly as

13:00 long as the airstrip, has got to be cut back, cut out and there was nothing, and he says, "There must have been a cyclone go through there and tore the hell out of everything. Because," he says, "there was nothing in that area." I tell you what I did see there, was a skeleton of a big carpet snake about 15 feet long, and caught

13:30 in its jaws, about that size, was a hindquarters of a wallaby; that's where they finished up. I'm sorry I never took a photo of that. I never had time; should go back and check it out.

Did you spend a good deal of your time just on your own working on different jobs when you travelled around in that special unit?

Yeah.

14:00 On my own a lot, depending on what the job is. That didn't worry me; every job was a challenge.

Did you enjoy sort of being your own boss on the road?

I was my own boss mainly right through the war. We worked as individuals in the units I was in.

14:30 And I'll never forget back in Townsville, a chap said to me, he said he had a shaver. And I still got a coil winding for different things on the motors and that, electric motors and that. And, he says, "Have you got any fine wire? You could rewire this." I said, "Yeah I think so."

15:00 I picked up the wrong coil of wire. I picked up a resistance wire instead of winding wire, and instead of being five or ten ohms, it was 5000. Of course it only go like that, I said, "You can wind it next time." It took me all day doing it.

15:30 And I gave him wire, spin the wire, showed him how to do it, "That's your job now." But they often see the way it's done and put the other one on the same. Oh we'd rewired a couple of the big alternators, couple of them had got blown up; we had winding wire for them.

16:00 That was pretty heavy wire, large gauge wire. And mainly due to the negligence of the people that were using them caused that and had to rip it out. They couldn't do it on the job. We had a set up in the hangar and they could take them out and wire them out, solder them in and that. It was

16:30 quite an interesting thing.

Did you feel that all the training you'd been through had prepared you for your job, or was there a lot of on-the-job sort of learning?

90 per cent of the jobs came out of the old head. You can only teach the physics and that, of the work, but you got to use your fingers, use your hand and use your brain.

17:00 **Can you tell me about the other guys you worked with?**

Hm?

Can you tell me about the other guys you worked with?

Well I was never there that much. I was there, with the girls in the unit, Air Defence Headquarters. That was quite interesting. I was there about a couple of months, because when the Japs, when the Yanks invaded the Philippines...

17:30 But by the time, like I went out there soon after the landing, the Philippines, I went to another unit, that May, from the Air Defence Headquarters, to RIMU, RIMU, Radio Installation

18:00 Maintenance Unit. It was quite comical.

Why is that?

You ever seen anything of the old General MacArthur? He was a very pompous bugger. Oh, I remember going along George Street one time, the women, blokes with

18:30 loaded pistols, stop. Stop, the general was coming out, "Stand to attention." I said, "I beg your pardon, I'm an Australian, I'm not an American." And he said, "Well stand to attention." That's as far as I'd go. He, pull everybody up in the street; he gets out, comes out, swaggers out and into his car and somebody opens the door and

19:00 then they shut it and then all saluting and all this carry on. And then there were a couple of incidents on the tarmac in Townsville, at the Garbutt there, of various things that happened there, but one was just after the war had finished. They brought a general down for interrogation,

19:30 and I don't know how long he'd been flying though, but he must have taken a short, he just dropped down, just dropped down and dropped it, just like that - in front of all concerned. I bet he was relieved, poor fellow. The only thing they didn't do to him is sink the boot into him.

20:00 Another incident at Garbutt I remember, we were up, taking the, actually the unit the of comflight [communications flight]. We were down at a different part of the area and we used to have to, if a Tiger Moth's taking off, we had to trundle them out. They had the motors going

20:30 but we had to guide them and take them out to the runway, and then they would hold onto the tail like that get all the dirt and the screaming noise, and then they'd drop and take off. This incident, meaning

to tell you about...

- 21:00 It was five o'clock one night. Things were very quiet, about five o'clock, everyone was going about their business and that, and the CO and a chap, he was a sergeant pilot, I can't remember his name now, I was a friend of his, I used to do a lot of work for him and that at that time. And he said...
- 21:30 I said, "Where are you going?" He said, "Oh just going up to get a bit of time up." And he was in front and the CO was behind - the main pilot's behind see - and saw the plane go up like that over Garbutt Road and come down like that. They're doing, across the street, neatly missed the barbed wire then on both sides, and straight into a
- 22:00 civilian. They were, I forget what they were, CCC [Civilian Construction Corps] I think it was called, Civilian Construction and something. And a fellow was walking up and there were not many people there and it was the equivalent of a road you know. And, he says...
- 22:30 I'm watching this bloke and he's reading his letter from home see, he looks up and sees a Tiger Moth coming straight at him, He says, "I never laughed so much." He's still laughing when we picked him up over the road. He said he thought he was a goner. And the CO, he's turned around to the CO and said, "I thought you were flying." He said, "I thought you were flying." So,
- 23:00 it went up on its own, went down on its own.

Do you have any more stories about sort of near accidents at the airstrip?

Yes I have got one. One day we were taking off a Tiger Moth and there was a squadron of planes ready to take off.

- 23:30 I pulled him out of the way while they went off, and there's about a dozen in it, and there was a major, he was the American. And he went up and around, and they were coming down I think.
- 24:00 Anyway, they clipped one another's wing and that fellow, he said, "I've killed my best mate." He says, "I'll never fly again." He ripped his wings off and threw them on the ground. He says, "I've killed my best friend." Oh, jeez it was nasty, you know. He was just about inconsolable. It was terrible. Another time, I didn't witness the whole thing, but
- 24:30 I was out on the road to, oh just out of Townsville there, heading south, just over the bridge, and two of our fighters came in and I thought, "Jeez, they're low." Next minute, crash. They wouldn't have been more than 50 yards inside the...
- 25:00 There was all trees there. There was an airstrip behind it. And, matter of fact my cousin was in that squadron, and he remembered it well and he says, "Silly buggers," he said, "they should have both been alive today." But that's war. Another
- 25:30 thing that happened up there, wasn't no aircraft involved, it was one of our trucks was going to somewhere in north, south Townsville. And in summer time the grass grows about eight, ten feet high, or it did in those days.
- 26:00 And it was all strips. There's about 16 airstrips around Townsville, it's hard to believe. And at Therangara, that big bomber strip is behind Townsville and there's another one at Garbutt, that was the biggest one. Anyway, they cut a whole
- 26:30 top of a hill, range off, and brought it in. That was all, where Garbutt is, that was all waterholes, strangely enough, they went down about 30 feet. These big machines they brought in, God knows where from, America I suppose. And you see them go down and all of a sudden puff of smoke and up they'd come the other side, laden with these
- 27:00 like these, same sort of thing as they do in the coal mines, the open cut mines. And enormous things. But they took that way and they use the fill on the sides and brought all the rock that used to, up in the hill there, and they rolled it all in.
- 27:30 There's about 20 feet of rock fill there, and they'll never sink. Of course there's nothing the size of what the planes are today, but that's a whole different story though about that.

Do you remember where some of the other airstrips were in that area?

Yes, around Townsville? There was three fighter strips down around

- 28:00 the river and, I think there was three, and one over the river which 75 Squadron was in. And going out of town towards and up around the corner past the gaol, you go right and you go up to Salome [UNCLEAR] and Charters Towers.
- 28:30 That road was built about three times the width of a road and actually wider than that and they were, all the heavy bombers and that, were in there along the side. They went in between the trees, I think it was a really a sight
- 29:00 to be seen. And, all the way there, I think there might have been about ten squadrons of Americans and

that there. You never knew. I remember going up there, up to Charters Towers once, and I think the road, you could see where they all are and were not there, and all camouflaged and that.

29:30 **Where there many wild rumours that circulated at the time about what the Americans were doing?**

What do you mean rumours, what?

Well just, you seem to suggest that you know what was going on?

Yeah, I remember the first day I landed in Townsville at three or four o'clock in the afternoon, and we got out of the train, after six and a half days -

30:00 Going back in time, I'll tell you another one first leading up to that. St Lawrence, we were outside St Lawrence, pulled up in the train, the old suburban train, oh I could hardly live with myself. I'm sitting on the train there for about four days, four and a half, five days and we were all, a lot of us were like that. So we start asking the engine drivers, "How long do you reckon we'll be here?" "Oh," he says, "half an hour." I says, "Good." I said, "I'm going down for,

30:30 a few of us are going down for a swim." There's water in the... We went down and had a look. There's a creek there, you know. Oh, get in there and just got all lathered up, 'toot, toot'. "You lousy cow." There's about ten of us, and so I grabbed the next train, was an American train, full of Americans, and I said,

31:00 "Can you give us a lift up to Bowen?" "Yeah, hop in, wherever you can." I was talking to the marshal on the train. So we were left behind having a swim. I said, "We've come from Brisbane." I said we hadn't had a drop of water to wash with, except at the stations you know. We get our meals all right, designated places you get your meals, and

31:30 of course, you could have your breakfast at 10 o'clock or you could have your dinner at three o'clock and tea at nine, eight or nine o'clock. You know, you never knew when you were, time you got something. It's been hours in, 100 ks [kilometres], 100 mile, or 50 miles or something like that you know. It was incredible; the trains just went like that.

32:00 **What do you mean by that?**

Well they, they were big long shunting, that many trains on the line, all laden with munitions and articles of war. It's like, they couldn't just go straight through because it was only a single line. Single line up there, it was then. I think it's a double now.

32:30 And, you'd have to wait. You pull up, you might wait ten minutes, you might wait half an hour, you might wait two hours. You never knew when you were going. You'd be, "All right, go for a camp now." Whoomp, take off you know. So that was very busy days then.

You were going to tell me that other story about rumours?

33:00 Hm.

You were going to tell me the next story, you said, "I'll come back to that."

In Townsville the first day we were in there, they took us straight out to the personnel pool. And we got off, they actually said while we were still on the bus, the trucks, "Now, don't get off."

33:30 We didn't get off, we waited, going, "What's this? Now there's no leave, right, for tomorrow night or the next night. Why?" Well, two days ago it was one Australian with his found with his head down at the Ross River mud, dead

34:00 by the Yanks, it was the Negroes. The Negroes were across the... Negroes were always kept on the southern side of the river, strangely enough. I don't know whether it was it was dark or white or who. Anyway, that night there was three Yanks finished up dead in the river; our blokes didn't mess around.

34:30 And, then the next night there was, four Australians or something. Oh, they had to call the troops out and really get stuck into them. That was just one of the incidents. Another incident there was, having at Castle hill there, the Negroes got fed up with the whites,

35:00 the white soldiers. They feed a lot of the guns and ammunitions, went up to Castle Hill, and they started a war, their own private war. They killed about 80 or 90 of them up there. Last for a day and a half.

So how was that resolved, how did they resolve that, how did they stop them from warring with each other?

They just killed the lot of them.

35:30 There was about 80, I believe, was massacred in that respect. Oh, the Yanks copped a lot too. They were firing at them, they were actually... The Negroes had the advantage because they were up above the... They were firing down on them. But, that happened in the war, never publicised.

Do you know roughly what year that would have been?

36:00 No, wouldn't have a clue - the height of the invasion. About '43 or something like that.

So what were the Aussie soldiers saying about all this?

Oh, "Let them kill themselves." But there was some fine chaps amongst them. I remember one night, one afternoon, I was sitting down, standing, or sitting down in the gutter at Townsville

36:30 Railway Station, that was a pick-up point, anybody was going out, they had a spare seat, they'd, pick you up and take you out to Garbutt you know, keep on, they'd be going out further. And there was an American technical sergeant there and, he said he was cheesed off. He said, "I'm fed up with this service," he said. Because, he said,

37:00 they run around, the officers, with all the girls and that. He said, "It's incredible, not just our girls but their girls too." A lot of American girls in the services even then, and all flash in their white cars, their officers had white cars, and he says to me, "By Jesus," he said, "if my Dad knew what was going on," he said, "there'd be hell to

37:30 pay," he said. "You'll have to save it all up when you go home and tell him." I said, "What's he do?" Oh, he said he's a potato farmer in Idaho. And I said, "Oh yeah, what size?" "Oh," he said, "about 10,000 acres." Of potatoes and potatoes alone; that's all they ever farmed. Incredible isn't it? "It's big wide acreage farming over there," he said.

38:00 He said, "But the trouble is now," he said, "they're turning all over to aircraft manufacture, to cover it in cement," he said, "the best soil in America." And he says, "And they're covering it over in..." Oh, he was sour on them. And he said, "My Dad's farm is limited no end because of that." He said, "War comes first."

Did you see or hear of instances in Australia

38:30 **where that was the case with Australian farmers when you were travelling around?**

No, not in north Queensland, because there was, well they didn't interfere with the cane farms because it's all in low country and more or less tidal country that they were growing the cane.

39:00 But not there was not much taken over in that respect. They had taken over, they must have taken areas back at Rolling Stone there, around, behind, because they had big workshops over there. I was saying before about the re-machining the barrels of big guns, that was all done there. And then, over

39:30 the road from, from Garbutt was the big Boston - was it Boston? I think, yeah, Boston Bombers. They had them all around the roads for miles. Waiting for the invasion of the Philippines. And their pilots and that were camped under the wings and that mainly, and till the word go and then there was 36 hours of

40:00 murder and mayhem, and they took off. One poor fellow went straight into the top of the mountain on the top of Magnetic Island, about ten feet from the top, not a pretty sight. He got...

Can you describe the mood at the time when they were all taking off, was there a big buzz in the air or...

We all knew what it was.

40:30 Because, it was just after, not long after the invasion and they got these, Luzon think it was, that's where they went aboard, went ashore didn't they, Leutzon, LEUTZON, something like that, a name like that. And that's where the main invasion point was. And apparently there was

41:00 airfields behind that there were they'd captured off the Japs, and they all were landing there.

Tape 6

00:32 **Just wondering if you can tell me about the guard of honour you did at the State Parliament?**

Oh yes, that was, in 19, I think it must have been 1940. I was out of the army, not out of the army, it could have been '39, '39 I think it must have been. Yes, it would have been just before the war started. And that's the opening

01:00 of parliament. It's still held every year; it was quite interesting. We did about three months of pounding the streets, all around parade ground, get it right, spot on. When I was, during the air force, a bloke said to me, he says, "Have you done marching before?"

01:30 I said, "Just a bit." So I was in the army, never told him what it was and left it that.

And how did you get picked to be in the honour guard?

Height, they try to keep the height approximately the same. Little blokes and quite big blokes. There

was never big blokes much over six foot then. That was

- 02:00 about as high as high as people got. Now you see them six foot five and that, but not then, or not that I know of. Never got a chance to grow that high. But that's, approximately. We trained for three months of a Tuesday night and sometimes
- 02:30 we had daytime ones. We used to do marches through the streets sometimes. All part of the start of the war. It would have been prior to the war and, you might note that, on what I was wearing was boots and baggies and breeches because originally
- 03:00 we belonged to that Australia, First Australian Corps of Signals. And they were a mounted division in the First World War and they retained the uniform. The CMF was started, I don't know when. They called for recruits and that, when did the war start - '39 wasn't it? September.
- 03:30 At least 12 months before that, I remember there used to be a chap on the radio. He used to come on Sunday night and he used to quote, "We need 1000 planes in defence of Darwin." Everybody laughed at him. And anyway, the planes we had they would have shot them out of the sky anyway. It would have been a fruitless
- 04:00 job even if we would have had them. They were Wirraways. They, got around them, got into them, and the Buffalos, they were in Malaya, Bristol Buffalo. Bristol Buffalo, I think they were. They got shot out of the sky. And, they were supposed to go
- 04:30 with the Singapore, and assembled in Wellington, I think it was. And, well the war, the Malayan war finished before I got there.

What about the Boomerangs?

Oh they were just, they were supposed to be a fighter plane, they were quite a good plane, well built. Wirraway

- 05:00 weren't too bad; they were a good plane. Did the Boomerangs come before the Wirraway or after?

After I think.

After yeah. They weren't successful, the Altagio had the speed and the lightness and the manoeuvrability. That's how they won the first air wars.

- 05:30 And Jackson, at Port Moresby, they were gunned out of the sky more or less. There was two in the one squadron. One was the CO and another bloke was one of the main, leading pilots. And they said, oh, chap that I met, "We never had a ghost of a chance." And they went up, then they reformed
- 06:00 and went into, Morotai, Morotai? Yeah. And they beat them there. They beat the Japs at their own game there, the fellows from 75 Squadron. They were a pretty cluey bunch of boys those fellows And I got a photo there
- 06:30 of one of them, on the tarmac. One of the planes was going out and they were the first ones that went up. They lost five planes when they first went from Sydney up to, Moresby, not so much due to bad flying,
- 07:00 but more due to weather conditions. One got struck by lightning just after leaving Newcastle, I think. Somewhere down there there's one, another one up in northern New South Wales. It finished up there were three of them. About six, they lost, but they were replaced by other planes. Of course pilots is a trouble.
- 07:30 They take a bit of training, and, speaking of pilots and that, when the air wars started, really started down this way, the Yanks, through no fault of their own, they weren't told what to look for, the submarines, the subs.
- 08:00 And I can remember a time when, I think they reckon they shot 200, 200 submarines out of the sea. You know what it was they got? 200 whales. Oh terrible, so they went, Australians, Old Blamey must have got into it, because he enforced
- 08:30 the point that they must have an Australian navigator and co-pilot and, then it went down to one, two or three, over the next week. Oh, well, you know, that's wartime I suppose.

That day of state parliament opening, that must have been a pretty big day in the...

It is every year.

- 09:00 It's in August or September, August I think it is?

What can you remember of that day?

I can remember quite a bit about it. I had to stand and present arms for nearly half an hour. Two blokes fell over - I don't blame them, I was pretty close to it. The governor arrived late, something like that,

- 09:30 something happened anyway. In fact after the war I got to know the governor's son, and I said to him, "What happened?" "Oh," he said, "it was just bungled, you know, red tape." Well we ran like you know whats, but these things happen I suppose.
- 10:00 When it went off, it was quite good. We could still march. I still reckon part of my varicose vein problem started from that, strapped up legs, standing still for nearly an hour. Oh.

When you did your electricians course at Ultimo,

- 10:30 **what would be a typical day there as far as study and drill and everything else went?**

No drill. We might have drill half an hour. See we already done a 'rookies course' as they called it at your respective stations where you started from. It was a month, and that to me was just an extension of what I'd already done.

- 11:00 He called me out, he said, "Where did you learn to march?" I said, "In the army." Oh, I didn't elaborate on it, couldn't be bothered. I was too disgusted at what had happened that day.

So what did you think if basic training?

In the air force? Oh great, no worries at all.

- 11:30 Marched us around for, for three weeks or so it was.

Sydney must have been a real eye opener after coming from little old Brisbane, what did you think if Sydney when you got there?

Oh great. I had a great time down there, socially, and Melbourne socially too, had a great time. The Australia Comforts Fund had places in

- 12:00 the city where you could go and see them. And there used to be parties and that put on by different people, you know, for the troops. And we'd really, you know, enjoy ourselves at these different places. I remember once, in Melbourne, oh, I been to a couple of good ones in Melbourne.

- 12:30 I got an invite to go to Nicholas's place, the Aspro bloke. Had a big feast there. Oh, that was good. Another time I had an invitation to go to a chap at Fitzroy I think it was, not far out of the city, and he was a dentist and

- 13:00 he laid it on there, "Have a drink," and all of this. "Have a cigar." "No thanks." And sit and chat type of thing. I enjoyed their company, you know. And anyway, family, he was, the dentist was down below and they lived on top of it. It was quite a... If I was at Fitzroy today it'd be a

- 13:30 different story. Another time down there, we wanted to go to somewhere different, you know. We get sick of going around, "What else have you got?" Oh, what's - a woman said, "There's one not far away, over near Fitzroy." "Oh yeah."

- 14:00 So it wasn't the one I'd been at previously. She said, "You go around to this place at such and such a street and knock on the door." They hold parties there, you know a bit of a do there for any kind of... The son is a professional pianist or something or other. I don't know what he was.

- 14:30 And he had a friend, a nurse. They brought about three nurses along you see, and it was a wet night and I said to them later, before we were in there, I said, "I don't like this place." So we rolled up our overcoats and shoved them under a bush, "I think we're up for a quick exit here." But I says oh, things didn't go too well at all there.

- 15:00 "Oh, they'll be here, you know, oh they'll be here." This woman she was a hoity-toity you know. So anyway, the girls did turn up eventually, about half past nine I suppose it would have been, and they had a big of a fidget around, anyway. "Oh," I said to me mates, I said, "I can't take this, he isn't organised." And, "Let's get out."

- 15:30 So I went in to use the phone to call a taxi and get out of it, not good to me, he was a real pansy. In fact I, I picked up one of the girls there. She said, "Let's get out of here." I said, "Righto." I started it, and she said, "I can't stand this." She said, "He's me boyfriend though."

- 16:00 I said "You be joking." She said, "Yes, I think its the last time I'll be seeing him." So we got a taxi, we got the taxi, I rang the taxi, and using the phone, you see, the woman said, "He was a bit of a pansy." "Oh," I said, "Oh yeah." And

- 16:30 anyway, so he's going to ring the police so I grabbed hold of the phone, ripped it off the wall, said, "Right that ends that. That ends us too." We went out and picked up our overcoats from out under the bush and waited for the taxi. The woman says, "Go on, defend your honour, defend your honour, oh."

- 17:00 **So, can you tell me about dancing at the Trocadero and Radio City?**

Oh great, that was great. Really had a great time there. The girls and that. We used to see them there and take them sometimes if we want. I really enjoyed that in Sydney. I'll never forget one night there

with a girl from Kings Cross. She was a ballet

- 17:30 dancer, turned out to be. She nearly screwed me inside out, dancing. And you know there was different women, different people you know.

What were the rules of dancing, like how did you go about selecting a lady?

Just asked her for a dance, yes. You get a knock back once in a while. But not really, never too much.

- 18:00 In Melbourne, I remember the Stage Door Canteen, was run by Myers, old Sidney Myers run it. That was good. That was a real turn up. Used to get a good meal at night. He paid for the lot and had a good dance band and they were real good times there.

- 18:30 It was always patrolled by the service policemen. Anyway, we got around that, fixed that up. There'd be anything up to 200 servicemen there different, Americans as well as Australians.

What was that like having to compete with the Americans?

That didn't worry me.

- 19:00 I remember one night I went down to the Naval Institute I think it was. Yeah that's right, the Naval Institute. It was upstairs and going up the stairs, there's... No, couldn't have been.

- 19:30 Railway Institute, that's right. Going up the stairs there was a sign, 'sailors and dogs not admitted', a sign like that. It was only new; we'd been there before and there was nothing there. And I thought, "There's going to be a turn over this." I said now, we went up and had a look around, we stayed for a while.

- 20:00 There was not that many people there that night and the next night the sailors done the place over. It was the fact we, many years later, my, cousin that married and he was a radiographer then and he, I said,

- 20:30 mentioned to him about this place down in Melbourne and, "Oh yeah," he said, "were you there that night?" I said, "No, I was there the night before." I said I wasn't going back the next night, I knew it wouldn't be a safe place to be.

What was Sydney like then compared to Brisbane? How different was it?

- 21:00 Not much bigger than Brisbane really, a lot of old buildings here and that, apart from that, see, our main buildings were comparatively new before the war, where their main buildings there was, dated from about 1800, and a lot of old stone buildings there

- 21:30 whereas, lot of, Brisbane had quite a number of stone buildings, but the one remaining that I know of is the one at the corner of Edward Street, is it Edward Street, or Alice Street? Alice Street I think. Alice and Queen, yeah, Alice and Queen I think it is. There's a

- 22:00 National Bank, it's the original National Bank, it's a beautiful building that... You ever been down there, seen that one? It's a lovely building, still standing there today, about the only one that is. You wouldn't remember the one up the road near the park in front of the post office on the northern side the Courier Mail building; it was

- 22:30 you know the first ferro-cement, the old... It was quite tasteful, but it's gone now. A big HSBC [Hong Kong Swiss Banking Corporation] on there I think now, a big bank. But the old post office is still there, but the telephone exchange is gone from behind it where I worked, and the workshops was there as well during the war,

- 23:00 before the war. And next to it was the, Brisbane City Exchange, telephone exchange. Well they sold that off and they built the one over at the Gabba [Woolloongabba], the big one at the Gabba, high rise. They took the communications all across there, a bit of foresight of what's going to happen there, and now I think they've got them in the basement of shops, basements of big buildings and that.

- 23:30 There's a tunnel the whole way up in, in Queen, Elizabeth Street, on the western side. There's a tunnel right through under the road there where all the telephone cables go up there, and I suppose it's still there.

- 24:00 **When you're at the gunnery school at Evans Head, did you see any mishaps there?**

Yeah, only one. It landed in a cane field, and they were supposed to be experienced pilots. There was no trainee pilots there. Something happened and he misjudged and he came down in the cane field and so Hancock, when we went out

- 24:30 with a gang and see what we can do, Hancock, he was the CO, and he says, "Oh, we pull it back and put the tail up on the fence." And he says, "I reckon I can take it off." Take off and he was levelled out the road a bit, the cane farm a bit. I said, "Sir, if you keep straight you're right, because," I said, "it'll go between the furrows." "Gee, so it will." And so he got in it and

25:00 revved it up and revved it up and, and away it... straight off.

What sort of an aircraft was that one?

Fairey Battle. There was one. There was another incident there too, at Evans Head, where this trainee pilot, I don't know what he was doing there, must have had trainee pilot training there too, because

25:30 something had happened to his landing carriage, and he couldn't get one leg down, and they flew up and told him what to do, beside him, and give him a graphic description and, no, he couldn't do it. And, so what he did, along the side of the runway

26:00 was, it was only been running, working aerodrome there for about three months before I was there. And so what he did he went over the side where the sand was all heaped up and he wiped the wheel off and then belly-landed it there on the sand. He was commended for doing that. Trainee pilot.

26:30 **And then you used to have the job of, fixing them up again I suppose to a degree.**

Yeah. There's always a couple there, a couple of planes that they were chasing parts off of. We were always short of parts for the aircraft.

Actually there was one time wasn't there where a pilot radioed you and he had engine trouble and he was calling you for advice, can you tell me

27:00 **about that?**

Yeah, that was a chap in 25, 75 Squadron. He was flying back. I mentioned his name before. Jackson, one of the Jackson boys, there was only one at that time because his big, elder brother got killed,

27:30 he shot himself out of the sky. He, this fellow, like he couldn't do combat any more and so they gave him the job of ferrying the planes back to Charters Towers, one by one. They soon take them back and they get one that was fixed up or a new one; this case was a brand new one. And come up to our place and I checked it over and all that I

28:00 could do, and because I never worried about the armour part of it, because there was, no there's no armour on it, just come up as a raw plane you know, have the guns and that, they keep them off the one going away, because we're always short of guns, short of ammunition what have you. So he came through and, I said, "You're a

28:30 clean bill of health." He said, "Right," he said, "I felt there's something going on." I said, "What's the matter?" "I don't know," he said, "I've got a feeling." I said, "I can't find anything, take it up go around and come down," which he did. "No," he said, "It's all right," he said, "I must be imagining things." I said, "Righto." Off he went again. He got out about an hour,

29:00 just over the hour I think it was, heading for Moresby and he radios into the control tower, "I've got oil inside the cockpit." I said, "How much?" Oh," he said, "it appears to be a fair bit, all over my boots and that." I said, "How's the motor going?" "Oh, good," he says. I said, "How's the temperature gauge?" "It's good." "Oh." So, "Well,

29:30 how about the oil pressure?" "No oil pressure," he says. "Oh well, it's not heating up and it's okay." "I suggest you either fly on or come back to me." He said, "I'll come back to you." He said, "I know if there's anything the matter you'll fix it." So he came back and landed, and, oh yeah, oil all over his boots and everything; he had to clean his boots,

30:00 flying boots. And I found out what it was, it was a brand new aircraft and it had struck a bit of rough weather going out. And we took the cowls off and had a look at it and the engine fitter says to me, he says, "Got me beat." I said, "Well, as far as I'm concerned it's nothing to do with the

30:30 motor. It's nothing to do with the... It can only be the instruments itself, the pressure gauge." So, I said, "Just grab the oil pipe." So he goes up to the gauge. He says, "It's loose." "Ah, that's it." So we, out that big tanker we had, there was pipes running everywhere, you never seen anything

31:00 like it. Actually it come from New York and has been driven across to the west coast and shipped out here. And it had pumps and everything in it, in the back of it and we used to pump, use the pumps to fill it, because we used to fill up twice a day. Sometimes we used to get through 12,000 gallons of juice some days.

31:30 That's a lot of, lot of petrol. And anyway, we forage around the loops in the cable, in the pipes. The Yanks have done well. So I took the diameter of the pipe, also I got one a half size bigger see. So what I did, I cut a piece that long out of one around the back of

32:00 the tanker and I joined that one up again because we needed it. And, what we're going to do, we'll slide it over the top, solder it up and put the joint on that goes to the gauge, that goes to the other end, so it'll fit in nicely it'll look good, beautiful. No

32:30 oil leaks, and showing the pressure all right. He says, "Thanks George."

What sort of an aircraft was that one George?

Kittyhawk, one of the later ones. And it was just a fault. It happens. "It could have happened to anyone," he says. I felt happier coming back to see you than... Because he'd been through it before. And I used to look after him and the electrical

- 33:00 inspection. They have a daily inspection, and therefore I used to do that at all ours. The Yanks, I don't know what they did. But all ours is certified to fly and the engine chap and the airframe chap, they go over the lot. A cursory you know. And I had to sign for the electricals, I had to sign for the
- 33:30 instruments and also the armament, but there was never any armament on them, so they were going as light as they could to give them maximum range. And that was all right. He come over all right, come back in another fortnight's time. And he says, "Jeez," he says, "that was a good." Half a dozen of beer when he come up next time. He says, "I'll look after you."
- 34:00 Good thanks, and, that was, it was very good. I was well paid I reckon.

How did you compare the Australian maintenance of aircraft compared to the American maintenance of aircraft?

I can't compare them at all. I didn't know how they did, where they did their maintenance. I was only in... They never had any crew travel with them, so

- 34:30 each bloke must have done his own maintenance. Not when they were going from A to B. And they were all new planes more or less, so there wasn't too much to worry about. But one bugger had some worry, didn't he? He couldn't fly, and another fellow couldn't fly either, because he was
- 35:00 dead on arrival, but, oh well these things are wartime so.

What did you think of the Kittyhawks?

Oh good. Very nice plane. I like the... See they had Alison motors in them. I still think the Rolls Royce were better to work on, although you had to have a special kit, you might find one in the...

- 35:30 What was, what was the main English one?

Spitfire.

Spitfire, yeah. We had a few of those come through. Oh they were a nice plane. Apart from that I only worked on the other Avros and the Fairey Battles. While we were down in Melbourne, we had planes right back from the First World War. Wapatis and all that, and they had them lined them up on either side of the runway

- 36:00 and we were taught how to, you know, through them, as to how the planes had advanced and it was amazing. One chap was there, it was a very cold day, starting up the Wapati, and they got paddles on the back - so big, wooden they were, and this chap, the wind was blowing and
- 36:30 the chap had his overcoat on and it was pulling. They were hand start you know, and it backfired, lifted him! He wasn't hurt though.

Aside from the engines being different, was there any other significant differences between British-made planes and American-made plane?

Oh, well I think the

- 37:00 English planes were, they weren't to be compared actually. A lot of them had... See the Alison is an adoption of the Spitfire motor, the Rolls Royce motor, and there's not much difference in them. They were called Alisons. They were made by Alison in America under licence, which was all right though I suppose.
- 37:30 Everybody had to share everything.

So with the different services you did, there was, was it 60 hours, 120, 240 hours?

Yeah.

What exactly were the differences in services for those different hours? Can you break that up for me?

Well I can't really. The daily, it was dailies too, we had to check everything, you know, make sure everything was secure and serviceable. And

- 38:00 when you climb in the cockpit and run them up and see what speed the regulators worked at to bring in the batteries and that sort of thing. Apart from that give them the okay and that's, away you go. If they were flying at night, you always check their lights. But where you were going, you'd be going into the night,
- 38:30 but there wasn't much of that because it was all mainly daylight flying in those days. But I had one hairy

trip, that was, squadron leader, flight lieutenant, I forget now, but both of them, in the middle of a cyclone, bloody test pilot, my word, what a

- 39:00 set-up. And he knew more than everybody else. I said, "You do realise you're following a cyclone?" "Ah, what's a cyclone?" he says. "You ought to see the winds we get over in England." I said. "You ought to see the winds that we get here, before you start boasting about the winds over in England." And I said, "Are you prepared to fly
- 39:30 at 20,000 feet?" "Oh yes." And we got up and we got out over Mount, out over Cleveland Bay, and he comes down, about 40 feet, and he's flying at 40 feet and you could only see 100 yards ahead of him. And I said, "Are you in command of the plane?" "Don't you talk to me like that," he says. I said,
- 40:00 "My life's at stake here. I don't know about yours, yours must be expendable," I said, "because you're down well below the islands in the level at which you can fly at." Anyway, we went up and we got caught in the storm. She was the mother of all storms, and we got struck by lightning, we got struck about three times, successively in about 10 minutes.
- 40:30 It was right in the middle of the cyclone, and then we get into the middle of it, "Oh," he says, "it's right; it's all gone." I said, "No, you got to face it coming the other way when you get out of this." I said, "We haven't got a compass, you know." He said "Oh, no, we haven't either." I said, "What are you going to do" "Oh," he said, "I'll know me way out there." I said, "You ever been here before?" "No." I said, "Well, I've been taking a bearing.
- 41:00 I've flown up here in this particular plane. I've flown it about half a dozen or a dozen times," I said "I think this is the first time you've flown this one, isn't it? This is an Australian-built plane. You wouldn't have struck that in England." He says, "No, but oh they're all the same. Flying's all the same." You know, real cocky sort of a bloke. So anyway, he gets down to the 40 feet again, as soon as we get
- 41:30 into the cyclone area again and I said, "You got to change your course," I says, "because there's not enough petrol to go to Moresby." He said, "Oh we're not going to Moresby." I said, "You are on your bearing." He said, "How would you know?" I said, "I fly up here quite often, in this particular plane too, we got four of them." And they were transports, see.

Tape 7

- 00:31 **What was he flying at?**

Hm.

How high was he flying again?

About 40 feet. You could see the water. I said, "Look, there is a lot of water up here. There's a lot of islands in the area." And I said, "You got to take it up to at least 4000 and you got to change your course to about 20 degrees." "How would you know?"

- 01:00 I said, "I travel up here quite a bit." I said, "We went past Cairns so you've missed the area of Cairns. We're up around towards Cooktown, but," I said, "we're not going towards Cooktown because you're flying towards Port Moresby and it's about 15, 20 degrees difference." And after about quarter of an hour he says... I said, "Well, put
- 01:30 it this way. If you don't follow my instructions, we'll be finishing up in the sea because there's only enough petrol to get to where we're going at Higgins Field with a little bit to spare, I hope." He says, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well I'm plotting you the point that I think you were at. You were out from Cooktown, well out to sea, and you'll have to bring yourself in,
- 02:00 I'd say fly for half an hour at 10 degrees to the west." "Oh." He realised then I knew something about it, which I did, and we came out of the clouds up there and sea all around us, and I said, "Keep going," I said, "you'll be right." We come up, I said,
- 02:30 "There's the tip of Cape York." I said, "Now right, come directly right back," I said, "We're ten minutes and the airstrip will be right underneath you." He looked at me with a silly look on his face. "You sure?" I said, "Yeah, and I'll tell you another thing I'm sure, we've only got ten minutes of petrol left." And he come down and we came down and
- 03:00 just got onto the strip and went one motor, and we were halfway along when the other one blew. You know what he did? He opened the canopy up and shot off for the bush. He deserted his plane, and the boys come down onto the strip, says "Where's he gone?" "I don't know," I said "I think he might have blown up into the cloud or something." I said, "He's
- 03:30 not in the right frame of mind at the moment." And, anyway, we flew it in, drove it in, they towed it in I should say, towed it into the revetment, along further, and he said, "You're looking a bit white." I said, "I've every reason to be." I said, "I've been lost out over the Coral Sea for two hours," I said.

- 04:00 I managed to talk him into coming, changing his course, because all our instruments are gone, burnt out. And, oh, we were struck by lightning three times and he said, "You're lucky to get here." I said, "You're telling me we were." And it took them quite a while to get that fixed. Part of the wiring
- 04:30 had burnt out and everything. But anyway, it didn't matter. I never saw him again. I don't think they did either. I think he might have fed himself to the fishes, wouldn't know. All about my job. and I said to the boys, I said, "You ever see that bloke that flew that plane in?" "I don't think so, don't know where he got to." I'm not worrying about him,
- 05:00 I said mother earth that's all we wanted. Talking about mother earth, I remember a time at the Iron Range where we landed. I was up the Iron Range and I opened the door of this C-47 and a darkie come out, fell out onto
- 05:30 the tarmac, and he picks up and little dog. He says, "I sure is glad to see you." "Why, what's the problem?" He says, "Oh," he says, "can't say." I know what was going on, they were getting ready to throw him out, little doggy sure is glad to see you.
- 06:00 It was a Mitchell Bomber I think, something like that. They wouldn't, no, it was a C-47, that's right, transport. We used to get planes from everywhere there.

So, with the different, like you couldn't tell me exactly what the different services were, but like they must have taken different lengths of time did they, the 60 and the 120 , and the 240?

Oh yes, they were.

- 06:30 **Can you tell me how long roughly they would take?**

I'll tell you, the 240s, a complete overhaul probably about a week, depending on the requirements. They used to run the micrometer over the bearings and that. Make sure everything was right and touch things; all the alternator had to be checked and pulled down and checked, that was in the older planes.

- 07:00 I don't know about in the new ones. And the magnetos were all pulled out the electricians used to have to redo the points, resurface them. There's two magnetos to every motor. They run on one or the other, same as... There was two

- 07:30 carburetors too actually; they could swap them over. And I think that was mainly due to the fact that during the war, when they were in combat and stuff, if one got blown out, they could try the other maggy [magneto] and got them home sometimes.

What would happen if both went by chance?

Well, mate, it'd kill the motor wouldn't it?

- 08:00 Don't fly well on one motor. The [Avro] Anson would, but not the C-47 would fly on two motors, on one motor. I think I stated before about the one that I was coming out from Cooktown, I think it was, and one motor,

- 08:30 smoke blew out of it, and he shut it down, and coming over Palm Island which was there, started the dive, the flight run into Garbutt, and the other one started to get cranky. And that's when I had to kick me tool box out

- 09:00 with a 45 at me head. Wasn't very nice that, knowing those blokes. Just got in and the other one chopped out, got up to the tarmac area.

So, generally speaking what was the relationship like between aircrew

- 09:30 **and ground crew?**

All right, quite good. They relied on us and we relied on them, didn't we? No, it was always cordial. There was only one bloke, at Iron Range. I read him the riot act. He was a captain. He came in there and, I don't know what it was, must have been a C-47 I think,

- 10:00 that he'd flown down from one of the islands up there and he decided it was a good place and he was going to have a rest. And we were always short of rations because we had to feed these jokers, at lunchtime, or that sort of thing, and he'd go up and come back. He said, "Oh, it's too rough,

- 10:30 can't fly in that," and come back. So after two days I said to him, I said, "Are you hungry?" He said, "Why?" "Because," I said, "We are." "What do you mean?" I said, "We're existing on rations dug out of the sand hill, out of ant hill. Oh, so I suggest

- 11:00 you get in your plane and go up and go." He says, "I don't like your tone of voice." I said, "No, I don't like your attitude either." So he took off more or less. I said, "There's Cooktown down the road," I said, "you try booking in there on your way down and see if you get better

- 11:30 class of a hotel down there."

So on the rare occasions that you would have got a little bit of time off, what did you do?

Time off? I remember I had a couple of swims there, that was about all. I used to get the, what we call the fire tender,

12:00 it was a truck, and we'd go down to the... We were only about a mile from the beach. I found out and there was an area there which had a row of stones, big rocks, and there was no-one anywhere near that. It was a... Have you flown down the coast at all? Have you been up there? And

12:30 we used to put two blokes with rifles out on the rocks in case of sharks, which there was plenty of them in those days; they were everywhere. They take a potshot, chase them away. They got a couple of them one day and...

Can you tell us about that?

Oh no not really, nothing to tell. Blood and guts in the water; decided we'd get out of it.

13:00 Another time, another day, it was a Sunday. Traffic was pretty light on a Sunday and on a Sunday we decided we'd go up the Claudia River a bit. Went over it and up the side of it and along and we must have been about 15 mile, 20 mile, until it was only a stream. And there was a

13:30 a big log across the river there which you could get across. And we had our rifles with us, always carry our rifle, and a bloke says, "Oh," he says, "there's a pig over there." I said, "You just wait awhile, they come down to drink." It was later in the afternoon see. "Just

14:00 be quiet." And I said, "Right, shoot all the piglets, but don't go." He says, "Why?" I says, "Just steady up, we'll wait a quarter of an hour or so." He says, "Why?" "Just keep quiet." And within ten minutes, big snapper come out grabbed the piglet. I said, "That would have been you, wouldn't it?"

14:30 "Gawd blimey," he says. He said, "You been up around these parts before?" I said, "No, not really," I said, I'm just using a bit of logic." So we didn't have our piglet. That same time, we did have pigs, they been captured, and

15:00 strangely enough, the CO we had was of Jewish origins, and when he arrived on the scene, he, demanded we let the pigs go. "No way!" So it was a bit of a... I won't mention any names in this respect, because he could still be alive I don't think so, but he...

15:30 So the sergeant in charge of transport, he looked after the couple of pigs we had there and used to feed them scraps from the table. But there were never many scraps, so they got little or none from the mess hall. But we always... We had our food down on the... Like, we used to go up and get a week's supply, and we'd go down to the... You never had time to go up for meals,

16:00 that's why we moved from the camp area down to the strip, because it got so busy. It was quarter of an hour taken up driving down and back. Which is a lot of time in those days when the planes are flying in and out. And we use to get up at half past four and fill the tankers. We used to fill the tankers, the big tanker

16:30 and the small one if necessary, which was 73 or 75, 73 I think it was, octane. That's for the Tiger Moths and Rapides and all those, planes. But the, 90, 91 octane was reserved for the big planes. They were what the Yanks used and us. We were, any planes,

17:00 the war planes you know, not the smaller stuff. They all went on 91 octane. It was a green colour and strangely enough, when we were filling them... They'd been dumped there about six to 12 months before; we had to fight our way into the jungle and find them. It would sometimes take you half an hour. And they were in dumps of 100

17:30 forty-four drums of oil. Can you imagine what a forty-four, what a drum of oil is? Boy o boy, that took some doing. You'd be going along all together and after a while you can have a 44 gallon drum and you can throw it up yourself on end to put the pump into it and you hit them, you hit an oil one

18:00 and you can barely move it. And boy, they were camouflaged you know; you didn't know which was what. Well, got through all right and not all the drums were fit for use. They used to bubble up like champagne, some of it, and it'd be 20 minutes before

18:30 you could take the cap off. That much pressure in them. Wonder they didn't blow up. Never seen one. They're all in the... There was two sizes of drums, two types of drums, a light and a heavy drum. All the aviation spirit was in mainly in the heavy drums, and even they used to cop a dose of whatever it was; it used to go off. This pressure in it, it's unbelievable, you just

19:00 move the one half, quarter of an inch, shh, "Oh, struck a baddie here." And, we used to let them off bit by bit because they were dangerous. If anybody came to... which there was a few thieves, they wouldn't touch the ones laying down, only the one's sitting up. They'd rock them to see if there was any petrol in them. So we found we had to waste time

19:30 tapping the gas off, and, and then tip it out. We used to tip it out on the ground. You'd get four or six of those in a hundred. It wasn't very nice. And it changed colour; it went from blue to green. If you got a

green one you knew you had a crookie.

20:00 **If you mixed the different octanes, would that be a problem?**

Oh yeah.

Did that ever happen do you know?

Well same with the car. If you run your car on ordinary petrol, well the same thing.

Can you recall incidents of an aircraft being filled with the wrong fuel.

No, no way. That was absolutely taboo.

20:30 **I was going to ask you about the exhibition hall at Ascot Vale?**

Not in Ascot Vale. The exhibition hall was not at Ascot Vale; it was up behind the parliament somewhere around there in that area.

How exactly was that all set out and divided [divided] up in there, because people there was actually sleeping quarters in there wasn't there?

I believe so.

Can you recall what it was like set up inside?

No, I can't. Only

21:00 we went and did fitting and turning in there. And we were not allowed... There was extension leads everywhere. You got to be very careful where you walked and we were not allowed to put anything onto the floor or anything like that. We were all on duck boards

21:30 laid over the top. There was carpet laid underneath it, and the duck boards actually, like a false floor actually, and they were all sitting on top of that.

How did you feel when you were all ready to go overseas and suddenly they rescinded your orders?

What could you do? Get back to where you come from.

22:00 **Because then after the war the army wanted you to go up to New Guinea didn't they?**

Yeah.

And what did you say, think of that?

I said it was an insult. He said, "Why?" He was only a fairly young bloke, this fellow in charge of RIMU, and I knew he

22:30 could only been in '40, late '42 and later on. I joined in '40. I said, "What's your service number?" He said, "Double four six eight," or something. I said, "Mine's two three, two three double eight three. He said, "It's impossible." He said he only knows fours there. I says, "I consider that you only been

23:00 in recently." He says, "Oh, 18 months." He said, "Well, in that case, how about you going over?" I said, "I'm ready to go home. There's only one way for me - home." It was six weeks they allowed me to go. I had to get the order from air board. I don't know how it worked, some of the younger

23:30 blokes, because I was young in those days too, but there was a lot of fellows that were recruited much later than I was, by then I was probably one of the seniorest fellows. The motor mechanic, he was another bloke, he was about the same time as me. And a couple of others like that.

24:00 But apart from that they were really all, they were radio mechanics, or radar mechanics. Well radar didn't come until '43, early '43, or something like that. So they were included around about that time. I said, "You can send one of those blokes," I said "You're not sending me. They've had their chance at me but you didn't give it to me, so ready to go

24:30 home." So he says, "You're a bit cheeky, aren't you?" "No," I said, "I think I'm entitled to say my piece." And he says, "Oh well, in that case, I suppose you are." "I said before, I said not only was in the air force in 1940, I said I was in the army before that." "Were you?" he said. "I was still going to school." There.

25:00 **Can you tell me what, Townsville was a real bustling place during the war, a real garrison town, can you tell me what Townsville was like?**

Well I tell you my first impression of Townsville, it's way out beyond, what's the area there where the gaol is? Stewart. Out beyond Stewart it was all cleared

25:30 and bulldozed flat, from there right up to Townsville. And there was crates of this and that and everything else, big crates by the hundred, up 15 feet high, at least, on both sides of the line. You never seen anything like it. It was absolutely incredible. And they either come on boats or come up from

Brisbane or whatever

26:00 and they stacked alongside the line, which was the only place they could stack them in that time, the emergency times you know. And they must have had a pretty good inventory of everything because they knew where everything was. It's all American stuff.

What was it like in a social scene, in a social way?

26:30 **Oh, I was quite happy with the Yanks mainly, you know. Take them with a grain of salt.**

Did you get to go dancing at all?

Eh?

Get to go dancing at all?

No, didn't get much time in Townsville.

What about, did you get over to Magnetic Island, or?

Oh yeah, matter of fact I met up with a couple of

27:00 lasses that worked in one of the stores there, and they were lovely girls. And actually they were Judge Douglas' daughters. Both of them worked in this shop, like a merchandise, like you know, like Floyd and Gibson's or something like that, something up there. I forget the name of

27:30 the place. And we had a great time with them. And the last time I, oh, I had a friend who I had befriended way back in the militia days and I met him another time coming up from Sydney. And I was in a carriage and he yells out. and he was up on the luggage rack,

28:00 "That you, George?" I said, "Yeah, who's that?" He says, "It's Neil Mackay." I said, "How are you?" He said, "Room for another one up here." So, up I get, up there, climb up, and get in and got me kitbag there down below. And it was a troop train and pretty safe, it was. And we were yakking all the way up. I said, "What are you doing?" "Oh," he said...

28:30 I met him in the army. He signed up as a bugler but he couldn't play the bugle. He wanted to get into the music situation and he learned the bugle, but he was a violinist - he was amazing with a violin. And I didn't see him after that, out at Fraser's Paddock out at Drayton,

29:00 I didn't see him after that until later on in the war on the train. And he'd joined the air force and he was a violinist and he took Gracie Field's concert over there through the islands and that, and then he come back and he took another one of the women through, mind a party of them and by then he was a

29:30 sergeant. And then next time I saw him, it was just after the war finished. Ran into him in Townsville, in the street in Townsville. And he said to me, it was a Friday, he said "What are you doing on the weekend?"

30:00 I says, "Nothing, really." And he says, "Know any nice girls and that around?" And I says, "Yes, I'll get in touch with them." I said, "What will we do?" I said, "We'll go over to Magnetic Island for the weekend." And we went over there and he played all night. Oh, he was a marvellous violinist. He'd been through the conservatorium in Sydney

30:30 in the meantime, and passed out with honours. And we had a great weekend. And I said, "Well, come Sunday night," I said, "I've got to get back." I said, "I'm going up to the Cape tomorrow or Tuesday." I said, "I've got to go on Tuesday." "Well, what about coming up to Biak with us?"

31:00 And I said, "No, I can't." And he said, "Oh, I've been up here," he says. "I've been up here a number of times and I haven't seen you in Townsville." And I said, "No, I'm never there either," and told him what I was doing. He said, "Oh, how about coming up to Biak for the concert?" And he said, "And then you can fly down to Cape York in the morning?", like the next day. I said, "No, I got to pick up some gear before I go."

31:30 He said, "Can't you get it this afternoon?" I said, "No, all the shops are shut." I said I didn't want to go up there, you know. I felt that I was exceeding my limits, which I was too. He never arrived. Nor the party he took up. They weren't found for two years. They went into the mountains

32:00 around Biak. I never knew for about five years later. About four years later I was working with a bloke. I said, "Oh," I says, "I had a very good mate and never saw him after the war. I don't know where he is." He said, "Who is it?" I said, "A bloke named Neil Mackay." He says, "I know him." He says, "You want to know where he is?"

32:30 I said, "Yeah, I would." "Well," he says, "found only about six months ago, buried in the mountains, with a concert party." There was some of them were Americans and mixed Americans and Australians in it and they all went in, so that was that, he was my best friend.

33:00 And we had this weekend over in Magnetic Island; it was marvellous. And, funny thing, we used to get two huts, one for the girls, one for us, and I never mentioned anything about the bird that was there,

and she come out and knocked on my door. She said, "There's something around here," she says. "It says, 'Give me another feather and I'll fly'. It says, 'Give me another feather and I'll fly.'"

- 33:30 And I said, "Oh, that's all right, he lives here." She said, "What is it?" I said, "It's a parrot. It's got about three feathers." I said, "He's got more scales on him than anybody else I know of." And he was scratched and scrawned all over; he was incredible. He had about two feathers in his tail, about all he had.
- 34:00 He's gone too; he's gone long ago, same as the rest of them. Talking about birds and that, at Aitkenvale I was stationed there for a while, and we were, I think it was after I was doing that travelling, while I was doing that travelling, and
- 34:30 I had been over to Karumba and I picked up half a dozen crocodiles. Because a fellow at St John's museum, or, I don't know what it was - a museum or whatever it was - you, know like a zoo, he
- 35:00 wanted a couple and the boys up at Karumba gave me a bag full of these and tied it up with wire. And I come back to the hut; I just chucked it in the corner. He says, "What's that wriggling in there?" I said, "Oh, I don't know why" I said, "You're imagining things." "No, I'm not. Look at it. Is it a snake?" I says, "No, not a
- 35:30 snake. Have another guess." "A crocodile in there?" I said, "There's six of them in there." "Oh," he says, "Don't be. Don't be stupid." "All right." I took them, cut the wire off the bag and I said, "Stick your hand in and see." The silly goat did - come out minus the top of his finger. I said, "You won't do that again, will you?" He says, "No."
- 36:00 "I warned you." I took them down to the zoo. I suppose they finished up... They might be still around the place. But, something had happened to one of them. It had got killed and one of them down there had got killed down there on the road, and another one just died of fright, like, you know, he only had two and one had got killed and I think the other one died of a broken heart or something.
- 36:30 So I got him six new ones.

You were telling me earlier that one of the airfields you were at you could actually see the Jap planes up really high and you told your CO. Can you tell us that story?

Yeah, at Evans Head. He said, "Oh, we can't do anything about it." You could see them shining and glinting in the sun. You're laying on the beach and you look up and you see the planes way up high; they were off the submarines and that sort of thing.

- 37:00 And they knew more about the Australian coastline than we did. And they used to, at the Iron Range they used to say Tokyo Rose - you heard of her, have you? There's a... We come, we've got you in our sights, you're the Iron Range Butchers. There was marauders working
- 37:30 out of there as well and they were flying out and hitting the Japs up in the islands and coming back and so they reckon they were coming to get us. Well, we did see these two Bettys come flying past one morning, about 20 feet high, up the strip, and I said to the boys inside, I said, "Did you hear that?" He said, "Yeah."
- 38:00 I said, "That's two planes, and," I said, "they ain't ours, they're theirs." "Oh," he says, "it can't be." I said, "If you hear them coming again," I said, that slit trench out there, get into it." And one of the boys, he was in such a hurry to get in he went in headfirst. And had to pull him out of the mud; he was in a bad state - he didn't even see them. Second time, but,
- 38:30 I rang up the CO but he wasn't there. He was still asleep I think. He used to be plugged through. There was nobody on duty, only on times when planes are normally flying at the tower, which was a wooden
- 39:00 pole stuck up with a shack on top. And he came down. He says, "What was that plane?" I said, "Well, you would have been told if you answered the phone." I said, "I rang you." Looked at me, "Jeez, I must have been asleep heavy." I said, "Well, there was two of them. It went up and it come back."
- 39:30 And I said, "Well, we haven't heard anything since, so here's hoping they were only reconnaissance." Which they were. We never got any... That was the closest we were to actual fire. When I first went up there, it was always reds about three or four times a day over the top of Cape York. And they used to come down further and
- 40:00 we'd set up... Would you turn it off for a while? I have to take the drops.

Tape 8

- 00:39 **Can you tell me about the old duck?**

Oh yeah. That'd been Bullrushes they call them - single engine, pusher, pusher engine, you know

pusher plane. And

- 01:00 it was meant to be for air-sea rescue and pick up pilots and that sort of thing. And we never had any water pick-ups when I was there, but we gave it a good going over. I mean really
- 01:30 gave it a good maintenance overhaul. And we decided to take it up to check out the magnetos on it, one thing, apart from that the overall condition of the motor, it had been idle for, well not a long time but for a while. And we took her off and took her up
- 02:00 with it's wheels on it and took off and out and over the basin. "Oh," I said, "Well the motor's not going too well. I think we've got a problem with the regulator on the panel." And the pilot said to me, "Oh," he says,
- 02:30 "Oh well, if we go down into the harbour and have a look at it." We were well out, too, at the time, and I crawled out and pulled the cowl off and got at the regulator - they were pretty crude in those old planes - and sorted it out. And I was putting it back and I heard a yell
- 03:00 from down the bottom. "How long are you going to be?" I said, "Oh, about five minutes." He said, "Well, I've got gallons of water coming in." What had happened, we got holed taking off while taxiing to the runway apparently. And I said, "Put your foot on it." And he says, "It's a bit tricky." I said, "I don't care what you do, put something on it." I said, "I'll be five minutes." And, anyway,
- 03:30 that was all right. I got the cowl back on again. They're not very easy to put on those cowls. You got a big screw you got to press it in and turn it - you know those cowls on things like that on motors and that? So rev her up a bit of course I'm hanging onto the plane, and then righto, hop down no,
- 04:00 hop down and got in, jeez, the water was about...deep. "What are we going to do?" I said, "Take off. We'll fly up the main street." "Gee, that's a bit rash isn't it?" I said, "No, it'll give them a thrill." And, in the height of a drought, it was nearly all drought up there, it was terrible. That's another thing I'll talk about, I went up and flew down the main street and unplugged the
- 04:30 the hole. It wasn't a big hole, but it was enough to make it look like rain. In the paper next day was 'RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] breaks the drought', but it was salty.

And then that old duck had a bit of a history about it too?

Oh yeah, I don't know the exactly full history about it, but I believe it had been down the Antarctic or somewhere

- 05:00 down there. And, probably been about 20 years old I suppose then, it was a good old plane.

What did you want to tell us about the drought?

Oh yeah, well that was when I first went to Townsville, when I was in the personnel pool. Water was only available

- 05:30 midnight till dawn. It was shocking. So one day we decided to go up and have a look and see where the water came from, and I don't want to ever repeat that again, but it was terrible. It was only, there was dead animals and they used to bulldoze the hole out and look for water and, they'd fill the tanker
- 06:00 from water from the underground part of the water. It was horrible. It was all dead animals up ahead of us, you know. Oh well, you got to drink you got to drink, haven't you? So that was my first part of Townsville. But this, on the duck, 'Pass the Duck' we used to call her.
- 06:30 And that was later on. That was couple of years later. And that was a funny episode.

Can you recall what your special pass that you had, you were telling us before when you had trouble with the MPs, can you recall roughly what it said?

Yes, 'This is to certify that Corporal Riddell, GW has

- 07:00 the right to any installation anywhere in the continent'. I think it said 'in the continent'; in military areas actually. And I only had to produce it once, this clown airborne order about this parcel. I had to memorise it. I can't remember it now. I had to go 2 46 pass something or other,
- 07:30 I think it was that. But I couldn't give it to you. And then I used to hand it back. And because I finished up getting ready to go back, I think it was mid month, apparently he knew when I was going because he rang up, or he got one of his
- 08:00 underlings to ring me up and he said, "You make sure you send that pass back." I says, "Why?" I said want it for a memo, you know, something to remember the place by. "Not that one," he says. That was a red one, it was a red pass. When I saw him 25 years later
- 08:30 I said to him, "What was the significance of that pass?" "Well," he said, "you can go anywhere on it." I said, "I know that." I went to Melbourne. From Cape York. I was up at Higgins Field. We barely had to work and it was about 12 month after the war had finished and

09:00 and the CO was telling me how his daughter was in a play in one of the theatres down there. He said, "Jeez, I'd love to go down there." I said, "How long is she there for?" "Oh," he said, "a couple of weeks." Wheels started turning around and I thought to myself, "I got nothing to do for another few days," so I said to the fellow on the Dragon Rapide,

09:30 I said, "How about taking us down to Townsville today?" "Yeah, right." Kicked another bloke off. He said, "He can wait till tomorrow." There was only three, four seats I think in the plane, and so he kicked off one of the lesser ones and I got down to Townsville. It was about half past eight, and I go up to the transport movements

10:00 office, and there was colonel there, ranting and raving that he had to get to Sydney that night. And the bloke behind the sergeant or corporal or whoever he was, behind the counter said, "No," he said, "I'm sorry. there'll be nothing till eight o'clock, or nine o'clock tomorrow morning." So I thought, "This looks a bit cheeky." And so he went off in

10:30 disgust. I stood back, ready to have another blast at him, and I took my pass out and showed him and he said, "Ten minutes." Gawd, I got out of that place as quick as I could, over to the plane and got onto a Fortress, American Fortress, and flew down to Sydney and flew into there and refuelled and went down to Melbourne. Refuelled in Brisbane too.

11:00 And went down to Melbourne. So, I knew where she was going to play at, so I went and bought a bunch of roses from her father. "Your father's not here, but I'm bringing them for you." That's funny, that's funny.

11:30 And I'd left them at the stage door, at her door see, because she was the leading actress in this play. And I went and sat back where... I wrote my seat number on the ticket I'd given her, like, on the flowers.

12:00 She come down and her mother come down and sussed me out at the end of it. And she said, "I don't get it." She says, "My husband's up in the top of Cape York." I said, "Yes, I know. I was there yesterday." "Oh, were you?" I said, "Yes, and she says, "How did you get down here?" I said, "By plane."

12:30 "Oh." So, "You can't go back straight away," she said. "When are you going back?" I said, "Over the weekend." And she said, "Where are you going? Where are you staying?" "Actually I haven't booked in yet, but I know where I can get in." A hotel, it was still there

13:00 and I'd been past the place there, the Cathedral Hotel I think it was called, corner of, I don't remember, the main street and one of the main streets that went up to the Houses of Parliament. And I just went in casually and I said, "Have you got any vacancies?" He says, "Yeah." I said, "Well..." I don't know...

13:30 He knew me. I'd stayed there several times. Always used to come up from Melbourne and from Point Cook and that, and then when I was at Ascot Vale I stayed there a couple nights too. And so we had a bond of friendship that had developed. He said, "What are you doing in Melbourne?" I said, "Matter of fact, I've flown down from Cape York today."

14:00 He said, "Oh, why? What for?" I said, "Well, my CO has a daughter. She's in show business and he can't... I didn't ask his permission, to come down. I've come down just to see the play and meet his wife and his daughter." I say, "I bought her a bunch of flowers,

14:30 which are here," and I said, "I'm going around to see, and I don't know whether I might, I'm hoping I'll get an invite down their place for the weekend." Sure enough I did. He said, "Oh, well..." She said, "I can't work this out. How could you get down so fast?" I said, "In a Flying Fortress. I happened to get one that was going right through to Melbourne."

15:00 She said, "Oh." She said, "Would you like to come down and meet my daughter?" And I said, "Yes, I certainly would." I said, "I'm going to tell her father all about it," and I said, "I want to be back to see the rest of the show." She said, "Righto." It was a quarter of an hour interval or something like that and I met her and I went back to my seat

15:30 and her mother came back and sat beside me. There was a couple of spare seats in the theatre there, a couple were spare, and we both sat there and nagged on about things. She said, "As a matter of fact it's his birthday this weekend." She said, "I was going to bake a cake and send up, but, oh, I didn't know whether it'd get there in time," sort of thing. So anyway, I said, "If you make a cake,

16:00 I'll take it up." And she says, "Will you?" And I says, "Yeah, certainly." So got my invitation to come out for the weekend and so I spent the weekend there. And on Monday morning I went down through Essendon, and I said to her, "Where are you going?" I said, "Oh, Sydney to start with," and this was in Melbourne

16:30 and Sydney yeah right. We were on the despatch plane to Sydney and it was going out to Brisbane apparently, so I said to the pilot, I said, "Have you got any vacancies to go to Brisbane?" He said, "Yeah." Said, "All right, I'll stay on if you don't mind." I said, "I'm travelling on a special pass." "Certainly."

- 17:00 And we got as far as Brisbane, and I catch a DC-3. He's only going to Brisbane, to Townsville, and go to this bloke with a silver plane, mail plane, back up again. It was on the Tuesday I got back up there, and he says to me,
- 17:30 "Where you been?" I said, "I've been around a bit." I said, "The war's over now, I said. And he said, "Where have you been? I've heard rumours." I said, "There's no rumours coming from me." I said, "Well you really want to know? Your daughter was superb in her play in Melbourne." "Oh,
- 18:00 what?" he says. "God," he says, "I wished... the opening night too... I wish I had gone." I said, "Well, I'll tell you what, I'll lend you my pass to go down and come back, see." And he says, "I can't, wouldn't be game," he says. I says, "There's no reason why not," I said, "I give you my uniform, I'm a corporal," I said, "you can have my uniform, we're about the same size."
- 18:30 "No, I couldn't, because I'm too well known down there." So anyway I said, "Happy birthday," to him, give him his parcel, big cake she'd made over on the Sunday, so that was that.

When you flew down on the B-17 how long did it take from Brisbane to Melbourne in that?

Look I don't know. I can't remember, they were fairly fast.

- 19:00 I'd come down from Cape York to Townsville in one day. I got on the plane on the civilian plane early in the morning, about eight o'clock I think it went through our place something like that and I didn't get there till eight o'clock at night. There's over 1000 miles between Townsville and the top of Cape York.
- 19:30 And come down, came down a couple of places, Cairns and Cooktown and where have you and back to Townsville and that was that. And.

Actually you told us sort of where you were at the end of the war. How exactly did you hear that the war had finished?

Over the PA [public address system]. We could get three.

- 20:00 LO radio station - 3LO] in Melbourne very well on the short wave.

And what was the reaction to that?

Oh, we got it before it was over. Like, you know, it was in negotiation and then they said well it could be today or it could be tomorrow that peace will be declared, at this stage we're not sure if he throws the...

- 20:30 The Hiroshima bombing had only gone off the day before, you see, and they threw the spade in then. But it was a momentous time then.

So had you heard about the atom bomb?

Didn't, I knew it was falling as it went down. We knew it then because it was a special

- 21:00 announcement made over the air and we got it relayed through the PA system.

And the CO in Townsville, he was a pretty good bloke, how did he suggest that you get back to Brisbane after the war?

Oh, oh we just packed up and went down by train. Had a pass.

- 21:30 We got down to Brisbane, and about to... I went home. I was living in Woolloowin in those days, and I rolled up there... Was it early morning? I think it was. Can't remember now. Anyway, I walked in and said, "I'm finished. I'm out." I said, "I've got to back to Redbank yet to demob [demobilise], get demobbed. I said, "I'll be home."
- 22:00 So I had a day at home and it was worthy of a day. And I went back next morning and I got demobbed and given 20 bucks for a suit and for clothing, 20 pounds clothing allowance and that sort of thing. Kept your
- 22:30 uniform, I wore me khakis to work until they wore out. And also my blues, I had those, they were no use for anybody else and that was the end of it. When I got back to work, that was on the Friday I got in, I went back on. I rang my mate up to see if he was back at home. He was, so Saturday we went and had a few beers
- 23:00 and Her Majesty's pub. He got out before me. I just rang his mother. I said, "Is Kev out yet?" She said, "Yes, he got out last week." I said, "Oh, is he around?" She says, "No, but I'll tell him you're home." He rang me, and I
- 23:30 went and had a few beers. And on Monday I'm going to have a day off. Sleep it off, Sunday and Monday. I went Tuesday morning into work and the clerk at the work, he said to me, "You should have been here yesterday," and I said, "You should have been in hell yesterday." "What do you mean?" he said. "If you hadn't have come in today, you would have lost your job."
- 24:00 He says, "You can work one day, and then you can take the leave that's due to you." But I had to work

one day. So, "All right, I'll work one day." I didn't do anything that day, so I went up and saw the director of post and telegraphs in those days because I was friendly with him.

- 24:30 His name was Malone. He was a great fellow, and he retired shortly after that. And I remember later on when I picked him up to go to a reunion and I had the car then and I'd bought it. I built a house and bought a car, bought an old Chev[rolet] and I was building the house and
- 25:00 I knew he was retiring and he said to me, he rang me up in the workshops, he said, "I'm retiring tomorrow." I said, "Are they giving you a send off?" He said, "Oh yeah," he said, "would you like to come?" I said, "Yes." Oh I had a great old time. I was only a technician's assistant in those days,
- 25:30 a trainee mechanic you know. I forget his first name. Anyway we had a few drinks together and him and his wife. He said, "Will you take me home?" I said, "Yeah, I'll take you home. Where's home?" He did tell me. I don't know where it was, somewhere out Toowong somewhere, and I said, "Well, I'm going out through Toowong." I said, "I'm living
- 26:00 at Oxley." And he said, ah, he said, he had a fair few too many I think. I says, "Where do you live?" and he says, "Oh, somewhere in Toowong." Somewhere like that it was, and you go this road and go that road, that road, and this road. I says, "I'm not getting anywhere. Just tell me where you belong, or where
- 26:30 what street it is and which suburb." And his wife said, "I'll take over." And she says, "Oh, silly old goat." And, took him home in about ten minutes and put him in. Took him inside and we bedded him down and I went on to Oxley.

Where some of the airstrips made of different surfaces, laid with different surfaces?

- 27:00 Oh yeah.

Can you tell me about the different surfaces?

Some hardly call an airstrip, just a paddock with a bit of dirt shovelled on it. Actually it was a bit of gravel mainly to keep the dust down and they never had a tanker in these isolated places. And normally they were

- 27:30 bituminised. That was the main ones. The gravel ones were a bit rough taking off, too, and hard on the tyres. Because aircraft tyres are not like automobile tyres, and they used to avoid them as often as possible. Cooktown was... I think that was only a dirt strip, I remember rightly.
- 28:00 Remember getting off at Cooktown once. I remember going over to the air force place, radar station, their camp was not in Cooktown, theirs was up on the grassy hill, but the camp was around the other side, over the river. Do you know there were Aborigines living in their natural state there
- 28:30 on their way around, with a pig tied up, and striped dogs around and that? It must have been about the last of them I think; the rest of them were all in missions on the Cape.

Did you see anything of the scorched earth policy up in North Queensland at all?

- 29:00 No, scorched earth policy, didn't have a scorched earth policy. We'd had one, but it was never activated on. Even Bundaberg the strip was mined. I never knew till afterwards. Later, after the war, before it was...
- 29:30 By the time I left there, the war was starting to move away. And the CO said to me one day you know he said, "This has all been... It's all mined, in case of enemy action." And at the time, the action, the Coral Sea battle, we were all, I was at Bundaberg then and we...
- 30:00 That was the only time when we were on guard, the whole air force.

So, can you tell us more about like what you did after the war?

I can tell you another one episode from Evans Head. I had three days' leave, or four days, for some reason or other. I'd been in hospital. I had an infection and they put me into hospital for three or four days

- 30:30 and they gave me a leave pass for three days, so I thought, "I'll take off and go and see me sweetie down in Sydney," which I did. And, that was on the Monday and I come back on the Wednesday, and I... Yeah on the Wednesday, Sunday, or, must've only been three days. Payday was always on a Thursday or a Friday. It might have been a Friday down there. And
- 31:00 anyway, I come back, I got off the train at Casino and two big service policemen grabbed me by the shoulders, "Right, you're name's Riddel, isn't it?" I said, "Yes." They said, "You're AWOL [AWL - Absent Without Leave]. I said, "No I'm not." I said, "I would be if I went over to Friday, but," I said, "tomorrow's payday and I'm broke. That's why I'm coming back
- 31:30 a day before." And, oh, smart bugger, eh? So anyway, straight into the cell... bomber cell, and I sat in there wondering, "What am I going to do?" So Evans Head was the only place in the service where I

was stationed at

32:00 that had on the wall... The senior administration officer had all the things you could do, you know, and down the bottom was 'If you thought it possible, I can be called out at any hour'. So it was about half past eight, nine o'clock by now. I hadn't had any tea

32:30 and I asked the fellow to call the... "I want to speak to the senior administration officer." I forget his name now. Oh, I know, yeah it was the chap, he was killed in an aircraft accident in the harbour in Townsville

33:00 later in the war and, his name was, I can't... it started with an A.

Doesn't matter they'll be able to work it out.

Yeah, and, he said to me, he said, "You're George Riddel." I said, "Yes."

33:30 Well, he thought for a while. He said, "Well, where have you been?" I said, "In Sydney. I'm covered by leave. There it is - my leave pass." I said, "I'm on leave till tomorrow night. It's payday tomorrow," I said. "I've come back because I'm broke." He says, "That's a fair enough answer." And, he said, "Well, it's signed legal document there you've got, so let you out."

34:00 Then he said, "Who took you? Who grabbed you?" And I mentioned, I don't know, I can't remember his name there, he was a bloke from up the way there, at Kilkeaben or somewhere here and he was crooked on air force places. Like, you know... Looking for an extra stripe or something. And he said, "Oh," he said to me two days later, "Oh," he said, "George,"

34:30 he said, "that fellow won't worry you any more." I said, "Why?" He said, "He's on his way to Darwin. I've been wanting to get something on him for a long time." He got sent off to Darwin, so that was quite good. I enjoyed that, he was a real, you know, Hitler-type bloke.

So what did you do in the years after the war?

35:00 Went back to the post office, worked in there and then I got a transfer to... I got on a training course. It was very hard after the war. I don't know how long I worked in the workshops. It wasn't too long, but the fellow that was in charge, he didn't like servicemen, and

35:30 he took a proper dislike to me. Because I'd been away the longest and there were a lot of new trainees around and he was throwing his weight around. And I said, "I want a transfer." "You won't get a transfer from me," he says. "All right then, okay." Softly

36:00 does it, so I went home and give it a thought. And I knew the engineer because he'd been a trainee when I was first there, and I said to him, I said, "I know there's a course going, a transfer course where you work three months here, three months there, and three months back again." And yes, his name was Petrie, Keith Petrie.

36:30 And, and he said to me, he says, "Oh, you going up against that bloke, too?" Farrier, I think his name was, Farrier. No it wouldn't be Farrier. I don't know. It doesn't matter anyway. I said, "He's taken a total dislike to me and he's trying to break me." I said, "He'll never break me."

37:00 So anyway he says, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, I want to go on that transfer business, to three months in subs [subscribers] installation and three months in the exchange." That's when I was in the workshop, see. And, "Okay," he said, I'll sort that out for you on Monday." And Monday I leave. He said, "I've just had

37:30 word from the engineer he says that you're to go subs installations," - subscribers installations see. I says, "Have you? Gee. When do I go?" He said, "Now." I said, "Right, I will too. Goodbye." And, "You know what you can do." And I went down there and three months there all around the place and

38:00 towards the end of the three months I was with a chap called Hal Jones, good bloke, and he had been in the services too, and we gelled together. He'd been in the army and he said, "Well, we've got to... My job is to go out to...

38:30 out from Darra," a place there, up in the hills where all the pineapples and that grew, out over the river there. Not where Jingaloo is, out further than that. It was administered for, the main exchange to that was Darra. And we went out to, not Fairfield,

39:00 Can't give it to you.

Oxley?

No I was living in Oxley.

Seventeen Mile Rocks.

Hm?

Seventeen Mile Rocks.

Out past there.

Further than that. Benalla?

Hm?

Benalla?

No, that, down the river. Anyway there was a community there, of farmers and that mainly, and hoity-toities, you know...

39:30 At the start of the, of the farmlets...

Oh not Kenmore?

Kenmore yeah. Around Kenmore. And that was all magneto phones then and we took them all off and put the automatics on and had them all to connect up. And when we had them all done, we went around and uncoupled the others and took the others, the new ones in. We put the new ones, connected the

40:00 new ones up and, oh, some liked them, some didn't, they wanted their old Magneto phones back. And, no, you only move one way and that's forward. Sorry. Oh, of course the other one was party phones, and there was three on one party you know. Well, when we finished up they were all on singles then, and the wiring had all been done for it. And anyway we finished that

40:30 about three or four weeks, and that was a good job that. I'll never forget one afternoon we were going in along Coronation Drive and my mate Hal Jones was driving and he used to smoke a corncob pipe, Hal did, and he got hauled up for speeding. And, I said, whatever it was 30 mile an hour or something wasn't it, in those days,

41:00 whatever it was. And he said, "You're five mile over the limit." And he said, "I've got to charge you." And he says, "What's your name?" He says, "Jones, H L." "I beg your pardon?" He said, "Jones, H L." "Well I think you might understand if you said it 'H L Jones'." "Oh, H L Jones." "Yeah, that's better." He couldn't work it out.

41:30 Anyway he got the ticket. When he got the ticket his pipe dropped down like this. Gee, he was funny. Anyway, that was a lighter moment of being caught up. So then I worked... I went to South Brisbane Exchange and I worked there for a couple of years, worked inside in the exchange and I worked outside on the maintenance

Tape 9

00:31 and then I rented a house and the person who owned the house was at Mount Isa. He was a fireman, an engine driver or something. Looked like he had half the railway in the place and he decided he was coming back and like I was given one day's notice. And I'm...

01:00 The bloke, the chap that Hazel knew before the war... And he said, "I'm sorry," he said, "he should have given me a week's notice." "I know you should have," he said. The fellow lobbed on my doorstep and he wants a days notice. I was a bit stymied for a minute. Anyway two doors up was a lady, an old lady. She says, "I think I'll have a little holiday." She says, 'I'll go away for six months to my family

01:30 up in the Downs." And she said, "You can have the house for that time, as long as you look after the two cats." Oh, those cats. She'd fed them on liver and they were real vicious. Ever seen a cat that was fed on liver? Like that all the time. And she took to our younger daughter

02:00 Barbara. I said, "This is not going to happen." And I locked her out of the house and made sure she couldn't get in. This cat couldn't get in. She had two of them actually. The other one was not bad. Anyway, we fed her meat, not liver, cut her off liver straight away and then within a week, minced meat you know, and cooked meat. The cat cats had never seen cooked meat.

02:30 And she used to feed them on raw liver all the time. Oh, they were animals. Within a fortnight they were pretty quiet. I finished up painting the house for her.

So tell me more about the work you did down there?

Yes, telephone technician down there and when I first went down there, there were only five of us to do everything. We laid

03:00 from the bridge down to Tugun. Very busy on installation maintenance and that. One bloke stationed at... Where was it? I can't think of the names now. I'm losing the memory for that sort of area.

Doesn't matter.

03:30 Yeah, anyway, halfway down between the border and Tugun. And he did the maintenance down there

but we did all the installation. And we were out of Surfers [Paradise] and we were put back to Southport, in the line section. The line section had moved out to somewhere else.

04:00 And by that time we had about ten on the staff. But first two years, I never got time to clean my vehicle. I was flat out, as soon as I got to work till we knocked off.

What was the population of Surfers Paradise around then?

I couldn't tell you, about 50,000 it might have, around like collectively around there.

What sort of industries

04:30 **were there at the time?**

Very little, they come later. Chap started industries up along, Nerang there and, that area all along. You been down there by road lately? You know the area? All the commercial business in the back areas there? Well they only

05:00 started about two, three years after us. Seaworld was in its infancy then. I did a lot of work there.

What was there at the time?

Just Seaworld.

Yeah but what did Seaworld look like at that time?

Oh, about half the size of what it was, what it is now. Less than half the size.

05:30 Dreamworld wasn't there, the film place wasn't there. They were...

What sort of animals or attractions did Seaworld have?

Mainly fish. The chap that started it off was Ben Crop, and he had a revolving restaurant on the Isle of Capri, one with big fishbowls all around and

06:00 it was quite interesting. Ben and Eva, was it Eva Crop, I think it was, I think that was the name and, the chap that started Seaworld up, he got the inspiration from that, and - he went, he went out of the business

06:30 the bloke in the restaurant, and, I think he finished up working for the bloke at Seaworld. It was, it wasn't Seaworld it was... Seaworld was another part of it. There was another place before that, I can't recall.

It doesn't matter, it's okay.

Yeah, anyway, and then it

07:00 was replaced by Seaworld then and they made it bigger and, now it's about three times. They're putting in a big shark pool in again.

So is there a sense of a new beginning, post war, down there?

Yes.

Can you talk about that?

The beginning of it?

A new beginning, a new start, did you feel like you were starting afresh?

Yeah, it was a lot of hard work. Very much so, we were very short staffed,

07:30 with no overtime, and I had to be in by five o'clock because that was the rules and regulations the commonwealth government set on us. Eight to five, start work at eight and finish at five and then I used to work half a day on Saturdays, on roster, we used to work on roster.

How many would be in a team?

08:00 Just me. And then later on, when I finished up I got another assistant and we went off. I worked with other blokes. I got other fellows then and finished up I became a desk jockey [clerk] and looking after about 15 men

08:30 in the end. But, originally you would have had the first high rises and that. There was only Kinkajou, was the only high rise and then one near it there came up. I wired all that.

What do you think the Gold Coast meant to you at the time in a social sense?

Nothing. It was too much hard work, no time to do anything no time for joy.

09:00 And...

Do you know, do you have any idea what other people did?

Oh yeah, but I treat them with a blasé sort of... Many different people. Knew... What's his name? I can't think of it now? That built the Isle of Capri. He was the bicycle bloke.

I don't, sorry I don't know him.

Oh, anyway

09:30 he came up and sunk his money into it, and he built up the Isle, first of all it was a, there was another island they built up first, and then they went on to the Isle of Capri, which was a prestige area. I'll think of his name; it'll come to me.

So, what plans did you and Hazel have as a family, like

10:00 **what was your, what was your, your plan post war?**

Post war? First of all we built our house, and then it took me about two or three years to build that.

Is that down the coast?

No, in Brisbane. I contracted, I didn't come without the second home. We built that place

10:30 from scratch, up at Oxley, and I couldn't sell it. And I got down the coast I had it rented for two years and they just about wrecked it on me, and I lost six months' rent. There was no real estate agents; the nearest on was Quirindi or something, not Quirindi, Graceville I think it was, so pretty sparse in those days real estate and they wouldn't take on

11:00 renters. So I just had to go and I got my brother to go and get the rent, and he was not the sort of bloke to lay his foot down hard. He's not like me, been through all the ironies of life. Anyway I finished up, I tipped them out,

11:30 the whole family out. They'd grown up in the meantime. They were... All fellows were teenagers. Well, two years and they were all men. And, oh, rough and tumble, they never, when I got custody of the place, they'd never - everybody was visiting around the district. Outside of the

12:00 front door, it was about that high off the front door, there was a landing and the steps down and they used to chuck all their cigarettes over there. And the side door - there was side door and a back door - the side door there was a million razor blades, closest to... They never chucked them out. They couldn't actually, anywhere else, they chuck

12:30 them out the side door. In the garden, about that high in razor blades - you never seen anything like it. And then the backyard, there was two wrecked cars and God knows what rubbish. and everybody was owed money. And they said to them, "We got to get ours out of them." And I said, "You won't get anything from him, so you'll have to wipe him."

13:00 There's no way in the world. I finished up I got a solicitor from Ipswich to read the riot act to him because there were no solicitors on this side of the bridge, at Chelmer, up to Oxley. There were no solicitors in that area at all then. And a chap from Ipswich come down and he read him the riot act. And, he said, "Well, you've got to go." And anyway he finished

13:30 up going and after a lot of hassles, and left the place in a absolute mess. And then I did it up and rented it for another two years to a very good tenant then. I'd painted it and in the line of the dust from, the cement dust from, from the cement works at Darra;

14:00 you'd know about that. And of a night, and mainly in the winter, used to float down the valley. There between Oxley and main road and us. You know Oxley at all? Englefield Road? Well I lived on... It's still there. The house is still on the corner there - corner of Englefield Road and Douglas Street. It was

14:30 our place. I built it up and I sold it for 8000 dollars, 8000 pounds.

So, George in terms of your career, what sort of changes did you see from a technical point of view throughout the years?

And how, we started off with magneto stuff and then it became common battery and then it became automatic phones and

15:00 CB [common battery] was when you lifted the receiver and a light would come up in the exchange. There was parts of the area, of the city, was automatic. And I worked in the exchange there for a while before I went down the coast.

Can you describe the exchange for me?

Yes because

15:30 it's not there now. It's taken over by that big complex on the corner. Woolworths and Big W that's still

going up, all around MacArthur Chambers. You know MacArthur Chambers? That's where General MacArthur had his headquarters there. And now there's only one building I think between there and the post office.

16:00 I think that might have gone now too. It'd be pretty close to going. But, well, the old post office behind the main post office was still in Elizabeth Street. A lot of it's still there; part of the old exchange years ago, before the war, well before the war. And the telegraph

16:30 section was in there. And just up towards Queen Street and I crossed the lane was the post office itself, on the right hand side, opposite the St Stephen's Cathedral. That was quite a happy place and they were all ex servicemen from the First World War and that, mainly. There was a couple that weren't.

17:00 **How many people worked in there?**

Oh, there was about two dozen. This was before the war. There would have been about two or three dozen.

And after?

And after they moved. They'd moved during the war to Barnes' Building, which was on Barry Parade. You know, the big one near Centennial Park, Centenary Park I think it was, on the corner. Well there, it was a

17:30 place where all the drunks and that used to live across the road from there. There had been a Barnes, an outfitter's place before the war, and they'd given up and built. And were bought by the department and when I came back they'd moved down there and things were totally different. You wouldn't read about it -

18:00 I walked through the door and I walked straight into me old mate from before the war who lives in Milton, not Milton, Woolloowin. And he come back, I knew he was in the services, and he come back and he was a very sick bloke. I think he's still alive, as far as I know. He lived out Jindaloo way, somewhere there, and I seen him a few years ago. He'd had a severe bowel

18:30 problem. And working on planes that had been in India, you work on the maintenance of them and you had to slide down the wings of them and he got a germ in his bowel and he lost two thirds of his bowel. And, he had a colostomy [bag] beside him and... You know what they're like? And his wife, she couldn't hack it, she

19:00 left him. But, he had a wonderful spirit for a bloke. Well, we were cyclists together and I joined up before him. He wasn't in the post office then. I don't know what he did, probably I used to have a rendezvous with... go for a ride down to Sandgate and see who would be first down there.

19:30 The last one, there was three or four of us, the last one down there had to buy the pies. What we used to do, we used to go down, and this is before the war, I used to go down there and swim across the sharkproof area there, at Shawnclyff, and back up to the pie shop.

What were pies like in those days?

20:00 Good. Used to be the last pie place in Brisbane was at the corner of Edward Street and Queen Street, I think it was. I think it might have been Adelaide Street and Queen Street.

And how much was a pie in those days?

Oh, about, pie and peas and a lump of potato would be, a mashed potato would be about,

20:30 one and six or something like that, or a shilling, something, it might have been a shilling. You could buy a pie for sixpence actually, but when we put the pie and peas and all that, had a good meal out of it. I never indulged in it. I never had the money to indulge in it. But, anyway, that was that. Before we came down the coast it just grew and grew.

What were the highlights of your career post war?

21:00 Oh, didn't have too many highlights, had a lot of work lights. I worked out of the exchange back to south, back to the main exchange at Surfers Paradise, and I worked out of there. And we finished up it was nearly a hundred working out of there and it was a big organisation

21:30 by the time I finished. Well that's all been ripped out, and the exchange, exchange part's gone, and they'll have a half a dozen cameras. Whacking big bus-pass area for the where all the lines come in and...

How revolutionary was that at the time?

I didn't see all that go.

22:00 We had two systems, we had Siemens. Siemens 16 I think it was at South Brisbane and we had another system that came in. I forget the name of that one and that was at Surfers Paradise, and that, because that's really like topsy. And they had to put another building in, and we had more staff.

- 22:30 And I got out of the exchange part of it because, well, they wouldn't, over 45, over 40, yeah, over 40, they wouldn't retrain you. So, "Well, righto, I'll go next door to the installing." And I went in there and I became a technical officer. And I had about 16 on my staff, which a lot of blokes from Melbourne and Sydney and those places.
- 23:00 They were hard to control, because you had to keep an eye on the all the time, but in the meantime we had, given over the wiring of these buildings to private contractors, so I had the job of licensing the majority of these contractors to teach them the rudiments of what the wire and how it was done and so forth; take them around and show them a building that was done.
- 23:30 And then another chap took over from me and he had that alone to do - supervision of the wiring - whereas I had supervision of installations and there were six of us in our part, split up the coast, and, there it went.
- 24:00 I say now, I went back there a few years later, after I'd retired, about ten years later, and the whole lot was wiped out. And all the maintenance, the outside installations, was still there, but it became a different story altogether because they all had to be, every unit was wired then,
- 24:30 and they had to be otherwise we wouldn't put them on, put phones on...

Were they generally good times?

Oh yes. Quite happy with the place. So, I knew a lot of fellows, a lot of people there, and, high quality and a few of notoriety too. One chap I met there was,

- 25:00 I won't give you names, I met him through... I was working one Saturday morning and he was very irate. The complaints were controlled by the Southport staff then and a girl rang me and she said, "Oh, I've got an irate bloke on the phone." And I said, "Put him through to me, will you?" I said, "What's your problem?"
- 25:30 "Oh," he said, "will you come up and see me?" I said, "Yes, I will. I'll stop at the exchange. Now it's nearly half past 11," I said, "as soon as half past 11 comes," I said, "I'll come up and see you because it's in my time." And, "Oh," he says. I said, "Yes, so you're dealing in my time as a person." And I went and saw him and I went in and he was irate and he said,
- 26:00 "Oh, I've..." I think he was a big contractor, right down the coast. He had contract gravel contractors. And he said, "All my foremen ring in on Friday afternoon between about four and six, and," he said, "they couldn't get me." I said, "Oh, we'll have a look
- 26:30 around." I said, "Seems all right. I'll go back to the exchange," I said, "and I'll check your lines out and what we call the final selectors in your group, all the switching arrangements." And I said, "I'll ring you from each one," because I smelt a bit of a rat. Something was a big, not right, and I said, "Now, is it like this
- 27:00 when you couldn't get in?" And he says, "Yes." "Now," I said, "well I've got you on every outlet." So I went back to him again. I said, "Now, be truthful. You must have another phone somewhere." And he sheepishly said, "Yes I have." I said, "Would you plug it in please? Before you plug it in,
- 27:30 I'll get you to ring the girl in the exchange and she will ring you back." And he said, "Yes." And I said, "Without the phone in, it rings all right?" And he answered, "Yes, that's all right now." "Right, produce that phone that you've got." And he produced an American phone, and I said,
- 28:00 "Would you plug it in please?" Mr O'Neill was his name, I will mention his name. He's gone many years. And, he said, "Well, I've never seen a person like you before, the way you handled me." He said, "I'd take you on my staff tomorrow." And I said, "I wouldn't be
- 28:30 any good in your business with all sand and gravel and that stuff." And his sons had just started in the business then, and over a couple of years I got to know him and he lived just around the corner, in Fern Street and the Highway. It's a restaurant now or something and that was very good. He called me when he went in there and he said,
- 29:00 "Oh," he said, "I need to get some wiring done." This was earlier like. "I need my phones reorganised." I says, "Right, I put one beside the toilet for you." He says, "How did you know?" I said, "Well, I know that at four and six you probably want to get to the toilet." He said. "That's right." I said, "I can't give you one in the toilet, but I'll give you one on a ten foot or 15 foot lead and you can take it with you." So, it
- 29:30 was a great joke. And that was the type of bloke that. Who was the bloke that developed the Isle of Capri? Bruce Moore, yeah, I just couldn't think of his name... Oh yeah, oh he was first, I used to call him Bruce.
- 30:00 Working backwards and forwards it used to come in handy and I...

Sorry George I might just ask that question, or people might not understand?

Hm?

How did your war experiences transfer over into civilian life?

Well, I was an electrical fitter by then in the air force, and I was a corporal electrical fitter which was... I used to travelled around, used to look after the phones.

30:30 And the phones are all between the main headquarters and the outstation, which had the power units in. They were half a mile apart, the power units, because in case of bombs, from the main centre would be the

31:00 radar and the camp would be somewhere else around there, but it all had to be connected. It was all connected up and I used to do maintenance and all that too. Made sure everything worked. Did I tell you about the old lady at Mount Surprise? I took her in and I got her on the truck all right and took her back to the exchange but we couldn't get her back to the

31:30 camp, but we couldn't get her off.

Yeah, told us about that. So, how do you feel that your wartime sort of shaped you as a person?

Oh, it totally changed me.

Can you explain how?

Oh more self-confident and that sort of thing. Apart from that, that's about all I can give you.

What about in terms of problem solving, it seems

32:00 **like you really had to think on your feet a lot being on your own a fair bit?**

Oh yeah, oh back on the exchange I able to catch up with the lineys [linesmen] and tell them what to do and that sort of thing, which we're not supposed to do - let them find out for themselves. But it was taking more time, and that by the time they found it out and I could tell them and that's it, and, anyway, it's getting... It's dark.

32:30 **Okay, if you don't have anything else.**

No. I don't think so.

Okay, what are your thoughts on Anzac Day?

Very solemn, because a number of my friends died and my Dad's a returned soldier, and

33:00 Hazel's brother was lost out to sea, or we presume, his body was never found - in the Mediterranean or somewhere over there. It's had a vast effect on the whole family. But of course Hazel's brother was a prisoner of war, and the other brother,

33:30 the third brother went to England on the Blue Star Line and worked over there until he came back to Malaya and he spent some time there just after the bad days over there, and then he came back to Queensland to Maryborough and then he went to Sydney and

34:00 he's since died. He was an engineer, top grade, top grade engineer.

Did your father used to tell you tales of his experience in the war?

Not much. Not much, I couldn't say it was very much. He might have said a few things, that's all, he was a very inward

34:30 person like that. Wasn't he? My Dad. and he always went to the Anzac Day parade. That's about it.