Australians at War Film Archive

Selwyn Evans (David) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:43 **To begin with, keeping in mind the summary I talked about just a moment ago could we go through from the beginning of your life and if you could tell us a little bit about where you were born and your family?**

I was born in

01:00 Sydney, our family was in Sydney as far as I know then and grew up in Sydney and went to school in Sydney, went to school at Mosman, Marist Brothers and played sport in school and finished there. For a very short time while I was at school I worked in the Rural Bank, but then I was hardly there and I joined the air force. War broke out when I was fourteen

01:30 and I remember that well and there were paperboys singing out, “War declared! war declared!” and my mother forked out tuppence and I was with her and brought one. The paper boy said, “He will have to go.” I was a bit tall for my age and my mother was absolutely taken aback and gave him a swift answer and it never occurred to me that the war wouldn’t go on, the only war I had known about was the First World War and it went on for years so I assumed that would. When the Air Training Corps

02:00 started up I joined that and stayed in it until I went into the air force. When I went in I could do Morse [code] at fifteen wpm [words per minute], which was required in the air force. I knew something about navigation and meteorology and those things and looking back I don’t know how they would have got the air crew they needed without such a scheme. I joined up.

How old were you when you entered the air force from the Air Training Corps?

The day after my 18th birthday,

02:30 I was marking the days off the calendar for a couple of years. I went to Bradfield Park for initial training and then to Narromine for elementary flying training and Bundaberg where I graduated from the Advance Training School and so on. Then 42 years later I got out of the air force.

We will go into a little bit what you did in the air force. At the very beginning how advanced was the war by the time you had finished your training?

It was 1943 so the war in the Pacific was

03:00 raging and the war in Europe was really at its peak you might say. No one really thought we would loose but to think back to it, there was no certainty we would win but no one thought that way. There was a glut of aircrew of course later on, the Brits had asked Australia to provide

03:30 two hundred and twenty six pilots every four weeks, two hundred and thirty two navigators I think and two hundred and-something air gunner wireless operators. For a country of eight million it was an incredible call on us and the country met the call. As I say it depended on organisations like the air training corps and no doubt other services had similar things going and of course it ended quite suddenly.

04:00 Because there were so many air crew and there were air crew in 1944, forty five picking fruit because the Brits had stopped calling for air crew at the end of 1943 and we were bringing air crew home from Europe so it was very hard to get a job. One of the things was I was sent to Watsonia to do a toughening up course where I did rifle drill and threw grenades and I thought, ‘hell, I thought I was going to war with an aeroplane

04:30 strapped to my behind, what am I doing this for?’ But it was filling in time. Then I was posted to Evans Head as a staff pilot which was the school of air navigation and I plagued the chief instructor there for a posting to operations and I said, “I wanted to fly Beaufighters” and he was very helpful. He was a nice bloke and I think he did his best for me, but he got a little bit screwed up and got me posted to Beauforts, which meant I had to

05:00 do a general reconnaissance course first which took three agonising months. Then I got to Sale with the Beauforts and had just finishing the operational training when the war ended. That was a curious thing because we were told, “This course will be disbanded and discharged and posted within the next few weeks.” I said, “I don’t want to,

05:30 I like this flying business,” so I saw my flight commander and told him, I was a flight sergeant, the war was over and the air force is huge and we will be discharging people, and that is the information we had from Air Force Headquarters, “You will be posted for discharge.” Then I saw the wing commander and he told me the same thing and I thought, ‘to hell with this,’ so next morning I went out the gate and got

06:00 a train to Melbourne and went to Air Force Headquarters at Victoria Barracks. You could imagine that was rather daunting for a flight sergeant, I had no idea who did what, but I wandered around corridors and I saw a door with ‘Flight Lieutenant so-and-so Postings’ so I knocked on that and went in, “Yes flight sergeant,” he said, “What do you want to do?” I said, “I would like a posting sir, well I would like to stay in the air force, I would like to get a permanent commission.”

06:30 and he laughed and said, “Wouldn’t we all!” and that was it. Later I saw a door ‘discharges Squadron Leader L Smith’ and I knocked on his door, “Yes flight sergeant” and I told him and he said, ‘”Well I suppose we would like to man the air force with volunteers” he said, “I will tell you what I will do, I will go down and if I can find a posting for you, I will stop your discharge.” He went away for about twenty

07:00 minutes and when he came back he said, “How would you like to fly to Kotus?” I said, “Anything at all sir.” He said, “You are lucky, your discharge was in the out tray with the rest of the course.” I went back to Sale happy and about two days later we were all called together and they said, “Flying Officer so-and-so posted to Richmond for discharge, Flight Sergeant Evans posted to 38 Squadron.” The Flight Commander was reading them out and he stopped and he looked at me and said

07:30 “What the hell has happened here?” And he went on and off I went to 38 Squadron which was at Archerfield flying courier runs up to Morotai and New Guinea and shortly afterwards runs to Japan so there I was then on from there.

Can you take us through the squadrons you served in and the main operations that you were involved in from there on?

08:00 In 38 Squadron we did the New Guinea operation, which was right up to Rabaul and around all the bases in New Guinea. We did that very regularly, we had a detachment at Morotai where I did three or four months amongst other things got dengue fever but we were flying all over from Balikpapan, Borneo, Singapore and out to Japan and

08:30 it was quite interesting flying, the tropical flying with large build-ups of cumulus. I wasn’t very experienced really and then we started the Japan courier. We moved back from Archerfield where the squadron was based to Schofields where a wing was formed, 86 Wing with 38 Squadron, 36 and 37 Squadrons, Transport Squadron

09:00 and we undertook the Japan courier which was a long way to go for a Dakota [Douglas Dakota transport aircraft] in those days. The weather was sometimes quite appalling through the intra-tropic front but I was too ignorant to know too much about it. The fellow who checked me out as captain who later became a very senior Qantas pilot, he said to me “You can fly through anything in a Dakota at eight thousand feet.” I used to plough through the most appalling winds and believing this was

09:30 so and it obviously was so but frightening trips at times, builds up of ice in Japan. The wing ran three services a week, Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays and didn’t miss a beat, didn’t break an aeroplane or that sort of thing. Then Qantas took over eventually that run using Lancastrians,

10:00 I think it was a converted Lancaster bomber sort of thing. We were doing that and obviously the normal transport trips around Australia and then Berlin Airlift came along and we sent eight crews of which I was one over to Germany and based at Lubeck. We were gone fourteen months which was a long time but no one thought it would last more than a few weeks. I got married, I was due to get married

10:30 the day we went and that had been planned for about six months the reception and everything and the week before I was told I was going to Berlin on Monday. Someone said to the wing commander, “Evans is getting married the next Saturday” and apparently he was writing away and he must have had a bad marriage because he threw his pen down on the desk and said, “The bloody young fool

11:00 we will get him off on Monday” and in fact I got married on Monday instead of next Saturday and I didn’t go until the next Saturday so it was five days before. Off we went, thinking we would be back in a few weeks maybe a couple months but in fact it was fourteen months because not only did we stay for the airlift but when the airlift finished in May they decided the Americans and the Brits [British] decided once they stood down it would take

11:30 three months to get back to that so they decided to put in three months of reserve stocks in Berlin and then we came home. Then we sat around in England for a good five or six weeks, no one gave a damn about bringing us home, we set off rather quickly and it was a incredibly frustrating we were getting annoyed but back here they couldn’t care less. We waited and got a ride home on a York, a British aircraft.

12:00 “What do I want to do when I get back?” I thought, “I would like to do a flying instructor’s course,” and we were all asked before we left what we would like to do but no one got it. I got back and we were met at Amberley and remember we all lived in Sydney because the squadron was based in Sydney and we remained overnight at Amberley, God knows why, it was crazy, but we did.

12:30 Group Captain Blithe read out the postings and by then I was a flying officer. I was posted to be air movement’s officer at Mallala in South Australia and I could imagine nothing worse. In the mess that night Group Captain Blithe and a couple of staff officers had come up from air force headquarters with him were in the mess and we were having a drink and I said how

13:00 incredibly disappointed [I was] to be going to that sort of dead-end job. I think probably the thing that got them on side, I said, “I suppose I have seen a lot more air transport movements section than I ever saw before I ever went away, probably could see things to improve them, but I still don’t like it.” While I was on leave I got a telegram posting me to the flying instructor’s course, which I did and then I went instructing at Point Cook and then on exchange to New Zealand

13:30 and then back after that to the Queen’s Flight to the transport wing which was then at Richmond. Because I had been instructing I was the wing instructor and the instrument rating examiner and when the Queen’s [Elizabeth II] flight was coming out, I was the training officer for it. I flew around with the Queen and I stayed in the transport and then I was the personal pilot to Sir William Slim who was the Governor General

14:00 for a bit more than a year and that was an interesting experience and he was an incredible bloke.

Did you use Dakotas?

Yes, we used Dakotas and we got Convair 240 in my last year there, which was a great improvement. Then I converted my replacement to that and went on to Staff College. In the Staff College I was interviewed and then took over as staff

14:30 officer for the Minister for Air. I was a squadron leader then and he was a fellow called Osborne. We had a Minister for Air in those days of course and Supply and a Minister for army and navy. I spent a lot of time in Canberra when parliament was sitting, I was here, I lived at Fairburn, but I was in Parliament House from nine o’clock in the morning until midnight or whatever

15:00 or when ever it finished. A different experience for an air force officer but I think it probably did me the world of good, I got to understand the incredible way politicians think and people were nice to me who never would have noticed me, senior officers would ring up and say, “Dave there is a file there on so-and-so, do you think you could get it to the Minister quickly so that I don’t get it back?” Sometimes we cart files

15:30 from here into the case down to Melbourne while we went down there to the Air Board meeting and then up to Sydney where his home office was, we would be carrying them around for weeks trying to get the information. Then he asked me to do a second year with him which I did. I suppose I took advantage of being with the Minister and being nice to all these guys and said I would like to fly Canberras [bomber aircraft] because I wanted to get out of the transport, I had been on Beauforts when the war ended

16:00 and back to that sort of flying. I got posted to Canberra’s and then went to Malaysia with 2 Squadron when I finished, had lots of interesting things to do with bombing then. I was sent to Malaysia and then I was posted to England to do a six months course. Things were pretty miserable in those days it was a six months course so

16:30 my wife couldn’t go with me so I raced back to Sydney and settled the family in a week and then I went off for six months and then came back and then I was posted to a staff job in Canberra to do with bomber aircraft.

You mentioned your family. How large was your family by this time?

By this stage I had two children. Then I came back from that and

17:00 as I say I was a staff officer only for a couple of years and then I was posted to America as the Assistant Air Attaché. We had a baby while I was in Malaysia so we had three when I came back, they wont be pleased me forgetting this. Three when we came back and then we went to America and it seemed whenever we went overseas we had children because we had another

17:30 son born in America. While I was in America I was Assistant Air Attaché. I had sent off a thing saying I wanted to go in a Canberra squadron in Vietnam because we had 2 Squadron being deployed there. I got a signal back saying I was going to 36 Squadron to command 36 Squadron. I sent a little note to the then Air Commodore in charge, “I believe

18:00 one volunteer is worth a dozen pressed men [conscripts], would you think again about 2 Squadron?” and fortunately he did. I was placed with 2 Squadron and served there for a year and was promoted on return and became Director of Air Force Plans. I did a couple of years at that and then went off to England to do Royal College of Defence Studies and then back from there

18:30 and was Director General of Plans and Policy. It was curious, the administration wasn't outstanding in those days. I was in England due to come back within a few weeks, didn't know where I was going, no posting, so I rang up AMP [Air Member for Personnel] and said "I don't want to ask too much, but where do I send my gear?"

19:00 and he said, "You will be coming back to Canberra to a one star job," at least I knew, but I didn't know what the job was. I got in and turned up and I was in the Department of Air and said, "Where do I go?" they said, "You are supernumerary, wait until we sort it out." I thought it was a curious air force, it wasn't that big, they didn't have that many generals and I said, "This is rather curious," and they said,

19:30 "There are two air vice marshals waiting here for postings too and they are not sure" and that's true, "Which they were going to shuffle into which holes." It was sorted out and I became Director General of Plans and Policy. I came back in 1972/1973 and got while I was in that job the F111s [United States' fighter/bomber] arrived

20:00 and clearly I wanted to go and fly those so I pressed at Amberley, which I eventually got and I went to Amberley at the end of a couple of years and I commanded for a couple of years. It was great I had two helicopter squadrons, a Canberra squadron and 2 F111 squadrons and I did my conversion to F111s and a refresher on Canberras. I thought because I had helicopter squadrons I should show an

20:30 interest so I did a conversion of the Iroquois [helicopter]. It was great, I had three days a week, and I would fly one of each aeroplane. They soon realised that it was perhaps a bit silly, that the F111 wasn't that sort of aeroplane that you could just fly occasionally so I thought I would concentrate on that. So from then on I flew it two or three days a week I would go flying the F111 and that was great and I could have stayed there forever but

21:00 I was promoted to Air Vice Marshal and made Chief of Air Force Operations and came back to Canberra for that. I did that for a couple of years. In fact that was the end of my field postings, I came back to Canberra in 1977 and I was Chief Air Force Operations and Deputy Chief of Air Staff and then Chief of Joint Operations and Plans in Defence

21:30 and then Chief of the Air Force.

How long did you serve in that role for?

Three years.

Subsequently you retired from the air force altogether?

Yes.

That is a fantastic summary of your career and there is so much to go on there. Since then what has happened in your life in your retirement?

I very soon got bored.

22:00 I had to be doing something, I started to write a book, which I wrote, and it was published by Macmillan here, 'The Fatal Rivalry' and that filled in a bit of time. During that time I was going to China, the Chinese here the Defence Attaché was a major general kept saying, "Why don't you visit China?" when I was Chief, and in fact I said I would because it seemed a sensible thing to do

22:30 and he said, "That's good." I put it to the Minister and the Government decided, 'no, we won't send the Chief' that would be about 1983 I suppose, 'it is not time to send a Chief, we might have a staff polly visit or a ship visit, but to send the Chief of Staff would give the wrong impression.' So then I was embarrassed in front of these guys they were saying, "When are you going?" and I would say, "I am terribly sorry," and I put this off.

23:00 In the last six months I said, "Look I won't be able to make it, but when I retire I will visit China." I guess I hadn't been retired more than two weeks and they were knocking on the door saying, '"When are you coming to China?" I did visit China and I thought it was a good idea and my wife thought it would be interesting to go and my son was seventeen still at school so he came and we visited China and they looked after us very well.

23:30 Before I went, I said to DeHavilland, "Look I'm going to China is there anything I can do?" and they said, "That would be a good idea," and they gave me a couple of tasks to do and so did the Bell people said , "We are interested in getting a helicopter," they said

24:00 "Would you put our case?" I found that interesting and I did that and when I came back DeHavilland said, "That was good, would you come on board with us as a consultant?" that was only part time sort of thing. It gave me an interest and they were bidding for a new trainer to build a trainer here so I spent a few years. Again I could make my own time I didn't go in anywhere

24:30 everyday, but I was here if they wanted me and I would go and see them and I would go up to Sydney and see them once every couple of weeks. By this time I was missing flying, I thought I would never bother to fly light aeroplanes, I had been flying F111 and I continued to fly the F111s until I retired. Three weeks before I retired my instrument rating ran out and I was Chief of the Air Force and I had to

do another instrument rating because I wanted to fly around the base and say farewell and I wanted

25:00 to go out with an aeroplane strapped to my behind. It might be looked upon as indulgence but I rationalized that to myself saying, 'surely this is the impression for young officers and pilots to see the chief being able to fly these things and he must know something about what he is doing,' anyway that was my rationale and that suited me. I had done that but then

25:30 I could have got a civil license without any trouble, but I didn't want to fly light aeroplanes. About eighteen months or two years later I thought, 'God it is better than nothing' so I got a civil licence, just one to fly light aeroplanes, but I had left it so long I had to do all the subjects which was a damn nuisance. When I would go to visit Hawker DeHavilland I would hire a light aeroplane and fly up there

26:00 and if they asked me to go to Sale for something on one occasion I would hire an aeroplane I would do that. They were starting a flying school in Adelaide for airline pilot training, they were buying one and expanding it so I had a lot to do with setting that up in the way of advice and what sort of aeroplanes, where do we get people etc and instructors. Then they were eventually taken over by BRL

26:30 a British Company and the commercial director said, "I am leaving and going to ADI the Australian Defence Industries would you come there?" So I said, "All right," because DeHavilland was taking on a different face so I was with them until they were taken over by

27:00 British Aerospace then. I joined them as military adviser and then on the Board of British Aerospace and then they merged with Marconi and became BA Systems, but I was on the board with them for a while. Then I finished that and I guess by age I was out of being on boards but I am still with them as a military adviser.

27:30 I wrote another book on the principles of war, I like writing.

You have had by the end of your career a passion for flying?

Yes

Where did that come from?

I have know idea, I can't tie it to anything, but it never occurred to me that I would want to do anything but join the air force. When war was declared,

28:00 I didn't think, 'will I go into the army or the navy?' I was reading a book on various Chiefs of Air Force recently and they asked, "What was your passion?" And he said, "I didn't care one way" he wasn't a chief, he was an air vice marshal he just said, "I would have just as soon gone navy, but the air force came up", but I never thought of anything else and that's why I say I joined the Air Training Corps. That stood me in good stead because

28:30 I learned the ground subjects so I had good knowledge for that I think.

Was there ever any conflict between that passion for flying and your subsequent career as an official on the ground?

What of doing staff jobs? I was extraordinarily lucky, I didn't do a ground job for fourteen years and I had more flying than most blokes due to

29:00 the good fortune of my postings. The war ended and I had about five hundred hours and they were mostly staff pilot at Evans Head on Avro Ansons [fighters], was pretty dull but at least I was flying and other people weren't. The Beauforts were difficult, more people got killed training on Beauforts than flying them in operations and then the transport runs to Japan and round New Guinea

29:30 and the Berlin Airlift, so I built up a lot of hours. Then flying training as an instructor and posted to New Zealand on exchange during my instructor's tour and then back to the Queen's flight and transport flying again so by the time I went on Staff College I had five thousand hours more than most people finish their careers with. Then I went back flying so I ended up with nearly nine thousand hours,

30:00 it was more than... I remember my dining out night, saying that in my forty two years from the day I joined the air force until I left, I had averaged twenty hours flying a month so I was extraordinarily lucky and when I was chief I used to one day a month fly the F111 or a day and a half sometimes.

30:30 I used to feel ten years younger when I came back, it had a wonderful effect on me to do it when I would get back. I never really stopped flying, I wasn't getting as much but I realised that. During the war when we were training the people I trained with couldn't give a damn about rank

31:00 we could have been LAC [leading aircraftsman] or airmen pilots we just wanted to get our wings and fly and that was not only me that was most of the people I was on course with. It wasn't until I was here at Fairburn, flying the Governor General, and I was promoted to squadron leader I thought 'I suppose I could get to be a group captain and command a base'

31:30 just looking at my age and the age of other people and that was a possibility. I wouldn't say I was overcome with ambition but I thought 'I wouldn't mind doing it.' I didn't mind going on Staff College, but I was able to keep flying with most of the things I did.

One particularly interesting historic

32:00 **thing is how many hours did you fly during the Berlin Airlift roughly?**

Roughly a thousand hours.

That is quite an incredible piece of, not many people would have done that in that space of time?

No that's true.

What effect did that kind of intensity have on you?

It was a curious sort of an organisation. When we first got there it wasn't terribly well organised at all,

32:30 to start with the daily routine it was, we worked to a twenty hour day. For instance, the Australians flew in a block of eight aeroplanes, three minutes apart. Let us say I was scheduled to take off at eight o'clock this morning, two trips to Berlin, I would finish at four o'clock in the afternoon and then I would have twelve hours off

33:00 and I would start at four am and I would finish at midday and I would take off at midnight. It was a twenty hour day, two trips took eight hours and twelve hours off and did two trips. At the end of three days or six trips you had thirty six hours off and started the cycle again and when you did four of those cycles you had four days off.

33:30 We got used to it, going to bed and getting up to fly at midnight and next day starting at eight o'clock and finishing at four o'clock in the morning it became routine so I get amused these days when I hear of people getting extra money for shift work and how it has a great effect on them and the great stress, we seemed to manage alright, it didn't worry us at all but

34:00 there was plenty of flying in that sort of routine.

Coming quite early in your career, how did that affect your passion for flying, did it increase or deaden it that intense workload?

It increased it I loved it. The weather was appalling in wintertime and things we had never struck before. We were flying Dakotas and we flew at an altitude where we got more ice than anyone else

34:30 and we use to pack ice on so that even with climbing power the spoon would be falling off going down the corridor and it would be coming back and we were separated by three minutes and subsequently we would be all flying at a certain speed, all flying at that. If the speed was falling back because of ice build-up you would wonder what the guy was travelling behind you and you'd say, "I'm going to so-and-so." You also knew that it would

35:00 all end within another forty minutes, you would be able to descend out of the icing but it was building up and the speed was falling back climbing power, you couldn't have gone on much longer otherwise you would have stalled the damn things, but we got used to that it was the norm. Only on one occasion in all my things, I took off, the bloke behind me was a guy named Berryman

35:30 and he lives here in Canberra, no he died only a couple of years ago. Anyhow we were in cloud from about four hundred feet on take-off and broke out on a GCA [Ground Controlled Approach] approach into Berlin, probably two hundred feet and when I taxied in he was in front of me. Our navigators almost came to blows, it didn't matter he was wrong he had passed in the corridor somewhere.

36:00 I loved that, it was great there was plenty of sweat in it and the thing was succeeding.

What was your role in 2 Squadron during Vietnam?

I was the commanding officer.

What did that involve in specifically in 2 Squadron at the time?

36:30 When I went there they had been doing night spot bombing from thirty five thousand feet under radar control. They had then started to do, they had asked to do daylight bombing but the 7th Air Force thought the Canberra would be too vulnerable as a level bombing doing a daylight bombing from a low altitude.

37:00 Anyhow they said, "We will give you a trial" and they had a trial and they were doing one a day as a trial and that was good, that was much better and I through our air commodore in Saigon pressed for doing all daylight. We ended up doing six daylight and two night things as it went on.

37:30 We had to be bombing accurately and supporting the ground forces of course. The aim was particularly troops in action, it was very satisfying to be able to go in when the troops on the ground were in action and do some accurate bombing and as the army level bomber we were able to do things that the Americans, using dive-bombing technique, couldn't do. We put a line of bombs down at various lengths and things.

38:00 **You were instrumental in creating techniques in which you could increase that accuracy, is that right?**

Yes that is true.

Tape 2

00:32 **What were your earliest memories of growing up in Sydney?**

Sydney was just, it didn't come into it because we didn't know anything else. We used to go holidaying to an aunt and uncle who lived in Ettalong of all places, every year where I used to go out to the dairy farm and learnt to ride a horse and rustle cattle at the end of the

01:00 day and the milking. Living in Sydney I lived in Wollstonecraft and went to school at Mosman so I got the tram every day to Mosman, but we were better behaved on the trams than the kids are today I think, not all that well behaved I suppose. School was good, I enjoyed school, I didn't like the academic part, but Marist Brothers were good for sports. I played football and

01:30 in the various under 7s and we used to go by weight and went up until I played in the senior team in rugby and I played cricket. My parents were keen on tennis and I learnt to play tennis and was coached by a guy, Edwards, he was a guy at Roseville and he was a famous coach and I played quite good tennis. In fact when I was in the airlift I played for the RAF [Royal Air Force] and there were two

02:00 Australians in the team. So growing up in Sydney was quite good, I wasn't excited. I always seemed to be looking to the next step I suppose, in a way I can't explain. Certainly from my teens it was just the war and air force in my mind. In fact that was when I started doing reasonably well at school. I was

02:30 more interested in sport than academics, I did what I had to do but when I knew I wanted to join the air force and I had to do, I worked significantly harder and better, not brilliant but better. Life was pretty good in those days, there was a Depression and we weren't well off by any means, and I think we lived with my grandparents

03:00 for a while and one of my father's brothers. I think my father was the only one working at one stage of the game but I didn't notice it. I went to school, I had a school uniform, and we had a car. I remember being told at the time things I couldn't understand, we couldn't go here because we didn't have money for petrol.

03:30 It was nothing depressing, I always had plenty to eat.

What was your father's profession?

He was a policeman.

What did you know about what he did during the day?

Not much, the only thing I knew about the police force was they had some tennis courts and that is where I played tennis and the family used to, my Mum and Dad, their social life was around the tennis and the tennis court. I used to go and scavenge

04:00 as much tennis as I could get between sets just running on with other kids and just hitting the ball. School, as I say school was a good relief, I enjoyed the sports and I enjoyed the atmosphere. The Brothers were good sort of blokes encouraging sport and sportsmanship as distinct, not only winning, which seems to have disappeared from our

04:30 ethics today but I was quite happy. Then from fourteen I had an aim and the aim was the war and it was going to go on and if not necessarily win it, I was going to be part of it. I guess that had a remarkable effect on my outlook on life because I used to go two nights a week and at least one day on the weekends to Air Training Corps things and I used to play tennis on one day of the weekend so

05:00 it was a full life.

One very big event for Sydney and especially the North Shore was the raising of the bridge, what impressions did you have of the bridge going up?

I was a very young kid and I remember watching it because we used to get the ferry across to town with my parents and seeing it coming together but I didn't realise the significance of how clever it was of course it was just the thing coming together. That was

05:30 happening and the ferry ride across. Going to town was quite an event you didn't go to town every day, I wouldn't know how often but there weren't any suburban shopping centres apart from the little grocery stores, tobacconist and milk bars and that sort of thing so to go to town was quite an event and it might be the sort of thing, "We might go to town next week." "Oh really?" and we would go.

06:00 The big event was we would go into a Sergeants Restaurant and have a meat pie, that would only happen perhaps once every couple of months, or go to the State Theatre or one of the big movie places in town.

What were your impressions of the city as a young man?

I don't know that I had the impressions as a young man but it was a dead place

06:30 on weekends, twelve o'clock Saturday everything closed up, it was almost depressing, it was not a nice place, that was my impression of Sydney it was not a nice place the city itself.

What siblings did you have, brothers or sisters?

I had a brother born when I was fourteen and another brother born when I was eighteen, I was in the air force when the second one was born which was a curious family set up, the same mother and father.

07:00 **Were you very close to your parents as a young man, how did they affect you?**

I guess so, although like all young people I wasn't as good at writing letters when I went off and joined the air force and we didn't phone. In those days if you go to the phone you'd wait hours outside for a long distance call outside a phone box, so that was something that didn't happen.

07:30 I suppose I was quite close to them, I respected them, they were kind and good to me, and they gave me as much as they could afford to do. It was a good relationship.

What kind of woman was your mother?

My mother I guess she was the dominant partner, she controlled things and she was quite clever. Her parents died,

08:00 she was an orphan when she about ten or twelve and she had four brothers and a sister and they would say she was the brightest of the lot, she was academically quite bright but then again because of the times she didn't go through to do a university course, but she was smart. She was a great help to me with Maths [mathematics] and English

08:30 when I was at school. She set the standards sort of thing for the family, she was fairly strict I suppose but not oppressively so and we had full standards. Dad was more docile, oddly enough for a policeman but he was. She ruled the roost

09:00 would be putting it a bit strongly. When I think back for the brains and direction of what I should do came from my mother.

What other adult role models did you have as a boy?

I had a few, only my aunts and uncles, I had one of Mum's brothers who was a doctor who didn't live far from us and he was our family doctor,

09:30 he was a very urbane sort of a bloke. Mad about racing, in fact all her family were racing fiends, he had a few horses and he was a good bloke, a bit of a con man I think, but a nice fellow and extraordinarily popular, particularly with the ladies I am told. The other ones were quiet and they were quite good to me.

10:00 In those days people went visiting you would call on people, you didn't necessarily make arrangements, but you would call in on people and they would bring out scones and cakes and that sort of thing. These uncles would always throw me a couple of bob [shillings] and that was pretty good so I use to feel that I was quite well off, two shillings in those days was quite significant. Mum's sister used to give me money and

10:30 I used to love milkshakes and they were four pence each at school where we bought them and she would give me five bob and that will buy you and only have one milk shake a day and that would last me of course for weeks.

What else would you spend your pocket money on?

I didn't have any other pocket money that was it. My pocket money was threepence a day, a penny each way on the tram and one penny at the tuck shop [school canteen].

11:00 You would get four clinkers for a penny.

What connection did your family have with the First World War?

None what so ever. I look back on my family and think 'what a bunch of cowards they were' and that is a strong word, but they are. I did search and think that surely we would have someone who did something but not as far as I know.

What did you know about the war, was that

11:30 **searching the First World War?**

Yes the First World War. I don’t know, you have probably seen we had a huge photograph on the wall of the troops storming the shore at Gallipoli and I use to ask questions about it and been told what everyone knew in the news but there were no Evans’ involved in the thing to my great disappointment as far as I could find out. No. In the Second World War I

12:00 don’t know anyone but myself being involved.

When you say they were cowards, was there an active need to get away from it?

No, I don’t think so, I didn’t know them very well but my father was too young and I guess his brothers were too young for the First World War

12:30 and then the Second World War, Dad was in the police, which was a reserved occupation, his brothers didn’t seem to, one brother joined the army and did do anything. Cowards, but it didn't interest them, I didn't understand that but it didn't worry me, I knew what I wanted to do. It never occurred to me that I wouldn't

13:00 join something if war was on.

Maybe reflecting with hindsight what put you in that position then to unquestionably want to serve your country?

I grew up proud of things that I did in history of the British Empire and ‘the sun never sets on the British Empire’ and the Boers, because we always assumed that

13:30 people, the Zulus and everyone we fought were retched monsters and the Brits were there saving the world. I took it that they were heroic sort of people what they did in India and the Indians they must have been dreadful otherwise the Brits wouldn’t have been there with their troops. The Kaiser, movies used to be made along those lines and the odd ones, ‘Hell’s Angels’,

14:00 were things that excited me and I always thought we were in the right. Obviously the propaganda must have been pretty good growing up but at school we were taught to be proud of the Empire, despite the fact I went to a Catholic School I didn’t hear any harsh criticism of the Brits or English. They

14:30 I guess appealed to me as a dedicated way of life and courage and all those sorts of things, I thought they were good.

How important was religion in your family?

Mum was religious. I mean they weren’t, we didn’t say prayers together, we didn’t say ‘grace’. We went to Mass

15:00 religiously every Sunday but we didn’t race off. I went through a stage at school when I was about twelve and we had Mass every day and I thought I would be a Marist Brother which horrified my mother although I say she was a bit religious. She said, “Don’t be ridiculous you will grow out of that.” Catholic schools in those days you would have a retreat

15:30 and then you would be told, ”Did you have a vocation?” and you’d say, “Yes, that sounds like me.” It really wasn’t, I don’t know whether most kids in Catholic schools in those days went through that sort of thing, I did but it didn’t last long, it might have lasted a year when I thought ‘yes I could be a Marist Brother’ and that went away and as I said Mum was horrified but she was quite religious.

16:00 She used to go to help the nuns and things like that at the convent with concern for them and go to an orphanage which was nearby which was run by the Sisters of Mercy and help there. We didn’t speak religion but when anything came up obviously the Catholics had to be right. It was an awful era and when I went with the nuns, the Marist Brothers weren’t like this but when

16:30 I was at primary school the nuns would say, “They are dreadful, if you are Catholic, you can’t get a job there and Catholics are discriminated against,” and they were almost setting up a war between Protestants and Catholics but that was dreadful. I never let it get into me but I suppose I believe it because David Jones were good because they employed Catholics,

17:00 and someone else I can’t remember was it Mark Foys or somebody didn’t and it went on in those days and this was one great refreshing thing about the armed services. In fact I was talking on the golf course only last week to another ex-air force chief and mentioned, ‘so-and-so was Catholic,’ and I said, “I can’t ever remember that in the service,” I wouldn’t have known what religion anyone was that I served

17:30 with or even right up until the end. I didn’t know my senior officers what their religion was, Neville McNamara was Catholic, with a name like that he had to be but it never came into service life at all.

What impact did that discrimination, Catholic/Protestant have on your boyhood?

It didn’t have any. I went to a Catholic school and I was a Catholic and the nuns used to say I should say, “I am a Catholic and I’m proud of it.”

18:00 I don’t think I went around saying it, but I felt that way. I wasn’t very old I don’t think, when I say very

old I must have been about twelve or thirteen and going to the brothers and being told that if you weren't Catholics you were done for, you couldn't go to heaven, and I use to think, 'that can't be right.' I used to think two things, what a damn shame that I am Catholic because

18:30 I have got so many more rules that I have got to go by than if I weren't and if I didn't know those things I would be all right. Why shove all this into me and tie me up with restrictions if I'm not a Catholic, but however common sense said there couldn't be a God that said only Catholics could go, and all those other people, they must have a God and they believe it and I was quite tolerant at a very early age in my own mind and

19:00 because it didn't make sense the other way.

Taking yourself to being a student at Marist Brothers in your early teens, what evidence was there that there might be a war building up?

There was talk of the war and

19:30 the Italians were in Abyssinia and that might have been a war. My parents would say, "The Germans are building up, something should happen, we are going to have a war" yes it was building up then and then of course there was the Munich crisis and again when Chamberlain [Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom] came back and waved his piece of paper and said, 'peace in our time.' If I had any feeling it would have been disappointment,

20:00 which is not very noble, but we are brought up in different times and it was always looked upon as being courageous I suppose, the majority of people because we had been successful and dreadful. There is no doubt I used to hear stories, I knew the odd bloke relative, not relative but friends of relatives who had been in World War I and listening to them talk about it although it was horrendous

20:30 some of the stores told, there were two sides of it, there were horrendous things but there were acts of incredible bravery which probably had more an affect on me than the dreadful things and probably still does. One of the things that annoys me today almost anyone feels the RSL [Returned and Services League] at a function or ceremony they feel obliged to get up and say, "This is not to glorify war."

21:00 I think you don't have to say that, no one thinks war is great, but on the other hand you might say it brings out the worst in people and the very best in people. This country of ours during World War II, it was wonderful too, I remember, the country was united, people had a purpose, we were more united than I ever remember. The wharfies used to go on strike occasionally but that was normal but generally and as a service person you never had to be lonely

21:30 wherever you went there were invitations to go and play tennis with people or go to homes for dinner or go to dances. Every group of girls in Australia used to form a club and invite servicemen to a party, the trouble was there would be ten girls and they would invite fifty servicemen never less the country was really behind us and it was great. War is horrible and no one would want it,

22:00 you think forty million people killed in World War II, it is atrocious but never the less it brings out some very noble parts of people's character. How did I get onto that?

You were telling me how you heard about the build-up to war and what was going on?

The build up was going on, in fact for some reason I also had, I had read a lot about the British Navy and that's not surprising because

22:30 it was the strength of Great Britain in the pre-war years and I think I had a book in which I kept a list of battleship names, the Donald, and the Warspite and the Hood and all those and the cruisers and I was immensely proud of Britain's building of the seas. As there was talk of war, I then learnt of German pocket battleships.

23:00 so I used to follow this and think this I suppose was leading somewhere and with people building up like that there had to be a contest in the end.

What ways did you gather news?

I sound profound, I was not that profound but I thought there must have been something there keeping these books.

What sort of books were available what ways were you able to find out?

I used to

23:30 read the paper and cut bits out of the paper and put them in books and I used to write 'Britain, six battle ships and so many cruisers, destroyers and submarines' and I used to keep my own records in writing them. I never recall having any books on the thing or being able to afford to buy books on them I guess

24:00 but it was only what I read and cut out of papers and magazines.

What books in general had an influence on you growing up?

Books in general? Not many, I can't even recall the ones we did at school. I used to read Zane Grey who wrote westerns and about

24:30 sharks and such things, adventurous sort of books. I didn't have much time with sporting and study and the Air Training Corps, I really didn't have much time to read fiction or novels or even historical books. History was a great favourite with me, I liked history and I use to read history a good deal so that would be the dominant

25:00 part of my reading that I was able to do and they were usually textbooks, but I enjoyed reading them, only textbooks on history, not on Latin..

You spoke of a certainty that the war would go on and that you would like to be involved. What did you discuss of your desires with your parents for example at the time?

My mother thought, 'rubbish, the war will be over,'

25:30 so she tolerated my talk and going on and going off to the Air Training Corps a couple of nights and sometimes saying, "It would be better if you concentrated on your school studies," but that was about all she did. Obviously it was when it was getting close to me going in and the war was on and she was a bit concerned and

26:00 and I remember saying and obviously it was in a fit of frustration. I was determined to get in the air force the day I was eighteen or the day after, it never occurred for me to go early because I knew they would block me if I wanted to go earlier but I remember saying to my mother, I used to haunt the recruiting officer in Sydney to make sure I got called up as I

26:30 was getting near and they said 'we cant guarantee something', and I said, "If I am not called up straight away I will go and join the army," and my mother nearly had a fit. I went in the day after I was eighteen.

What was it about the air force or the Air Training Corps that first attracted your attention?

I used to read everything about the Battle of Britain was on,

27:00 Paddy Fenuikin and these guys and I knew all the fighter pilots, it just appealed to me, I don't know why but it sure as hell did. I didn't ever get down to the mundane things and say, "It's better than crawling around in the jungle", or something I just didn't want to do those things I just wanted to fly. I would have been devastated if I found that I couldn't

27:30 be selected as a pilot.

I can see your mother's point of view though with the Battle of Britain going on and the horrific losses of fighter and bomber pilots?

Yes.

What did you know about that?

I knew a good deal about it as much as anyone was. It didn't deter me in the slightest, I didn't think about the thought that I might get killed.

Can you tell us a bit about

28:00 **the Air Training Corps and the set up there?**

It was very good. It was set up in 1941 because I was a foundation member by a lot of old guys who had been World War II pilots. There was a Wing Commander Love who was the man who ran the NSW [New South Wales] Air Training Corps and the squadron leader that had the squadron that I belonged to, it had flights in North Sydney and Chatswood

28:30 and various places, I've forgotten his damn name but he was a World War I pilot and they were characters and they were dedicated. They had a lot of volunteers, the girl who taught Morse code was a good looking girl, about twenty so there was no difficulty trying to learn from her but she was very good at Morse. They were

29:00 interesting subjects. We used to go along two nights a week and have a half an hour's drill and then various subjects, meteorology, navigation and what was called E and M, electricity and magnetism, which was a curious one but it was how electricity works and things and navigation. We would also be told what was happening with the war,

29:30 we would often have an air force fellow come and talk to us. For instance Pockley, he was very famous pilot and he came back to Australia they gathered the Air Training Corps and these guys would talk to us and tell us about operations. They kept you interested and excited all the time. What you were doing was furthering your possibility or probability of

30:00 succeeding when you went in. Only there was no flying of course but the ground subjects were quite important and there was good spirit, everyone in it wanted to do the same thing. Although everyone didn't want to go to air crew, there were a lot of Air Training Corps people who wanted to be ground staff in one way or another. We used to go away for good weekends of sport.

30:30 I remember coming up to Canberra to play hockey, I never played hockey but we came up in the train, our flight, and we were billeted with people here and we played hockey for the weekend and went back. It was an additional way of life that was heading you in the right direction or the direction you wanted to go. In fact I don't think the air force could have ever succeeded in training so many aircrew if it hadn't been for the Air Training Corps.

31:00 **How did things change in Australia when Japan?**

And it's still going what's more as you should know.

Yes.

You will find it very hard to find a star rank officer in the air force who wasn't in the Air Training Corps.

How did things change in Australia when Japan came into the war?

They changed, although we had been talking about it for a long time there was a thought that Japanese would come into it and when they did of course they did it in a way that immediately

31:30 generated a great deal of hate for them, the way they attacked without notice. We were stupid enough in those days to think that you didn't go to war like that you wrote a letter to the Prime Minister and say that, 'at midnight tonight there will be a state of war will exist between us.' Chamberlain had done to the Germans, but this was an attack without declaring war was an incredibly bad mannered thing to do,

32:00 we were naïve, weren't we? People hated the Japanese and it wasn't very long before stories of their atrocities started to come out and there was a genuine hate for them. At the same time they executed a lot of people who were shot down and this I learned later as time went by. The Beaufort squadrons they

32:30 lost a lot of aeroplanes and rarely were people taken prisoner but executed if they were shot down. There was a good deal of hate against the Japanese and a great deal of respect for their fighting capabilities also having been told that they wouldn't be able to fight and that their Zero [fighter aircraft] was a second rate aeroplane, it didn't look like the Mustangs, Spitfires,

33:00 it just looked like something a decade before, but it was extraordinarily good. These surprises took us and their success of course was quite frightening and there was a genuine amount of fear that Australia would be invaded and could lose. We were obviously very pleased to see the Americans arrive and that was a great thing. I

33:30 was too young to be deeply interested in MacArthur [Douglas MacArthur United States' general] and his influence on us, I was more interested in myself. We had problems in the air force that I was totally unaware of our two senior officers fighting with each other and not co-operating, it was dreadful looking back on it. It is something that all members of the Royal Australian

34:00 Air Force should remember forever, we should remember the warts, they were awful. Japan coming into the war certainly put another dimension on it. Yet I still wanted to go to bomber command, I don't know why but I did. I was impressed with Middleton. Do you know the story of Middleton? He was a

34:30 VC [Victoria Cross] winner and he impressed me perhaps more than any other airman and I now tell the story and say it shows how foolish youth can be. I wanted to go to bomber command because I was impressed with him, he pressed on and the poor bugger was killed in the bravest way, he got his crew back and bailed them out

35:00 and went down with the aeroplane. The thought of pressing deep into enemy territory seemed to appeal to me and I don't know why. I think I always get accused these days of being the bombocracy by people but I suppose early in the piece I decided the defensive use of air power was the way to do it. The thought of flying

35:30 hours into enemy territory and bombing them, I thought it appealed to me better than bashing around in fighters, odd but it stayed with me until the end of my days.

There is quite a distinction between pilots who want to become bomber pilots and pilots who want to become fighter pilots. Can you talk about that for a little bit, what sort of difference in personality is there?

It depends on whom you talk to of course.

36:00 I think that fighter pilots are exceptionally good pilots and I don't knock that but then they assume they are the only ones who are good pilots because they are fiddling around and replaying with each other all day with one on one and two on two and fours and it must be great fun and they are as I say very very good pilots

36:30 as getting the most out of high performance aeroplanes. Bomber people, most of the bomber people today, the F111, it is a F111, it was fighter built and a designated fighter, most of the blokes that fly F111s come from fighters anyhow. We take off course today probably the top people off the course who graduate

37:00 go to fast jets rather than F111s or fighters so yes there was always a distinction. Fighter pilots, it wasn't that they weren't good pilots but they knew they were good pilots and used to brag about it, I suppose it put them offside with a lot of bombers. A lot of pilots probably felt jealous or felt that they couldn't do that. I always took the view that if you graduated as an air force pilot

37:30 you could fly anything that you were sent to fly. I suppose I got one thousand hours on single engine aeroplanes with my flying, a lot of that was on Wirraways [training aircraft] and Harvard's instructing, but I flew Mustangs because when I was in New Zealand one of the tasks was to go round the ATC [Air Training Corps] squadrons where they used to

38:00 give them flying at aero clubs and check out the instructors to see that they were up to standard. Depending on where I was going, if I was going to a place that a Mustang could land at I would take a Mustang. It was always a good way to arrive and impress people I suppose if you are going to instruct. I didn't have any fear of flying fighter aeroplanes, I would have liked to have been able to do both but you can't do both really.

38:30 As I say bombers from the very start that is what they appealed to me but there is a difference in their personalities. For instance I used to make a point when I was in 2 Squadron at Butterworth, it was peacetime and the open day and the annual flying display, my blokes would be, if we were saying we were starting our

39:00 flying display at three o'clock they would wander around talking to people their own families and things, in the uniform of the day until it was time to get changed and go flying. I was amused at the fighter blokes used to arrive in flying suits and wander around all day with scarves and things, only fighter pilots.

That's a nice illustration actually.

Tape 3

00:31 **Can you tell us about the first time you went up in an aeroplane and realised your dream of flying?**

I can remember it very well, this was at Narromine when I had finished ground school and posted to Narromine and Tiger Moths and my first trip. I was strapped in the back and I had no idea what I expected but the instructor took off and noticed the altitude of the aeroplane, we were climbing. I expected it to be like that, to be

01:00 souring up into the sky and it was almost about the same, about four degrees different to what we were doing straight and level at the time. The Tiger Moth, it made me think but the altitude I was astounded, 'here I am flying' I expected to be, it looked as though we were flying along level so that was my first impression of being on. Not much was expected, the flying instructor just took you and

01:30 he didn't say much, "This is how the aeroplane turns" and after about fifteen minutes he said, "Where do you think the airfield is?" I said, "I don't know," I pointed in some direction, I think it was generally in the direction but that was the first thing and then I realised I perhaps should have been paying more attention to where we were going but he was a nice bloke and that was my first impression, the altitude of the aeroplane was something totally unexpected to me.

02:00 As I say he was a good bloke and I was fortunate I had a decent instructor, some of them used to scream their heads off, and were bad tempered fellows. You lived in fear really, thinking back on it. People used to get scrubbed every day, fifty percent got through I suppose and it is still the same today.

02:30 Then when you finished your ground subjects you went before a board at Bradfield Park. You walked down one of those long huts and at the end a trestle table with five officers sitting and they quizzed you for about fifteen minutes and then within a couple of days they read out the list, "So-and-so, air gunner, so-and-so, navigator and Charlie Brown, pilot," and they went through the list and this was after a fifteen minute interview

03:00 and the results of your ground school. Now they spend hundreds and thousands of dollars on psychologists and tests and God knows what and they get fifty percent scrubbed, nothing has changed. You lived in fear because every day someone in the hut would be packing up or a couple were scrubbed or

03:30 to be navigators or air gunners or whatever. I think, 'how silly, you lived in fear that you wouldn't get through and people wouldn't be able to shoot at you' it was an awful life, the pilots life, you had this great worry of being one of the fifty percent scrubbed and fortunately I got through but it was a depressing time.

04:00 You weren't treated very well it was as if they were doing you a great favour by having the grace to train you. Life at Narromine was bloody awful, the food was awful, you had to line up and have your meal ticket clipped by a service policeman so you didn't get fed twice, often the food was maggoted

04:30 and we went on. We didn't go on strike, but we decided once that it was so bad that we wouldn't eat and the town at Narromine was only walking distance from the aerodrome so, "We won't eat," and no one ate lunch, "And we will go into town tonight and get a pie" or something. All that happened was that no one said a word, "Why didn't anyone eat lunch?" they closed the camp, no one was allowed out and we got bloody hungry the next

05:00 day but no one said, "What was all that about?" they just went on and just ignored it.

Can you tell us about your first solo?

There is not much to tell. I remember it distinctly and in fact I have a photograph on the back of my office door there, it was so typical, it is an instructor getting out of the Tiger Moth and taking the stick with him and it was a

05:30 satellite field, you didn't know it was coming around and he said, "Taxi into the line." They didn't even take me into the line, we got back and we went to the take-off point and he suddenly got out and said, "Go and do a circuit." I remember getting airborne and I thought, 'I should do something about this,' so I let out a big yell just because I thought I should do something to celebrate it and

06:00 I went round. The other student that this instructor had was watching, he hadn't been solo then but it was a good landing and I only got one circuit and taxied back and that was me for the day. The next was more drill and the great thrill was probably a week later when we went down to the flight lines of the morning and pushed the aeroplanes out

06:30 early and my instructor said to me, "Evans, you can take 97 over to the satellite and I will fly with so-and-so," and here I was allowed to fly an aeroplane by myself from Narromine over to the satellite which must have been ten miles away, a big thrill.

Yes it's an unforgettable experience. Can you tell us about any training accidents?

I don't think we had,

07:00 at Narromine we didn't have any serious accidents. One fellow crashed landing at night for no reason except that he screwed up. I can't recall any major accidents, people doing wing tips, taxing accidents, that was the only accident in flight and no one was hurt.

What was the biggest fright you ever gave yourself at that time?

07:30 I don't know that I had a big fright but I remember my instructor would say, "Evans, go up and do a couple of spins each way, let it wind up a bit, go up to four thousand feet and do some steep turns and spins." I would get to four thousand feet, I would think maybe five thousand feet so I would go that extra bit. I came back and

08:00 after a few solo things, we did a lot more solo than people do today during the course and I was doing slow rolls and I had great difficulty with slow rolls in the Tiger Moth. One thing he said, "Jesus Evans you must frighten yourself when you are up there alone," I didn't say anything but you really don't know, I did but I didn't let him know that.

08:30 My aerobatics in Tiger Moths only became good when I was instructing on Tiger Moths and doing aerobatics instructing on them, it is extraordinary how instructing teaches you more when you are teaching the students and I got quite good. Tiger Moths are not an easy aeroplane for aerobatics there is no spare power or anything, you either get it right or you stuff it up.

09:00 My formation aerobatics that I first did were in Harvard's and that has go no spare power either, you really had to anticipate your leader, to be putting on power before he had so you could keep with him. I don't think we had major accidents, there was no one killed on my course

09:30 nor was there in Anson's. I had an engine failure when I had thirty hours on Anson' s and it was my first cross country and I had sixty hours on Tiger Moths and thirty hours on Anson's at across country and suddenly the starboard engine started backfiring and I looked out and there was black smoke coming out of it and I thought, 'all right', you had

10:00 to land, no one said you had to go on because I doubt that it would have maintained the height on the Anson, and the thing was always, "Land straight away." I looked for a paddock straight away and I saw one and I thought, 'yeah that looks all right,' the problem was, land wheels up or wheels down. The rules of the day was if

10:30 there is any doubt wheels up and fields look all right from height, but when you get down low they can be rough, so if in any doubt wheels up. I saw this paddock and I was going to position myself to land on it and in doing this I saw something better still over there and I thought, 'that is better,' so I went and landed there, 'Wheels up or wheels down? I don't know. Better be wheels up.'

11:00 Then as I got closer I thought I could do it with wheels down. It was one hundred and fifty three turns of the wheels with all my thirty hours on Anson's winding and I'm on finals still winding and I landed in this field but I hadn't got it right down, it landed on the wheels almost until the end and then the starboard undercarriage collapsed and went to the ground. I thought, 'bugger,' because the field was

quite all right

11:30 and I was feeling slightly embarrassed. I got out of the aeroplane and there was nobody around and then a bloke rode up on a horse and said, “Sir, you were in a bit of trouble up there, I saw smoke coming out of the engine” and he said, “Are you all right?” And I said “Yes, I am all right” and I said, “Where am I?” He said, “Mundubbera” and I said, “There is an emergency airfield here, isn’t there?” and he said, “Yes mate, this is it.”

12:00 and it was, but I hadn’t got my wheels down unfortunately. I rang up and my instructor came out in an Anson and a couple of other blokes and I told them the sad story and there it was. I thought, ‘this means I will be scrubbed, gone forever,’ but they didn’t think that, they thought I was reasonable and I didn’t say that I didn’t know it was Mundubbera

12:30 and they said, “It was a good job to get to the emergency landing field Evans,” I thought ‘OK; so that was a bit of luck. The aeroplane they had it was flown back in a week, some people come out and jacked it up there was no real damage done. That was an incident in my flying training that was unfortunate. I was not happy to see smoke

13:00 tearing out of the engine it was really black and horrible, I don’t know what happened. We didn’t have any losses on that, the only losses we had were on Beauforts and OCUs [Operational Conversion Units]. We lost an aeroplane through doing a general reconnaissance course

13:30 from Sale and fog came in one night and there were sixteen aeroplanes milling around and I think six crashed some got to other places and landed and I think there were about four fatalities that was a dreadful night.

Were you up in the night?

No I got back early I was coming back from Tasmania, from across country and landed as other people were taking off.

The war was drawing to a

14:00 **climax and also perhaps towards its close, how afraid were you that you might miss out?**

I was desperately afraid and that was why I was plaguing the instructor at Evans Head, the chief flying Instructor or OC [Officer Commanding] Flying as he was at the School of Navigation to get to the war and I did want to fly Beaufighters because they used to come from Williamtown up along the beach and we would see a lot of them.

14:30 He just got me a flying posting to Beauforts and that is really what stopped me getting to the war because it was preceded by that three months general reconnaissance course. Which was doing, you would do one trip as a pilot and one trip as a navigator doing all sorts of complicated creeping lines ahead, looking for submarines and stopping at every ship and doing a rating and description of the ship

15:00 but that was three months wasted, I suppose I should have been at OCU. That fear was with me all the time that the war would end which sounds an awful thing to say but indeed it didn’t.

Can you tell us a little bit about the transition to the Beaufort that was your first sort of operation?

That was the first operational aeroplane. I went there

15:30 even though it wasn’t what I wanted it was a thrill to be going onto an operational aeroplane. The instructors were all blokes who had done a tour of ops and they were interesting blokes to listen to and it was totally different sort of flying. Beaufort had a fearsome reputation for accidents and you know how you get cleared into a base when you go there you go round the various sections and get signed in to the libraries and flying clothing stores and all those

16:00 and then the rumour was that at Sale the local undertaker was on the bottom of the clearance form and you had to get cleared in. We had two aeroplanes while I was at Sale that crashed and were fatals. One happened when it was on a trip to Mt Gambier and the other one was off Sale on a bombing exercise and it was

16:30 but I was too ignorant to realise it was a difficult aeroplane, if anything was wrong it was me. On my first solo check to go solo I stuffed up because the instructor cut an engine on take off. There were two types a thing where you press a button to feather the engine, that was a Hamilton propeller and there was a Curtis propeller with little stick

17:00 like a match that you jiggled and they were side by side and I jiggled the wrong one and was feathering the wrong engine but the instructor stopped me and said, “Lets got back you need a little bit more, go and do another hour.” It was just to discipline me and probably a bloody good thing that he did and anyhow I did another hour and half more and then did a solo check and went off solo.

17:30 It was an aeroplane that was vicious if you did something wrong, it wouldn’t fly very well on one engine you had to make sure that you were high enough to come in if the other engine, the idea was to glide the last three hundred feet and in retrospect that was a stupid bloody technique really

18:00 but it was the thing that you were taught of the day. The same as you were taught 'never turn against a dead engine', I don't why but you do it. Those things had grown up and there was no real scientific reason behind it or aerodynamic reason. I suppose we all had a good deal of respect for the

18:30 Beaufort and were a bit careful but then once it was flying and you were doing an anti-shipping exercise, you flew it around and enjoyed it. I had a very good instructor and he use to do remarkable things with Beauforts, like rolling, there were rolls. The interesting

19:00 part of course was the bombing and the weapon things we used to do, that was good. I think we were worrying that the war was going away from New Guinea there wasn't much happening there although there were a few Beauforts squadrons doing a run and they were still doing God knows, Timor got bombed for years by Beauforts, the same Japanese bases, I don't know why the hell they still existed but they did, they lost a lot of

19:30 Beauforts in operations. When we were at the movies one night on the base and then the lights went up and they said, "The war is over," and everyone cheered except the blokes in my course and said, "So near but yet so far."

What was the movie you were watching?

I have no idea.

20:00 **That must have been quite a blow?**

It was after finishing training and eventually getting to OCU, but common sense should have been delighted but then we stuffed up. There was a stand down for two days so I had two mates, we had been posted to Evans Heads together and then posted from Evans Head to Sale,

20:30 we made a tactical error, we said, "Let us go to Melbourne for the celebrations, everyone will be dancing in the street." Going through Moricale, it's a station between Sale and Melbourne and the train pulled in there and there were people dancing in the streets, girls dancing in the streets and one of my friends said, "Listen if we go to Melbourne everyone of the

21:00 world will be there, there will be lots of servicemen, lets get out at this little town, look at all those birds and there is only three of us, the odds will be better." We got out and went to the pub and had a few drinks. At six o'clock everything closed down, the pubs closed at six o'clock and everything else closed down and everyone had gone home off the streets and we had a miserable night talking to ourselves.

Of course you went on

21:30 **to serve in 38 Squadron?**

Yes.

Can you tell us about your introduction to the Dakota, the DC3s, and the famous aircraft?

It was a famous aircraft. It was pretty haphazard, the war was over and people were obviously looking for jobs and I went there as a flight sergeant and the rules had been that you did time as a second pilot but if you came off

22:00 Beauforts you could get checked out as captain and that rule did not apply to flight sergeants. When I went to that squadron there were twelve or thirteen squadron leaders and they had come there and had kept flying, there were so many so they were just normal squadron pilots, there was a squadron leader who was CO of the squadron and there was a squadron leader flight commander and there were other squadron leaders.

22:30 There were navigators so I was relegated to a co-pilot, there was no conversion given, I was just put on a board and I was given the pilots' notes to read and my name went up on a board and you would have captain, co-pilot, no navigator and wireless operator and as your trips came up the ones on top of the board

23:00 would go out either to Morotai or wherever it was going or Western Australia and so you went up. I was going up to the board and I said to one of the other sergeant pilots, "You had better take me down and show me how this thing works," so we went down and he showed me how to pull the undercarriage up and told me a bit about the cockpit and I sat in the right hand seat while he told me and then my time came up and I went and got into the right hand seat

23:30 and the captain was a flight lieutenant. Rather facetiously I said to him, "Now if I remember correctly, to raise the undercarriage I do this and that," it was facetious and I remember him being pretty browned off. I remember when we got back he said, "Fine bloody co-pilot I had, he wasn't sure how to raise the undercarriage." There was no instruction given, I guess I was sarcastically saying that

24:00 if I hadn't gone down and had this bloke show me, I would have had to ask him how to do it. We were going to Biak and went up and back.

This is your first trip outside Australia?

Yes. I just sat there and did what I was told and put the flap down when I was asked and didn't get to touch the controls and this was very frustrating and that is

24:30 how they treated you. Then most of the captains were not authorised to let people fly so then you had to organise yourself to get with a bloke that could which I did from time to time. Some of them seemed quite dull, I remember flying over New Guinea one day at eighteen thousand feet on a later trip and we had been into

25:00 Merauke and then we were going onto Biak and we were at eighteen thousand feet and the speed was way back and I said to the captain, "The speed is pretty low sir," he said, "Well up here true air speed is one hundred and fifty knots," but I said, "It doesn't stall on true air speeds" however I sat there and shut up. They didn't have navigators and

25:30 one day the CO pulled everyone together, we had a navigator posted in and he said, "It looks like we are going to get navigators, anyone doesn't want to navigate or who is willing to take a navigator put your hand up." And only about two hands went up. The navigator must have felt unwanted. I don't know why. It was a real ring of,

26:00 what? It was an iron ring they had going and I went on and I had done about five hundred hours as co-pilot and then by this time we were running to Japan and I flew with a bloke called Summerfield and - I was telling Chris [interviewer] - who later became a senior Qantas bloke and I still keep in touch with. I

26:30 flew with him and he was pretty reasonable and taught me a good deal about it and used to give me a share of flying pretty well every second leg and he had gone along and said, it was time Evans was made a captain and I became a captain by which time I was a warrant officer. We were doing the Japan courier

27:00 and I did a route check to Japan and back. We stayed on that until we went onto the airlift.

What was the route to Japan and how long did it take?

It was a curious one, we were based at Schofields in Sydney and we used to go to Laverton and spend the first night, just to pick up passengers and crew. The next day to Adelaide and then slip for two days,

27:30 the next day to Darwin, the third day, the fourth day to Morotai, the fifth day to Manila, the sixth day to Laog which was in the top of the Philippines and the seventh day to Ebocuni. Then have three days off or if it was the Tokyo one, which was a Friday when you went to Tokyo and you went to Tokyo and had a week off and

28:00 there and back was about sixty four hours' flying. It was quite interesting flying, all the trips were about six hours once you went down to Morotai, we had long range fuel tanks put in which had to be changed during flight. Through the inter tropic front from Darwin to Morotai, which could be

28:30 nasty at times not a big humidity build up. The weather, I could be going through Okinawa one day, did I mention the Okinawa trip before it was after Laog, Okinawa then Ebocuni and being told to divert to Shanghai, the cross wind thirty five knots or something and the Americans were flying C54s and most of the transport went through there. We had to divert to Shanghai,

29:00 we didn't have enough fuel to go to Shanghai or anywhere else but to Okinawa so we landed and all was well but it was one of those curious things we had to land there. Another day I did my first GCA approach and I had never heard of it, the weather was poor at Okinawa and I called for landing instructions and they said 'the cloud base is'

29:30 whatever it was, it was pretty low, "Would you like a zippo approach?" and the only aid we had was a radio compass of course and I said, "What is a zippo approach?" He said, "It is a radio-controlled approach, we will tell you what to do." I did a GCA approach and I was absolutely astounded, here was this bloke telling me what to do, "Lower your undercarriage now and do this and that and then look ahead and land," and we broke cloud I suppose about six hundred feet but it wasn't terribly low,

30:00 it was extraordinary this bloody approach, I had never heard of it. That was my first introduction to GCA [Ground Control Approach] which was very good. Somewhere in all of this I've forgotten to mention I was sent to China a trip to Shanghai to take some UNRAR people up, UNRAR was the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation,

30:30 and a number of Australians they were volunteers to go and they were paid. I flew them up to China and then we came back through Hong Kong and all we had was a radio compass and I remember coming down to Hong Kong we picked up an Australian doctor who had been up in China for some years and we were bringing him back.

31:00 We went down over the sea and making sure we were over the sea because there were lots of hills if you look at that coastline and on the map so we are outside but we didn't know which inlet was going into Hong Kong and this was about four hundred feet and the hills were going into cloud but we obviously couldn't stay there forever, going up and down and wondering 'that one or this one?' Then a ship came sailing out,

31:30 and we thought ‘that’s got to be Hong Kong harbour’ and we went in. That was the old airfield and you virtually slid down a side of a mountain to get in and it was a short strip of about three thousand feet and that was quite an extraordinary one. We had an NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] crew, four of us, not much experience.

32:00 No one thought of going off with a radio compass sometimes the wireless operator would get a bearing but not much.

The DC3, the plane that you were flying was famous aircraft?

Yes.

Could you tell us a bit about it and just talk us through what you thought were the strong points and the weak points of it?

I don’t know. When you think of the

32:30 weather we flew through, particularly going into cumulus sorts of clouds, an extraordinarily rough ride but it did it, I haven’t heard of one breaking up but it was incredibly rough. You would find yourself going down but fortunately we were well taught, you kept the altitude of the aeroplane and you

33:00 didn’t try and change it but to go down 3three thousand feet a minute and the next minute you would be going up and the thing was to keep the altitude of the aeroplane right. I probably learnt more about flying in weather from that than anything else and it stood me and the squadron in good stead when I got onto Canberra’s later which I will tell you about. There was great confidence in the aeroplane itself, it packed on a lot of ice but it had ice removers on the wing

33:30 and the propeller, the first time I struck that and I thought that I had been called for when I put the icers and coming off the side and hitting the side of the aeroplane the noise, but it was good. It could fly on one engine pretty well but on take-off you would have difficulty if you lost an engine, say under four hundred feet depending on

34:00 the load you had on, if you were empty you would be alright and you would climb away. It was essential to get it feathered quickly because of the drag you were getting otherwise but I had lost an engine coming back from Melbourne and I landed at Newell, I was bringing a Merlin engine back that I had in the back, nothing that you could throw out but I landed at Newell and it flew alright and I got to Newell and landed.

34:30 I lost an engine, much later on I had a fire warning light come on when I was flying Lady Slim out of Alice Springs and I feathered that and came back and I said to the co-pilot, “Nothing to worry about.” That poor lady, she was sitting in the VIP [Very Important Person] seat up the front and right there the engine stopped and the co-pilot thought that it was nothing to worry about. When we landed she said,

35:00 “David, I had no idea it could fly on one engine and it never occurred to me that it could” so when it stopped she thought this was the end. The aeroplane it flew through all that weather up to Japan and it could fly on one engine and people lost engines occasionally and always managed to feather and land safely. On the airlift it proved

35:30 itself, we could fly and at that height where any other aeroplane, the DC4s, would have had great difficulty in putting up with the ice pack. As I said earlier it was only because we knew that we weren’t there for that long and we would be descending, it was a thoroughly and wonderfully reliable aeroplane but just rather slow. As time went by it was so outdated you felt you wanted to be seen in something else.

36:00 It was like being seen in an old model motor car I guess and one that you’ve got great affection for. The heating system didn’t work well, if you were warm in the cockpit without being overly hot people down the back froze so sometimes you were selfish, depending on the passengers I suppose it was not a great heating system.

36:30 The loading of the thing being a tail dragger was always difficult whereas Caribou came along later and it was not as good an aeroplane as the Dakota but at least it has got a tricycle undercarriage and easy to load. I can’t think of anything wrong with it. When I was flying VIPs, the Governor General Sir William Slim, he was a great bloke but we had down the back of it

37:00 a passenger department with an altimeter and an air speed indicator. Lady Slim she hated flying and if it got a bit rough she was unhappy so if it was ten thousand feet you would go up to eleven thousand feet, he would either send the steward up or come up himself and say, “David, can you go a bit higher because her ladyship she gets

37:30 ill,” so I would try and creep up and I’d go back and he’d go back and sit down. Then I would get a message from her, “Could you go down Lady Slim says she gets a headache if you go above ten thousand feet” all those sort of funny little things. I landed at the wrong aerodrome one day at Brewarrina, he was going out to look at the floods, there were floods all round

38:00 New South Wales and we flew around everywhere and Brewarrina was the worst and he wanted to go there and land so we sent a message we were going to Brewarrina. I looked and I saw this airfield and

said, “What is that? That is an odd looking airfield,” but there was the signal square and a wind sock anyhow I landed there and even as I came over the fence I thought, ‘it is a funny bloody place to have a fence, it is cutting off the end of the runway.’

38:30 I landed there and took some climbing power to taxi because it was sand anyhow we got through what looked like a tarmac area. The crew raced out in those days we used to get out, go down the steps and stand at the bottom of the steps and salute as the Governor General came out. We are there they had just started to come out and the Governor General was coming down the steps and a little kid came up and said, “Hey mister, you are at the wrong airfield”

39:00 and I thought, ‘go away son’ and it was all saved by Lady Slim bursting out laughing. I was a bit amused, the Mayor and everyone sitting up and it was about a mile away with a speech ready to make and we landed at the wrong airfield however, they were amused about that. It was good for flying VIPs, he had his own aeroplane which was the one the Queen used when she was out here and his own crew and we

39:30 had the same crew all the time. I gave a dinner to Mike Jeffery’s the week before he took over as Governor General and I was recalling this to him and said to him, “But you now have to share an aeroplane and crew with Prime Ministers and other ordinary people, but then on the other hand you are the commander in chief if you want your own crew, remember I have some considerable experience, I am available,”, but he hasn’t taken me up.

Tape 4

00:35 I haven’t said anything bad about the Dakota, I really cant think of anything accept it was out of date and there were more modern aeroplanes running around the world but it was a wonderful aeroplane.

What was the nickname it had amongst the pilots or the troops?

No it was just the Dak [Dakota], I think the troops liked it too. We used to take paratroopers out of course and that was one of the tasks that we did,

01:00 it was quite good for that. It is still flying, I notice somewhere in the paper over the weekend and I was looking at holidays and this is the aeroplane that flies people over the outback I would love to do it but I couldn’t bear sitting in the back of it.

How are you enjoying your role on the courier run to Japan?

I enjoyed it immensely,

01:30 it was great. There was a different place every night, we used to get there and stay overnight and go to the mess or the club or go shopping, and it was very enjoyable.

What was your impression of Japan?

Surprise, just remember it was 1946 and all the women wore kimonos,

02:00 and my first impression of the people it must have been winter when I went to Tokyo and they wore masks over their face in the Japanese garb. You would see people stop and bowing to each other before talking and leaving, it was so totally different and I was amazed. We didn’t fraternise with the Japanese at all. There were a lot of Americans there, particularly in Tokyo

02:30 which we used to go to, they had decent clubs where you could eat and drink. We didn’t go to Japanese places, it was frowned upon in the days of MacArthur running Japan. The anti-fraternisation was pretty serious. I guess if you had been stationed there they probably would have found Japanese places where people went.

03:00 I went to Curay where the Australian Army was because we threw a barrel of West End Beer in the toilet leaving Australia and took it up to them and that was an eighteen gallon keg which was popular with the troops. The only thing I did wrong was stay up too late at night, drinking or carousing or whatever

03:30 and taking off early the next morning, it was not unusual for young men I suppose.

What evidence did you see of the bombing on Japan?

We saw that, we went to Hiroshima and had a look there. In fact we travelled a bit around Japan in the few days we had there. I went to Hiroshima on the way to Curay. I had

04:00 a friend in the Australian Army, a captain who was a friend of ours from here and that is why I took the eighteen gallon keg up and it was a long way away. The Australians were on the base at Ebotuney that was run by, there were a lot of Americans on the base and there was a bit of tension between us at times. The American,

04:30 I used to hear these stories rather than be involved in them but it set the sort of pattern to our attitude toward the Americans at the time on that base. American Military Police for instance were allowed to do all sorts of things. I remember they walked into our officers' mess on night to question someone and the OC told them to get the hell out of there, they weren't entitled to be in there and those sorts of things there were little tensions. We did quite well,

05:00 we had a fighter wing there and the Americans were astounded that one of our pilots topped the gunnery school in the annual competition. I suppose three days off is not a hell of a lot of time off but to do shopping, used to bring all sorts of things back to Mum, brothers and sisters and girlfriends.

What impression did Hiroshima leave on you?

It was a

05:30 total mess and this was the way. I assumed and I suppose a lot of people did that, that would be the pattern in the future, you would drop one bomb and wipe a place out but of course it didn't happen that way. I was astounded that it happened with one weapon because later when I saw Berlin, Berlin it was just as bad but it had taken a hell of a long time.

06:00 I didn't have any profound thoughts on, 'oh God we must never do this again.' The Japanese were people who were hated and clearly they were fanatics and if we had had to invade Japan the losses would have been incredibly high and this I suppose seemed a great way out. You only thought of saving your own lives

06:30 in those days. The way we think today if civilians get killed in downtown wherever, whoever you are fighting or Basra if anyone gets killed there, people say if twenty civilians were killed but they killed six hundred thousand Germans and no one gave a stuff, did they? We didn't, we were fighting a war. Now I think it is dreadful really.

07:00 I thought that earlier, I had written about that earlier that it was wrong to be going aerial bombing, I always thought it was wrong. I say 'always' and I suppose 'always' means after the war when you have time to think about it and assess it. Hiroshima didn't worry me in any way that it was a brutal thing to do, it was only that

07:30 it was a wonderful scientific advance.

Wars don't finish with the cessation of the hostilities?

It was the enemy that was killed, although there were women and children among them but it stopped the war and it saved us from scores of thousands, hundreds of thousands of casualties probably, so it was a good thing.

Can you describe what you saw in Hiroshima?

No.

08:00 It was just a desolate city, everything was either flattened or sticking up and gutted it was breathtaking to think that such a thing could happen. Remember by this stage we had seen photos of bombed out German cities and British cities, Coventry and things, what bombs did was no real surprise,

08:30 in fact the only surprise was it was done with one bomb the whole lot. Years later in the airlift you would drive around Hamburg for twenty minutes and not see a building that wasn't gutted it was quite extraordinary.

Can you take us on the journey from your courier run to how you got to go to Berlin and your arrival in Europe?

09:00 I am not quite with you.

I would like to know about how you got to leave the courier run?

This rumour came up, the Russians were blockading Berlin and were we going to go and then Australia offered to send aircraft and then it went away, they were negotiating with the Russians

09:30 to stop the blockade and then the thing came it was on, and the Brits and American were flying food into Berlin and Australia had offered ten aircraft and crew. We had ten aircraft put aside, inspected and line up at Schofield to go and there were three squadrons there, most people wanted to go. I

10:00 was getting married and those sorts of arrangements had been made so there was a lot of anxiety, were we going to go or were we not? At the same time I had applied for a job with Qantas and I had been called for an interview and I had the interview and then was asked to come back for a final interview in

10:30 two weeks' time and then the airlift came up. I thought, 'to hell with Qantas, this is more exciting.' Then we were told that they didn't want the aeroplanes, the RAF didn't want the aeroplanes but wanted the crews so then we decided to send eight crews and a CO and I was one of the crews selected to go.

11:00 As I said earlier it was going to be the day before I was due to be married, a week before I found that

out. There was busy doing all sorts of things, getting cleared from the squadron at Schofields to go, with my wife to be sending out letters to all the people who had been invited to the wedding saying,

11:30 “It is not on.” Then deciding to get married on the Monday, running between Schofields and Bondi daily and then getting over there and arriving in England, met by an RAF wing commander who said, “Well I reckon this is history repeating itself, I was here as a flying boat pilot, when the people arrived from 10 Squadron to collect

12:00 Sunderland’s and take back to Australia and then the war started and they stayed for the duration of the war.” He said, “This is history repeating itself.” I thought, ‘yes, that sounds alright.’ We did a quick bit of flying around England and learnt their techniques. We went to the Commonwealth Squadron which was 25 Squadron where the Commonwealth, we had a couple of exchange crews, the

12:30 Canadians had a couple of exchange crews with them and the New Zealanders so it was the Commonwealth Squadron, but an RAF Squadron and they were a VIP Squadron. They watched us fly aeroplanes and taught us to be more VIP pilots, I mean taxing slowly and when you stop the aeroplanes the passengers shouldn’t feel it stop and on your approach you use a quarter flap and then half flap and then put the

13:00 pitch up slowly so there is not a big change, the passengers should not notice any change in altitude or noise all this bloody nonsense but it was good stuff I suppose. Then we had to do their green card, we didn’t have a green card instrument rating, it was unlimited and they had white and green cards and you needed a green card to fly in the airlift. We had to do the test for a green card

13:30 and there were patterns that we hadn’t even heard of. You might be familiar with it now, you do two minutes and then you do a climbing turn at a thousand feet through seventy degrees and then you do the whole thing. We hadn’t heard of that but we did two weeks there and everyone except one of the flight commanders got their green card, but he stayed on for another day or so

14:00 and then off we went to Germany. We had to do a BABS [Beam Approach Beacon System] which was another let down aide which is done on radar where the navigator reads his screen and it was a blip and there was a centre line and then a blip and if the red line was over this side you were to the left of the thing and if it was right over you would say, “Right, right, right, right” and if it was just a little bit he would say it slowly, “Right” and you got to know your navigator and it was quite a good

14:30 approach but you did your own thing. At one mile you would want to be three hundred feet and at two miles, six hundred feet, he was giving you the distances and you were making your heights and we used that. We had to use that at the Lubeck end because the Russian zone was over there and there was no room to do a GCA or any other sort of approach and it was a truncated sort of approach. We arrived there and did our first trip. In those days

15:00 it was chaotic you just flew to Berlin and landed and if the weather was bad you went to a front out beacon and you would be told to let down to whatever the height the cloud was but I had been told to let down on my altimeter with no aid to one hundred feet on the altimeter except you were in the beacon and you turned onto the course with the runway but then they got organised.

15:30 At night you would get down there and there was no timing, you just took off when you got there and there were people from other bases getting there and you would find a lot of aeroplanes milling around in poor visibility at night. I thought I was smart and I would look for someone turning onto base and then whip in behind them. One night, drinking in the mess a few weeks later, I found everyone was doing the same thing.

16:00 This culminated one day it was very bad weather and General Tunner who was the American commanding the airlift flew down in one of his aeroplanes and an American aircraft a DC4 had gone off the end of the strip and caught fire, the one landed behind it had seen the fire and then screamed on his brakes,

16:30 not judging how far it was away and blew four types. Another aeroplane mistook a construction thing on the northern side of the airfield for a runway and landed there and crashed. Aeroplanes were stacked up to twelve thousand feet in cloud milling around with all this chaos and General Tunner was one of them.

17:00 He got on the air and said, “This is Tunner, send all these God damn aeroplanes back home and stop this chaos.” The sort of voice came back, “Say again sir?” He said, “Send them home.” They sent them all off, he landed and then went in and said, “We are not going to have this mess again,” and told some pilots there, gave them a navigator and got some officers for them and said, “Sort this

17:30 thing out and never let it happen again.” They sorted out a system when we were organised and we were given block times so for instance we would be given a timetable from our beacon which you had to make within thirty seconds for our eight Australian aeroplanes and you had to go in that time and people were fed in. There were three airfields at Berlin within a six mile radius so you couldn’t change landing direction or circuit direction without

18:00 changing them all at the same time. Quite often they would overshoot you couldn’t if you missed out on your judgement in landing in bad weather you just went home, you couldn’t do a circuit, but at least

that was organised. When they changed the runway if they had to because of wind often they had to overshoot a whole wave of aeroplanes to go back from where they came from and start the thing again. At least that

18:30 got some sense into it and it worked pretty well. You would not have been able to carry on really the way it was when we first went there but that was soon sorted out.

Before you left, what did you know of the reasons for what you were going to do?

Before we left Australia?

Yes.

Only that the Russians had blockaded Berlin and we thought that if the airlift didn't succeed other people were saying and

19:00 **we were getting messages from the English press or not messages but of what the view was there that it wouldn't work in winter and the Russians knew it wouldn't and therefore we might have to go to war to save Berlin or loose Berlin. If you lost Berlin you would loose the whole of Germany because their confidence and the western allies would have gone and the Russians were there but it didn't happen and that is why**

19:30 **the RAF bloke said, "This is history repeating itself." No one really thought that the airlift would succeed in winter but it did.**

Did you have any particular opinions of whether it would succeed at the time?

I didn't know whether the thing would succeed or not because I only heard about the weather but I thought if it didn't there would be a war and the one I missed out on here, I am going to be the first in on this one

20:00 but that was our sort of thinking, that, 'if it didn't succeed, so what, we would have war,' which is just as well. It is looked upon strategically now by historians now or many historians as the most strategically important air operation or operation of any type of the Cold War because it did in fact probably prevent a war.

How did you

20:30 **get the Australian aircraft over there?**

We didn't take them, the RAF said they would have our crews but not the aircraft. We wondered about that and it was only long after we found the reason was the corridors, there was no agreement with the land surface entrance to Berlin, they didn't have any contract signed with the Russians that they would be allowed across Russian territory.

21:00 With the air corridors, it was a drawn up agreement between the Russians that those corridors were there for use of aircraft of the occupying powers. The Brits thought, 'well Australia is not an occupying power and if we put in aeroplanes that don't meet that contract they may well close the corridors and say you have broken the contract and its not on, so let's not take that risk and

21:30 we have got enough aeroplanes, use ours' that is how that came about.

Can you describe the scene at the Lubeck airport when you got there in Berlin?

In Berlin there were lines of aeroplanes, you just pulled in behind the aircraft that were lined up. As soon as you got out of the aeroplane and jumped out there were trucks backed up and people were unloading it and

22:00 right on the edge of the flight line where the aeroplanes were lined up there were little huts, we went across and got a cup of tea while we waited. The Germans there were a lot of women unloading the thing, scruffy looking women, poorly dressed, almost working like peasants, which is not what you expected in Germany

22:30 but the unloading was very quick and run by the British Army. The moment you were unloaded you took off and came back. A lot of the time you carried passengers back, the Americans wouldn't on the grounds the time it took to put passengers on you could be on your way back and getting more missions done, the Brits did. I don't know how often

23:00 I flew passengers out but I lost an engine, it started to fail at one hundred feet and totally gone at four hundred feet and I had twenty three passengers on board. It was winter and most of the passengers were kids so it wasn't a heavy load and I was able to go back and land and that was not remarkable.

23:30 The only thing that reminded me of that was we had a Dakota land in Botany Bay taking off from Mascot and he lost an engine and he ditched with passengers aboard, almost the same thing. It was a cold day so the air was dense and the aeroplane flew well. They found the fault later was a rag in the petrol tank and I wonder whether it was

24:00 sabotaged, that someone had done it purposely but that was as much as I knew about it, I never did find

out the outcome of the enquiry, I never did find out.

What were you able to see of Berlin on the ground when you were there?

Not much. Virtually nothing, I went down and spent one day and a night at the Australian Mission in Berlin and got driven around and saw a lot of the place and bought a stein, that is all.

24:30 All we'd see of the buildings, burnt out and shelled, didn't see much of it at all. Right up the end of the strip about a couple of kilometres was a Russian air base but we didn't fly over it so it was a little to the left and we just missed it but it was a big base. At one stage

25:00 before I got there a Russian fighter had flown into one of the aircraft, it was an airliner with a lot of passengers aboard. You might wonder why the Russians would allow, they would send out messages that they would be flying in the corridors 'we are having exercises over the, we will intrude into the corridors and flying should stop.'

25:30 General Tunner refused to stop on all those occasions and said, "We will continue to fly and if anything happens it is on your" what? –not conscience I don't think they had any conscience but, "You will bear the responsibility for any consequence." The next thing they would be flying artillery over the thing but Tunner was resolute on that. You might

26:00 wonder why they put notice but one of the things should be remembered and not many people realise that Harry Truman deployed two Squadrons of B29s to the United Kingdom and B29 was known for, if nothing else the bombing of Hiroshima. Two Squadrons sitting in UK could have had a salinity effect on the Russians.

26:30 Aeroplanes were buzzed occasionally and the media told lies about it. I was sent a thing and I was most embarrassed and my new wife sent me a cutting out of one of the Sydney papers 'RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] pilot buzzed by Yaks:' 'Flying Officer David Evans was flying down the corridor and he said, "My trigger finger gets as itchy as it did during the war."'

27:00 I carried a reporter down and he was up in the cockpit and standing in behind me and we saw in the distance some aeroplanes and he said, "What are they?" I said, "I can't tell but I think they are Yaks," and that is what happened in the Sydney paper.

Was that your first brush with the media?

Yes it was I suppose.

What were the consequences of

27:30 **flying in the corridor?**

I don't know, you would expect to be forced down, I don't know that anyone was and I never went outside the corridor but the feeling was they were entitled to shoot you down if you did and they probably would. The fear of the Russians or our opinion of

28:00 what would happen and that was what we were told, 'don't play with us and think you will get away with it because you probably won't' and they were probably within their rights if they did so people were very careful. It is twenty mile flying and you shouldn't go outside it. The chance of it happening was if you were coming down here and turning into that corridor, I mean turning a bit early

28:30 you could easily get outside or going on too far. I don't think, it wasn't that far that you had. We had good navigation aids well not good but for the day they weren't bad, we had our radio compass and the HTS [High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile Targeting System] was the radar that the navigators used to use during the war

29:00 for bomber command. The weather was the worst thing really and the concern of the Russian zone was back on your own base if you were coming in it was easy to go to the Russian zone there because it wasn't very far away so you took great care not to do so.

What supplies were you carrying?

All sorts of things.

29:30 Flour, coal, lots of coal, food supplies, some aircraft carried fuel, not us, fuel had to be taken in. They were Tudors, the Brits did that. We mostly coal, flour, I carried

30:00 on one occasion a great carton down one side of the aeroplane of condoms which I suppose was the same as vital but I was pretty browned off when I got up in the middle of the night in freezing temperatures and I get aboard and see this, however I suppose it was necessary.

The people you were carrying out what was their status?

Mostly kids with things around their necks giving their name and where they were going to.

30:30 Displaced persons, mostly kids, some old people and usually someone looking after kids.

Where were you staging from into Berlin?

From Lubeck near the Baltic, it was a nice place, a German Air Force base and the quarters were very good compared with our own out here.

31:00 Lovely mess and bar is usually downstairs in the cellar it was good. Beer was four pence a pint and occupation money, the smallest note, it was all paper money, sixpence was the smallest and there were pennies but they were Bakelite things about that big. If you are having a pint of

31:30 beer that cost four pence it was better to have a pint of beer and a Benedictine chaser which was sixpence and it saved you carrying pennies around.

How were you dealing with the fatigue, the monotony of long flights?

We just got used to it, I think you get used to almost anything. Twelve hours off wasn't bad because you

32:00 could get eight hours sleep if you wanted, not that we often got eight hours sleep but that wasn't too bad. I think the worst ones were the four o'clock in the morning and midnight ones when you did sleep and there would be distractions. We hardly went off the base oddly enough. I don't know, at Lubeck I wouldn't have been into town in that fourteen months

32:30 more than a dozen times. What was there to go into town, there was an officers' club there and we had that on the base there were movies on the base. If we had the time off we would go to Hamburg or I went down to the Harz Mountains for skiing when my leave came up and that was good. There were German Army instructors there

33:00 to teach skiing, got all the gear, stayed at the hotel and fed, one and sixpence a day it wasn't bad.

What was your impression of post-war Germany?

I was pretty impressed with it. I was young and not greatly experienced in a sophisticated way of Australian life but

33:30 when I went to Hamburg and stayed and I did this when I was playing tennis with the RAF and we went and played at Hamburg and stayed at the Four Seasons Hotel. I went in and was met by a German bell-hop, but it was a bloke in his forties I suppose, bow tie and a vest on and those things that keep the sleeves up, and he took me up

34:00 to my room. I went to this room and it was huge and there was a bathroom off it, ensuites were in then in Germany and I had my own bathroom, full bath and it was a lovely room so I was impressed by this. We got there and he said, "Would you like an early call sir?" And I said, "No thanks." "What time would you like your bath sir?"

34:30 I had never been asked that before, rather than look like I wasn't used to this sort of thing I said, "About nine o'clock," and he said, "And what temperature?" When I eventually had a good look at the bathroom there was a big temperature thing floating in the water. I was pretty impressed by all this and it was very modern for the day or any day and an elegant hotel that was the officers club.

35:00 The people I quite liked the people. We had a bloke in our mess at Lubeck who had shot down sixteen Lancaster's, Bruno, he was a favourite with us all, he used to look after us and tell us stories. The commander checked on him and he had shot down sixteen Lancaster's. He used to tell stories,

35:30 what a pig Goring was, "Why are you working here as a barman Bruno?" "Well it is a job and jobs are hard to get, but I think there is going to be a war and you will need me." I had a good impression of Germany, it was such a modern place by our Australian standards.

36:00 The food was excellent. Again there was no fraternising with the Germans supposed but that was a lot of nonsense, I suppose people fraternised where they went, they probably watched, I don't know. The Brits had a huge public service there or

36:30 civil service running the country. There were places to go, Travemunde up on the Baltic was a good place and in fact I went back there with Gail only a few years ago but it was a holiday place and it had good restaurants and everything was cheap and you could afford to do it

37:00 and just as well I suppose and better places than I had seen in Australia which was surprising.

How were you finding your absence from your new wife?

Like everyone else in the squadron, most of the blokes were married and we were getting pretty grumpy about it because we were badly treated because no one told us how long we were going for but the general feeling was

37:30 that it wasn't going to last any more than a few months at the most. When we were there six and nine months no one would tell us. The New Zealanders were replaced, the South Africans were replaced. The RAF would come over in a squadron from England and they would do two months over there and go back to England and another transport squad would come over and take their place. We were the only ones that spent the whole time there and we were getting pretty grumpy but no one told us anything

38:00 we couldn't find out, 'are we going to be replaced?', 'are we going to be here forever?' we got no answers We complained to our own CO, but he was just as browned off about it too. I think we were treated dreadfully in that respect and even when it ended and we were back in England no one made any arrangements for us to be taken home. Why couldn't they put us on Qantas? We sat around England

38:30 for six weeks or more and God it was frustrating. By the good grace of the RAF they put on a York which was no way to travel but at least it got us home.

Who were you under the command of at the time when you were there on the airlift?

Under the RAF base commander that we were on and then there was an airlift command headquarters with the American, General Tunner, running it

39:00 and the British Air Commodore as his deputy but we were under that headquarters but the task, but then we were under a base commander a group captain on that base and we had a squadron leader who commanded our squadron.

Were you identified as Australians?

We were identified as Australians we made bloody sure of that of course. It is very interesting

39:30 it was only in latter years that I heard that there was an airlift association. In 1998 I had a letter from a bloke asking, 'did I have any photographs of the airlift?' and he described himself as a member of the Berlin Airlift Association RAF

40:00 and I wrote back and I sent him a couple of photographs I had and said, "What is this association?" He wrote back and said, "We formed this and there is an American association and the Germans have a fund that they put out scholarships for children of people who flew on the airlift and they look after widows of people killed, they have invited us to Germany" and no one told us.

40:30 Next year is the fiftieth anniversary and we are going for that and I want my book finished. No one had told us about this at all the Australians. Our kids could have had scholarships or whatever perhaps as they did. I went to the German Attaché here and said, "Can you find out something about this?" and he finally did and come back and said, "Yes, there is a

41:00 Luftwaffe [German Air Force]. It is a charity set up by Willy Brandt and they had lots of money" and he said "They are having a thing and this is the man to write to" so I wrote to him, Gert Russer,

41:30 and I wrote to him and he wrote back and said, "Yes, we want people to bring back all the people from the airlift that flew and if you let me know your association" and I wrote back and said, "Alright but we would appreciate that but we want to be known as an Australian group we are not part of the RAF," and that happened and we went as an Australian contingent to Ramie.

Tape 5

00:31 **You were sitting at a table in a castle, can you tell us the story?**

Lolsberg Castle, we went to several castles but this one there was a big dinner given there and the Australian Ambassador was there and the American Ambassador and all us people were invited. We are sitting at the table and my wife was talking about something he was the President of the British, the RAF Berlin Airlift Association

01:00 and he said "There were no Australians there" and she said, "You were wrong, we are Australians, my husband was there," he said, "I know but they weren't there as Australian Air Force they were part of the RAF," and I said, "I think you are getting it wrong, we were Royal Australian Air Force," and he said, "But you don't get what I mean, you were on an RAF base and you were under RAF command so you were part of us but of course we appreciate it but we never

01:30 looked upon it as being the RAAF there."

At the time how much did you feel part of the international effort of west versus the east, the Cold War front line?

Very much a part of that. I think even though we were young and inexperienced the enormity of what would happen if two million people of Berlin could not be fed and

02:00 we tend to forget that they did it hard. I presented, when we went over to the Airlift Museum, a couple of things the RAAF standard and I said, "But we forget that you have been very grateful to us in showing your gratitude but remember it was a combination of ourselves and the tenacity of the people of Berlin," it was and they lived. Heat could only go on even in the dead of winter

02:30 they had heat they were able to use the four hours a day that sort of thing. The calories they got per person, what you would think would be normal for today, not only normal but even the minimum, so they had it hard and they could have gone over to the Russians but they were determined not to so it was very much a combination of their tenacity and the airlifts

03:00 succeeding.

It obviously went on a lot longer than anyone expected, what signs did you get one way or the other to its success?

They were still going on and it was building up, we would get the tonnages flown each day and month by month they were increasing the tonnages. I've forgotten off hand but I think eleven thousand tons

03:30 a day use to go in by train etc and then the first days it was only eight tons. General Tunner put on an Easter Bunny at Easter time and we flew in I think twelve thousand tons in a day and that broke the back of it. The Russians from that moment thought that it was not going to succeed but it was

04:00 we were looking and it was encouraging to see even during winter when people said it would fail, generally it either maintained the same or built up slowly all the way so it was clear we were going to get there.

What methods or competition or encouragement were there among the pilots in keeping yourselves enthusiastic about what you were doing?

I don't think we had to be kept. I was probably the youngest pilot on the

04:30 thing, I didn't need to be kept enthusiastic but most of them, morale started to wane when it was clear that it was succeeding and we were, it was just going on and as I say we weren't being replaced or didn't know what was happening that had an effect, it affect and it affected our operations but it affected our morale some what.

05:00 Writing home I would say, "I don't know," Gail was going to come over, "Will I come over?" "Yes." Ok she was coming over and then we get word that we would be going home. So I wrote and said, "Don't come because we are coming home," but we didn't go home. Those sorts of things were frustrating and annoying and as I look back I think it was

05:30 very unfair to us. This was a period when not very long before we had sent fellows over there during the war, married, single, with kids or whatever and they came home five years later and no one told them they were coming home. People are so much better treated today, you hear some of the fellows coming back from the navy and they have been away three months and

06:00 their wives are pretty upset that they might have to go again but we wouldn't do that to people today but we did.

What accidents or problems did you witness during the airlift?

The only Australian killed was a bloke on exchange with the RAF, a fellow named Quinn, he crashed not very far from our quarters at Lubeck one night

06:30 in a very typical winter night he made an approach and at the end of it you might break out of cloud at about one hundred feet but visibility was quite poor if you weren't lined up exactly on the strip. The strips were icy, you would overshoot and go round in cloud but usually fly just round about five hundred feet to do a circuit which you would time yourself going down wind because you couldn't see the runway so you would turn off the reciprocal

07:00 and fly for two minutes and turn back in and he flew into the ground on doing that. It was an RAF crew but a RAAF pilot. I think the casualties there were, if my figures are about right, eighty one Americans and about forty Brits that sort of thing over the thing but only one Australian.

07:30 We only heard of them. You could understand because the weather was not only bad but we were used to flying in bad weather like when I say on the way to Japan, cumulus nimbus clouds and things which are much bigger than the ones you get in Europe but we weren't used to fog, sleet, ice and snow. Snow you can't see it and the ice

08:00 on the runway was right but what I thought was pretty unfair they would say, "The runway is iced up, land at pilot's discretion." Who else's discretion could it be? It was more or less, 'don't blame us,' that sort of thing.

Can you take us through what it is like to land a heavy laden Dakota on an icy runway?

08:30 It wasn't really anything great, fortunately the runways were quite long both at Lubeck and in Germany so you didn't have to scream on the brakes. It was really worse when it was soft ice and you could aquaplane because your brakes weren't just working but eventually the aeroplane would slow down below an aquaplaning speed

09:00 just because of the aeroplane and no power and you didn't touch the brakes and you didn't when it was icy if you could possibly help it until it was going very slowly. That was always the danger and idea that

the aeroplane slid off without necessarily doing any harm or bending the aeroplane or the people. I think snow was the greatest danger because you just couldn't see in it, icing

09:30 in the corridors. I tell the story that I went for a week without ever seeing the ground above four hundred feet from take off but you got so used to it. Even today four hundred feet would be looked upon not that the aerodromes at Canberra would be closed at four hundred feet cloud base. I was going out flying one night and I was walking across to my aeroplane and I passed a RAF crew coming back and it was winter and it was cold

10:00 and Lubeck there was snow all over the field. I saw this RAF crew come back and I said, "What is the weather like in Berlin?" and they said, "Good mate, it is four hundred foot," I said, "Oh good." You get so used to it that four hundred foot seems a good cloud base.

How did you initially pick up the skills for flying in these unfamiliar conditions?

I don't know, can't answer that really we just did.

10:30 What happened, we started off being very bad and as I say milling in around the cloud around the end until that got organised. Then you were fed in such an organised way but it was quite comfortable. We became very good at instrument flying because most of the time we were flying on instruments but with the thing organised, good aids, it wasn't a great problem.

11:00 I say that but you land and your flying suit would be wringing wet with sweat. There was some bad times where you really were concerned about the weather and visibility but I got used to it I suppose and got very good at it.

It is one of the great logistical triumphs of the 20th century in a way?

Yes it certainly was.

11:30 **Were you happy to be a small part of it?**

Yes indeed and I still am. The strategic influence of that operation recognised more now than perhaps when they were on and that is pleasing to have been part of it and it certainly did save the war.

You mentioned one incident where you came in front of the

12:00 **pilot or the pilot that was suppose to be following and he came in front of you. Were there any other close calls or mix ups?**

That was the only one I heard of but that is quite remarkable because we are all aimed going down the centre of the corridor at the same height. I would love to know how close we went.

Can you tell us what happened when you landed on that occasion?

I said to the bloke, "What the stuff have you done wrong

12:30 you have passed us?" And I was angry because he had passed us. Then the navigator says 'such and such' and my navigator was a big warrant officer, a tall bloke, he wanted to thump that flight lieutenant and they were going on. Flight Lieutenant Berryman and myself separated them and stopped the thing, both convinced that the other had done the wrong thing, I still think he passed us he certainly passed us

13:00 it doesn't matter much. Tempers flared there is no doubt about that and the more you think of it and I think of it today and think 'gees it must have been close.'

You mentioned rumours started appearing that the thing would end. When did you finally get notification that you would be no longer required to be involved and would be moving on to England?

No longer required?

13:30 It ended in May and we flew on until August. It was over but we still weren't told, we weren't told then that we were building up reserves in Berlin, we were just kept flying and wondered why the hell why. It wouldn't of hurt us to tell us what the plan was but no one told us and we kept working. We were getting really browned off then that it was over and

14:00 what the hell was the use of us being there, that was bad enough. When we went back to England we were sent to an RAF base and billeted there nothing could be found out. We had nothing to do so Australia House got sick of people trooping in and saying, 'what the hell is happening,' but no one could tell us. Then they decided

14:30 they would keep a couple of crews to go to the RAF and those that volunteered got interviewed and I think one crew and that was an interesting story. One of the blokes that was selected for that and he was on the return to the airlift he had been shot down

15:00 he had a girlfriend in England, she was pregnant, he was shot down and a prisoner of war, when he was released he was sent back to Australia and never did make contact with her and then he went back to England and found this girl and married her and they were out here. Mitchell was one of those selected

to go to England to keep on and it was while he was back there that he found this girl.

15:30 That was the worst period of the thing because we were so anxious to get home and annoyed.

When you finally did get back to Australia, was there any reception or recognition for those who had taken part?

Yes. Nothing except the aeroplane was met and

16:00 I told you that we were met and given postings at Amberley and that was the final insult, staying overnight within a couple of hours flying from Sydney, why the hell they didn't. We arrived at Schofields and Air Vice Marshal McCauley met us and said nice things I suppose. My parents and my wife were

16:30 out there to meet us and I had some leave, it was good and then off to instructor's course.

Firstly you were posted to Mallala in South Australia?

Mallala in South Australia well outside of Adelaide, as an air movement's officer and seeing aeroplanes loaded and doing remittances, it was awful.

How did you manage to get

17:00 **yourself out of that posting, what was the situation exactly there?**

I was just talking in the mess to the group captain that night and said I was disappointed, that I really did want to do a flying instructor's course and I had asked could I do one and I saw that it was the best way, I had been flying transports for a fair while then and it was a good way to do a flying instructor's course and then go into another branch,

17:30 a fighter bomber and in my case I would like to get onto bombers but I think I convinced him by saying, "If I am going to do this, I think I will be able to do it well because I have learnt a lot about things," and I think that must have impressed him or someone dropped out of the course or whatever but it was lovely to get that telegram saying I was posted to Sale to do the course. I did that

18:00 and it was a good course and we ran a very good instructor's course and still do. Then I went from there to Point Cook and did some instructing and then I was posted. The Korean War had just started and I don't know that anyone had been posted from Point Cook amongst the instructors then but eventually most instructors that were down at Point Cook

18:30 then went off to Korea. While I was there I was night flying and the bloke that I was flying with a friend of mine took off in the night in a Wirraway and I said, "Will we finish flying now?" and he was OC night fly, he said, "Let us get one more off" one more solo, and he took off and spun in at the end of the strip and there was a wall and he was killed.

19:00 He was going to New Zealand on exchange and I was suddenly thrown into that and I went off there for two years. I spent two enjoyable years in New Zealand, had a daughter born there and then was posted to Williamtown when I was coming home to do a fighter OCU

19:30 and go to Korea but again the war ended so that posting was changed to transports because the Queen's Flight was coming on.

What was your attitude to missing out on another war, had you matured a bit since then?

I couldn't believe it.

Had you mellowed?

It just seemed incredible that it happened again so yes that was disappointing.

20:00 This is why years later when I was in Washington and Vietnam came on I started agitating early.

How important is that operational flying experience in a war time environment?

I think it is very important really, I mean it's not essential. People go off and start war and people are very well trained. I suppose that

20:30 you know yourself better, until you do it you think, 'what, am I going to be good at this? Am I going to be scared? Am I going to turn out to be a coward? How will I do this?' Until you have done it and you know yourself

21:00 you are probably wondering. I think that is what are you trained for, that is what you are supposed to do, being fed and paid all these years and you haven't done anything to, what was your purpose in life? The big thing is I guess to know yourself, how you are going to react, you are either pleased with yourself or browned off with yourself I suppose.

21:30 **Are there certain moments in your long career where that became a prominent thing, where you thought, 'I have learnt something here about myself,' that might be a turning point in your career?**

Yes, I think that is so. It was a time, I don't want to sound as if I am full of myself but

22:00 there was a time when I knew in my transport flying for instance, I was a junior when I started and I was learning and I used to listen to the experienced pilots. The day that I was flying the Governor General or the Duke of Edinburgh and I knew I was good.

22:30 I had total confidence in myself but anything could happen in the aeroplane I could hack and the same later on with Canberra's, when I felt I knew more, understand more about the bombing business than most people knew in my own mind.

23:00 I might have been wrong, I felt totally confident and how we should go about flying Canberra's and bombing and flying in bad weather and those sorts of things in Malaysia. As I said to you earlier the realisation came when I was made a squadron leader, 'there is probably a career in this air force which I should think about seriously,' which I hadn't, I was just enjoying life and flying.

23:30 I didn't do anything great, there was not much I could do, and I did staff courses when they came up without argument but I did ask for postings to go back to bombers. I think that was what I wanted to do and I was desperate to go to, after I had done the Royal College of Defence Studies and was an air commodore to go to Amberley as a

24:00 command a base there because I thought, 'now if I go there and I fly the F111, I will fly the most advanced aeroplane in our air force, certainly until the time I leave so I will be totally up to date with everything that is happening in the air force and I will be able to speak, that I know what I am talking about.' That was probably a defining moment too.

24:30 As far as the air force is concerned, I don't know, I never read my reports, I know people who had read their reports but I didn't want to read them.

Are there any figures then that you can point to that inspired you into that direction?

No, I think the big thing with my career was Vietnam,

25:00 the squadron did very well and obviously that is what people go by. That got me on the next step to be Director of Air Force Plans and in that you had a finger in every pie, everything that was going on. Plans are not planning for war, they are plans of where the air force was going 'how will we get out, will we stay in

25:30 Malaysia when the Brits got out?' and those sorts of things that were to do with the future of the air force as a whole and I found them very interesting. There was nothing happened in the air force in that job and the next one I had was Director General of Plans and Policy that I didn't have a hand in. I rate the

26:00 concept of operation for the Royal Australian Air Force at a time when we didn't have a concept of operation nor did any other of the services, the army and navy, and we wrote one but the civilians in defence didn't necessarily accept, no one accepted it but we had it and the air force knew where it was heading and it has finally become the concept

26:30 of the Australian Defence Force, that we stop people getting to this country and not worry about how we are going to fight them when they get here and that sort of thing and taking a defensive approach to it and I became thoroughly embroiled in this.

Let us go back to another one of your jobs that we haven't talked about in great detail was the VIP flying job and the Queen's Flight can you tell us a bit more about that and which came first?

27:00 I was flying the Governor General as his pilot no I'm getting out of sequence. I came back from New Zealand and my posting to Williamtown was scrubbed and I was sent to transport and I was the instructor and the instrument rating examiner and then I played that part in the Queen's Flight, when they formed the Queen's Flight I was to see they had the right training

27:30 and instrument ratings etc. A fellow called John Cornish who also flew with the airlift but with the RAF on exchange flew the Queen and then after that I became the Governor General's pilot. That was a good fly, I did some interesting trips in the outback and those sorts of thing and I was sent to New Guinea with him

28:00 and I got plenty of flying. I didn't only fly him occasionally I would fly other VIPs. I enjoyed the Governor General he was a good fellow and very good to me. Gail and I got invited to Government House fairly regularly. My daughter had her tonsils out and he went to hospital to see her

28:30 so those sorts of things were nice things, he was all right everything had to be perfect of course. VIP flying is a curious thing I remember flying Bob Menzies [Robert Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia], he was going off to England and I flew him to Adelaide and he must have been boarding the ship in Adelaide but he didn't like flying much and we had a perfectly normal trip across and he got out and the media were there to see him in large numbers because

29:00 he was going off to England and he said, “Anyone that flies is an idiot” or words to that effect By the time I got back to Canberra the AAC was ringing up and the chief of the air force was ringing up, “What happened to the Prime Minister on the way across? Why did he make a statement like that?” No reason in the world why he did but those were the sorts of things that happen. Flying the Duke that was a good experience he used to come up to the cockpit. I said to his

29:30 ADC [Aide-de-Camp], he was an Australian Naval officer, Parker, “Tell his Royal Highness he can come up to the cockpit after we have taken off if he would like to.” He said, “His Royal Highness will come up to the cockpit whenever he wishes,” I said, “You won’t so go back and sit down now” and I took a dislike to him. The Duke did come up and we had some funny

30:00 things. This was a Convair that we got that we were flying with and I had to get two hundred hours captain the Convair before I could fly a VIP, or certainly the Duke, so I flew around Australia I mean it was ridiculous. I took off one weekend I think on a Friday afternoon and got back sometime on Monday and I had done forty hours flying, just filling in, it was absurd but that is what you had to do.

30:30 The aeroplane was new to us and the Duke would sit in the right hand seat occasionally and ask all sorts of questions about it. I thought ‘gees I hope he is asking questions I know the answer to.’ We got to a couple of places and in all places they had round circles that you put your wheels in where the Royal aircraft [landed] and it had ‘R’ for royal on the circles where the wheels go. You couldn’t see

31:00 them I mean from the cockpit you would have to put your head out the window like that and look like a damn fool and I said to the Duke, “This is ridiculous you can’t see a thing” and they will put them, the crowds always crowd around and if your wheels didn’t go the people amongst the crowd would say, “Oh they missed out that time” it was foolish. I was saying this to the Duke and he said, “Tell them not to put the things there anymore

31:30 it is absurd.” We got to Cooma and he was in the right hand seat and we taxied up I said, “We have got those damn circles again” and he said, “Ignore them, stop the aeroplane here,” and he said, “I’m serious stop it here, I will get out here and they can walk down to me.” I said, “You realise next week you will be gone and up there is my OIC [Officer in Charge], my air vice marshal and he is going to be here forever, I better do what he wants.” It was quite good too.

32:00 **You pulled rank on His Royal Highness?**

Yes.

Was there anything else you learnt from those VIPs, Sir William Slim for example?

What do you mean?

You were still a fairly young pilot, you would end up becoming more of a VIP yourself in the way that those people operated?

The way they operated yes but I mean that is true and going to Government House and knowing what he wanted and what he liked I

32:30 recognised that pretty quickly which was everything was perfect, the chin would go out. He was intensely loyal, he really was. This happens to anyone VIP if you are flying anyone all the time they think their pilot is the best there is and it is probably important they do feel that, even though it might be wrong and he sort of took that attitude. For instance we’d get to an RAAF base

33:00 I landed him in Pierce, he was going, he would say to the base commander, “I want you to look after my crew and see that they are looked after and see that they have transport.” I had never been offered transport in my life as a pilot on a base no one takes the slightest bit of notice of you but here the air commodore would come up and say, “David,

33:30 would you like some transport would the crew like to go into town, I have a car available if you want?” I was quite astounded but it was the Governor General that we looked after. I had a couple of, he came down to the cricket in Melbourne, the Melbourne Cricket Ground and we came and went in and were watching. I knew he was there for the day and he came down to go to the dressing rooms and saw us standing down there and he came up and said,

34:00 “You can’t stand here all day, you will be too tired to fly me home.” He immediately took us back to the member’s stand and that sort of thing. A parade he was taking in Melbourne we came in to have a look at and it was a big parade he was taking and then when it was time to go back the crowd was everywhere and we couldn’t get a cab, we were getting desperate and it was time to go so he got this cab and I said, “For God’s sake, I have to get back to fly the Governor General.”

34:30 On the way up to Essendon there was a police motor bike stop and pulled up and said, “Is the Governor General going through?” “No, he has gone through, he is, about five minutes ago” and said, “Oh God we have missed him.” We got there, raced up to the aeroplane absolutely breathless in the cab, I thought, “What is he going to go on about?” but he was quite good, he said, “Take your time, don’t hurry, I don’t want you to get aboard breathless.” I told him what happened,

35:00 so those sorts of things happened and he was very good. When I was posted to Staff College in the end

and he knew I was going and he said, “I remember my staff college well,” he said, “I remember some of my solutions I put in, one remark on it was from the directing staff, was, ‘your knowledge of tactics is still

35:30 abysmal, however your wife’s spelling is improving.” Another one and there were lots of the chaps, there had been Indian ladies in the town of Greta for years typing the solutions for the students going through the courses and one of his friends’ got a solution back one day that was typed by these women and she had put a little note on it, “I notice you had omitted to put the courses of action open to the enemy, I have taken the liberty of including

36:00 this for you.”

What was your time at Staff College like?

Pretty miserable. A, we were poor, the air force again in those days were bloody miserable. If you were posted anywhere it wasn’t a two year posting, you weren’t entitled to removal, you weren’t entitled to any rental assistance, you weren’t entitled to anything so

36:30 I was posted from here to staff course, it was a twelve month course so I wasn’t entitled to anything. We were in married quarters here and had to get out of the married quarters so we got there broke, found the cheapest accommodation we can get, Footscray, it was awful, about one hundred yards from a migrant centre, dunny down the back, it was awful.

37:00 My pocket money for that year was a pound a week. We would finish perhaps working at ten o’clock at night and go over to the bar for a few drinks and then say, “Eleven o’clock, the bar is closing, let’s have a couple of bob and keep the steward on for an hour.” It was awful and hard work, we worked very hard, we stayed in, we came home Wednesday nights and weekends.

37:30 Usually the weekend was a full working weekend, getting a solution done, it was hard work but added to that there was a dreadful financial situation and I remember that as a bad year. The assistant commandant didn’t like me and I think he liked my wife more than he liked me but and he was a dreadful man.

38:00 At the end you get interviewed at the end and they tell you you have been recommended to do this. I wasn’t recommended to do anything, I wasn’t recommended to do a joint services staff college, The Royal College of Defence Studies and I said, “What is the use, I thought I had passed this course.” “Yes, Dave, you have but you know but we just don’t think you are suitable for these courses.”

38:30 I did all those courses and he died and I thought not a bit of sympathy, I was curious but I didn’t enjoy it. Yet my best mates in the air force the people I did the staff course with, was wherever you were they were and if you ever needed help from them, if they were in a job that could help they would or we would help each other, that was the good part of it.

39:00 The daunting fact is that I said to the bloke who runs our reunions which we have about every five years I said, “When is the next reunion?” And he said, “I don’t think it is worthwhile, there is only nine of us left.”

Tape 6

00:31 **How much did your years in Canberra in the late fifties open your eyes to the politics of the day?**

Opened my eyes very greatly. Firstly I saw all the things that came through the Minister’s desk of course and many of them I would brief him on from my own knowledge but all the files from the air force coming over I saw and had to go through so I learnt a lot about what was going on but

01:00 learnt other things.

01:30 On the bigger picture I learned, for instance, that we were after search-to-air missile, we sent a team overseas to look at what was available. There were really two contenders at the time,

02:00 there was the American Nike Search for Air Missile and the British Bloodhound. The team came back and wrote a report that it was clearly the Nike that was preferable and that cabinet submission was written on that basis when it came to cabinet. The Brits sent out a politician and an air vice marshal and others to see Prime Minister Menzies and tell them that this

02:30 was not very good for British industry and the cabinet submission was re-written to say that the Bloodhound was the one. I happen to know two of the people, a wing commander and a group captain expert people who went over to do the valuation of them and they were adamant that there was no comparison between the two missiles and told me why. I found

03:00 myself in this dilemma, here I am a squadron leader and this is being put up by the air force that we had been told to rewrite it by the Minister. Should I tell the Minister about my disquiet about it, that there is no comparison. I wrangled this around in my mind for a couple of days and I thought, 'I have got to do something because I believe this is important to the nation,' so I

03:30 said, "Minister, look, I feel I am in an awkward position but nether the less I am your staff officer and I think that I am there to brief you." This is the thing I had all the way through, I am an air force officer but I believed I had to tell him the truth. I said, "The other missile is far superior." He said, "David, I understand there is shades of grey, it is not black and white as you are making it out" and I said, "Well

04:00 the Bloodhound flames out at fifty thousand feet and the Nike has shot down a target over seventy thousand feet, that is not shades of grey to me Minister." He said, "David, you have got to see the big picture, this is not just a matter of Australia and what we get, it is the sale of the weapon. Britain is trying to sell this weapon in Europe to Norway and other countries, if we a British dominion, turn around and buy

04:30 an American missile, clearly it is going to have an effect on the sales of the British missile so they are the reasons behind it." We bought the Bloodhound and we had it for years and of course it didn't do anything and we gave it to Singapore eventually. There was an indication of politics intruding into what we got in the way of a weapon. There was a similar thing when we bought, the air force had

05:00 thought it would buy for VIP aeroplanes the Canadian Challenger and another American aeroplane, but then the air force chief engineer was amazed to pick up his paper one morning to find we were buying the Back 111, the British one and the Mirage

05:30 which he was astounded. It was something the air force didn't give a hell of a lot of care about because it wasn't a combat aeroplane and it was a VIP aeroplane and it would do excepting the others had greater range and were better things, but I found we had an agreement with Britain that if we bought American when there was a British product available we would have to pay duty to the Brits, they are the sort of things I picked up.

06:00 I picked up that the Minister couldn't command an air force. One day, Osmund was a junior minister and very frightened of the Prime Minister, old Ming, and Ming wanted an aeroplane to go somewhere, a VIP aeroplane and was being used for something else the only one available, the Minister was beside himself, he said, "David, get on to the operational command and tell them

06:30 I insist on a VIP being made available to the Prime Minister." I got on to command as told and I spoke to a then Air Commodore Hartwell, the chief of staff, he said, "David, tell the Minister he cannot command the AOC [Air Officer Commanding] or the air force to do anything he has no command and we have made

07:00 arrangements, the aircraft will not be available, we can't be given an order by a civilian." He said, "He can go to the Chief of the Air Staff and if the Chief of the Air Staff wants to agree with the Minister we will accept an order from him but we cant accept it from the minister." I looked into this further and the Chief of Air Staff would have said, "No," the Minster could have sacked him but Ministers can't give an order to the defence force.

07:30 So I told the Minister that and he was a bit furious for a minute and then he came out after and said, "That is quite right David, we won't go any further with this," another interesting lesson.

How much is an air force policy or aims driven by the technology?

By technology.

08:00 What do you mean?

Does technology dictate what the air force do or does the air force demand the technology?

The air force demands the technology. I wrote the air staff requirement in the case we bought the F111, we wanted it to go 'x' number of nautical miles in a radius of action and we wanted it to fly at a certain height, we wanted it to carry a certain bomb load, all these things were operationally important.

08:30 The maintenance people wanted it to have so many flying hours per maintenance hour, if this was available and all these things were specified. With the F111 for instance it was an interesting one in writing it myself and this might be sensitive that I'm saying, you can cut it out if you wish but I will say it. Obviously we wanted to be able to go to Jakarta and places in Indonesia and as I

09:00 I wrote in the air staff requirement 'this doesn't say that Indonesia is the enemy.' But Indonesia was occupied by the Japanese on one occasion, if they were occupied by anyone or whoever it was there it didn't matter to us but that was a logical place from which an attack on Australia would be mounted. The Americans had the maritime ability to land anywhere on our shores so we wanted to be able to hit certainly Jakarta and those places.

09:30 The ideal radius of action would have been fifteen hundred nautical miles and I had that fifteen hundred nautical miles in the air staff instruction and the Chief of the Air Staff then Val Hancock said, "There is no aircraft that does that distance, there is no good in putting in something we can't get." So they

looked at it and he looked at it and

10:00 his planning staff and said, “Well, make it eleven hundred nautical miles.” We worked out that you can get to Jakarta on eleven hundred nautical miles from Learmonth but you have got to go in a straight line, you can’t divert or stuff around, you can go through Cocos, but you couldn’t bet on Cocos being available or the strip might have been put out. We went for eleven hundred miles and we got the F111. All these things were laid out and I remember to this day that eleven hundred nautical miles you could reach sixty nine percent of the targets

10:30 that we wanted. Technology wasn’t available then to carry that many bombs and go that far and we wanted it to be supersonic, which now of course we want to carry fourteen thousand pounds of bombs, today it wouldn’t matter, with the accuracy you had in those days you had to have that much to make it worthwhile to go anywhere, now you can take a bomb

11:00 and put it right on the target. We know that a bomb today is equivalent to nine thousand bombs in World War II and nine hundred bombs in Vietnam, one bomb so you don’t need that carrying capacity. So when we are looking for an aircraft now and the JFS [Jet Fuel Starter] is the one that seems to be selected, you would want it to carry say two two thousand pounders but guided missiles,

11:30 smart bombs, you can put on the targets and you would hit two targets with that, it is worthwhile going.

In the late 50s what was the vision of the air force?

The vision of the air force, I must confess that the air force since its inception has had a pretty sensible idea of where it was going, a balanced air force for our country. We have always had a good maritime force, whether it was getting back to Hudson’s and Anson’s but something that could

12:00 patrol the coastline during World War II. We started before World War II with Anson’s and then Hudson’s and Bowfords and then we had Neptune’s after the war and we put two jet engines on them with two burning and two turning as they would say. The Lincolns, maritime Lincolns and the P3s and we keep updating the P3s until now and I am

12:30 told and I believe that that we have the best long-range maritime aircraft in the world with the systems in them, they are excellent, good anti-submarine capability. We need a strike force and because we are a small nation and man power is a big factor with us, we haven’t got the manpower to even threaten or even defend ourselves against a country that has got millions, two hundred million people. We can’t

13:00 engage in operations that are man power intensive so how do we overcome that? We overcome it by using technology and fire power and getting to the enemy rather than waiting for him to get to us and so they are very great importance of strike air aircraft to Australia. It is essential that the, and we have the political will to use it but that always remains in doubt although with the present Prime Minister I would say we would but we can’t afford to have, let’s say again

13:30 Indonesia or someone there having a poke at Cocos Island and building up forces as though they were going to attack and we react to try and try and put people there to protect it and the next thing they are building up in New Guinea and Enjia and try to build up to ten divisions there and we say, “What the hell are they going to do are they going to try and attack Papua New Guinea?” and we react to that. They intrude into our off-shore oil rigs

14:00 and threaten them or even attack them or raid the, raid on Australian coast, intrude into our air space and then turn back. Within a month we would be run ragged, we couldn’t keep doing this because we are so small. The only way we can react is say ‘listen chum stop this or watch out or we will do something’ and then we should take the initiative, perhaps mine the harbour at Serebao or take some

14:30 offensive action, say, “Listen, we have got the capability of giving you a bloody nose” that is why strike aircraft are so very important to us. If you take Timor, I think talking to Peter Cosgrove, no-one really knew what the Indonesians were going to do when we went into Timor, their army there was far superior in numbers to ours and which way were the army going to go and I doubt that the Indonesians really knew

15:00 what the army was really going to do. The fact that we had a capable strike force on strip alert an hour’s fly away surely must have entered their considerations.

In the late ‘50s though, we were still in the Menzies era and you were looking at defence policies, you said yourself you were looking to England?

We had the Canberra and the Chief of the Air Staff of the day, Val Hancock.

15:30 I remember him going to the Minister and saying, “The Canberra won’t last us beyond 1963, it is fatigued, we must have a replacement,” and two things happened about that, he was saying that. Billy Snedden went in one night because the Canberra’s bombing was extraordinarily inaccurate, one hundred metres so bombing at thirty thousand feet giving one hundred metres it was looked upon as a good bomb.

16:00 Billy Snedden went to the Minister and said, “Fred, I talk to air force blokes that the Canberra is pretty useless as a weapon system,” and the Minister called me and he said, “David, Mr Snedden said the

Canberra is useless" he said, "For God's sake disabuse him will you." So I went and said, "No Gordon it's green satin which is a new aid and with that it will be a modern aircraft and

16:30 modern navigation systems," and Billy said, "That is a relief but it is not what I hear that though." The Minister said, "Thanks for that David" and I said, "Yes you look as though you are believing it Minister," and he said, "Isn't it true?" I said, "No it's not true, what Mr Snedden said is right." He said, "Why haven't I hear of this? Get me the Chief of the Air Staff, I will get him over here tomorrow and ask him." The Chief of the Air Staff came over and confirmed it and he said, "I need a new bomber and

17:00 what's more the fatigue business we needed to get it ready" and that started a great look for a bomber but then what was available wasn't much and we ended up in 1973 with the F111, nearly thirteen years later. Menzies tried in 1963 there was an election coming on

17:30 and this lack of a good bomber was known and we had three B47s come out and fly around and in fact I went and flew it up to Amberley and flew a few trips in it. The Prime Minister would have been keen to get a squadron of those but the manpower it would have taken would have meant that we would have lost the three Canberra squadrons and that wasn't a good deal and we told the government and they accepted the air force advice on that.

18:00 That was the end of the '50s, we were in a bad way, we had the Canberra but we didn't have a great force at all.

What obviously Vietnam came up, was that on the planning horizon, some intervention like the possibility of Vietnam at that time in the late '50s?

No, not the late '50s it was later than that it was about 1964 we first got involved with Caribous.

18:30 **What was the greatest threat to Australia and obviously what role the air force would play in counteracting that threat at that time in the late '50s?**

The late '50s it was always that it would be always someone in the archipelago that would come to Australia. People had the wrong idea they'd say 'no army could come here and just going across the desert from Darwin to the south, the desert, they couldn't do it' but

19:00 the reality was the air force used to say 'they didn't have to and they could at any time come over and land a few hundred paratroopers at Darwin a few hundred at Learmonth, Derby and Cape York', they have got all the fields we would want up there, we couldn't get there and they didn't have to do it. The next day they could build up by the scores of thousands in the next few days and we would have the desert to go across if we wanted to attack them in any way.

19:30 We wouldn't be able to attack their home land they would have all the northern bases and all they had to do was say, 'OK fellows, we are here now, let's negotiate.' The thought was that they were going to have to drive south and take all the cities, which is nonsense, so we needed something. Firstly we needed to know they were coming and we needed radar and my biggest worry and it remained so and it is still much the same until today.

20:00 They said that our air defences were not better than when the Japanese came here in 1942 and it is true. You can fly into Australia any night, I offered to say, "I would fly into Australia with a squadron of aircraft, we will be coming tonight, what are you going to do about it?" Nothing, we had no radar, we had radar at Darwin, Perth that way, and Townsville and they against a high level

20:30 aeroplane could see two hundred and fifty miles if it was thirty thousand feet. If it decided to come low they could see twenty miles so virtually we were totally unprotected and this is when I was pushing very strongly for airborne early warning aircraft. The air force has been asking for those since the early '70s and they are not here yet and they will be here in another couple of years, thirty four years without them we have no

21:00 things. Over the horizon radar was being developed, the civilians were against the airborne early warning because they were saying the Australian scientists using over the horizon radar will solve this problem for us. The air force view was 'this won't happen, it will give us a trip-wire and the over the horizon radar doesn't give us precise', it puts an incoming aircraft into a box of about ten kilometres by ten

21:30 and it doesn't give a height so it means your own fighter has to get up there and turn on its radar and start looking for it and it present as one. We still don't have an air defence system and we didn't have it then. We are very very conscious of it and we are putting it to the government and air force as strongly as possible but it wasn't supported by defence, the civilian side of the house. The other services wanted things for themselves and obviously saw it as more important than air defence.

22:00 That has been a great deficiency with that but we have had some sort of strike capability though out that time even with the Canberra.

How great a threat, obviously the thing that would precipitate military action was perhaps communism at that time?

Again the communists were in Indonesia the great coup which had Sukanao kicked out but he was behind that coup and that was a great

22:30 danger but then they went anti-communist and they killed about five hundred thousand of them but it has remained an unstable country and you never know which way it was going to go. Sukarno was anti, well look at Malaysia, he was going to attack Malaysia and confrontation, it didn't happen but there was always that threat there with Sukanao. When he went away there was the tendency to say amongst the civilians,

23:00 in defence which we always had difficulty with that crop of civilians were saying, 'the threat has gone away.' You can have a threat one day and that guy is toppled and everything is alright but why can't the present government be toppled and another one that is militant and aggressive in place. I don't think we can never assume that there is no threat.

23:30 I spoke to Robert Hill the other day and he was saying the same thing and I was say, "I hope with all these" we were just talking informally. "I hope that all that is going on you are not going to be foolish enough to let the F111s go.'" He said, "Yes but where is the threat? You know who is going to attack us?" The answer is, if we are going to get

24:00 new aeroplanes we are not going to get them until 2012 or 2015, they will be in service for twenty five or thirty years, we are looking to nearly the mid-century, now who in the hell can say, 'where is the threat coming from?' then? Nobody can say that in the world we have got, China might be even the dominant power, America might have lost its way, you never know.

24:30 Look at George Bush and the way they are going now. The Americans are likely to get totally sick of this sort of business, they must. I don't think you can take the bet that we don't have a threat and we are not going to have one.

How difficult was it at that time when you were encountering, I guess your civilian masters?

Great difficulty with the civilians because their view was that there was no identifiable threat, to use their words,

25:00 'no identifiable threat' so how could we possibly structure a defence force? So what we should do is have a little bit of everything, not much but a little bit so that we are trained and then we can expand when a threat appears. That is nonsense, it was called the 'core force' and the core was all these little bits. There was no concept of operations at all but we would wait and see what the threat is and then we develop our forces for that and of course you would never do it in time, develop forces overnight. A strike force, if we didn't have one,

25:30 would take ten to fifteen years to be really good at it and understand what we are doing and what we needed to do. The air force, this is when we wrote a concept of operations, I wrote a concept of operations and it says that we would have to stop people getting here, we are not big enough to go and fight a land battle and we haven't got the man power to do it and we have got to avoid this by the use of air power and naval power and

26:00 that was our concept of operations. We were the only service to have one but it wasn't accepted in defence and they still went on with this absurd core force. The three chiefs and all the senior military people were against it and said 'this is absolute nonsense' but Tang was running the place and a few people like Alan Wrigley, they were hopeless. You put in for something that you needed in the air force, example tankers,

26:30 tanker aircraft everyone should have tankers, particularly Australia. He was saying, "This is enhancing the capability of the force, we have got no grounds for enhancing the capability," it was dog in the manger attitude, it was awful. It was depressing to go to meetings and have all these endless arguments about what you needed and the almost determination to stop you getting anything, dreadful.

27:00 **How would you describe your attitude to having spent those two years in Canberra?**

Which one, with the Minister?

Yes.

I learnt a hell of a lot but it doesn't mean I liked what I learnt but I knew what the part politics could play. Apart from that Bloodhound

27:30 surface to air missile and the VIP aeroplane I think the air force has always got the equipment it has asked for in the way of aeroplanes. We wanted the F18, it frightened me that we were going to have the sixteen pushed on us because at that time the F16 was simply an interceptor and the Americans air force said, "We are going to develop it into a multi-role aeroplane",

28:00 but there was always the thought (a) if they didn't do it here we were left with an interceptor and we couldn't possibly afford the development of a strike air force version of it so the F18 was a multi-role aeroplane and that is what we pushed for. Again, two engines that argument raised on, one or two engines, and we ended up getting what we wanted the F18. The air force has done pretty well really and we

28:30 have always had that balanced force with the maritime force, the fighter force and the strike force and

the transport support force. That balanced air force has been going as long as the RAAF and I think our earlier planners were pretty smart but it has been an endless fight to keep it and it is looming again now.

How much of that strategy at the time, because we had aircraft carriers in the late '50s and early '60s,

29:00 **was this based on the Second World War and the Korean War?**

Yes it was indeed. It became pretty obvious to airmen that ships against missiles that were coming along and what was being developed couldn't survive. I know the Americans have an air force that is enormously powerful and so is the navy with their carriers, their tremendous capability but with stand off

29:30 weapons the carriers are going to have a fight on their hands. They have never faced a real enemy that they haven't had air superiority nor have our soldiers or any of the soldiers in the western world, they don't know what it is like not to have air superiority and long may it go on. I don't think you can be assured of that forever but

30:00 their carriers are tremendously capable. We did trips against them in F111s, I was always sure that we would get even one of the American carriers with the harpoon stand-off weapon and I was equally sure we would lose a lot of aeroplanes doing it but you would get it. If we sent a dozen F111s against an American carrier

30:30 with harpoon missiles, I reckon you would probably lose at least half of your aeroplanes but you would get the bloody carrier, not a great prospect really but if you could combine a submarine attack and an air attack at the same time, I like the submarines they are great weapons.

Getting back to your own career, you were having itchy feet to go and fly

31:00 **bombers, can you tell us about your conversion to the Canberra and your transfer to Malaysia?**

Firstly I had been off flying on the ground jobs and I requested to go and fly Canberra's and I got posted to them but then I had to go and do a refresher down at Sale, a flying refresher, which I started off flying Vampires for about twenty hours I suppose.

31:30 I remember the day I arrived down there they lost two people in a Vampire and my mother knew that I had gone down there to fly Vampires and they were ringing up everyone and I was alright but the aircraft went in on take-off. I did my twenty hours at Sale on the Vampires and got back into flying reasonably.

A bit different to a DC3, a jet aircraft,

32:00 **what was that conversion like were you behind the aircraft?**

No obviously I wasn't at the end but I would have started off being. I had been instructing and I had done a fair amount of single engine flying, the jet engine was not difficult, I thought it was and I had heard about the lag and the acceleration but it was quite easy, the Vampire is a very easy aeroplane to fly. The instrument flying and things in it

32:30 and doing instruments from twenty thousand feet instead of ten thousand feet or five thousand feet or transport aeroplanes was a totally different thing. Twenty hours got me and then I did a conversion to a Canberra, they are a very quick conversion I just went solo in it and that was it. They had two Canberra trainers down at Sale and I went up to Amberley and did the ACU which was about twelve weeks and which I did

33:00 the weapons work and bombing etc, navigation and all the things that go with it. The high altitude and cruise climb and those sorts of things. The conversion, I didn't have any difficulty with it.

Was the Canberra all that you expected it to be?

Pretty well, it is the most loveable aeroplane, anyone who has flown the Canberra loves it and yet it is the most uncomfortable aeroplane anyone has ever strapped

33:30 on, it really is, freezing cold. Consider it on the ground in Amberley in summer it would be forty degrees inside the cockpit, you couldn't open it, the canopy in the Canberra, so you would be bathed in sweat and then twenty minutes later you would be thirty five thousand feet and all the sweat would be turning into little ice crystals, the ice was like the inside of a refrigerator and

34:00 it was bitterly cold but at night it was even worse but we all liked it. We all like it and it was the best operational aeroplane we had, the only bomber we had.

British piece of engineering, those sort of characteristics?

The cockpit, you would be looking for something back here, the navigator to do half the things he couldn't reach and he was strapped into his seat, he had to have a handle with a claw on the end of it, this is true and he used to reach across with this claw. If he had dropped it

34:30 he had to unstrap and get out of his parachute and his harness and pick it up off the floor and go back and then he had to get out of that and go up the front for bombing to drop his bomb.

How did you get in and out of the Canberra if you couldn't open the canopy?

There is a door on the side, you put your head down and got inside and got into your seat and strapped in, you had the parachute and then the harness

35:00 and then bowyangs to put behind your legs and they pulled your legs in if you had to eject. You had to remember if you were ejecting to knock a switch over here that pushed the control column forward because if you were just in a panic and pulled the blind you broke your knees on the control column on the way out. It was an awfully British aircraft.

Can you take us through an ejection drill on the Canberra?

35:30 Firstly you had to be two thousand feet instead of 0 0 today but you had to be two thousand feet for safety and it was pretty simple, you told the navigator to go and he pulled his blind and went and then the pilot did that thing to push the stick forward and then you reached up and pulled the blind down over your face and away you went through the canopy. No one had ever ejected from the Canberra,

36:00 and we didn't really know, there was argument whether you went through the canopy or jettisoned the canopy. We had known that we had a spate with Sabres ejecting the canopy and it would cut people's head off because it came in this way and we lost about six or seven pilots before they knew what was happening. Then they modified it so they fired up through the canopies and bolts broke the canopy first and the pilot went up through it.

36:30 We didn't know what the Canberra was the right way to do it, it hadn't been done. I determined pretty well to go through the canopy.

You had an option did you between shooting through the canopy and jettisoning with the canopy?

Yes, you could jettison the canopy but no one knew which way it was going to come off and if it had of come this way you spoiled your day. The second aeroplane and the

37:00 last we lost in Vietnam when they were hit a surface to air missile they ejected through the canopy and everything went perfectly well and that proved a point after all the years the Canberra had been around. My only worry was perfectly simple, pull the blind and away you went but I used to think if I forget to push that control column I am going to do my knees in and I always had the fear in that I

37:30 would forget it, I don't know why anyhow I never had to worry about it.

Was it a stick control?

Half-wheel so with the F111 you go with the cockpit and all.

It is a pod isn't it?

Yes. You go out in glorious comfort and that has worked every time.

What about the take-

38:00 **off in the Canberra, what is it like?**

It is pretty straightforward, you have two engines, if you have got a cross wind, the only difficulty was if you got a strong cross wind one engine is not going to get the air take and you will get a stall so you want, with the strip that way up there and the wind is coming from there, you want to

38:30 get across that way and get full power on and then go down there.

Ram air into it?

Yes.

What is the sound like in the cabin?

Not much with helmets and things on so you can't hear much. My worry with the Canberra, it has a safety speed on one engine of one hundred and fifty five knots if it is clean so you need one hundred and fifty five knots to be able to control it if you lose an engine.

39:00 With the wing tipped bombs or wing tip tanks on it is nearly two hundred knots so you have taken off and airborne and if an engine goes you can't control an aircraft with full power, it will just flip on its back and do it very quickly. In Vietnam I used to have my finger on the bomb jettison on take-off, I would put on power and have my finger on it until I got to a speed where I could control it.

39:30 It is quite a different routine by the time you get airborne or a position on the strip where you can't stop anyhow and you have got safety speed and it seems forever but probably you are often about two hundred feet before you get safety speed. If my finger was to press that the moment anything went

wrong, was to press that and pull the live engine back so I could keep straight with the rudder and

40:00 hope for the best.

You couldn't keep a straight line with full power?

With full power, once you got the bombs off the wings one hundred and fifty five knots you needed to keep straight and then it was someone with experience, it was a hell of a push on the foot.

Tape 7

00:32 **Perhaps you could describe that safety equipment you were wearing when you were in the Canberra, we were off camera when you were talking about that?**

You have got the parachute and I have explained that that was cumbersome and you have the bowyangs behind your legs and your harness. You had your oxygen mask plugged in and tube out here and you had an auxiliary oxygen supply line to your parachute so if you went out you had

01:00 an oxygen bottle with it that came with you and that was connected and automatically turned on when you ejected. You were fired out in your seat and you should get out of your seat, release the seat harness, remembering not to release the parachute but the seat harness, and you kick yourself out of it. If you were at thirty thousand feet before,

01:30 it was a long way and you were unconscious, it would fall and automatically open at thirteen thousand feet but you had to really kick yourself our of your seat so that was a bit of conflict of what happened but it was a cumbersome sort of system. The only time we know it was used it has been successful.

02:00 All those things to remember go out and the seat could tumble so you had to wait until it settled down, release your straps and kick yourself out of it. If you are unconscious, I think it would just, if you kicked yourself out of your seat and then floated down and didn't pull your chute it would automatically open at thirteen thousand feet.

02:30 Then you had with you, before you landed you are supposed to unstrap what you were sitting on and drop it dangled on a cord about twenty feet below you so you went in clean and it hit the water before you if it was water, and it was still attached to you so you could bring it up and inflate your dinghy and climb into it.

03:00 Then you had all sorts of goodies like a fishing line, your water, some emergency rations, and those things. We did a jungle survival course in Malaysia as a crew. We spent a week in the jungle and I was very lucky, I was going around and we met up with a Royal Marine and a lieutenant and a couple of his soldiers,

03:30 it was quite extraordinary, he was an officer in the jungle and when they had stopped for the night the soldiers would run and get him everything he wanted and he couldn't conceive that here was I, a squadron leader doing all these things for myself and he had his man. "Get me something to eat," it was ridiculous, it wasn't a real jungle survival course as it should have been, I couldn't believe this Brit, he just couldn't accept it, he had two soldiers there, "They can look after me instead of me looking after myself."

04:00 **What was the Canberra being used for at the time?**

In Malaysia?

No, at the time you converted to?

It was a high level bomber and my bombing from thirty thousand feet or above, I came back and said, "This is ridiculous" I was new to Canberras, I said, "This is ridiculous, getting a hundred metres bomb is no good to man or beast." "No sir, that is a good bomb if you are going to bomb one hundred meters with this system,

04:30 that is good." When I went up to Butterworth when I finished and we were in SEATO in those days and we used to do SEATO exercises the South East Asian Treaty Organisation, and we had targets allotted to various parts of SEATO. One of ours was a bridge in China operating out of

05:00 Thailand and I got the books out and knew the accuracy we were getting with these hundred metre bombs. To get this bridge it would have taken three hundred sorties and the way you went past a Chinese fighter airfield, it was just ridiculous, and I said this to the squadron and the CO and most of the blokes , "That is the system," and I said, "We have got to get it down to

05:30 fifty metres," and this was ridiculed, "You can't do it." We started going thirty thousand feet obviously to get the distance we wanted to go we would have to go high, but then we let down and bombed from either go low to get under radar and then pull up to ten thousand feet with a thirty second run in, so you need your initial point and then run into your target. We started bombing and we got the

06:00 bombing averaged out at fifty meters in the end, which was good. We also had two other squadrons there, the Brits and the New Zealanders each had a squadron of Canberras. I formed a flight that was a marking bomber flight and we used to go at night and we would go from an initial point into the target and drop flares, which would light up the target area and then there were four of us in

06:30 this flight, two would stay out to be called in. I would go and drop the flares and then mark the target with a green or red marker and then call the bombers in as they came over to bomb my green marker, one hundred yards ahead of it or short of it, and that used to go on and that went on for a couple of years. That was good fun and dive bombing at nine from five thousand feet in a Canberra wasn't really the greatest thing to do but it worked.

07:00 **How aerobatic was a Canberra?**

You could roll it, it could loop, it could roll off the top, figure of eights, but you weren't suppose too, it is totally forbidden but you could do those things.

Negative Gs [Negative Gravitational force acts on aircraft that pitch abruptly downward]?

Negative Gs, you couldn't pull much, but you could yes, about one meg of G [Gravitational Force (G-Force)].

For instance, could you fly inverted?

Not for long, thirty seconds, why would you want to stay

07:30 inverted longer than that for? You could do a very good display in it at low level. You would take off and it was a very light aeroplane, you would take off and from about three hundred feet you'd do a loop and with enough speed you would pull up and roll as you were climbing. Loops are easy and as I say figure of eights and all those things.

08:00 We used to do those on display, very illegally really, only for Squadron members. That was the technique of marker bombing was the most challenging and the best part of flying Canberra's.

What is your air speed limitation in the aircraft on the dive, is there a limitation on the Canberra?

Yes it had a

08:30 MAC [Mean Aerodynamic Chord] .82 was its limitation and it shuddered and went ape after that and you had to slow down but you wouldn't be doing that in a dive. Dive bombing from five thousand feet you used to get back to two hundred and fifty feet and then pull over and dive and the navigator would call the heights and he would call every two hundred feet and at twenty two hundred feet you would drop your marker, press the bomb release and then pulled out

09:00 and usually you'd pull out by a thousand feet and that was the technique and it worked well.

This particular technique, did you develop that yourself or was this something that was in the operations manual?

No it hadn't been done in Canberras, but we wanted to be a marker bomber because flying at thirty thousand feet you couldn't find a target at night, you would never see it unless you had someone to mark it.

09:30 We developed that way of doing it, there had been Pathfinders in World War II marking targets and we just developed a way of doing it. We had to find the target first by dropping flares that lit up the whole area. We would go across at three thousand feet and drop half a dozen flares, because you would pick an IP, about two minutes flying at most from the target, and know that you flew three six zero from there, there was the target,

10:00 you couldn't be far out by flying at about two minutes flying at about three hundred knots or three hundred and fifty and as soon as we got there we would drop the flares and slow down and pull up so two hundred and fifty knots was where you want to start your dive and start the dive almost straight. Drop the flares and look at the target and going up and down and then drop your marker and then call the bomber stream in.

What defensive equipment did the Canberra carry?

10:30 None.

What about heat seeking missiles, against heat seeking missiles or anything?

No, we didn't have anything.

How would you characterise the Canberra in its heyday?

When it was developed it was so fast and flew so high that no fighters would get up there and it was above the height that fighters flew and it was faster than any fighter. That only lasted a few years and then it was taken over

11:00 by fighters that went faster and higher. We really decided that the only way to would go was to go in low. Going in low but the Brits in Far East Air Force wouldn't accept that and we had the bomber streamers we had in World War II going over at thirty thousand feet. We came down to Darwin with the three squadrons and did some exercises again my little team of four did the marking and they came over at

11:30 thirty thousand feet and dropped bombs.

Which is essentially what you used to do in the Second World War?

Yes indeed, and no more accurate, I suppose a bit more accurate. World War II was dreadful the accuracy it was appalling.

The Canberra, what updated equipment did it have in navigation?

Only the screen sat was the thing that took sort of a number of bearings and

12:00 it got a sort of lines and where they crossed was where you were from ground stations but why it was developed that way was you didn't need anything that the enemy could pick up. It was a passive receiver and so you weren't transmitting anything and enemy radar couldn't pick you up. It wasn't bad, it wasn't great, nothing like we have today.

12:30 **Did you have equipment that perhaps indicated that you were on an enemy radar screen or had been picked up?**

No.

What was the role of the Canberra bombers when you were there in Malaysia, you said you were part of SEATO and you had designated targets, can you tell us what this was all about?

Yes. That one was a bridge and they were that sort of a thing bridge or airfields, airfields are awful because your chance of surviving an airfield attack are pretty remote because it is flat

13:00 and opened but anyhow SEATO didn't come to pass. We would go there, we were never given a fair go in this way that if you had an exercise in Bangkok or in SEATO we were the attackers. If we had been running it ourselves as a bomber squadron we would have gone in low, very low and we would have got in and no one would have seen us until we had dropped our bombs against a lot of the targets

13:30 but we weren't allowed to do that, we had to go at thirty thousand feet. So the fighters could shoot us down and they could say to the Thais, 'we have got a great air defence system here and Bangkok is well protect it,' it was bull shit really but we were forced to do this. The same as operations or training against the navy later on with F111s. Every time we did an exercise against the navy you would see in the

14:00 headlines in the paper 'navy shoot down four F111s' we would have fired a missile sixty miles out, they would not have seen us, this is when we had a carrier but we had to then continue on to give their air defences a chance to train. Then they would say 'they shot all these F111s down' nonsense.

What is this culture that you are given certain operating modes and you

14:30 **are supposed to stick by them. Surely anything goes if it works?**

No, I mean you should adopt that system. In our exercise in Malaysia we had two fighter squadrons on the base and they did not want to take off and find there was nothing to shoot at because they couldn't see anything and the radar didn't pick it up so we had to play those games, it was training the fighters as well as ourselves. In

15:00 reality we would have never gone that way if we had to go to war and be shot at unless ordered by the superior headquarters to do it and the bomber screen continued to go at high level, the New Zealanders and the Brits, but we wouldn't have gone that way and we didn't do it that way and as I say we got our bombing down to fifty metres. When I got to Vietnam and we were doing these daylight things, we were bombing

15:30 generally from three thousand feet but we were fifty metres and it wasn't good enough because you could see immediately what was happening and you were missing targets particularly in line. There would be a string of targets along a canal edge and if you were fifty metres off you may as well not go, it didn't do any harm to man or beast. We had to get it down and I

16:00 couldn't see how we could do it. The bomb sights, we never looked at we just bombed until we got very bad bombs and someone else would do it. Firstly you would say the crew stuffed up so then they'd go out the next day and the same thing would happen so it must be the bomb system and then you would have it recalibrated and a string line. In Vietnam I had them string a line every day after

16:30 every mission, if there was a bad bomb dropped once, the whole thing was recalibrated. I as squadron commander saw every bomb drop, took a photo of it, the target and where the bomb dropped and people used to get their behind kicked and threatened to be sent home if they went on dropping bad bombs and we got the thing down to twenty metres which people would have thought was impossible

for a Canberra to do but we did.

17:00 If it was one that required great accuracy in line we would bomb from a thousand feet which people said to be stupid because you copped small arms fire and everything else but the small arms fire the Canberra could take a lot of because it was a good solid aeroplane.

How heavily armed was the Canberra against for the pilot?

The fuel tanks, we had nitrogen suppression of the tanks so a bullet

17:30 through there didn't set the whole thing on fire. The pilot, we put armament on the bottom of the seat which meant we had to take the water bottle out because that raised it that much and we had to take the water bottle out and go without it but we were flying over land so that didn't matter if it was raining. With all this, what insistence of mine and good bombing and

18:00 berating anyone that missed out, I got myself into trouble. My navigator and I were going to a target and we got a call up to go to a village where the Viet Cong had taken over the village and kicked everyone out and had a headquarters in this village. We came back and it was a clear beautiful day and the village was on the side of a river and I thought, 'what a fantastic target and it is full of Viet Cong down there, this is beaut.'

18:30 We went along and lined up and everything going for us and my navigator stuffed up somehow, all the bombs were in the river bang, bang, bang, eight bombs along the line about fifty to one hundred meters out from the village and I was absolutely furious. We got back and there was nothing we could do about it, I felt stupid. A few months later someone came to me, "What are we going to do, are we going to do a squadron Christmas card?" "Yes,

19:00 get one, give me a look at it." The first one that came along was this photograph of this target and my bombs along there with a note 'missed you at Christmas'.

The role of the Canberra as a bomber, what was the bomb load?

The bomb load was six one thousand pounders that we had, they were British World War II bombs,

19:30 two five hundred pound British bombs on the wing tip, so it was six thousand and one thousand, seven pounds, that was a good bomb load. As a matter of interest we were looking to get rid of those bombs, we had twenty six thousand of them before Vietnam started and we were going to pay something like ten shillings a pound for them to be taken out and dumped somewhere way out in the ocean because we

20:00 thought we had to get new bombs. Vietnam came along and they were great bombs, they were much better than the American seven hundred and fifty pounders that we bought afterwards. We dropped all those and as I said they were beaut, the five hundred pounders weren't worth a thing, if they weren't on the target they were pretty useless but the thousand pounders were wonderful. Then we bought the Americans and when we got the American bombs and we couldn't put the seven hundred and fifty pounders on

20:30 the wing tips so we just went on with six seven hundred and fifty pounders. We were asked to look at a modification for putting the seven hundred and fifty pounders on the wing but I rejected that because we were paying the Americans a lot of money, we were paying for every bomb plus an administrative charge, we were paying them for our fuel, for our rations that we drew. I think every American on the base assumed we were getting it all for free I mean we were just like the Koreans and everything was given to us, it wasn't, we paid a lot of money.

21:00 We get some good targets and a lot of rubbish, why spend another eight sorties a day and two extra bombs that is sixteen bombs seven hundred and fifty pounders and we are paying a lot of money for them so let's just press on with a bomb load of six seven hundred and fifty pounders, which is what we did.

What other sorts of ordinance were you dropping?

That is all.

21:30 Flares if you wanted to take flares on a particular mission, that was OK but generally it was just bombs, we didn't have anything else. We tried VT fused [proximity fuse] bombs, which was an Australian bomb, this was one that you could set to go off above the ground and you could set the height forty, fifty or one hundred feet and it was spread out and it was good if there were troops down there. But the Americans had tried that and they had been unsuccessful and they lost a few planes before Vietnam in

22:00 dropping these things and it hadn't worked. We developed it here and it supposedly worked but every time we took them they would give us targets that needed penetration, it was just stupid, here we wanted something soft targets, huts or people or whatever. It would be targeted for something and you would need to penetrate from bunkers it was stupid.

22:30 I complained to the 7th Air Force about this and they picked out a target for me to hit one day and it was going to be examined and evaluated. I went out with these six VT fused bombs and dropped them from thirty thousand feet it might not have been thirty but it was high, twenty or twenty five thousand

feet, I have forgotten the exact height over a largish

23:00 target. So I dropped them and I wanted to see what happened and the bomb doors opened and as soon as I dropped the bomb I closed the throttles, left the bomb doors open and put the speed brakes out and went down as steeply as I could to get down and see what the effect was. I didn't see anything, and I said, "What in God's name has happened?" I couldn't believe that they hadn't gone off or what happened.

23:30 I tied everything up and pulled up and above me the bloody things had exploded in the air, I must have gone down through them and there were all these things in the air so we never used them after that. That was the last time VT fused bombs were used.

Did you ever get involved in using Napalm?

No, we didn't carry Napalm and now we are not allowed to use it.

24:00 **I believe the Canberra also had a fairly unique bomb bay door arrangement for its bomb bay door?**

No they used to open normally, no the Canberra use to open like that. No you are thinking of the F18s they had a roller door and the British Blackburn had a roller door and it would just swivel around.

You mentioned that the auto-pilot situation, what was that in the Canberra?

They didn't have one,

24:30 it was all manual flying which was a bit tiresome. You are sitting up at thirty thousand feet or more, we use to go from Darwin to Butterworth, we used to cruise fly and we would end up about forty eight thousand feet and it was incredibly cold but you had to fly it all the way and you are stamping your feet on the deck trying to get some feeling in them.

What was the range of the Canberra?

The Canberra, the range as distinct from radius of action

25:00 was about three thousand miles and this had a great, not the range in Vietnam, whereas the fighters would go to a target and they would be, a battle might be on between the ground forces and while they got settled to know who was there and they wanted to put down purple smoke or green smoke to mark the goodies' position, the fighters went off and said, 'we can't wait, we have got to go' and we could stay there for an hour or two hours if they wanted too and that was a great help because we were there

25:30 waiting for the moment we were needed to go in which was something, the only aircraft in Vietnam. While you might feel pleased with yourself about that then occasionally you might come up with three B52s and here we are carrying the six bombs I was just talking about and the three B52s each carrying one hundred and eight bombs in formation would just drop and see this three hundred and twenty bombs come out,

26:00 you think, 'what the hell am I doing here with eight bombs or six bombs.'

It is not something a lot of people would have seen, could you describe a bit what that looks like?

It is really awesome and that is a word that I don't use often. If I have seen anything that is awesome that really is to look at the ground. You can imagine about twenty or thirty yards apart or whatever they set and three aircraft dropping out hundreds of bombs along

26:30 and this is done on intelligence where they think the North Vietnamese or Viet Cong are in this area, or there is a headquarters there and they come over and do that yes it was absolutely tremendous.

What are the CEPs [circular error of probability] for that kind of bombing? What sort of accuracy does that have?

I don't think they were so concerned with accuracy, it hit the area and of course you could be a long way out, two thousand yards, yes well over

27:00 a mile and three of them line abreast formation it would cover a great deal of ground and you wouldn't want to be down there, it is an awesome sight but it did make you feel, 'I have got six bombs what good am I going to do' except we think we might be a bit more accurate.

That is a crucial point of about how 2 Squadron operated under your command especially. I could talk about that a bit more and I know that it has been dealt with a little bit already but I think we should deal with a bit more in detail. How much of your

27:30 **bombing for accuracy was pioneered in Malay before Vietnam?**

The bombing to get it from over one hundred meters to fifty meters happened in Malaysia and that was pretty well established but having been quite pleased with myself for getting that happening and when I got to Vietnam it was quite obvious it wasn't good enough and we went to these other lengths of getting

it and making people

28:00 realise that anything in excess of twenty was not good enough and then we started getting better targets. We had been sent out to hit fortifications where they thought there might have been fortifications and bunker systems but once we established that ability to be the only level bomber and put down a line of bombs and put them down with that accuracy we started getting much better targets and more of our targets were troops in contact.

28:30 Somewhere along the way during my time we had five hundred, we used to get bomb damming assessments that you saw ten sampans and so many yards fortifications and 'x' number of enemy killed by air and it would either be actual or estimated. If the forward air controller saw

29:00 say twenty enemy troops in an area or in a building and you bombed that part accurately, he would estimate that you would have probably had killed ten or actual he'd see bodies because he was sitting looking through binoculars and things. We had during my tour and I think it was about three quarters the way through five hundred killed by air

29:30 confirmed. I remember when we sent it to headquarters down in Saigon we got a signal back from the air commander saying, "Congratulations, are you heading for a thousand?" I used to look upon it that is what we were there for because every enemy soldier we killed by air was not going to knock one of our people off on the ground.

30:00 **We will get to Vietnam but I don't want to miss out on what happened in Malaya first. There weren't so many troops killed on the ground in Malay, it was more a scare?**

The bombing in Malaysia, we used to call it monkey murdering. The intelligence wasn't that good and there would be a thought that there was an enemy in a camp in this position so they would send off in the early days

30:30 Lincoln's to bomb the area or Canberras to bomb later and you would hit the jungle and never heard whether you hit anything or not. As far as I know there certainly was never any feedback and we assumed that it was probably the intelligence was duff. I think it was probably a great waste of money but it did at least keep them awake or cause them to shift camp regularly and all those sorts of things but I don't think it did any

31:00 particular good as far as causing great damage or casualties.

Under those conditions how is the accuracy of your bombing measured?

What in the jungle? In those days it was very difficult to measure because you were given a position and you would navigate to the position and you would have some certain landmarks

31:30 that have been picked out by reconnaissance. The landmark might be five miles away but you would get a certain angle from that and another landmark there and you would sort of know that is the area where the bombs have got to hit. It was as broad as that, it wasn't good at all and I doubt that the accuracy was any better than you would expect from that.

In the attempt to pioneer new bombing techniques

32:00 **which brought the accuracy from one hundred meters to fifty how were those measurements?**

We had our targets and we had a range and we had a range near us at Butterworth that the RAF and ourselves and others used and it was floating targets and we had people on islands measuring where the bombs hit and they were giving you accuracy. We began to, on three occasions sunk this big target which caused the RAF to be

32:30 a bit browned off because it costs money. This is when we were pulling up to eight or ten thousand feet and dropping bombs. We tried all sorts of things obviously high level bombing wasn't doing it, low level bombing wasn't good enough if you were dropping bombs because if it were a target say an airfield you were open to the small arms fire and all sorts of rubbish could be thrown up at you

33:00 so you wanted to get above that so ten thousand feet seemed to be a pretty good compromise provided you didn't spent too long there because there were still surface to air missiles that could hack you. So we figured if we made it a thirty second run in and then down and out as quickly as you could go and that was the way to go and that's how we started to get that accuracy. Just having a good IP, good reconnessence at the area,

33:30 a good IP, target four hundred knots and release your bombs and out so you are there no more than thirty seconds and that is a long time if someone has done their, if the people on the ground are good manning but never the less we got the accuracy and it was better to do that than go and miss, you may as well not go it was so crazy. We practiced that regularly almost every day

34:00 and the whole squadron became very good at it.

There are any number of reasons for a squadron wanting to get their accuracy down, they range from economic to morale concerns I guess, how much of each is involved in those decisions?

The basic thing is if I am going out to a target and I am going to put my life at risk and I know before I go that the accuracy is such that the chances of doing me damage

34:30 are negligible, why in Gods name should I go and face this and bring my squadron with me so we have got to find something and of course we will be sent back the next day and the next day until we get the damn thing. So we have got to find some way of doing it and getting rid of it in one go and with as small a loss as possible to ourselves. In the first place to cut your own losses you have got to get rid of the target quickly

35:00 so you don't have to revisit and everyone understands that and obviously everyone wants to do it, apart from the pride in the fact that you can do it. We had two other squadrons in competition with us a New Zealand and a Brit squadron and we would like to think we were the best. We were finding our own, we were at least by ourselves at Butterworth and they were both stationed at Tanga so really we didn't see that much of them

35:30 in operations and we wanted to do better.

What about the other side of the moral question in that there might have been inaccurate bombs landing on civilians?

There weren't, in the jungle I don't know what was down there but that was not for us to work out if we were given a target. I think once you have squadrons at that

36:00 levels trying to work out whether it is right to attack a target here or there, you are going to have an undisciplined force that is not going to try and certainly not do its best. I think that would be an atrocious way to behave for a squadron or a squadron commander. He might if he feels it is wrong go to the headquarters and say, "I think we are probably killing

36:30 people we do not need to kill and we should not be doing this," but then is told to go ahead and do it you can either say, 'well take me out or I will resign, I wont do it.' But you have got to leave that to higher authority. That sounds like I just do as I am told, orders is orders, I don't think any of the people I know would have gone and bombed a village full of people knowing they were full of people because there might

37:00 be some enemy amongst this, I don't think you would get Australians to do that. I don't think you could ever get Australians to have a melee incident, I couldn't imagine telling Australian troops to kill this bunch of women and kids, they would say, "You are out of your mind sir," they might even shoot you, but air war is so different because you don't generally see what is happening down there except the intelligence

37:30 that you are given. I have bombed that village I was telling you about, I was told that the enemy had gone in there and set up a headquarters and the villagers had been vanished and pushed out, I accepted that, I wouldn't know but that was the intelligence we had and we went and hit it except we missed that one.

Was there ever a time in your career that you had to question a target that you had been given?

38:00 No. There have been times when we have waited and asked with the forward air controller to check that this has been cleared, this target and we might have waited twenty minutes in an area and had it confirmed but never one that

38:30 I was told, "No we are not sure," or whatever. On about three occasions we have asked that question.

Tape 8

00:30 **Just before we go on to Vietnam, when you first joined up with 2 Squadron what sort of Squadron were you introduced to?**

I was introduced to a squadron that was a bit like an aero club. Butterworth was a nice place to live, people lived well and had servants and flying was good fun.

01:00 We were in SEATO and those exercises we knew were farcical because we were just showing that the defences in Thailand were good and they weren't. We went on trips to work with the Americans. We went to Okinawa and spent a week there with the 13th Bomb Squadron that had Canberra type aircraft, B57s coming down from Japan

01:30 and we flew each other's aeroplanes and I flew a F100. You know how Australia is if a bomb drops outside the area, it is almost a court marshal offence if it is an off miss and the dreadful enquiries go on. I flew this F100 and went to the bombing range and I hadn't done a tossed bomb before and they said pull 4 G and the

02:00 bomb flies up to its target. Anyhow I threw this bomb and it went, the American with me, he said, “I think it has gone into the village,” I thought, “Oh my God, the strange air force and I visit and I have done this.” He said, “Don’t worry about it it will save them going down to the bomb range and pinching it for lead,”

02:30 it didn’t worry him in the slightest and I didn’t want to do any more. A strange aeroplane, to get in it for the first time and then go and do a toss bombing was a stupid thing to do.

Who was operating those F100s?

The Americans. They brought their B57s down also and we flew with those and that was the meeting, the tours. We used to do those

03:00 enjoyable sort of exercises and then we would fly to Hong Kong occasionally on navigational exercise and spend a weekend in Hong Kong so life wasn’t too bad. The serious thought of getting our operations professional, people were keen to do once we thought about it and got around to doing it, I think everyone was quite proud of themselves.

03:30 It was a bit of an aero club but I suppose that goes from time to time and that was depending on the CO.

Who was the CO when you arrived?

A fellow called Steele when I arrived and then later on came

04:00 I know him very well he only died about three months ago.

Colt Steele, I have heard of him before, what was your opinion of him?

04:30 It was a very poor opinion of him and he was a very poor CO and interested in Colt Steele and not particularly interested in the squadron. I enjoyed that in a way because it left me as flight commander to run the squadron. He was a trader, he would buy things and sell things. We went to Hong Kong and coming back from Okinawa he bought a heap of booze, filled his bomb bay up with booze from the Americans because it was cheap. We got to Hong Kong

05:00 and he and the rest of team went to town. As flight commander I had to see that the maintenance was done on the aeroplanes and they were refuelled and everything so I didn’t get into Hong Kong at all. I said to Colin, “I wanted to get in, I wanted to buy a camera” and he said, “What sort do you want? I have got one I will sell you.” He sold it to me and I took that back to Butterworth and was

05:30 pleased with my buy and I am wondering down to Penang I think a week later and my wife said to me, “What did Colin charge you for that?” and I said, ”That’ and she said, “Let’s go into a shop and see what it is worth.” It was about one hundred bucks cheaper in there, I couldn’t believe that he would have done that to me. I said to his navigator, “He wouldn’t surely to God do that to me, he knew I was out there working,” he said, “You don’t know Colin.” Yes he was dreadful bloke.

06:00 **Where did the drive to professionalise 2 Squadron come from if that is what happened?**

Jeffrey Hartwell was the base commander then and he was a wonderful man really, long pre-war airman and he became an air vice marshal and Director of Plans

06:30 I don’t know we were sitting around, he used to come and fly with us occasionally and I was talking like this, “I can’t understand how the Canberras have gone on so long with this sort of bombing and things,” and he said, “But we didn’t have a David Evans.” I said, “Don’t be sarcastic sir,” and he said, “I wasn’t being sarcastic” which wasn’t very nice of him and I said, “I don’t know

07:00 I think people just got into the habit of doing it this way, hadn’t taken the trouble at looking at the targets and what it would take and how it would take the task was.” Dalywater was the CO, Sam Dalywater he took over from Steele, he was good, and he got us into trouble occasionally. We went down to Tanger to do an exercise with the squadrons down there and the Brits ignored us virtually, they had a dining in

07:30 night or a dinner dance or something and didn’t deign to have a drink with us or invite us so the New Zealanders thought, ‘to hell with this,’ so they joined us and stayed away. Later in the night I remember Sam driving a vehicle and we had taken the piano out of the mess and put it on the back of the vehicle and took it out through the gate to the New Zealanders and invited them back to the married quarters so we took the piano with us to have some music.

08:00 The guard on the gate didn’t quite know what to do but off we went. The next morning we start and we had a late night and the next morning we started off to fly back to Butterworth and started up together to taxi out and go back in formation. As soon as we started up we got an order to close down, the officer in commanding, the tango it came down, the commanding officer to report to him at once. Same went up there and

08:30 the group captain said that we had stolen the piano from the mess and we weren’t leaving until it had been found. Sam said, “I don’t know, we know nothing about the piano,” he said, “Have a look in the mess.” They opened up the mess and had a look and the piano was there, we had put it back but on the

roof which must have been twenty feet high was a big two.

What about the way in which the Squadron worked in more of an interpersonal level where were the relationships like between

09:00 **the different members of the different parts of the squadron?**

Excellent between the air crew and the ground staff was as close as could be. I don't know how much you know about air forces but I think we are quite different to the army, the relationship between officers and airmen is totally different to what you would find in the army and to a certain extent the navy. You depend on

09:30 airmen them for your safety, they look after the aeroplane and they are as proud of their airplanes. The moment you land they say, "How is it sir? How is 22 today?" "Good, no problem, radio all right because it is new." They know it, they are not dumb clucks, they are very bright fellows they really are, outstandingly good mechanics and engineers and

10:00 to be on a base with RAF or Americans and you can see the difference. The Americans said to me in Vietnam, an American Engineer officer who we took around our squadron and saw our blokes at work and he said, "If I had one man in ten that was of the equivalent of your average bloke with experience" he said, "I would be delighted," and we are blessed in that way and people realised it.

10:30 There is no feeling of being subordinate to anyone, obviously by rank but not in our personal terms its very very good. The main thing that affects everyone in a good run squadron is the spirit of the squadron, it reflects on everyone and I think 2 Squadron has always been very good.

How did you enjoy, or otherwise living

11:00 **at Butterworth?**

I quite enjoyed it, had a daughter born there and it was quite pleasant. I think at the end of two years, at the end of the second year we would have come home but I was posted to England to do a six months' course and I just came back to Australia, I think I had two weeks to find a house for the family to live in and go off and do this course which I did but living at Butterworth was fine.

11:30 Servants, cook, gardener, housemaid, life was very pleasant, golf course and played golf.

You hadn't been brought up as a pukka sahib?

No.

How did you respond to that?

Very readily, I guess I liked it, it was very good. Australians generally treated the servants much better and we paid them more

12:00 and gave them time off in conditions they had never enjoyed, certainly from the Chinese and not from the Brits to the extent that we looked after them and paid them and saw that they had time off so I think we were popular employees.

Living conditions and relationships are all fairly good, what problem did the aero club nature, the unprofessionalism of the squadron bring with it?

It didn't bring any because

12:30 we weren't required to go to war or do anything demanding. I think our marker bombing technique that was sure as hell demanding and the bomber stream went over and still dropped bombs reasonably inaccurate but 2½ squadrons going over, they would do some damage to the target provided the target was marked but you would never find it worse than that and that was

13:00 quite good. Then we started to get the accuracy down people started to think, 'gee we are good and we will be some use,' and get the spirit and that was quite good.

I want to skip forward. I know you spent a period

13:30 **in America and you might come back too, when you arrived in Vietnam back in 2 Squadron, how much had things changed in what way?**

The squad was operational, people were deadly serious about their job, the squadron was doing the night sky spot bombing which they did really well but no-one really knew what the accuracy of it was. You go to thirty six thousand feet and you have a fellow telling you, "No, one degree left, hold, steady there and

14:00 coming up to bomb's release," etc and then you release bombs thirty six thousand feet or thirty seven thousand feet in day time or night time and you go home and you had no idea whether you hit anything or you didn't there is no pride in that. People take pride, we would fly within half a degree and our speed is spot on and we were bloody good at it and they were but it

14:30 is not enough to really gloat about it would happen occasionally and occasionally you would get some feedback that, 'this target was hit last night, well done Aussies, you did this,' but that was pretty rare. They wanted a job done, a formation bombing of only two aircraft against what was suspected battalion

15:00 headquarters up at Nikor up near the DMC [Distribution Management Centre] and we didn't fly, Australia didn't fly night formation and I don't know why. I accepted the task and I said I would go and I would lead it but I would fly number two, in other words the other bloke would be the lead aeroplane although I was the leader after number two and

15:30 we hit that target which I understand later but I could never get it confirmed but we did hit the target and there were forty North Vietnamese soldiers killed. I sent someone up to ICOR to find out and get that confirmed but he couldn't find anyone who knew anything about it but we did the task. That was sent back

16:00 and in the squadron reports going back to Australia this obviously got someone upset because I got a signal saying, 'we do not do formation flying at night and you are to be aware that formation flying in tropical conditions etc,' which annoyed me. I sent a signal back saying, "I was asked to do night formation, Americans do it every night and I was too embarrassed to

16:30 say we didn't do formation at night so we went and did it. I am well aware of the limitations and dangers of it but I didn't want to be ashamed of the RAAFs inability." I sent that back and didn't hear any more.

I just want to get for the Archives, can you describe a bit about Phan Rang and where it was and what you were doing from there,

17:00 **the general situation on the ground when you arrived in Vietnam?**

The general situation on the ground, it was the same as it ever was, we never had if you are talking about the ground war it was an impossible war to win because fighting wars people take initiatives, generals like to find where the enemy is and go after them and do a left hook around them. If we had a Macarthur or anyone allowed to do what they wanted to do in Vietnam they would have probably pushed up from South Vietnam into the north

17:30 and they would have probably with Americas maritime power landed troops further up and had a pincer movement against them, all sorts of things or into Cambodia and done those things but they were not allowed to go into North Vietnam. We weren't allowed to bomb or the Allied Air Force were not allowed to bomb Haiphong Harbour or Hanoi, they were limited to south of the 19th

18:00 parallel. American reconnaissance saw Russian surface to air missiles being put in up north and while they were being constructed asked for approval to attack them and get them and that was refused and I mean that's unbelievable but it happened saying, "If we don't attack them and they get the message we won't shoot it." Those missiles shot down hundreds of American aeroplanes and killed a lot of pilots. This is

18:30 where it became an immoral war and I think it was disgraceful that we allowed that to happen. We should never get into a war when we are with the Americans and we don't have a say in what we do. I was pleased to see in this Gulf War we had a big say in what we did and what we wouldn't do so we have learnt something. It was quite disgraceful, we were at Phan Rang supporting

19:00 the troops, fighting as army support, tactical support. When Vietnam installations were found we attacked those and there were lots of them, tunnel systems, ammunition storing places. The roads were pretty useless because you would bomb a road one day and look at it two days later and they had filled it in or went around it.

19:30 We were doing something that was satisfying that we were not winning the war or even anything towards it but saving the lives of people fighting on the ground I think and helping in that way and so it was useful and one could get some satisfaction out of it. It was gross stupidity that anyone could see that we weren't trying to win the war and the American President had said, "We are not trying to win the war, we are trying to see that

20:00 South Vietnam is not overrun." You can't fight a war that way, I was there when Tet [Tet Offensive] came along. It started in a curious way to me because General Vincent, the Australian Commander in Vietnam was finishing and coming home and all the COs were invited down to Saigon headquarters for a farewell party for him. I flew down with the navigator and we went to the party and we were staying at the Embassy Hotel and got

20:30 back there about midnight and there was my navigator and myself and John Hubble who was the Tactical Air Commander with the Australian Task Force, and other staff, four of us in the room. We were going back to Phan Rang in the morning and he was going back to Nui Dat. We were getting undressed and going to bed and there was firing outside and I said, "There is firing outside?"

21:00 and Hubble said, "No it's bloody kids letting crackers off," we got into bed and went to sleep. About four o'clock in the morning I was being woken up, "Let us get out of here, the white mice are firing outside" and they were outside the hotel, they were firing and the American Embassy they had broken into was

only one hundred yards up the way. A car from headquarters, the Air Commodore Ginty Lush sent a car for us

21:30 and we managed to get out to the airport but I wasn't allowed to take off because there was fighting on the end of the airfield so I went, 'where to go?' We had a hut there, Australia had a hut and I couldn't get in but my pistol and my flying clothing was in there and I couldn't get anyone at the Embassy at our headquarters

22:00 so broke the lock. We got in and got our guns and I felt more comfortable and we joined some American soldiers who were in the revetments beside us and laid there with them. About midday I got sick of this and went up to the flight operations and said, "Look my aircraft is needed back at Phan Rang for operations tonight" which was bulldust, so they reluctantly let me take off because

22:30 there was still fighting on the outskirts of the field so I took off and got back to Phan Rang. That was the start of the Ted offensive and did a lot of operations after that.

That take off was a little bit hairy was it not?

It was a steep climb and probably the steepest climb I have ever gone out for that very reason, with fighting going on, but it wasn't hazardous and we got away.

What did you see of that

23:00 **fighting that was supposedly going on in that airfield?**

I didn't look too closely, I was mainly concentrating on getting as much power and the best angle of climb I could and turning away from the area where the fighting was going on. I didn't hang around looking at it.

Was that a new experience for you in a way being an air war is different from being on the ground during the Ted offensive?

Yes it was and the oxygen storage tank which was about

23:30 two hundred yards from where I was with the Americans up there got hit and went off with a big bang. I wasn't feeling very comfortable about then about being on the ground in that situation. If I had been with Australian troops I would have probably felt better but the Americans seemed to be that brilliant and they had guarding airfields people called air police. I know

24:00 at Phan Rang if any movement over that side of the airfield might have been a kilometre away and they started firing at something everyone would fire, they would fire out just not knowing what they were firing at. The best troops there were the airfield defence guards that I had a flight of and I was very fortunate in the flight lieutenant that was commanding that flight

24:30 was a an ex Royal Air Force wing commander who had been in a Royal Air Force regiment and he knew a great deal about it and he looked at the plan for the protection of the airfield and said, "If this is ever put into practice the Americans are going to kill more people of their own than they would ever kill the enemy," because people were given rifles, no training and he said, "It would be chaotic."

25:00 I spoke to the colonel running the place the wing commander and told him and I said, "I had this bloke and he had a look at the thing and he accepted this and I wish he would give us a hand in working out a plan for the defence for the base" which he did a fellow called Foster came up with a decent plan. Our blokes they were keen too and they wanted to go out chasing the Viet Cong. Our job was to guard our aeroplanes inside

25:30 the base but they plagued me and said, "Can we go outside the wire?" We used to get mortared I suppose about twice a month. The enemy would come up close enough to fire about four or five mortars into the base and then they would bugger off and our blokes reckoned that they should go out and try and catch them. I approved them going out the wire to four thousand yards and no further which they used to do every night

26:00 we would have a thing out. Then he plagued me in the mess, "Can we go a bit further sir?" I said, "You can't go any further" and they weren't allowed to go any further but they did that and they were excellent and superbly trained. Because we had them we knew what was going on, he was in the ground defence, he used to go to their briefings every day of what happened the night before and what we would do. Just having them

26:30 there got us into the loop that we wouldn't have been otherwise and we felt comfortable having them.

What did they find on their four hundred yard patrols?

On one occasion they found people setting up an attack but they attacked them and then they disappeared, they didn't get any but they stopped the mortar attack.

Can you describe the situation of Phan Rang, describe

27:00 **where it was and obviously it was surrounded by jungle is that right?**

Yes, on one side it was jungle but on the other side it was just flattish country off into the village which was some distance away. The place was closed at night, all the Vietnamese people that worked there were sent off at six o'clock and no one went off the base. We were told that the

27:30 Viet Cong, as against the North Vietnamese who were in the village would come out at night. The other little drama, not much of a trauma, not terribly important but I suppose it was important to me at the time off the end of the strip about a mile down it was a big base, there were six thousand people on it. There were B57s,

28:00 three F100 squadrons and three transport squadrons of C123s so a lot of Americans six thousand and we were two hundred and eighty but we did our own cooking, we got American rations but we had our own cooks and our own kitchens, we had our own power. We were totally self contained and we ate a hell of a lot better than the Americans because our cooks was good.

28:30 People came through and got a plate and a knife and fork and sat down at the table and dined properly. The Americans used to go through with those awful trays that they slapped everything on. We would have a choice of three or four courses every meal only because the cooks would save some of this and gradually build up a reserve and we used to supplement it from Butterworth with transport coming through.

29:00 A mile off the end of the strip was a brothel area. When I first got to the squadron and took over and going around and finding out what happened. I went to the doctor to see how the health of the squadron was and I found we were having about eleven cases of VD [Venereal Disease] every month. I thought, 'this is no good, here we are, in the course of a year we will have

29:30 half the squadron and some people would probably have been back several times and we couldn't afford this,' and it was not a fair go to the troops to leave it so I put it out of bounds to our squadron. The blokes said, "Come on sir, we don't want to go down there for any of that but we want to have a look." I said, "Hard bloody luck, it's out of bounds."

30:00 I was serious and that stayed that way and I had a very good chaplain Father Patrick McCormack and he was very good and I said, "Look if you want to go down, come and tell me, get a bunch of you and Father McCormack will take you if that's all you want to do is have a beer." I think there was only one

30:30 fellow picked up in the strip area by American SPs [Service Police] and brought back who was in trouble. Fellows accepted that and I said, "It has nothing to do with morals, I am not looking after your morals but these are the chances, these are the rate of VD and that is not a fair go and I am not prepared to have blokes go down there and take that risk of getting it, so it is out of bounds."

31:00 **How much did your squadron have to do with other forces?**

Not much because we had our own messes we had our own officers and sergeants. The place was unbelievably bare and rubble and it was rocky, it was flattish were we were, we were all together, airmen's quarters down there and officers up there and sergeants' in the middle. It was depressing because it was

31:30 dusty and not a blade of grass. There wasn't a blade of grass on the whole base apart from around the chapel where the Americans had to pay $10,000 to have some put there. I said to the equipment officer when I walked around with him, I said, "I want to see grass growing here" and he said, "You can't grow grass there, it is impossible in that soil." I said, "No, go down to the river and get top soil,

32:00 take blokes down there and bring top soil back, if you can buy it, buy, if you can't, dig it up." "Oh we can't do that," we did and they went down and got it, I sent a signal down to Australia, 'what sort of grass will grow here?' and people reacted very promptly. A Hercules within two weeks came up with more grass seed than needed and it was

32:30 the shutters of our area blue to be different and blue for the air force. We got grass by chipping the grass down by the river and bringing it back as canturf sort of stuff and grass seed mixed with that and within a few months we had grass growing. The American construction squadron, Red Horse we got

33:00 to know them well and I was talking to their colonel and I said, "If we could get some concrete we could sure use it." He said, "We often have some and we have got our trucks ready and the job is not ready and it can't wait around forever but are you sure you could handle it if we brought it up unannounced?" I said, "Don't worry." He must have gone away because next morning about seven o'clock he was there, "Hey, Aussie

33:30 I've got some concrete here, where do you want it?" The blokes whipped out, we had marked out where we wanted paths and within twenty minutes they were able to start pouring it and I think that impressed them greatly and after that we could get almost anything from them. We got concrete and we put paths down and we had grass growing and it was almost a delight to see. Then one night in the

34:00 airmen's mess, I went down as I did about once a week to have a beer and the blokes were sitting outside the mess because its very hot in summer and said, "Sir is it all right for us to sit out there?" I said, "Of course it is" and he said, "That's good because the last CO wouldn't allow us because we could be seen drinking from the road as people went past." I said, "Sit out there but it is not a very nice place

to sit

34:30 it's rocky and dusty," and I said, "Why don't you build something? Look the officers are building their thing" and he said, "Yes but we could never get the material to do that, it is all right for officers to get that." I said, "Look, you give me a plan of what you want to build and I will get you the stuff." They come up with a plan and within a month the Red Horse came good with cement so they had a

35:00 lovely outdoor area, umbrellas for it and they were able to sit out under that. They built themselves a bar and they did their best to keep me out of the bar for a couple of weeks because they wanted to surprise me with the bar, they got vinyl from somewhere and it was real plush so they were happy. We built a chapel and we had our church services

35:30 there every Sunday, called St Christopher's. Americans used to bring their VIP visitors around to look at our area and the blokes were proud of that, it stood out with the blue shutters and then we had 'RAAF' on white rocks on the grass. The point I was going to make that we all lived together ate out of the same kitchen,

36:00 ate the same food, I don't think the American squadron commanders would of had the slightest idea of where their fellows lived.

It sounds like and don't get me wrong but you didn't have the utmost respect for the Americans and yet you were working for them?

I had respect for them, we were working for them and we were sent their to work with them and we were under the command of 7th Air Force that's true but we were very independent on our base and we were

36:30 proud of the fact that we had our own area and our own kitchens and our own messes. Again I was telling you earlier about the differences between fighter pilots and bomber pilots and how they dressed and this probably didn't go over very well but it had to be accepted, but I wouldn't allow flying suits in the mess at night because blokes would finish work for the day, come up at five o'clock and sit there and still be sitting in the mess drinking when the bar closed

37:00 and so I said, "You can't come into the mess in a flying suit and you have got to change out of the working dress of the day at six o'clock at night." The working dress of the day was shorts, khaki shirts and long socks, "Change into civilian shorts, you can still be in shorts and open neck shirt but if you are staying in uniform

37:30 you wear long trousers and long sleeved shirts" and no one wanted to wear that. That was not popular, 'this is an operational area,' and all this crap. I said, "But it is still an officers' mess." The Americans came down and in the end our blokes were proud of the fact that and say to the Americans, "You can't come into the mess in flying suits." A good friend I met in Okinawa he was there in a B57 squadron

38:00 I invited him down and he said, "Have I got to wear civilian clothes?" and I said, "You can wear a uniform," but he didn't have anything, he only had flying suits there. Our people said to the Americans, "You can wear shorts but you can't wear short socks, you have got to wear long socks," so they used to bring socks from Butterworth when they would go over and give them to the Americans so they could come to our mess.

38:30 That was something I supposed that started off being unpopular again but we were all very proud of it in the end that we kept those standards.

What jokes or different cultural jokes if you like came up between the Australians and the Americans, did they call them names or?

I don't think so but we had a couple of villains. An Irishman he was an RAAF steward, one of our blokes, we would visit the American clubs but we used to sell beer for

39:00 ten cents a can, the Americans paid thirty cents a can and their officer's mess was losing money. I remember the colonel saying, "God damn it, Dave, how can it sell beer like this, we sell it for thirty cents and we are losing money, $3,000 a month, God damn Vietnamese." It wasn't the Vietnamese it was his own people their own mess sergeants and people who were wronging them. "I could give you a warrant officer who could run your place, let's share the profit."

39:30 That was joking but it was incredible. They paid for their meals also on an account, they would get a bill when they sat down and had a meal. That was the difference in price for beer so we had ten cents a can and then there was never a free night because if you had free nights they would leave half cans everywhere half drunk and they had to pay five cents if they didn't finish it.

Tape 9

00:31 **Can you tell us the squadron call sign?**

We were the magpies and I was magpie one one.

How did you select the magpies?

Our squadron crest is a magpie, what is called a piping shrike but it is a magpie and so it was a pretty obvious choice. Before I got there, “What is the call sign?” and they selected magpie

01:00 because of the squadron crest.

Did you have any other particular use of code words when you were talking to the American Air Traffic Control?

No, the magpies just as the wallabies were well known were the Caribous. Wallaby airlines was well known throughout Vietnam and magpies became just as well known, particularly with the forward air controllers and

01:30 we had our favourites and people would say, “This is a good target for magpies.”

Can you describe the code words you would use to call in on a target and the words perhaps the code words used for enemy aircraft or anti aircraft positions?

No, we didn’t bother to use code words because everything was happening immediately,

02:00 the facts all had names like ‘Chris’ or ‘David’ and David three four was the fact you contacted when you got in the target area, “David three four, magpie one one we are ready for business,” and he would give you the co-ordinates and describe the target and say it was, “Troops in contact and wait until they put up green

02:30 smoke marking friendly positions and bomb to the west of that,” or, “Was a target of a line of bunkers down here on the edge of the canal stretching from here to there” or “When I put smoke down I will direct you after that and I suggest you run in from the south.” We might say, “It seemed to come in from the north” and they’d say, “Yes

03:00 point five but there are anti aircraft guns there suggest you would be better to come in from the south” and so we’d do that and, “I am putting my smoke in now,” and then we would go to the smoke doing what he said. Depending on the sort of target you would decide if it was a line like that, you would say, “I will bomb from one thousand feet because I will get a better accuracy on the line.”

03:30 He might say, “There is ground fire in this area, you might want to do it at three thousand” and the individual captain would make up their mind what they did but generally we would go one thousand for a line but if it was a jungle sort of target. The Australians called us out one day and we went down to bomb their area and it was

04:00 put down ‘clear a DZ [DMZ - Demilitarised Zone].’ I objected strongly to going down to let the soldiers chop down the trees, ‘we are not going to waste bombs clearing a landing zone for them,’ so we didn't go and do any more and they didn’t call us again. Of course the Australians got bombed by American aircraft they had called in and they were very very reluctant to call in are after that. We went from the DMC where the one

04:30 aircraft that was shot down and the CO and his navigator got out of it, they ejected but that was in the DMZ right down the four court right down the other end so we ranged all over the southern part of the thing.

Can you tell us of the incident of the loss of the aircraft?

They were bombing from thirty six thousand feet by day and surface to air missile hit them

05:00 they ejected and saw the aeroplane going down totally on fire, and they landed in an area which was an enemy area, we didn't have troops in the area at all and the pilot and the navigator were separated by about a kilometre because the navigator went first and by the time the pilot went they had travelled that distance but they spoke to each other

05:30 on the radio. The Americans thought for a start that the enemy may well have known where they were, they didn’t know exactly themselves the Americans but they had a good idea and were waiting for a rescue chopper to come in and shoot it down so they stayed there for nearly twenty four hours

06:00 and then they called up again and were picked up without any incident at all. The CO had hurt his knee and was sent back to Australia for medical treatment and stayed back and the navigator also, they didn’t go back to the squadron, I don’t know why but they didn’t. The CO was hurt but not badly.

Were you there at the time?

No he was the CO.

06:30 **While you were there what were the losses while you were there?**

We didn’t have any. We got lots of hits from ground fire but not an aircraft damaged beyond repair or

shot down and the repairs could be done on the spot. The other one that went missing had never been heard of which still

07:00 amazes me because they were bombing at night from a height and called ‘bombs gone’ and turning for home and that is the last we ever heard from them. Nothing of that aeroplane has ever turned up, not a bolt or a bit which is extraordinary.

Can you tell us one of the raids, particularly a raid that sticks in your mind when you were hit by ground fire?

The raid that

07:30 sticks in my mind was a good one, not because it was hit by ground fire but because it was only small arms fire but it was probably the most successful one we did and that was oddly enough down at Fulcore and it was late in the afternoon the fact we had a target. Enemies attacking a fort but they were a fair way from it, they would go away

08:00 and attack the fort and go back to where their rallying point was and he suggested again and it was one of those things, ‘don’t come that way because there will be ground fire,’ but it was by far the best approach to the target and we went down that way. I think from memory we got about seventeen enemy killed and confirmed and lots of sampans and secondary explosions from an ammunition

08:30 dump and we were absolutely delighted, my navigator and I, we came back they said, “What did you get airmen?” and we said, “Look at this lot sir.” The main thing was the seventeen enemy killed, six sampans and four secondary explosions. Secondary explosions are always good because you have hit something where they have been having their ammunition stored and

09:00 I had two little holes in the aeroplane where it was hit, it wasn’t terribly exciting but it was a very good result.

What did you fear?

Missiles more than anything and where there were .5 machine guns and they were a pretty big weapon. .5 we used those, another time

09:30 a fort was being attacked and the bomb sight, my navigator was not getting anything at all so I decided to dive bomb. Dive bombing as we used to do in Malaysia was always a fall back position, we didn’t like doing it because diving and pulling a G heavily would affect the bomb sight, it might put it out but if the bomb sight wasn’t looking good we would dive bomb.

10:00 To do it from five thousand feet and releasing at twenty two hundred feet you really needed to know the height of the ground and in fact you had to know the height of the ground because if you pulled out what was twenty two hundred feet and the ground was six hundred feet above sea level. We attacked down there and there were a bunch of trees about two hundred yards from the fort that they

10:30 were attacking and they all went down there and we hit that with two thousand pounders in the thousand pound days. I was unable to get any feedback from that, the fact that you hit the target perfectly and you didn’t get any feedback from it but that was another occasion where we were hit by ground fire and he warned us that the twin .5 calibre

11:00 down there. I worked off an ACT that was a son of a Vice Air Commodore Simon Ford and we were on our way to a target and he said, “You have just been taking ground fire” and he said, “They know they have been seen and they have gone into that hut, eight of them,” he said, “Stand by and I will see if I can get permission to hit that

11:30 instead of the target on the way to”, which he got and we got a direct hit on the damn hut. I must sound an aggressive bugger, I seem to be pleased with killing people don’t I? That is what we were there for, I suppose.

Yes, it was the objective I suppose. How important was, the body count by the Americans I guess this was an indication of success or otherwise?

It was to me, I

12:00 said to Chris that I thought that we were there to, it was frustrating to be confined to South Vietnam and I did ask if we could go into Cambodia because the Americans were going in there every night and I had a letter back from our Chief of the Air Staff who said ‘no’, he looked into when he got back but we couldn’t do that so we were confined to South Vietnam but there was a lot of fighting going on

12:30 with the enemy coming in and attacking places and then disappearing. The Americans were losing and we were losing people too, being killed in these encounters so I felt that our job was to kill as many enemy from the air as we could. We set about that more than anything else. Always wanting our targets to be troops in contact or where enemy formations were

13:00 and I say we had five hundred confirmed three-quarters the way through my tour so I felt we were doing something pretty useful.

How was that useful do you think?

How useful was it? If five hundred enemy soldiers were to attack an Australian battalion there would be casualties on both sides. We know we lost five hundred

13:30 of the army killed there and every one of the enemy that were killed by air was surely helping to save soldiers having to try and take casualties.

That wasn't the reason you were in Vietnam was it?

Yes it was.

To save soldiers?

No. It was support of land operations though. If we would have been able to take offensive action as bombers should and go to Hanoi and knock over stores and

14:00 that sort of thing which we should be doing or mining Haiphong Harbour that would have been great but we weren't allowed to do that, the Americans wouldn't allow it and this is why they lost the God damn war. What were we there to do? We were there to support the ground operations and how do you do that better than killing the enemy that are attacking our people? What else could we do?

It must have been frustrating knowing that essentially the

14:30 **or it must have crossed your mind, 'what are we all doing there?'**

I think to airmen it was incredibly frustrating and I've written a good deal about it and said, people say the Vietnam War was immoral, it was immoral because we were there getting our people killed and not allowed to do anything about it. The Americans lost fifty eight thousand killed and three hundred thousand wounded, God knows how many South Vietnamese were lost, we got

15:00 lost five hundred army people. That war could have been won, with the might America had it could have been won in six months. If we had of bombed the hell out of Hanoi and Haiphong Harbour where Russian ships were bringing in supplies for them. You couldn't stop bombing roads that was a waste of time they were tracks and they were carrying on, you couldn't stop that sort of

15:30 re-supply but we could have hit the factories and warehouses in Hanoi or wherever they were, but weren't allowed to.

Has a war ever been won solely on air power do you think?

I would say the Golf wars have both been won no solely on air power.

Sorry, I should have rephrased that I think thinking solely on Vietnam, do you think it could have been won on air power?

Absolutely. Well no not army air power,

16:00 I wouldn't claim that at all but air power could have given them great logistics problems by stopping them getting the supplies of war they needed to fight, it certainly would have demoralised them largely and had that been combined with the army being allowed to manoeuvre and go in and the navy to land troops wherever we wanted to take the initiative to stop them being able to go into sanctuaries

16:30 in Cambodia and not be allowed to follow them. Had the army been allowed to do that supported by a massive air power and at the same time a strategic air power against Haiphong and Hanoi and any other place they had headquarters and supplies, of course it could have been won.

The forces allied, arrayed against the North Vietnamese were overwhelming technologically

17:00 **powerful?**

They were powerful, the Americans had half a million troops in South Vietnam and had to wait there wondering what was the enemy going to do. There was no initiative with our forces saying, 'right-oh, we are going to attack these bastards, we will go through there and we will do this and bomb this,' we just had to wait there until they attacked. They would attack

17:30 and the Americans would react to it or the Australians or whoever, and the moment they looked like they were getting the upper hand they were over the border into Cambodia and weren't allowed to be pursued, or Laos, it was crazy. How do you fight a war like that? You have got to wait for the enemy to take the initiative then react and then he buggers off.

Yet Cambodia was heavily bombed?

Yes Cambodia was bombed and the supply lines and I never did believe it was a,

18:00 the Americans we used to get briefed every day, "Last night we destroyed three hundred trucks coming down and the night after it was four hundred trucks." I counted up one week and it was ten thousand trucks a week being knocked off and this was bloody nonsense, you would have to be out of your mind to believe that, they were kidding themselves I think. Keeping south of the 19th parallel, this is not

where the war is being organised and fought or supplied from

18:30 but the Americans were frightened that China would come in if they did it. If you are going to be frightened to prosecute war properly why the hell go to war?

Do you think there was an ideological or at least an operational divided between you and the Americans and that this was sort of the basis to it?

Between who?

Between you and the American forces when you were on the ground there?

The American forces were as frustrated as we were, that is why they

19:00 got to the stage of taking drugs, flagging their own officers, really the morale of the Americans when you think of the number of officers that were killed by their own people, and the drug taking that went on, they weren't supported by the people at home, they were tired of it, they were against the Vietnam War and they were getting killed.

It was similar in Australia, how was the morale in your squadron?

The morale was quite good and morale can be good and you can be thoroughly frustrated

19:30 but we were doing our job which was to try and attack the enemy and support our own troops, when I say our own troops I mean American or whoever was there, Australians, and I think we did that well and pleased to do it. I think anyone with any sense knew that we weren't winning. General Vincent, I told you about his party and leaving Saigon and we went down and that was the time of the Ted offensive

20:00 he couldn't get an aeroplane, he wanted to go by Singapore and he couldn't get an aeroplane and he came up and asked that we fly him out by Canberra and he came up and spent the night before at our mess. Here is a major general in charge of Australian forces and Tek was over and it was absolutely glaringly obvious to me, and I would think anyone with any sense, the Americans had been saying to their own people and we had been

20:30 echoing this to the Australian people, 'we are winning, we have got this, we are killing more every day, the body count is this and they cant go on, we are winning this,' and then all of a sudden they are in every major city in Vietnam, they got into the American Embassy in Vietnam, they killed a lot of people. I thought they had the most obvious political victory of all time. I spoke to General Vincent and he said, "No, Charlie is stupid, he is out of his mind,

21:00 he has lost ninety thousand people in this offensive, he is mad." I don't think Girt could give a stuff about losing ninety thousand people, but he sure as hell would know that this had turned Americans and Australians and everything against the war, it was a whole lie, we weren't winning and we were nowhere near winning.

How did things change for you in 2 Squadron after Tet?

We just got busier.

21:30 We went to Kyosan where the Americans had got themselves in a hole and air power saved Kyosan. There was no way they were going to get out of there, it was much like Dien Bien Phu, and the American commander in Kyosan amazed me, he was asked by the media, "Do you think this is like Dien Bien Phu?' He said, 'I haven't heard of that one.'

22:00 He was curious, he is in exactly the same position. We were getting to the stage where transport aircraft couldn't land, they would just fly over and kicking stuff out of the back and they were surrounded by Vietnamese and the air commander really took over and they went in and bombed the living hell out of it. They put an enormous number of sorties, we were involved in that in 2 Squadron, everything around the hills,

22:30 and they just covered it with bombs and B52s.

Can you tell us what Kyosan looked like from the air?

Just like any other village but with a runway and lots of huts for a military force, it looked like a military base with a runway that's all but with the hills all around it and it was pretty obvious that anything could be there. Our Caribous were going in there quite a

23:00 lot, we didn't send any Hercules, the Caribous did a good job. We bombed various targets around the place so did everything else but really that saved them, that got the marines out of there was air power.

Operation Niagara wasn't it?

Yes. I think it was.

Specifically how involved were you in planning and sending planes up there?

We were just given targets

23:30 to bomb and we went and bombed them, it is as simple as that, mostly enemy suspected camps etc and artillery positions and we went to the positions told and bombed it. We didn't win the war there but the Americans did with the B52s and we were pleased to be contributors.

24:00 **The forward air traffic control that you mentioned?**

This was not done around Kyosan because you are getting in touch with ground stations or troops on the ground but they were bearing from that so-and-so about two kilometres is the suspected area and you just bombed the area, didn't really see anything for it.

What could you see of your targets usually?

24:30 Very little because my head was in the cockpit, the navigator was up in the nose in the bomb sight and I was trying to fly accurately at height and speed and at that bomb sight your speed had to be right on and your height had to be right on and he was saying, 'left steady,' so my head was in the cockpit and it was only when 'bomb's gone'

25:00 and you are over the target, you can't see anything, that you bugger off so you didn't see much at all. The bomb photos showed the smoke and where the bombs landed and what was down there, you didn't see people very often, you would see buildings and sampans or whatever it was and fortifications and this is one of the things that bomber pilots miss, they just drop bombs

25:30 where they are told to and hope to hit the target.

What was the forward vision like out of the cockpit?

The vision was pretty poor, down is poor and forward you have the nose right out in front of you, vision it is a cockpit you've seen it it's all open and plastic so you can see around but not down. Nor was it good if you had fighter problems because you can't see behind you.

26:00 **You didn't have that problem in Vietnam?**

No, we didn't have that problem in Vietnam.

Where were the forward air controllers when you were doing these runs on your target?

They were usually based with our army and when I say our army I mean the allied army, whether it was South Vietnamese, Americans or Australians, they were based out in an outer camp with them, they would stay in tents overnight and be briefed by the battalion commander and even company commanders

26:30 on where they wanted the strikes and they knew exactly because they were in the area all the time flying around day by day and as I say they knew it intimately. So on their maps which would show them things within metres, as army maps do, they would go and recognise the target and they had probably seen it the day before or seen it moved from there to there, if it was enemy formation and they would fly far enough away and their binoculars

27:00 they had a good knowledge of exactly where the target was. Then their bloke was not always that accurate but he would say, "One hundred meters to the left, if you are running in on this heading and run into this heading and go to one hundred meters to the left, can you give me two bombs at a time?" sometimes and rarely did they want eight bombs in one go.

27:30 **Incidents of blue on blue or friendly fire?**

We didn't have one no.

The Americans were quite well know for that?

And they still are which is incredible, but no we didn't.

It must have been quite a worry when you were bombing in support of ground troops that you might hit them?

Yes, you mean the responsibility of not hitting them? Yes its indeed its something

28:00 that you are meticulously careful not to do and choose a direction that is not heading towards them or even over them but horizontally to them, to make your run in that way, it would be crazy to do it any other way. With our accuracy we had pretty good confidence in that and we didn't

28:30 have an incident at all. The only danger was and then you would always ask the fact then the enemy got to the clever stage, if the fact would say, "The battalion down there will mark their positions, their line and their line is this direction from two three zero

29:00 one five zero or zero five zero, that is the line and they will put up green smoke, green smoke and I will call for it when you are ready," but the enemy got cunning of putting up green smoke too so that caused you to pull off at the last minute saying, "Jesus I've got two lots of green smoke who is who" and then they'd give you another colour and try that and often the other side didn't have the selection of

29:30 colours, but if you couldn't you just didn't do it because you dare not. I had a few incidents like that. I had people call up and say they were given a target in Cambodia and the one thing I was told that we must not do on any account was bomb Cambodia. It was written high, whatever happens, don't go into Cambodia

30:00 and occasionally we'd get a target there and we would have to refuse which was irritating but the government, I figured that the government must know why they were so adamant about Cambodia. On about three occasions we refused targets we had been sent to because it was to Cambodia. Dearly would have loved to have done it but didn't want to embarrass the government.

30:30 God knows why they were so concerned about Cambodia but they were.

Towards the end of your time there how did your opinion of your role and the objectives of the Australian role there changed at all?

No, I think it was one of satisfaction

31:00 we were doing it well and we were recognised and we flew 4% of the missions out of Phan Rang and 16% of the bomb damage assessment was accredited to us so we were punching above our weight as the people have just done in the Gulf too the fighter squadron so that was pleasing and it was recognised for being reliable and accurate

31:30 what more can you want?

You mentioned before about Napalm and the fact that you didn't carry Napalm, for any particular reason at that time that you didn't carry it?

The Australian Government wouldn't allow us to use Napalm and I never understood why. In fact it is not a bad weapon and I'm told against well trained troops it doesn't worry them, they wrap themselves in a poncho or something

32:00 over it and just sprays over, it is only when they panic and run around they get, I am told that but I wouldn't know, I wouldn't do that and I'm a practising coward when it comes to that sort of thing. I would have used it, I thought it was a good thing to use and now it is banned, same as cluster weapons are banned now by

32:30 Australian Government, they won't use them yet we developed a very, very good cluster weapon in this country years ago but we are not allowed to use those now.

The Vietnam War was the television war, or so-called television war, how closely involved were you with the media at that time?

We didn't get, we were a bit out of the way I suppose and they used to go to Nui Dat

33:00 where the army was and the Caribou Squadron and the helicopters, they rarely came to see us. Ron Saw came to see us and we briefed him and what was the article about, the strip down the road the brothel area. We really didn't get a good go at all from the media, we didn't get any recognition.

33:30 **What are the other aspects that was new in that war was the defoliants, how closely involved was 2 Squadron?**

I wasn't involved at all it was done by the American transport aircraft, the C123s over the other side of the airfield to us they used to drop it, do a lot of that, spraying Agent Orange.

34:00 I saw aeroplanes when we were airborne dropping it, trails of stuff going out but we weren't involved at all. Around our area had been sprayed and the jungle came up close to our western side of our base, close and that was sprayed to defoliate so it was pretty bare for quite a range, that is why the ABGs [Air Base Groups] used to go out four thousand

34:30 yards and it was still in open country. That is close as we ever were to Agent Orange. I read about Gallipoli and World War II and I think Vietnam, it was only a frustrating war because we weren't trying to win it, I wonder why people now, Vietnam veterans I tend to think a lot of screamers

35:00 because it wasn't as bad as the trenches of World War I or Gallipoli and many things of World War II and the jungle in New Guinea and yet we seem to have more people complaining about it.

Is it fair to compare wars?

I don't know whether it is fair or not, you are comparing people and their, courage is not

35:30 the word but their ability to suffer it without going to pieces. My squadron is something that comes to my mind always of the people that went and got shot at every day, the aircrew, we didn't lose many aeroplanes but there was a lot of ground fire around and aeroplanes got hit

36:00 anyhow no one that I know as an aircrew has any problem but at squadron reunions I am appalled and I get letters from the repatriation department about the number of ground staff, many of whom went to work at eight o'clock in the morning were up at five o'clock in the mess having a jug and eating three

meals a day, the greatest danger was a monthly

36:30 mortar attack, are all on pensions and I find that extraordinary and I have got little regard for that. The repatriation will ring me up and say, “Sir, during your time, do you remember this that had happened that the enemy broke through the northern end of the base?” “No, I don’t remember it and it didn’t bloody well happen.” Or, “This man is traumatised because of mortar attacks and on one occasion

37:00 an American aircraft was shot down on an approach to the base.” He wasn’t shot down, he flew into a bloody hill in bad weather. “An American helicopter crashed on the 2 Squadron lines and the four crew were killed.” It didn’t crash on 2 Squadron lines, it crashed about three hundred yards away and you would have had to go up there and have a look if you wanted to see it. They put in for it and it is extraordinary

37:30 I have no time for that. I have seen something in the 2 Squadron association thing of which I am a patron, a fellow writing and saying, “I am suffering stress, I am on the naval reserve as a naval officer on the reserve and I am suffering stress. I don’t know can anyone recall what happened at 2 Squadron while I was there?” Really

38:00 it is extraordinary.

It is a real phenomenon of Vietnam?

Yes it is and I don’t know why. What am I saying, have we lost the fortitude that earlier Australians had or are we being pandered to or is it too easy. I think it is too easy, we are almost saying to people, “Come and tell us your troubles because counselling is here for you.” Counselling, people get counselled at the drop of a hat these days.

38:30 When we used to have accidents, all flying bases had accidents from time to time, someone would spin in, you would go to the funeral, have a good wake, everyone fill themselves in and back to normal next day. Now you have got to see grief counsellors and grief counsellors come in, I think we are going the wrong way the same as I think we are going the wrong way of paying the enormous allowances we are to people who

39:00 go off to the Gulf and Timor, $150 a day tax free plus their pay tax free plus all sorts of side benefits from repatriation, I think it is extraordinary. It is not that I begrudge them that but it is getting into a state of mind that people expect it, ‘if I am going to be shot at you had better pay me.’ That is awful, they are not going there because

39:30 they think it is their duty to do so, you have got to be paid to do it and that is wrong.

Tape 10

00:31 **The other main difference about the Vietnam war was its public reception in Australia. What incidents of that can you remember from your own personal experience?**

From watching it from down here or when I was in Vietnam?

If you knew any of it when you were in Vietnam but I guess more when you came back?

When I came back I was

01:00 disgusted the way it was being presented by the media and yet in hindsight I can understand it. The media were knocking it all the time why we were there, it was wrong and it was wrong as I was explaining to Rob because we weren’t trying to win it. Countries shouldn’t go to war without trying to win it. History tells us Hannibal wandered around thirteen years around Italy and, really Rome

01:30 was the force of the day and should have been able to finish it off but they didn’t because they were not resolute enough to do it it wasn’t they weren’t clever and didn’t have the resources, and we were doing the same thing in Vietnam and I think that was totally immoral and wrong. When I would see it being presented here for the wrong reasons, they didn’t say it was wrong because we are not trying to win the war, it was just it is wrong because we shouldn’t have been there.

02:00 The strategy when Vietnam started and the Americans went in had been the domino theory, we are going to stop communism expanding because once it starts to fall they will all go. That was the allied strategy, it wasn’t only the American strategy it was the Brits and the Germans and the French all took this thing. The first thing that really surprised and made me angry was

02:30 we have contributed to wars everywhere, perhaps foolishly but we did from World War I and onwards and here this is going on out in this part of the world, the Brits ignored and the Europeans ignored. We had a divided country, North Vietnam trying to take over South Vietnam and reunite it, no one could give a damn apart from the Americans and our selves.

03:00 Can you imagine what would have happened if East Germany had tried to take over West Germany, they

would have screamed their heads off and said, ‘this is war, everyone is expected to help,’ what was the difference in moral terms? I don’t see any difference but because we are out here, who cares? That was the first thing I felt angry about. Our own media virtually working against us

03:30 saying we shouldn’t be there and ‘what the hell are we doing there’ forgetting what the strategy had been, the domino theory and we went there. As a second and I wouldn’t say a primary reason but a secondary was to have America indebted to us because we are small and they are huge. We need more than American physical help, we would like to do without that but we sure as hell need their technology and what we get from them

04:00 because this is our only hope of survival in a war if we were attacked. We could do pretty well for ourselves but we need American support and technology and we need their intelligence because they have satellites running around everywhere and can find out anything that they need to find out, we need all that. We need their support with things like the weapons that are being produced

04:30 the stand off weapons that give us a chance as a small nation at defending ourselves. I see nothing wrong in supporting them if we can, if it seemed to be in our interests. To have that and then have your own media against you and saying that the cause has no validity at all is depressing and having been there and

05:00 participated and come home and see this still going on, you would be not normal if you weren’t put out by it. I don’t doubt for one minute that when Vietnam started and we first got involved the majority of Australians were for it, in fact an election was won on it in 1966, knowing that we were going into Vietnam. It was only the lack of will and I’ve said this

05:30 giving a speech and I was sitting and got up. Do you remember the Vietnam’s rededication of a memorial not so long ago and I was sitting next to the American Ambassador and I got up and all the veterans were standing down the middle of Anzac Parade, I said, ‘this is a unique memorial, it is unique and its the only memorial in Anzac Parade commemorating a war that we lost but don’t feel badly about it

06:00 because it wasn’t your fault, it was the fault of the American administration and they didn’t have the will to prosecute the war as it should have been.’ I went back and sat next to Tom Shiever which he didn’t seem a bit impressed with it but it is true. Nothing is worse than the lack of support from your own people and now of course its influenced totally by the media, if the media is against you, you have no hope of convincing people really that its right, do you think?

06:30 **I would agree with that to a point but since the period of time we began talking about it today and the period of time we are talking about from the Second World War to Vietnam War something had changed fundamentally in Australian society, what do have to say about that?**

In Australian society it hadn’t changed that it didn’t want to go to war in Vietnam had it because I’ve just mentioned that, they were for it and they have never had the facts of war

07:00 presented to them before, I don’t think this happened before Vietnam, I think it happened during Vietnam that it has brought about a great change in the thinking of Australians and American society. But again it was because we went there and it was needless because we didn’t try and win it so why the hell go. Looking back, that we could have always done

07:30 so we lost. What harm has it done to anyone? Would it have mattered if we hadn’t been there that changes society and the philosophy we have about war and indeed the same thing is being said about the latest wars.

What I am aiming at, correct me if you think I am wrong, but part of what happened in Vietnam

08:00 **from a historical point of view is to do with perhaps society not trusting its governments as much as it used to, not committing itself wholeheartedly. What do you feel about that?**

I believe that is true and that is surely brought about by the media in its presentation. Listen to Simon Crean this morning going on about

08:30 the advice from the British Intelligence Agency that going to war would increase the threat of terrorism, you would have to be stupid if you couldn’t see that anyhow but the media hammering, hammering and hammering this. Instead of saying governments what is fact and getting information and advice from a score of agencies, intelligence and strategic assessment agencies

09:00 the views they get will vary and they have to make a judgement in the end. So what the British Intelligence Agency said this, I would say that too but then the government might say ‘yes it may but if you resile and retreat from anything because someone says it’s a risk to you what sort of a nation are you becoming?’ The media are not saying that and the same in Vietnam in the way they were presenting it, we were wrong to be there.

09:30 That is the depressing thing and more depressing if you are up there and away from home and you are getting bits from the Australian papers and its saying, ‘what the hell are these blokes doing there?’ I

think the media has a great ability to change society which could be a thing for good and it can be a thing for bad and I think it has been irresponsible in my

10:00 view but then I'm a very right wing thinking sort of person and I have been brought up in a generation where duty and patriotism and belief in governments even though common sense tells me governments are not always to be trusted or believed but I grew up in an era where yes Australians were different people, I'm not saying that we were better people but certainly more dogged and

10:30 believed in duty and things. If the government said, 'that is your duty, then ' we accepted it but now people are questioning it and there is nothing wrong with that I guess. If we had a fair and balanced presentation, people could make a proper decision but I don't think we are getting that.

Is there not a direct relationship between that and the incidence of post traumatic stress disorders among Vietnam veterans about the Australia they come home to more than

11:00 **necessarily what they saw or did in Vietnam?**

I hadn't thought of that you are more charitable than I am, no I hadn't thought of that at all. That would cause me to be a bit angry that this attitude and only take it that people don't understand it wouldn't cause me to be stressed,

11:30 but then touch wood, I don't get stressed, I can't think of anything to stress me. Things annoy me, frustrate me, but thank God so far they haven't got me down, I am seventy eight and I think it is a bit late for them to start getting me down.

I think that is a fantastic thing. Are there any memories that you hold from your various experiences that still

12:00 **come back to you in perhaps not so pleasant ways?**

There were things I think I should have done that I didn't do or that I had given in too early or wasn't resolute enough about, there are things like that. I suppose most of this goes back to my time as chief but there were

12:30 so many things that turn up that my first thing when I took over as chief, I thought that the air force lacked discipline, not enough attention being paid to it. We had the fighting for money but what changed before I took over, only the COs before me, that the Chief of Air Staff became the Commander of the Royal Australian

13:00 Air Force whereas before he had been the Chairman of the Air Board and each member of the Air Board had direct access to the Minister if he was the Chief of Engineering, he reported to the Minister and he sat around the board so it had changed. The chief in my day was the commander and the other people were advisers to the chief. That was a

13:30 fundamental change and I think before that the chiefs had been content to worry about what was happening in Canberra, how do they get resources for the force, for their part of the service and develop the air force and out in the field was someone else's, we had commanders out there to do that. I think it was during this stage that the discipline within the force and the standards in every way

14:00 in accidents, flying accidents in the field, I am a great believer in drill, some people think that's observed. If you take any of the elite forces of any army or service, you will find their drill is quite magnificent because they have pride in themselves and when they put on a display they want to show you how good they are whether they are fighting an enemy or drilling in front of their own community so I think it is important. It also gets them feeling

14:30 as part of a team, that you don't get everyday and certainly in peace time so I tried to get those standards back into the air force. I got out in the field a lot and I continued to fly and I think those things improved. I had the ongoing fights with the civilians in defence and they were not irritating but if anything stressful. It was going to meetings

15:00 where you wanted a new weapon. One I can think of is a stand-off weapon for aircraft instead of going over a target and getting shot at, to be able to fire from twenty miles or fifty miles in those days and now we are talking three hundred miles, and then having some civilian saying, "Why do you want them you have just got a cluster weapon which we are spending money on, why do you want all this

15:30 arranged weapons?" It was a stupid question but you might have three projects and spend an hour arguing this point with someone who knew nothing about the actual operational side of it and they would usually win because they wrote the agenda and they wrote the minutes of the meeting and the report to the Minister and it got to the stage where I was lucky to see it before it went to the Minister and these sorts of things were very frustrating and annoying.

16:00 Things have improved greatly since those days of Tang and Richards and people but nevertheless it is still not great.

Was there a time in those difficult periods, or otherwise, that your faith in the air force was shaken a little?

My faith in the air force was never shaken but my faith in the organisation of the Department of Defence was.

The two you must have know were inexplicably linked and despite its ideals has to

16:30 **live in real political world?**

Yes we did live in it and we did pretty well because we got the F111s and we got weapons but we still haven't got an aerial refuelling tanker which we have needed, we haven't got an airborne early warning aeroplane, we haven't got an air defence system that can stop people coming into Australia any time they want as yet. When the horizon radar is working completely and when we

17:00 get airborne warning aircraft that are on order, we will have the semblance of a decent air defence and a defence against anything coming into the country, it doesn't have to be an enemy aircraft but drug smugglers or anything the defence force should be able to do for the community but we haven't got them. How many years ago was I agitating for this? I was Chief of Operations in 1978, twenty give years ago and they are still not there and now because

17:30 of the airborne early warning aircraft they look like they will only get four which is useless. I mean seven was the order, the minimum order, but they ordered four and they will consider the other three. The last three cost less than the first aircraft and yet the indications are the government is not going to get them because they are saving money which is stupidity.

18:00 They are frustrating things but I didn't lose faith in the air force because the air force fought for these things. The air force had a concept of operations all about them and didn't know which way they were going to fight a war. We have managed to keep a balanced air force with a good maritime force, a good fighter force and a good strike force. In the face of all this opposition we haven't done too badly but

18:30 the system is pretty dreadful. Now people going overseas to evaluate an aeroplane or a piece of equipment they go several times and there are thirty and forty people go. When we were after the F111 I had written all the air staff requirements, I had looked at every possible aeroplane across the world that might be a contender to replace the Canberra and I thought I knew it better than anyone else.

19:00 My boss was going with the Chief of the Air Staff and I said, "Why aren't I going sir? I have been writing all this for you, I know it.'" He said, "David, an evaluation team that can't fit in one taxi is too many." Now they go by the score.

What would you like to be seen as your professional legacy, having risen up through the air force to become its chief?

Its professional legacy?

19:30 A concept that the defence of Australia as I wrote and it has been written by historians about vehicles over that period as being the document that really put a practical and strategically viable paper on the

20:00 defence of Australia, that is one thing. Promoting always the offensive use of air power because we are too small to be fighting a defensive war. I think they are the two most important things professionally. To give the air force a sense of direction, I think when I left everyone knew where

20:30 they were heading or wanted to head and we all spoke with the same voice and improving the discipline in the air force.

This is a broad question. You joined up as a committed young sixteen year old to the air cadets and passionately wanted to join the air force and you achieved most of your goals.

21:00 **How did it build you personally, what personal impressions did your career leave on you and how are you at the end of your career different now than you were when you began?**

The first impression it leaves on me is that I have been extraordinarily lucky. What would have happened to me if there hadn't been a war? I suppose I would have gone on working in that bank and I might have been a bank manager in some

21:30 outback town which would not have been exciting. It gave me an opportunity to get into something that I would have never have gone into if it hadn't been for the war going and the need for air crew in large numbers. Then when the war ended I was fortunate to be where I could get in a train and go up to air force headquarters. When you think of the lucky breaks I have had that

22:00 kept me in the air force when people were being thrown out by the scores of thousands. People talk about downsizing today, I get amused when I hear the air force, "When you left sir," they will say, "We were twenty three thousand and now we are fourteen thousand that has happened in just fourteen years." I said, "When the war ended the air force was one hundred and eighty thousand three years later it was eight thousand you talk about downsizing," and I managed to stay in

22:30 during that time not only stay in but posted to a flying job and I never stopped flying. I went from ACU straight to transports and flew on in interesting things like the Japan courier and the Berlin Airlift. I have been extraordinarily lucky so I suppose that is one effect, I am very grateful. I sometimes think it

is

23:00 almost inconceivable that I have had such good fortune. I am grateful about it and I have matured and I look back as I suppose everyone does on what might I have done differently, not too much at all. I don't suppose I could have fought any harder for the things I didn't get, I made enough noise at the time

23:30 but never the less disappointment that I didn't get to World War II, disappointment that I went to New Zealand on exchange when I should have been going to Korea, things that I would have liked to have done. Then I think what could have I had done to avoid it but I suppose there isn't anything but that happened, but overall I think that I have been

24:00 lucky. I tell people that they get amused that I have had a sheltered life and I mean that. I have served in an organisation where people are dependable, people are not stabbing each other in the back, and you can take people at their word. You really can virtually bet your life on them if you needed to and be sure that you would be supported and they would

24:30 put their life at risk for you as distinct from what I see in civilian life, there is jealousies and factions in big firms, they are bureaucratic in the public service. I think I have lived a sheltered life, I have lived with people that I think are honourable.

The other thing I talked to you today and I think the air force must have fostered in you strongly was a passion for flying.

25:00 **Can you tell us a little bit about that?**

How do you describe a passion for flying? I do I love flying. Flying for just getting up and flying round in circles doesn't appeal to me, it is flying with a job to do, I like flying instructing and I had a few years at that. I went on exchange to New Zealand

25:30 as a flying instructor and instructed at their CFS [Central Flying School] which is their school that produces flying instructors. I like being in the formation aerobatic team over there. Canberra's are a good example, I went there and there was a challenge, we were dropping bombs and common sense told me it was ridiculous although I was a new bloke in transports. I went to transports

26:00 as a squadron leader but I was a new bloke and of course here is a bloke posted in as going to be a flight commander when he has finished his conversion, what does he bloody well know? He hasn't flown the Canberra before where people who have expected to be in Canberra's and done tours as a flight lieutenant or a flying officer flight lieutenant, perhaps a third tour they might be a flight commander. I suppose

26:30 I was expected to stand back and listen to the experts instead of questioning how we were bombing and yet it seemed common sense to me and that was a challenge. It was a challenge again when I went to Vietnam to have to do it better. The commanding Amberley with its five flying squadrons, the radar unit and aircraft depot was our biggest base then

27:00 to be interested in all those things and show an interest and run a good base. We all got one for having won the prize for the most efficient base in the air force. There was always something to do better and things to do better for the people who took over from me, always, so I have had a life where there was always a challenge.

27:30 Since getting out I have tried unsuccessfully to win the seat of Eden Monaro and failed, it wasn't a great year the 1987 election, and I have written a couple of books and now the National Capital Authority, I think I am delighted with the things I have been able to do there. It has been a great joy to me and I have enjoyed it and I think we

28:00 have achieved a great deal after I got rid of the dreadful CO we had but I don't know how to get rid of a public servant when I went there and I read where it said, it was along the lines of 'incompetency is not the grounds for dismissal'.

28:30 I thought 'gees this bloke is totally incompetent so how do I get rid of him? I didn't know how and Alan Hawk who had been in defence and was then Secretary of Veterans Affairs and then had become Secretary of that Department of Transport Regional Services, I knew him and I went to see Alan and said, "How do I get rid of this bloke?" and he told me how to go about it. It cost me money to get rid of him and other dead wood there and now we have a great team that worker as

29:00 a team and something I didn't think I would see outside the service. We have contributed a great deal, the flags on Anzac Parade, Anzac Parade looking back on it didn't have any footpaths, it didn't have any access for disabled, it didn't have anywhere to sit down so we have put all those things in and new lights and international flags. The fountains

29:30 opposite the old Parliament House hadn't worked for twenty tow years and God know why but I have been able to get those things done so that has been a challenge and something I have enjoyed and still enjoyed, I will hand that over after seven years at the end of this year. Having worked with BA Systems [BAE (British Aerospace Engineering) Systems] as military adviser has kept me in touch with the services

30:00 which I love and what is going on and involved with the air force and weapons.

Above and beyond setting and achieving challenges there is one thing that I think should be mentioned is the F111, is there not a special thrill for you attached to flying that plane?

Absolutely.

Could you just explain what it is like to be flying in a F111?

It is unbelievable. Firstly I had written the requirement so here is an aeroplane that I had written what it should do and it does it

30:30 better than I had ever believed because I had written in about terrain following because I didn't know about such things and the swing wing design. Then to be able to fly it and command the base that was doing it, to look at the sort of task it would do, anti-shipping very important task that we brought in plus land strike and getting the balance of training for those but to fly the aeroplane is quite fantastic.

31:00 As I said to Rob the take off from Amberley on a black moonless night and then you would fly the first part of your sortie so if you are going to a target you would go up to height to save fuel and come down to get under radar and then go to the target and then go up because once you come down you use three times as much fuel as you do at height and you can't stay down too long. We picked a target somewhere down in the middle of the Snowy Mountains and you can imagine flying down here through Kosciusko,

31:30 down the valleys at night at two hundred feet, it is incredible. The first time I did it in daylight you would go over this ridge and it would go down and then climb up again to the next lot and you would come to another ridge and you would see one just ahead and you would think, 'surely it wouldn't go down between them,' and down it would go. At night as you are going along we used to cruise around to save fuel at about four hundred and eighty knots which was slower than you would go

32:00 in operations but it was quick enough. Out of the corner of your eye you would see bloody hills sticking up there and it is a wonderful feeling and if it fails it flies up itself, if one of the two radars fails it will fly up so you feel pretty safe and its just the magic of it.

Very hard to put in words but is that the feeling of freedom or power?

32:30 Achievement I suppose, it is not your achievement, someone has built an aeroplane that does that but that you are part of that magic. There are still a few aeroplanes that can do this in the world, it is to be part of it is the feeling you take some of the achievement to yourself I suppose of at least being there and commanding that aeroplane to do what you want it to do.

33:00 **You said you left the air force with a direction in place for its future. I think it is fair to say that in the last few years the future of the world has been shaken a small amount. How do you see the future generations to the armed forces and especially the air force in Australia?**

Yes it has. It is difficult to see but

33:30 what makes it difficult is that I believe that paying out the sort of money that we need to pay out for defence which you are talking about, fifteen or sixteen billion a year, for a country of our size is a fair amount of money. Do you spend it on defence of Australia or do you look at it and say, 'well we get involved with these things overseas now with the Americans and there has been Afghanistan so should we structure the

34:00 defence force including the air force for these or should we spend more money on helicopters and tanks and things.' I take the view and I have said it to Robert Hill recently that I don't believe the Australian public would agree to us spending that sort of money to go off in what I call voluntary adventures, we didn't have to go to

34:30 the Gulf War, we didn't have to go to Afghanistan or Iraq, we could have stood back as many other countries did, look at it, let the Americans and others do it and say, 'we will just have a force for the defence of Australia and that is all we are interested in. We will contribute something out of a force that has been structured primarily for the

35:00 defence of this country and then if the Americans want some help we will give them something of that but we are not going to structure a force to go overseas at the expense of having what we need here.' That is the big question that has to be asked here. I don't know that the government have made up their mind what they are going to do here, they are in a bit of a dilemma. My strong advice was the defence of Australia, lets do that first and from that contribute as we see fit because

35:30 that is only a voluntary thing. I just hope that the government take that view so that has changed. You have got the army who are seeing a huge expense going out for the air force. The replacement aircraft will cost let us say we get it dirt cheap sixty million a copy, I don't believe we will get it for that, that Erocoy would have been about eighty million a copy

36:00 and probably there will be improvements to the one that would come along when we want it so you are probably looking at more than that and to be honest probably about one hundred million. If you are paying that much for an aeroplane I think you expect a lot from it in regards to the defence of Australia.

You have got to be very, very careful what we pick but the chief of army would say, “This is ridiculous, I need tanks, I need

36:30 more helicopters because I am gong to be sent off to Iraq or Iran or somewhere and I need things now and where is the threat to Australia?” and he will be advocating that, ‘why spend this money on the air force?’ but I would be taking the view that the defence of Australia is the thing, we don’t want to be fighting on our shores so lets get that fixed first.

How do you defend Australia against things like international terrorism?

That is a totally different thing to what we have been thinking about. You can do all sorts of protective things you want too about airports. Airports have got to be made more secure with who comes in and you can’t have Aikido baggage handlers working which we have just discovered, that sort of security must be tightened up. How with people with shoulder held anti-aircraft device

37:00 being anywhere within five miles of a major airport shooting at something that comes along in the back of a truck or a car they are only about five feet long. I don’t agree with the rubbish we heard the other day that there is no threat of that here, they are all out of date now that is rubbish, there were thousands of these things that the Americans had been giving out to shoot down Russian aeroplanes to the Afghans and no one knows where they are. That is the thing, do we spend money

37:30 on putting devices, flares, chaff and decoys on every civil aeroplane, I don’t think that is practical. If we go on doing this we will be doing it forever, we have got to take as much as I advocate the use of air power offensively we have got to take an offensive attitude to terrorism to wipe out where it is and

38:00 kill it. If we sit back they are just going to whenever they want to every few years do something. The Palestinians are doing to the Israelis with all their might the Israelis have for their small country they will never stop these people blowing themselves up and nor will we unless we take the offensive and root it out and try and put things that are wrong that cause this. If we started doing that it would be an even handed attitude to the

38:30 Palestine/Israeli thing.

With that perhaps in mind and we have very little time left are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future in this country?

I am always an optimist I suppose it is my nature to be optimistic but I say that at the same time I am very worried about the immediate future, the direction we are taking. I think

39:00 we should look far more carefully at what we do, have a greater say and we should never get involved in any war that we don’t have a seat at the strategic table of what way we are gong to do it and I think we shouldn’t rush into things but now there is no doubt about it terrorism is there and we have got to fight it. Instead of just looking to matters of security

39:30 in the home land security we have got to get out and find where it starts and get Arabs and Moslems on our side. Not all Moslems are terrorists but the things we are doing do help terrorism and I think until they get the Palestine/Israeli thing sorted out we are not going to be free of people who are prepared to give their life because what else can they do?

40:00 **What views in a hundred years time?**

I’d probably reach for something that is not original for me and once saw and it has been my guiding light and it might sound corny but it always had been and I’ve told my kids ‘reach for the stars, you might not get one but you will not come up with a handful of mud.’

Thank you very much for talking to us today its been a real pleasure.

INTERVIEW ENDS

NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2008.

Tape 11

22:26 **David tell me about the Berlin airlift?**

The first

22:30 thing to know about it is that historians now…

The first thing about the Berlin airlift that comes to mind, and I think it’s the primary thing, historians now rank the Berlin airlift operation as the most significant strategically operation of the Cold War because it prevented war. Had it failed the Allies had two choices, go to war or get out and give in to the Russians

23:00 and see Europe probably go down to the Eastern Bloc…

There were two dangers of course in the airlift, one that the weather might stop the supplies getting through to Berlin during the winter. In fact the Russians were quite certain that this would happen. The other thing was they ran short of people. There were, and Aussie aircraft landing in Berlin at each of three

23:30 airfields every minute and a half and one taking off in that time so every ninety seconds there were three aircraft landing and three taking off. The number of aircrew involved was enormous of course, and they most certainly would have run out in the end. This is why the Dominions came into it and ten Australian crews were sent across to take part. But the other thing you might ask, why didn't we take aircraft? It was a legal idea that the corridors were there for the use by the occupying

24:00 powers and although the aircraft would have been handy the Russians could have seized on a point, Australia and South Africa and New Zealand weren't occupying powers, what are their aircraft doing in the corridors, we'll close them. So that was another angle to the airlift that was interesting but the aircrew anyhow, I think were more important than the aircraft. We went through. The Australians stayed longer than anyone else. We were there for a full twelve months where the Americans were relieved after a hundred missions

24:30 or a few trips. The Brits transport squadrons would come and spend a month or two on the airlift and then go about other duties. The South Africans were relieved by another group coming over and we stayed there. So it was a bit irksome that way, on the other hand we learned a great deal about flying in bad weather.

So tell me the story about flying in bad weather? Take me through a first person account of a significant

25:00 **… you felt that you were in…?**

Well to talk about the technical side of the operation, that is the flying technical side, at the start it was an absolute mess. There were all these aircraft going into Berlin in bad weather, sometimes being told to let down to a hundred feet on their altimeter and with the most primitive let down aids and all milling around under the clouds at the bottom and dark night and bad weather. General [William H.] Tunner who was the American commanding, flew down himself in a C54

25:30 and he struck an odd situation. One of his aircraft had overshot the strip and caught fire. Another C54 landing directly behind it saw this, stamped on his brakes and blew all the tyres and was stuck on the strip. Another C54 at the same time had landed on a building site on the edge of the strip and aircraft were stacked up to twelve thousand feet every five hundred feet. General Tunner got

26:00 on the airwave and said to the tower, "This is Tunner speaking, send these aircraft home." And the voice came back, would have been in shock, "Say again?" "Tunner speaking, send these aeroplanes home." They all went home, flew back to their bases. He landed and then said to his crew and others, "Stay here and get this mess cleaned up and see that it never happens again." From then on we got into a system of being given times, block times out of my base,

26:30 Lubeck. You had to be over a beacon at a certain time within thirty seconds of that time and aircraft were fed in, in some sort of fashion and it became quite a different operation, a very well executed operation after that.

Well the actual planning of the operation, when we first started off it was chaotic. You would get down, let down to perhaps

27:00 a hundred feet below cloud on the most primitive of aids and I used to, when I got to the bottom I used to look to the end of the strip and tag onto someone that was coming in. I thought that was the safest way out of it. Talking later in the bar to my colleagues I found we were all doing the same thing. However it was chaotic and it wasn't until General Tunner, the American commander of the airlift operation himself was flying down one day and it was day,

27:30 it was foul weather. One of his aircraft had gone off the end of the strip and caught fire. The one landing behind it saw this burning aircraft and stamped on his brakes and blew his tyres and was stuck on the strip. Another C54 of the American contingent had landed on a building site on the other side of the strip mistaking it for the strip and had crashed there and aircraft, of course nothing could land. They were stacked up to twelve thousand feet at every five hundred feet. General

28:00 Tunner being at the top of it there, he got on the air and said, "Send these aircraft home this is Tunner speaking." The startled operator in the tower said, "Say again Sir." "Tunner here send these aircraft home." which they did. They all flew back to their base and he landed eventually and then said to his crew, "You stay here and get this mess cleaned up and see that this never happens again." And they were there and they devised a

28:30 traffic pattern that brought everything in, in line and in a sensible logical fashion. Aircraft out of each base were given times to be over a certain beacon. For instance out of Lubeck we were given block times. The Australians would have half an hour and we had to be over our beacon within thirty seconds of the stated time and all fed into Berlin each of the three airfields there.

Can you just tell me

29:00 **just go over the actual volume so set that up?**

Well you've got to imagine the congestion, how it could if it wasn't organised, there was an aircraft landing every ninety seconds at each of three airfields. The three airfields were in a radius of six miles and not

29:30 only did an aircraft land every ninety seconds at each of those airfields, but one took off in between, so it was moving twenty fours hours a day this happened and in and out it was a fairly hectic operation.

I'm quite sure that most of us when we went over thought there was a very good chance that we were going to war or that there would be a war. In fact when we arrived in London we were met

30:00 by an RAF [Royal Air Force] wing commander who said, "This is history repeating itself." I met Australians that came over to collect flying boats and ended up as No. 10 Squadron, the first Dominion squadron into service in World War II. That's how we were thinking and not only we were but one of the barmen we had in Lubeck, in the bar, was an ex-Luftwaffe pilot who had shot down sixteen Lancasters. He reckoned there was going to be a war and we would want him when it started.

30:30 Well of course the airlift, apart from being a strategic operation it upset the Evans' arrangements. I had been, or it had been arranged for me to be married to my fiancée on a Saturday. The Saturday before I

31:00 was told by my commanding officer that we were going to Berlin or to take part in the Berlin airlift. We had the weekend to make up our mind, decided to get married on the Monday and the contingent left in three, three ways some leaving on Monday, some on Wednesday and some on the following Saturday. I was shown the compassion being allowed to go on the last contingent on the Saturday. So I was married five days when we went away saying it will be over in a few weeks,

31:30 couple of months at the most. Fourteen months later I got home.

Tape 12

00:24 The Tet Offensive, I had gone down to

00:29 Saigon. The commanding officers of all the Australian units in Vietnam had been invited down to farewell General Vincent, who was the commander of the Australian forces in Vietnam who was going home and it was a very good party. We got back to the hotel, the Embassy Hotel, so called because it was a hundred yards from the American Embassy and I heard some noise going on outside. I said, "There's firing outside." Group Captain Hubble, who was at Vung Tau said, "Oh rubbish, it's

00:59 kids with their crackers." So that was a good answer and we all went to sleep. About four o'clock in the morning Hubble woke me up and said, "Let's get out of here." There were White Mice, which were the Vietnamese police. He said, "They're firing from in front of the hotel here." and so we managed to get a car and go back to the airfield in Saigon. There was fighting on the end of the strip and dead bodies of the Vietnamese attacking the airfield on the end and we weren't

01:29 allowed to take off because of the firing and fighting going on at the end of the strip. My pistol and flying gear was locked in a shed there so I managed to break the lock and get in and get that. It made us feel a little more comfortable. In desperation, after about two hours I went up to the operations and said, "Look, my aircraft is required desperately for a, tactical operations from Van Rang." and I was allowed to take off and climbed very, very steeply out I can assure you

01:59 because the fighting was still going on.

Vietnamisation was an American idea. Obviously the Americans were fed up and wanted to get out and have some reason and the idea was that we would give everything to the Vietnamese, all these great aeroplanes and armaments and teach them, as we have been doing for years and they'll be able to look after themselves. You'd have had to have been woolly-headed to think that could really happen. There was no way

02:29 five hundred thousand Americans and other allied troops there couldn't win or couldn't beat the Vietnamese under the restrictions placed on them, there's no way that the Vietnamese, South Vietnamese were going to do it and of course the inevitable happened. They were beaten and the war was lost.

Well the Canberra bomber put on a tremendous performance in Vietnam. It was over twenty years old at that stage and it looked to be

02:59 obsolescent but we were on a base of some six thousand. We flew four percent of the operations, flown from that base and in the credits given for bomb damage assessment, enemy killed etc. we had sixteen percent of the bomb damage assessment, which was quite remarkable for an old aeroplane. Old bombs.

We were about to pay money in Australia to have twenty six thousand World War II bombs dumped. Vietnam came

03:29 along and we dropped them. They were magnificent bombs. Much better than what we paid the Americans for later when we ran out. But the bombing accuracy of the Canberra was quite remarkable, much better than the Americans were getting from dive bombing and bombing with a bomb sight. This was the reason for our great success. So the old bird served us well in the end.

INTERVIEW ENDS