Australians at War Film Archive

Robert Cock (Bob) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:40 **Thank you very much for granting us this interview. Could you just please start and give us an overview of your life, and then we'll look at it in more detail?**

Very well. I was born on the 26th day of December 1914.

01:00 According to the records anyway. The first few years of my early childhood was spent in Adelaide in South Australia then my parents moved to Cleve on the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia where I started school. We lived in various places, farms and so on during those pre-Depression years.

01:30 I went to school in a one-teacher school until I passed my Intermediate Certificate at fifteen years of age. Then I messed around helping my father for a couple of years and I was employed by a Mr Stubbing who had a cinematic machine and a touring picture show. So

02:00 I was with him from 1930/31 until 1937 and I went up and down the Eyre Peninsula from Cleve. We would go out to Locke on the railway line to Ceduna – to Lock, Warramboo, Kyancutta, [(UNCLEAR)], Wirrulla, [(UNCLEAR)] – Penong, White Well Station

02:30 in the Nullarbor, then back down along the coast. Well I did that for a long time and being young I met a lot of the girls of course. And I got to know a lot of them, and one evening, I was watching the papers fairly careful because there had been rumours of war,

03:00 and I was mad keen to fly. By the way during those years with the picture show I built a glider, a primary glider, myself and two other friends. We had it parked in a paddock near Cleve hidden behind a haystack to protect it a little bit. But I was only there for a few days every three weeks,

03:30 and the boys were using it and most of them smoked. And one of them set fire to the haystack hence goodbye glider. Anyway, this evening at Cungena, I heard [English Prime Minister Winston] Churchill declare war on Germany and I thought this would be my chance. So I waited a few days and then I applied to join the Royal Air Force –

04:00 the Royal Australian Air Force. I had written to them previously in 1937 and I had studied electronics and so on and built radio sets and so on, and of course they wanted me to go as a wireless operator. I told them I wasn't going as anything other than a pilot. So I passed the tests and joined the

04:30 Royal Australian Air Force as a pilot. We were trained at Somers in elementary mathematics and geometry and engines and air frames and then went to Western Junction in Tasmania which was the first elementary flying school in Tassie. I think it was the only one. Anyway it wasn't quite completed at the time

05:00 and we froze. We had frozen water – anyway I did my elementary flying there and passed. That must have been about Christmas 1940. Then I went to Point Cook for an advanced flying training and we did another hundred hours service flying and what have you

05:30 on multi engines which were Avro Ansons, twin engine aeroplanes. We finished there and then we had a bit of leave with our families. Things were a bit urgent so we were lined up at Point Cook – oh by the way, we had a wings' ceremony

06:00 donating your wings, and it was quite nice. There was a girl there – we had this sort of concert at the end of our flying training and she sang – she played the violin and played Veelia, a beautiful piece of music, and I've never forgotten it and it buoyed me up all those years. I just mention that in passing because

06:30 to me it was one of the great things in my service. I could go back to that and listen to it in my mind. It was lovely. Anyway we were posted. We were building up the size of the air force so most of the pilots were taken for instructional purposes

07:00 here in Australia. But there were a certain number who were sent overseas and I happened to be one of them. Anyway we go in the dead of night and get on the Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mary and the Aquitania and head off to the Middle East. We pull into – what's the naval base on the island just off India [probably means Trincomalee in what was then Ceylon]?

07:30 Anyway we stopped there to refuel, and being a South Australian we never saw any tropical rain. We were only youngsters from the bush. Anyway it rained a tropical storm and the sea froths up about six inches on the surface with the amount of rain water falling. An amazing sight. I'd never seen anything like it as a kid.

08:00 The wonders were beginning. Anyway two or three of the boys swam ashore and then there was rather a major panic until they got them back on board, and so off we went again. We went up the Red Sea towards Egypt, up past Abyssinia

08:30 and Eritrea and we stopped about forty miles south of Suez. In the dead of night these ships steamed up the rest of the way, full bore with the head wind behind. Then they stopped, and they had these big lighters [boats] attached to the side and we scrabbled down these rope ladders in the dead of night. There was a big ship burning in the harbour. We'd never

09:00 seen anything like this before and the German propaganda was screaming that they had sunk the Queen Elizabeth. It was the Georgic and the Georgic was very like the Elizabeth. Anyway these lighters and we're scrambling down these rope ladders not too sure what was going on. But the senior officer who was in charge of the company on the ship –

09:30 the air force personnel on the ship was – I won't mention any names, but he was – we called him a pressure cooker officer because they did a fortnight's training to be in charge of ships and so on. But he didn't like a lot of us. During the long trip over there we played up a bit and he had quite a few documents with our names on them

10:00 to be reprimanded. We knew this. He was getting over the side with his briefcase and all these docs in it. He was coming down the rope ladder in the black of night and we all knew so we pushed the lighter away and held the rope so he would drop into the sea. In goes the brief case and it floats away.

10:30 So we pick him up and put him on and – 'Sorry Sir, bad luck' – but no documents, no court martials, no nothing. Anyway we get ashore at Suez and we go by motor vehicle to a place called Shallufa. Great Bitter Lake – but it had a sweet water canal from the

11:00 River Nile. Anyway the next morning the ship had given us a sandwich, an apple and an orange each and I still had the apple in my hand when I walked out. There were a crowd of English air crew there in this camp which was just sand and tents. And I was a bit browned off and we had been reasonably well fed on the ship

11:30 so I dropped the apple and there was a great big scuffle. About twenty English NCOs [non commissioned officers] scrambling for this apple. I thought things were getting a bit rough around here. Just one of those little incidents that occur. So we're all keen and half the boys get a couple of days leave to race off up to Tel Aviv in Palestine. Some

12:00 others go to Cairo and we're waiting for postings. Every morning there would be a parade and you'd be lined up and they'd say, "You, you and you are going to be posted to a squadron up the desert." They never called my name or Colin Dickson and Dougie Orchard and a few others. So we got together and said, this is a bit tricky, we're not getting –

12:30 we were all mad keen to get on the squadrons – we're not getting anywhere. So we said we'll go to Cairo and we won't tell them. There was a row of trucks from Suez to Cairo, nose to tail and a lot of them were driven by Australians. So, "Hey mate, what about a ride?" "Righto climb aboard." So we were away for a couple of days and when we got back, "Where have you been? You're being posted and you weren't here

13:00 so we put others in your place." So anyway sooner or later, a few days later nine of us got posted to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. Now this saved my life because the first boys who went up the desert on those stupid Blenheim bombers were killed off like nobody's business in a few days.

13:30 So we get on the Lotus, a boat going down the Nile and we get down to Atbara and get on a train to Khartoum and we arrive in Khartoum at about three in the afternoon. There's nine of us sticking together and our English friends were looking the other way at this colonials. So we walk into the sergeants' mess and it's evening meal.

14:00 We see a table with nine seats on it and so we all sit down and a bloke came along and said, "You can't sit there." And Decko says, "Why not?" And he said, "This is the warrant officers' table." And we said, "That's too bad, we're here now." Anyway we sorted that one out fairly quickly. We weren't going to be pushed around by these guys.

14:30 Anyway after a few days we were demanded for flying duties. We were taken by some of the English pilots in Bristol Bombers to Abyssinia and West Africa. We were all pretty keen so we soon became familiar with them, and the long range Wellesley which was my flying machine over there.

15:00 I flew both of them continuously and in the log book – I've just been looking through it, I was in the air constantly up to eight hours, down to West Africa or Abyssinia or somewhere, Cairo. But the interesting part was November '41. We had been there for about three or four months by this time. The war was still continuing in Abyssinia

15:30 The Italians were still in Eritrea – Asmara is the capital of Eritrea and I had an old Wellesley, with one gun in the starboard wing and that was just a 7.7 millimetre which would jam every five minutes and you had to land to free it up. Anyway the war finishes see. This

16:00 is November '41. We take Abyssinia and we fly back and we go and pick up the wounded – our wounded in the Valley of Gondar and fly them to Atbara bazaar, a big hospital we had there. I remember I had twenty-two stretcher cases and about twelve sitting wounded in the old Bristol Bomber which in those days – that's back in

16:30 1941 was quite an aeroplane. It was a big lumbering old thing but it did the job. Anyway we did a couple of trips with these wounded out of Gondar and we used Lake Tana as a – you did all your own navigation.

17:00 Anyway as the months go by – down in West Africa I used to take the old Wellesley – it had twelve fuel tanks on and I would fill them with fuel and I could fly for thirty hours continuous, if it kept going that was. Anyway I used to get down there looking for lost air crew

17:30 and there were quite a few young kids finishing their flying training in England and flying down the coast to Spain and across the Straits of Gibraltar to the African coast and then to Tac-ar-adi, and then flying through Tac-ar-adi up through Karno and the Sudan and up to the desert. It was a long trip. A couple of thousand k's [kilometres].

18:00 And a lot of them didn't make it so I used to go out looking for them. I found this Hudson this day on the Niger River and I found a spot I could land on, not so far away, a couple of miles. I landed and I had a little phrase book

18:30 so I could speak to the natives. I had picked up quite a few words. I was walking over to this aircraft and a native came to me and said – they called me –

19:00 I was the soldier of the aeroplane. And I said, "Where are the crew of this machine?" He said, "All finished." I said, "What do you mean finished?" Well it had turned out that the natives were going to help these kids, and the kids were frightened of the natives so they kept them away with their revolvers

19:30 and so they died of thirst. Six of them, idiots. And that happened quite a bit. You rush a kid out of a city like London into the jungle of Africa and he's really lost. They weren't colonials like us. We're used to the bush from childhood where they had never seen it. Anyway, that was that.

20:00 There was a crashed Hudson just out of Khartoum. I flew over – I don't know what happened. So I jumped in the old Wellesley and crank her up and away I went. I landed by them and picked the crew up and a couple of passengers and flew them back to Khartoum airfield. And

20:30 who is there but an Australian just arrived. Jim Parasine was his name. He was a schoolteacher from Mount Gambier. Anyway he's among them. By this time I'm getting jack of this Khartoum, and

21:00 I said, "What's the score?" And he said, "Well we just came out from England. We're 458 Squadron and we're going to reform here and do bombing and torpedo work." And I said, "Look I'm jack of this business, what about getting me up there?" So when he got back he went to the CO [commanding officer], Johnson and I get posted to 458 Squadron.

21:30 That's how I got on torpedos. And it was a little more dangerous than what I had been doing. I was there for a few months and my friend wants to come up. C.K. Dickson. We had trained together, gone over seas together and the last letter I remember he posted from the Sudan to me

22:00 in Malta. He had a sentence, he said, "From what you've been telling me about being in Malta it doesn't sound like there's much future in it." And I said, "You're darn sure. Dead right." I said, "You had better stay where you are." So he wrote back and said, "No I want to come up." So I went to Johnson and Johnson had him posted up. Anyway he lasted quite a long time

22:30 but he finally got killed, like all the rest of them. C.K. Dickson, 407414. All those years ago and I can still remember it. We were very close. Friends. Anyway I had never done an O.T.U. Operational Training Unit. We had gone straight from Australia to operations. So they sent me back to Shallufa and

23:00 I did the Star Illumination Course and Torpedo Dropping Course which took a month or so. I got a crew who trained with us at the training school and we went back to Malta. We did quite a lot of operational training.

23:30 Anyway Johnson came to me one day and he said I had been over here for a long time, in the Middle East and he said they were calling for air crew to go back and train pilots for the invasion of Europe. He said, Do you want to go?" So I said, "Yes, I'm getting a bit tired and I would like a bit of a break." So he

posted me to England and I got a fortnight's leave and I met an Australian

24:00 gentleman from the First World War who owned a hotel, the Favourite in London. Favourite was the name of the pub. Anyhow he was delighted – so I grabbed a few of my mates and we had a permanent home in the pub. Hornsey Rise. The Favourite. And he treated us so well. We had a wow of a time.

24:30 And a strange thing happened. This night we were drinking at the bar and by the way – he had a lounge bar and an ordinary bar and something else. Three bars anyway. So I'm put in charge of the lounge bar. We were on holiday but the machine ticked up the money as it came in and it always tallied, so he was pretty happy with his mad Australians.

25:00 What happened then? Oh yes. This night we were supposed to go to a dance. One of the suburbs. I was late and I had another beer and anyway we get to this – there's sirens going and black outs and bloody lights everywhere. There was a direct hit on this hall and nearly everybody in it was killed. We missed it by about half an hour.

25:30 We were having the last drink in the Favourite pub. So the luck of the game. Anyway I did a terrible lot of flying.

26:00 I was instructing day and night. I don't know how many guys I instructed but it was very, very constant. I was an NCO. I had risen from sergeant, flight sergeant, warrant officer and now they gave me a commission. I was good enough so they record. Anyway I'm pilot officer, big time. So they post me from Sillate to

26:30 Limavady in Northern Ireland. Gor'blimey! I jumped from the frying pan into the fire. I've never seen anything quite as primitive. Not really. They were nice enough people, but crikey I don't know. They were steeped in the past and didn't have a clue what was going on. If you went near anyone they'd say, "Ber-lin, ber-lin." Oh god.

27:00 You'd walk into these little pubs. The lintel was hanging down; you had to tuck your head down to get in there. They would have a couple of barrels of booze on the bar with a dear old thing behind. And the dear old thing would come staggering in and she'd say, "What are you going to have dear?" I would say, "I'll have half and half." Half bitter and half mild see. You'd walk over – there was always a fire

27:30 in the fireplace and there would be the old fellas sitting there, and you'd have a look and they might have a young one with them. Probably his birthday or something. And they'd have the poker in the fire and it would be red hot, and they'd all have a jug of beer. It was about a pint pot with a big handle, and they'd take this red hot poker out of the fire and jam it into the kid's booze and of course

28:00 it would go everywhere. They reckoned that was great and I never did learn what it was all about. Anyway, I got jack of that because it was cold. It was terrible. I had landed there in a pair of khaki shorts and it was freezing. The war was over in the Middle East.

28:30 We had beaten [Field Marshall] Rommel – the climate is perfect for flying instructors. So they're calling – and they're shifting all the big training schools out there, and they call for volunteers. I couldn't get there quick enough. So I signed up and within a week I was on a boat. A leisurely trip through the Mediterranean to Tel

29:00 Aviv. Cyprus – no Tel Aviv. I had a week's leave in Tel Aviv and went to Haifa. A big new training school at In-shema, in the Valley of Mig-oo, and there was all sorts of history and biblical stories. Anyway we get settled in this In-shema, a brand new huge place.

29:30 I was a senior instructor by this time. Of course I was curious. I raced in to see Jerusalem and where was Jesus born. Anyway I went and saw where he worked as a carpenter. Well, I wasn't overly impressed. It was a bit daggy.

30:00 They were using it to make money you know. Anyway, I was pretty curious and apart from flying I got quite a bit of time off. I went to Jerusalem and I wanted to see what was really going on. So I went to the holiest places in Egypt [Israel], the Wailing Wall.

30:30 Now I'm not religious and I'm not a real heathen either, but honestly I stood there and there's these Jewish fellas in black clothing, big black coat buttoned up in the front with a black hat on, a black beard, two rows of beards, one in each hand and they're hitting their heads against this old limestone wall.

31:00 They were mumbling to themselves, and I said to the next bloke, an Australian. I said, "What's going on here?" He said, "You had better keep quiet, this is one of the holiest places in the world." So that was that. I couldn't see the purpose myself. That's the way it was. They were quite nice to me. I met a young couple –

31:30 A young Jewish couple. They were quite nice. They were very good to me. Natan and Rochel, Nathan and Rachel to us. And they were about my age and they were both academics. And I was there for Passover. Well! I don't know. It was beyond me, the whole lot of it. But I got by.

32:00 We had In-shema and then Megiddo which was in the Valley of Megiddo just out of Nazareth. They had all these Polish girls, escapees, refugees. They were lovely kids from about fourteen to twenty-four. The top end were getting towards my age group. I was about twenty-four myself. Anyway these kids were good.

32:30 They put on a party for us and we brought them down to In-shema this time, and the only time I ever flew with any booze [alcohol] was one night there. I took this girl down – I was a senior instructor. So I took this girl down and showed her the lit up inside of a Wellington which is quite interesting to those who don't know.

33:00 Anyway I cranked it up and joined the circuit. I shouldn't have done it but I got away with it. I would never do it again of course, it was stupid. But I was young and trying to impress the girls. Anyway I got down safely and parked the damn thing. There were about half a dozen of them in the circuit and you had to get in, but I new how to do it. Anyway – what happened then?

33:30 So I spent this time and they said to me, "You've been over here more than three years and now you've got to go home. See, we were seconded to the RAF [Royal Air Force] and we only meant to be away for three years, and then they had to bring us home. Before we came home –

34:00 things were quietening down and the Yanks [Americans] were entering the war and we couldn't lose. All the restrictions were taken off. The pills we carried with us – the suicide pills were taken away. We were able to tell the enemy anything they wanted to know. We couldn't lose. So things were relaxing quite a bit.

34:30 So they said, "Righto, there's an Anson. You get some of your mates and go to Cyprus." So I got a few of my Aussie mates and a bit of gear and away we went and we stayed at the Nicosia Palace Hotel for about three or four days. A real pansy set up.

35:00 And the Cypriots were very kind and decent to us. So then we get back and I did a bit of office work. I was in charge of inspection business. Anyway the time comes and I had run out of time in the Middle East and I had to come home. I fly down to Suez in the old Anson and I was then taken by French aircraft down the Sudan to West Africa, Tac-ar-adi,

35:30 Lagos, and then flying boat from Lagos and then to Lisbon, and from Lisbon to Shannon in Ireland and then back to England. Wait a minute, I've got it all messed up. I had been in England hadn't I? Anyway

36:00 we came home. I came home by boat and we had quite a long leave and then I was posted to the Army Staff and Command School just outside Toowoomba, Cabarlah. We were there six months.

36:30 All the services by the way – by this time during the war, had started to learn to work together. We were the first group of the liaison blokes. We were the army, air force and the navy all doing the courses together. There was no rivalry any more. We were starting to wake up to ourselves a bit. Anyway that was easy enough, no trouble.

37:00 I got a bit more leave at home. And then the invasion of Labuan took place and I'm the liaison officer under R. N. L. Hopkins, 24 Brigade. Anyway, things are settling down pretty well and the war is coming to an end. I was standing on the end of this strip this day

37:30 with the Austars, the little single engine planes made in England. We had to pick up three youngsters who had survived the death marches. So three of us flew them to Ranau and they had lit fires and they had cut a little strip.

38:00 The SAD Army boys – what was the CO's name? Ripley! Flight Lieutenant Ripley. Why he was a flight lieut, I wouldn't know. Anyway we fly in there and fly these three out, Stipwich, Moxson and – I can't think of the other bloke.

38:30 Anyway we fly them out. They were the sole survivors of twenty-four hundred of our kids. The sole survivors. Anyway. We get a signal – by the way I had Moxson in my Austar. I get the others away and I get airborne and I'm about sixty or seventy feet high heading for the Pad-das River and the engine stops.

39:00 So I couldn't turn around. It was jungle both side so I had to go into the river. And the first thing I had to do was get this Moxson out before the thing sinks. So I get round – he had bumped his head. He had a little cut on his forehead. He wasn't too bad.

39:30 Anyway there were some of the SAD boys, twenty years old , big buggers, real Aussie kids, and they got in and they dragged him out – it was a fast running river. About six or eight feet of fast running water. Anyway these kids grabbed hold of this Austar and they just lifted it out of the water. Anyway the doc checks him over and they flew him out that afternoon in

40:00 another Austar. Mine was water logged.

Tape 2

00:35 **Ok, so take us back. You've crashed landed the plane into the water and the big burly Australians are helping Moxson out?**

Yes well they pulled Moxson out and the doctor checks him out. He's got a little cut on his forehead but the doctor flies him out that afternoon

01:00 from Ranau to Labuan Island. So the three of them are safely out. The only survivors of the death marches. Anyway this CO [commanding officer] of the SRD – the Special Reconnaissance Detachment

01:30 of the Army [Actually Services Reconnaissance Department]. Ripley comes to me and says, "The commanding officer of the Japs at Ranau has decided – he's got a signal from Australia on the little radio – has decided to surrender and tomorrow morning you and I are to go over and take the surrender." I said, "Are you sure he's not going to bloody butcher us?" And he said,

02:00 "Well we've got to take a chance." So away we go at daylight. We ford the Padas River and we walk about two miles to the Jap camp, and there's about two hundred Japanese soldiers there, rifles and all and bits and pieces. I said to Ripley, "Gee, this doesn't look too good mate."

02:30 He said it was right. They were quiet. So he went up to the commanding officer and through an interpreter he took the surrender and he said to me, "Now we'll get all their arms and we'll put them in a pile." They had some gasoline there. Where it came from I wouldn't know. So we just piled these arms into a heap, made them do it – the Japanese.

03:00 Any ammunition they had we put that in, and anything we thought was a bit dangerous went in too. We then poured this fuel over the lot and set fire to it. Got rid of the ammo and the rifles and things or most of them. The Japs were submissive and quiet. By this time it's getting late so we decided to go back to camp. Ripley

03:30 told the Jap commanding officer that they had to ready by nine o'clock next morning with their kit ready to march out to Jesselton which was two hundred miles away. So we get over there next morning and the Japs are all lined up with packs on their backs and there's a lot of Red Cross girls with Red Cross bands on their arms.

04:00 There were half a dozen females with very young children and they were all sitting. I walked along and made the very young girls with very young infants sit down. Anyway Ripley said to me, "What will we do now?" And I said, "We aught to make them salute the flag." We

04:30 got a small Australian flag and we got a post and a loop of wire, about twelve foot high I suppose. We made the Japs stand it up and we pulled this flag up. We had them in this square, all these Japs, and we made them salute the flag. Ripley said the first one wasn't good enough so they had to do it a second time. Ok

05:00 then he told them to march out. It was only a footpath about two feet wide through the jungle. And he makes them go single file out. Before they start out the Jap commander came up and he's waving his arms and going on. This day we had a Borneo scout with us with a Tommy gun. I was a bit wary.

05:30 I wanted someone with us. Ripley agreed. And he spoke Japanese and Malay and – this Jap commander came up to Ripley waving his arms and yelling. And I said to this scout, "What's going on now?" He said, "He's asking for arms to protect them on the march to Jess-el-ton." And I said, "Well what's their chance of getting to Jesselton?"

06:00 And he said, "No chance. They've been so terrible to our people, they will be murdered, every one of them before they ever get to Jesselton." I didn't like this very much, but it was nothing to do with me. It was Ripley's job. I was just a bit of decoration on the side as far as I was concerned. Anyway, away they went in single file.

06:30 He and I went back to camp and they flew a couple of aeroplanes in a little bit later – a few days. I spent a few days with them. And we flew out to Labuan Island, North Borneo. But that was very interesting. Out of the twenty-four hundred kids we had there, building that aeroplane at Jesselton, we had three survivors. There were

07:00 a couple who escaped prior to that, got to the Philippines in a few years. It was a shocking business. What they did to our kids Anyway that's past history. Then we had the big problem

07:30 of getting rid of the Japanese troops in Borneo but we got rid of them. They went down the river on barges and so on. I don't really know what happened to them. But I went back to Labuan Island and we waited there. I was fiddling around one day with my aeroplane – things had gone quiet you know. The war was over.

08:00 And the big effort of feeding the prisoners who were still alive, and get the sick out, was fairly well advanced. I was standing on the edge of the field this day and another officer walks up to me and he said, "G'day Bob. How are you?"" And I looked at him and thought know this guy. It was a fella I knew in

the desert three years before.

08:30 Russell Curtis, fighter pilot. And he says to me, “What are you doing?” And I said, “I’m just running this AOP down. It’s all quiet and there’s nothing much to do.” He said, “We’re flying to Japan in a couple of months. Flying the squadron to Japan. I’m short of a couple of pilots. Would you like to be in it?” And I said, “Ok.” It’s who you know see. So I’m in his squadron the next day.

09:00 I’m on 77 Squadron, crack fighter pilots. He’s got P40s, Kittyhawks, and he said “Get in there.” And there’s all these knobs and tits and bits and pieces. “Off you go.” So I did three hours familiarisation on P 40s and Mustangs were arriving from Australia, P51s.

09:30 I get into a P51 – I bent one – don’t tell anyone, but I did. They were a beautiful machine. Fantastic. Anyway in familiarisation, we spent a couple of months or six weeks I think it was and then we were going to fly out to Japan. So away we go. Three squadrons. 77, 76 and 82 squadrons forming 81 Wing.

10:00 The first day we fly to Clark Field just outside Manila in the Philippines. Of course we’re madly going over the capital of the Philippines – what is it? Manila. And the Japs had just gone and the place was a shambles.

10:30 They really ruined it. They almost burnt it to the ground. Anyway so we have about four days rest. The Yanks by this time are at Clark Field and by crikey, the food they had. We had our army biscuits and bully beef. They had chicken, ice cream the lot. So we made gluttons of ourselves for four days.

11:00 Then we climb into our P51s and we fly to Okinawa – Nar-har, a big airfield on Okinawa Island. That’s the second hop. The Yanks are there of course and so the same thing happened again. And then the third hop was from Okinawa to Bo-fu in Japan. And we lost three blokes

11:30 out of the three squadrons in a bit of bad weather. Anyway they flew into some hills and killed themselves. So we got there and we landed in Japan. We were on this Bo-fu strip and some lad races over with a bottle of beer with the top off. I had climbed the motor off. He climbs up and I had a bit of a swig. We had been five hours in the air.

12:00 Anyway I said, “Where’s all the Japs?” And he said, “They’ve all gone.” And I said, “What do you mean?” He said “As far as I know, all the women and kids are up in the mountains and only the sick old men are around here.” And I said, “What’s this all about?” And he said, “They’ve told them that we’re going to rape and murder them all.” This is the story they put around. Anyway

12:30 we weren’t there very long, six months I suppose and most of the Japs looked pretty well fed to me from then on. They started coming back in the first couple of weeks when they found out that we weren’t butchers. So they started to filter back. I loved those little kids. They were alright. I used to go to the PX [American field canteen] and get all the chocolate I could get my hands on

13:00 and break it up into little squares and every evening I would down to the water’s edge and the kids got to know so they’d come back and they’d all get a little bit of chocolate each. Fantastic. Anyway we flew surveillance flights over the islands, the main islands of Japan, and the Japs never looked like being hostile, except

13:30 Tojo – from the War Crime trials, he was sentenced to death. But the death sentence was delayed for nine months I think it was. I can’t remember. But we expected some trouble when the day arrived for his execution. We got an alert on the morning

14:00 of the execution to be aware but no Japs made any moves against us. Anyway we were there a while and flying with the squadron and the army comes into it again. The army commander comes down to see us. He’s going to inspect us so we all line up. He walks up to me and he said, “Cock, what are you doing here?” I said, “I’m flying with the squadron Sir.”

14:30 He was Brigadier R N L Hopkins, of the Army Staff School at Kabala. He knew me very well. He said, “Well you’re not flying any more, you’re in my headquarters tomorrow.” So I’m G2 [intelligence] at BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force – Japan]. I had only been at BCOF for a little while

15:00 and I’m duty officer and we had the greatest earthquake we had every had in Japan. Anyway I’m duty officer and the place is shaking, the lights go out and the water’s spurting everywhere. There’s a smell in the air. It’s about four o’clock in the morning and

15:30 I go to Tim Cape who’s my senior officer in G Branch. And he said “Things are in a hell of a mess, the railways and there’s people drowned” and all this business. I said, “Well what do we do?” And he said, “Well you’re duty officer get stuck into it. Grab the railway so we can start sorting things out. Send this signal.”

16:00 And it’s a war emergency signal. So we take command of all Japan and no one under the rank of full colonel or a senior army officer can sign a war emergency signal, but a lowly flight lieutenant signed it. I’ve got a copy of it. Anyway, we sort that one out. I opened the mess. I’m duty

16:30 officer so I can do what I like. I opened it at four o’clock in the morning and I gave them all a scotch.

Anyway we didn't have any casualties, or very few. By the way, my wife was there. She was a nurse in the AGH [Australian General Hospital] at the time of this earthquake. She got the odd bod in with cut feet. They would jump out of windows

17:00 and land on a bottle or something. But we didn't have any major problems. I finally get back to flying with the squadron. I've been away twelve months or so and we were doing these surveillance flights, and the first democratic elections are going to be held in Japan, and I'm ordered from Army Headquarters in BCOF to take the

17:30 Hagi Prefecture which is on the north coast of the Japanese main island, and I have the Hagi Prefecture – and I'm the boss cocky. I've got to go up there and see that all the polling booths are okay and that there's no mucking around with the voting or anything. So I get a jeep, an interpreter and a guard and away I go. Anyway I get to Hagi the capital and I go to the police chief and I'm JC and he knew what was going on.

18:00 And I said I want fly mats. They were on a sort of light paper – detailed maps. There were forty polling booths in the Hagi Prefecture and I wanted the position of every one. Anyway he comes – we get there about seven o'clock in the evening and the

18:30 next morning he was waiting there with these beautifully done maps. They were first class with every detail of the prefecture. So I go and inspect all these prefectures. All the polling booths, the forty in the prefecture, and they were perfect. So the polling day arrived – I think it was the next day.

19:00 Anyway everything was orderly. The police, I had them organised. Any arguments about papers or any scuffles were to be stopped immediately. There weren't any. They voted. The first time ever the Japs had voted. They weren't allowed to look at the Emperor let alone speak to him. If he came by they had to divert their eyes away.

19:30 Anyway these were the first democratic elections. So I went home a happy guy. I went back to Bo-Fu – where we were at that time, real pleased with ourselves because we had done a good job. Anyway, time's running out. See, we had been there almost three years and it was time to come home. My time expired again, three years.

20:00 So we came home and I became CO of the Air Training Corps in South Australia. That was a good job too. Nice people, good kids. I got sick of pushing a pen and I wanted to get back to flying. So I applied and they sent me to Mal-a-lar.

20:30 So I had to do a special – they had to do a special check because of the rocket range you see. We were supplying all the gear for the rocket range from Parafield Aerodrome in Bristol freighters. So I had come from the old Bristol Bomber back in 1940 to the Bristol Freighter in 1951. Anyway

21:00 we get this special clearance and we start flying all this rubbish up to the rocket range. That was alright, no trouble. What happened. 34 Squadron that was. Anyway I had met Marg, my wife. I knew about her in Japan.

21:30 I knew everybody because I was in G Branch and I had all their files. I could ask the clerk for a file on so and so. So anyway she happened to come home – her time had expired the same as me. So ring her up, meet her and we started getting around together and then we got married.

22:00 We had Junior, the bloke you spoke to on the blower, and a daughter. She's in Canberra at the moment. And mother and I are here in Gunnedah New South Wales. I'll be 89 on the 26th of December

22:30 which is the day after Christmas Day. So there it is.

Fantastic. That's fascinating. Now I'd like to talk to you more in depth about those periods of time. We'll start at your childhood. What were your first memories growing up?

Well I was a child in Adelaide. I remember it must have been about 1921.

23:00 My mother took me to a big army reunion business in Adelaide. The First World War soldiers were coming home and they had one of the early tanks coming up the streets of Adelaide. And my brother and I – he's only about a year and a half older than me. There was mother and we were on either side and we were looking at this tank, and a very old soldier came up to my mother

23:30 and he said, "Look after them, they'll be needed." Now that's the earliest memory I have of childhood. I was about six. Then we went from there over to Eyre Peninsula where I started school at Cleve. My first teacher was Hayden Rake.

24:00 He was a first class teacher too. I built the glider and built radio sets. I was mad on that stuff. We never had any money because of the Depression and so on, yet my father looked after us. There's one brother and seven sisters. So there were nine in the family.

24:30 All very healthy kids. The girls – they were dears when we were kids. It was open air, in the bush. We never went hungry but we never had a lot of clothes or anything like that either during those years.

So tell me about your mum, what was she like?

Well, she was a very caring person. Very active.

25:00 She looked after we nine kids with magnificent care, always endeavouring to keep us up with the mob and dress decently. She was a bit religious. She insisted on Sunday School and all that. I was never – never was and never will be. However I had to go twice on Sunday to Sunday School in the morning and to

25:30 church in the afternoon. What else was there? I was mad keen on electronics. I also wanted to fly but there was no possibility of that. Aviation was still in its infancy. The Broken Hill Proprietary Company had at Iron Knob which was a long way from Cleve really, but at Whyalla

26:00 in the late 20s and early 30s, from say '32 to '37, they had a flying school. I think someone was bright enough to realise the possibility. It was thirty shillings an hour to become a trainee pilot and they would teach you on Tiger Moths – Gypsy Moths – the Tiger's didn't come in until during the war.

26:30 And every time I saved up the thirty shillings I had to do something else with it, and I never got to Whyalla anyway, it was too far away. But anyway – oh, you wanted to know about my mother. She was a terribly caring person. She really looked after us. Finally, when she was about sixty-six she got

27:00 diabetes which is one breed of diabetes for elderly people. There was little known about it and she overdosed with insulin and she died. She died at sixty-eight. It was tragedy because the kids were all growing up and she had a bit of a chance to relax. But that didn't transpire.

27:30 Dad lived until he was eighty-three. He was very active. He was a skilled stonemason. He used to build most of the public buildings on Eyre Peninsula and a lot of homes – stone buildings, three and four bedroom homes. He built a lot of that. He did a lot of government work

28:00 with government sheds and tanks and things. When they were opening up that area of Dark's Peak and Kimba and Waddakee Rocks on the Eyre Peninsula. I know he had Ford motorcars and it was sandy country and you would be bogged half the time. So you

28:30 would push the first gear lever which – and you'd burn it out. So we would turn it around and push the reverse lever and reverse up the hill. Oh, there was – in 1935 there was an air race from Western Australia to Victoria and they were to land at Kimba which was about forty miles from Cleve.

29:00 There was a two wheel bush track. Anyhow our teacher wanted us to see this so we went in a couple of Chevrolet 6 cylinder trucks to Kimba and all these aeroplanes few in. Well there was one particular one, a Clem Monoplane. A German design and very modern.

29:30 I took an interest in this thing. They sold it here in Australia and it stayed here. I'm not sure but I think it's still around. That was about 1935. It was a little Clem monoplane. But aeroplanes were pretty scarce. My brother and I – we built this glider of course, but we used to

30:00 tow it with an old Dodge which had been converted into a utility, and we had about four hundred feet of half inch hemp rope. We'd tie it on the back of the Dodge and the front of the glider. You only had to be moving slowly and you could keep the wings level. There was enough air to control it. We would get up about two hundred feet

30:30 on this rope. Pretty steep and I could kick it off the hook on the front of the glider and glide down and land. We got quite good at it you know. Oh rabbiting! They used to call me 'Cat's Eye's' on Malta because I could pick up the shipping. This was all night work. You never did it during the day or we would be shot down. The

31:00 Germans had such good fighter aircraft. The JU 88 was a night fighter and it was a very, very good machine. So would pick up these ships and I'd say to Jim Parrer my nav [navigator], "See that ship Jim, we'd better look at that." And I'd say, "What's that down there?" And I'd turn and go down a couple of thousand feet,

31:30 and there it was. But shooting rabbits as a child – if you know anything about rabbits. They're grey and they did a little ditch and they sit in there with their ears down and they're very, very hard to see in a squat. We had .22 rifles. We would see one and bang you'd get him through the head, because you wanted to look after the skin.

32:00 Twelve big buck rabbit skins in the winter time would make a pound, and we would get four shillings a pound from the rabbit people for a pound of rabbit skins. For kids getting for shillings a pound! We were getting as many rabbit skins as we could. Plenty of cigarettes, tins of tobacco and whatever. We'd stick down at Christmas

32:30 time and buy a bottle of plonk [alcohol] from the pub. Publican was as keen as mustard to supply us too. In those early days – the policeman, a dear old fella – I can't think of his name at the moment, but I know him well. He came to me one night. Motor cars were early in the piece see. This was about '35. Mr Pattern was his name. And he had to go out

33:00 on one of these two wheel marks in the sandy track to pick up some stolen goods and bring that person

in. He was a pot bellied old fella and he had this four cylinder Chev, Capital Model. He didn't know how to drive it. He was frightened of it. So at fifteen I drove it out with him in it. He collected this bloke and all the gear

33:30 and we're sneaking down the pub. This is at Christmas, just after this happened. It was in Cleve at the hotel. There was myself and Ernie Crane and Chooky and a couple of my mates. We sneaked down and we were going to buy a bottle of wine from the publican.

34:00 And you reckon we weren't being watched. A voice from over the street calls out, "Bob, I want to see you." Oh this is the copper and we're gone. I walked over and he gave me five shillings for being a good boy and driving him out. Five shillings was a lot of money, so we got two bottles. I'll never forget that.

34:30 Ernie Crane, Chook Tilley, both killed. Ernie Crane was killed in Wye Bay in New Guinea. He was an engineer on a Catalina. They had engine trouble and the Japs got them and butchered them. I've tried to find out – most of my friends – well there's very few left of course. But I was incredibly lucky.

35:00 I used to volunteer but I cut that out. That was stupid. I went to Johnson on Malta. We had lost Jim Parasine and it was daylight. I went to Johnson and asked if would allow us to take an aircraft out – because we knew where they had went. And I said I wanted to find out if Jim was alive. He

35:30 said no because we couldn't afford to lose any more machines. We can't afford the fuel because we were desperate for fuel and ammunition and food. We were starving actually. But we were really desperate on that island. We almost – well I know at one stage we were to fly out and leave the Maltese to their fate. That was how serious it was at one stage.

36:00 But we didn't. We got a submarine in or something with the fuel and food. But those convoys – you know, we went up to all sorts of things. During the day we had the exhaust rings on the engines and a big pipe outside and you were sitting close to an engine and the air screw used to pass within two inches of your shoulder.

36:30 But they used to spew out carbon, red hot carbon at night, and the night fighters, the JU 88s would pick it up and they'd attack us. So in the day time – I was always very keen on looking after the aeroplane. I got a piece of wood about four feet long and about an inch and a half through, and I would tap the exhaust wing all around to free up this carbon and then start

37:00 the motor and blow it out, both engines. So it wouldn't leave a stream of red hot carbon behind you for them to pick up. All sorts of little things like that that we did. Radar, we had the latest radar of course for picking up submarines and so on. But the Germans had a very powerful radar

37:30 on Pando-lear-ia Island and the toe of Italy and we were over there and we had to go through there. We called it Ring-chu-chelli. But that's another story. We would try – but there was always a ground field, a ground cloud of radar. It would be fifteen feet, white blurry stuff. You couldn't

38:00 see anything in it. So we would take off, get up about twenty feet from Malta to Luca, fly across the island, and the cliffs were ninety feet high. So we would drop over the cliff and then fly six feet off the water even at night. I would trim the machine up, the nose up, and hold it down, and you could see the water. I don't care how dark it is, if you know what you're doing and

38:30 have a lot of practice, you can see the water. The stars even glint on it. You can just hold the machine down so that if you relax in any way it will climb away and not go down. So we would get through what we called Ring-chu-chelli in the radar misty bit. We'd get through there but we got attacked a lot of times and we lost a lot of blokes there. Anyway, that's the bit I don't want to remember.

Tape 3

00:50 **Bob, can you come back to those missions and just talk me through what happened?**

01:00 Yes. We operated at night all the time because our armament was poor. We had 7.7 millimetre, 303s in our turrets front and rear. But they were useless against the German 20 mm cannon and their machine guns.

01:30 They could always out fire us and could open up long before we could. I don't care – you're going to get stacks of people tell you that our firepower was superior. On Malta we were worried because we couldn't compete with the German armament.

02:00 We used all sorts of devices and schemes and rackets to avoid being attacked. But when you were attacked it became terribly serious because once they got onto you, the problem was trying to get out of their grip. The night fighters especially, the JU88 were

02:30 pretty good. And if they could get behind you and get at your rear turret, even if you were shooting at them, they had far superior armament and could stand back and he could hit them. But if they killed him then you were gone. They would come up behind you and just kill the whole crew. And we lost quite

a few people this way. We had

03:00 quite a few younger ones coming along who, a couple of times in the turrets, would lose their nerve, which was understandable. Before getting in – say you might be flying tonight – you've been briefed. We were briefed underground on the opposition, where they were, what armaments they had, how many against you and what

03:30 the weather was, and then you march out to your aeroplane at about eight o'clock in total darkness. These kids they knew that the armament against them was so good and they'd just lose their nerve. They'd drop on the ground and kick around in a circle screaming and going on. You couldn't do anything about it. We would just take them away in a straight jacket.

04:00 It was done quite a bit. And you don't let them tell you that air crew were over privileged. You make a mistake and start saying you're not going to fly, they had air crew correction schools which you've never heard about or most people have never heard about. And don't make a mistake. They would put you in there and they really pushed you around.

04:30 You would have real nasty sergeant majors. You went back flying rather than put up with that. You'd be surprised of what went on during those nasty years of the war. When we began winning of course it was a different matter.

So can you tell me more about the correction schools?

No, I never went to one but I spoke to several blokes who did. They were getting to the stage – the doctor would come around

05:00 and he'd say, "You – stand still, close your eyes, hands outstretched, straight out in front of you, fingers expanded." and if you were like this, which you got, then he sent you away for a couple of days or a couple of weeks or something to collect yourself together. But if you stood like this which we usually did with our eyes closed, then

05:30 you were right. And don't try and put it on because he knew. You couldn't fool them. But we had rest centres. While we were on Malta we had Selena Bay and another bay. Anyway, there was a fair bit of booze and a few girls and entertainment and if your nervous system

06:00 was shot then you could go there for a few days and get a rest. You'd come back refreshed. Finally we weren't flying too frequently. They would give gaps, fairly big gaps between so you could get yourself together again.

So what did your mates say happened in this school? What stories did they tell?

06:30 Well only that there was no amenities, the food was poor, discipline was over extended. You had heavy packs and made to march round the camp site, day and night. They would be pulled out of bed at all hours of the night and made to go marching and this sort of thing, until they decided to go back

07:00 because it wasn't so bad after all.

And the German night fighters – what would you do to try and get rid of them?

We did all sorts of silly things. Spiral dives, steep turns. But with the lumbering old Wellington, loaded with two torpedoes, it wasn't very easy to be evasive. I can remember sitting there and suddenly there was a funny feeling.

07:30 We never had any lights, no lights at all but the fluorescent dials on the instrument panel. Now the air speed indicator was just there and I had seen it back to forty with my nose up in the air and then it tunnels away, but you get control of it again and you stalled it. Anything to get away. Anything to try and elude them. Well we used to draw straws

08:00 for the moonlight nights. Moonlight nights are very dangerous. You can see an aircraft with its glowing exhaust pipe quite a way away. And we used to draw straws for those nights because nobody wanted to fly. A black night, pretty good because it was hard to see.

08:30 You didn't volunteer for anything. You k new your life was on the line and it was pretty tricky because we were losing a lot of guys. We lost a lot of guys and some bloody fine young men amongst them too. They all were. So they mixed the squadrons up. Canadians, English, Australians,

09:00 all together. They found that was better to have a mixture instead all from one country. Those terrible days – if you weren't young and healthy, I don't think you would have survived. Your mental capacity wouldn't take it.

09:30 I remember coming home – take off at eight and get back at five in the morning, then go underground for debriefing. After debriefing you'd go and have something to eat if you wanted it and go to bed in a bombed out building. The Shalufa building at Shalufa Bay we were put in. I'd

10:00 get up at ten in the morning for a couple of hours and go and see who was in bed. How many beds were occupied and try and work out who had got back and who didn't. We were getting new crews and we

didn't even know the kids. They were coming in so fast. The truth has never been told about the casualties to achieve what we did achieve.

10:30 But we sank every tanker that travelled from Italy or the coast of Italy to the coast of Africa. We sank everyone, and that's why Rommel stopped at El Alamein. He was out of fuel and that was because we sunk every tanker, but the cost was pretty high.

11:00 A lot of air crew. Those night fighters were very effective. A friend – lovely bloke – gee what was his name? I can see him now. We had been briefed that we had submarines in the Med [Mediterranean] – the same as the Germans did,

11:30 but with our submarines we had what we called a sanctuary – a latitude and longitude area where ours were supposed to be. Anyway this young fella, I'll think of his name later, he

12:00 sunk a submarine right alongside the edge of the sanctuary, and one of the English submarines didn't report in and of course they said, 'You've sunk it.' Nobody would talk to him. Anyway about three days later this Pommy [English] sub communicates with its base.

12:30 He did get a German sub right alongside the sanctuary, so he was a hero then. I'll never forget that. He was good at it too – this Dickson C.K. He was dead eye Dick. We had a marvellous radar. Now this is the sort of trickery that went on. We had ordinary radar

13:00 and it gave us a good picture of the ocean on a six inch tube. The blips would come out the side at what ever range you wanted. We had miles, thousands of yards, hundreds of yards and the blip – you could tell whether it was a submarine or a ship by the strength of the blip. Anyway

13:30 the bearing from Gibraltar to Malta was almost the same as the bearing from Gibraltar to Pandelemia Island [?], and the Germans got one of our Wellingtons with the radar in it. A couple of weeks later our radar goes blank. All we could see were stars and stripes.

14:00 They had got our transmitters and were transmitting with a frequency that jammed our receivers. So the old Poms, they're not silly – I don't like them, but they're not silly. They came out and checked and they gave us a radar centimetric signal. Don't take the old transmitter out because the Germans were jamming that. They gave us a new transmitter on a different wave length.

14:30 It had a clear screen. The Germans were jamming one but we had another one which was beautiful. The cat and mouse business went on there for a couple of years. We used to go out and we had acoustic mines. I see where they're writing about acoustic mines being fairly recent. Rubbish! 1942 Alex Barrass from West Australia,

15:00 myself and our crew went to the Gulf of Sirte on the north African coast and we laid six acoustic mines by parachute. The German shipping was coming into the Gulf of Sirte. We had it timed, one ship and up she goes. Then four ships could go over and then the fifth one would go.

15:30 We could set the timing to whatever we wanted. Usually two or three ships apart. They never knew ever – they'd mine sweep but they never knew when they had all the mines because they didn't explode them all. They might run up two and three times but we had some at four and five. So we had two left.

16:00 **In regard to Malta, you said the truth never got out about the casualties. What is the truth?**

Well I don't know the numbers, but they're pretty high. There were three torpedo squadrons. There was 458 –

16:30 Two English squadrons – 221 and 38, and 458. Three torp squadrons and we had youngsters coming in very quickly. I had to take – see, we used to take the new crew – one of the experienced captains would fly with them the first and second time and then they'd be on their own. If they made it for the third time then they were pretty right.

17:00 But they could get them first time too. There was no certainty about coming back. We lost a terrible lot of aeroplanes. I don't think they ever told the truth about it. Anyway –

So why were the new recruits getting shot down so quickly and not the old ones?

Inexperience. They didn't know the tricks of the trade like flying off the water

17:30 six feet nose up. See to drop a torpedo you had to fly exactly about a hundred and twenty miles an hour, sixty feet exactly straight and level to get the torpedo to drop into the water correctly. Nine and fifteen on the bomb panel were the switches and

18:00 we had two twelve inch naval torpedos. Nine on the right hand and fifteen on the left. To get them in the water correctly, they had a four cylinder semi diesel engine in them – compressed air and dieseline. And they'd run at forty knots but you could set the depth. Now, to set the depth

18:30 you must know what sort of a sea it is. The sea, the waves were important. Now, if you had a six foot wave you had to run the torpedo twelve feet below, or six feet below the trough. So that would be

twelve feet from the top of the wave, otherwise it would do this and either go up or down. So as the ships got back, we had to run the torpedos deeper

19:00 and deeper because – then they'd start running underneath missing. So they gave us a duplex head or magnetic head that would run underneath the ship and the south magnetic pole centre line north and as soon as it would hit the centre line it would blow and blow the bottom in from say ten feet below it.

19:30 So we had the duplex head which solved the problem because we wanted to run the torpedos a bit deeper so they didn't porpoise – and not missing the smaller freighters. The bigger ones were taking draft of say ten, fifteen feet of water and they weren't too bad because they were running well below the trough of the waves. But the problem

20:00 of laying off – you had to know the speed of the ship, you had to know roughly its length and its draft to do any good. It was a bit of a problem because you got – we used to study these ships, their speeds, their depths, the water they took

20:30 and whether they could turn quickly or not. Another business – I told you I went to this training school in Shalufa. I did a flare illumination course there. Now we used to have chutes in the back of the Wellington, a Tricell Chutes [?] we called them. There were three Mark 8 flares which we could drop. They were a million candle power

21:00 with a big canopy, a big parachute, and they used to fall a thousand feet a minute, and they'd burn for about three minutes. They would light up say ten square miles of water. So we'd find the enemy ships. We would draw a fifteen mile circle around them.

21:30 Their speed we knew was only about seven knots. So they would be inside that circle somewhere. Then we'd light the area. The old Wellington did a hundred and twenty miles an hour. That's two miles a minute. So if we dropped a flare every thirty seconds, then they would be a mile apart.

22:00 So we would drop a line of flares there and say a line here, and the ships were here. Now, we've got aircraft here and we had people looking at the ship and we're attacking from the flares to the ship because they're blinded by the light of the flares and can't see the aeroplanes coming. So we had all these sorts of rackets to keep alive.

22:30 That was the object of the exercise as far as we were concerned, and to get rid of the enemy shipping. All up it was a desperate business. There's no good saying otherwise because you're not telling the truth if you say it was easy. There was nothing easy about it. What else did we used to do?

23:00 I mustn't tell you that, it's a bit rude.

Everyone is being very frank with us, so please tell us?

Well, we were walking down to the aircraft his evening – and we're overloaded and little Jimmy Palmer was my rear tail gunner. He's got ammunition all over him and his parachute.

23:30 We had observer harnesses and the chute itself used to clip on. In the other hand he had a nine inch ring of three quarter armour plate steel with a hole in it and a piece of string and he's carrying it. I said, "Jimmy what are you carrying that hunk of steel for? You know we're overloaded to buggery. We can't afford any extra weight."

24:00 He said, "Bob, you know I got married just before I left Australia. Well I sit on that." – because the night fighters come up from behind – he's the tail gunner, and you know what they would do to him. So there you are. I won't say any more. It's obvious. I'll never forget that. Little Jimmy – we were desperately overloaded and we couldn't afford even another couple of pounds.

24:30 The old Wellington – to get off Luca was a bit of a struggle. The airstrip – anyway. Jimmy carrying his piece of armour plate and he sat on it. I'm not sure whether he came home. We separated. I think he left Malta before I did.

25:00 I lost track of him. But there was one bloke and he was a first class pilot – Alex Barrass. He was a reporter on the West Australian newspaper. I don't know if he's still alive. He might be. He was a very good friend of mine. We flew together a lot. Game as Ned Kelly that fella.

25:30 **I need you to be a bit more obvious about George, why he sat on the metal plate?**

Because he didn't want his genitals shot away. I shouldn't have said that, but anyway. Did you hear that Claire?

We need you to be as frank as possible, so this is excellent.

26:00 **Were there times that you were actually shot at on these runs?**

Oh yes. A few times.

Can you talk me through one of those?

Yes, we were attacked by a JU88. It had got onto our carbon coming out of one of our engines.

26:30 It kept attacking from the starboard, the right hand side. It was a black night too. Anyway it wounded the navigator and the wireless operator fairly badly too. Luckily he was shooting too low to get me. I was sitting up here and he was shooting a bit low. Anyway they weren't badly injured but they copped a couple of bullets each.

27:00 One went through an arm and one through a leg. But we got them home. We had a first aid kit in the aeroplane. I don't know how I got away from him but it was a black night and I just stalled it and let it fall. We just stalled it and let it fall towards the sea. But luckily we were about eight thousand feet, and we just let it stall towards the sea and

27:30 got control pretty close to the water. We were on our way home anyway and probably an hour later we got to Malta. The ambulance was always there waiting for you when you advised them that we had casualties aboard. We were shot at a lot, especially those JU88s. Most of the time

28:00 they could detect us because we had to pass between Pantaleria and the coast of Italy, and that area they had beautiful radar, and they'd pick us up. We called it Rig Twitch Alley. It really was dangerous. I can remember some of the turning points: Pantaleria was one; Cape Calavete –

28:30 Maritimo Island. These were along the coast between the toe of Italy and southern France. We used to get in that area because it was the area the ships used to leave from to go to North Africa.

29:00 All in all I was lucky, really lucky. I'm trying to think of the young fellow who sunk that submarine – he was a very fine kid. But night flying – you get so used to it, you don't like flying in the daylight.

29:30 There's something strange about it. On ordinary nights it's so smooth and gentle, but on dangerous nights like storms and so on – you could get into a rain storm and electrical storms – and the air screws. You've got one passing here. There's the side of the aeroplane and the air screw misses it by about two inches. Well they become – in electrical storms, the

30:00 air screws become great big bright blue discs, and the rain drops hitting the glass in front of you are splashing fire. Like the radio signal on the telly, and it's bright and all coloured blue and red. Fantastic and the thing's doing this. One night George Palmer again – he calls me up –

30:30 we're in this bloody electrical storm and he says, "Hey Bob, my guns are on fire!" "Shut up George, I'm having enough trouble up here!" And I was frightened that the engines were going to – you know, because of the spark plugs. But I'll never forget, "Hey Bob, my guns are on fire."

31:00 "Shut up George, I'm having enough trouble!" Bob Thurston was second pilot. It was freezing cold and I could see perspiration on his forehead. He got killed later. There were some funny times you know. But we had a lot of fun on the island too. There were certain pubs there and they had Cyprus Brandy and all that stuff,

31:30 and if you knew you weren't flying then you'd go to the pub and have a few. It used to relax you quite a bit. The boys knew where they were. But the food was bad. All we had were the big thick army biscuits. I never saw – when I got to England after Malta; they gave us an orange a day because

32:00 it was supposed to do something for your eyesight, but we never saw any oranges in the desert or bloody Malta. There were great big army biscuits and tins of bully beef. The bully beef was made in 1914. It had the date stamped on it. Fair dinkum, I'm not lying. They were funny little shaped tins you know. Crikey.

32:30 The tucker was pretty poor on Malta. Well it got to the stage when there wasn't any, and we were going to quit. Don't let them tell you we weren't, we were going to quit. We had orders to leave and we were going to desert – but a submarine must have got in with some stuff. I know a sub came into the Grand Harbour with a bit of foodstuff. The Maltese were starving, they really were. And

33:00 everybody lived underground. The limestone – you could carve it out like cheese, but it drips water all the time. On the floor level there was about three inches of water all the time and it would get contaminated and all the kids and big sores right up to their knees. They were walking in the water too you see, they were all underground. All the bombed buildings we built – the bombing was

33:30 so bad that we had bloody great blocks, two feet long and a foot wide, a foot deep and we built revetments to put our aeroplanes in to help protect them. And we did, we could protect most of them most of the time. They were scattered all over the island and we had a cleared area to get them out and bring them near to the airfield.

34:00 Talking about those sorts of things – we were all – this night, I'll never forget. We climbed in the aeroplane. It's about eight o'clock nice and dark, and the Luca strip has a sort of dump at the end. A bloody big cut away, like a dam arrangement.

34:30 Anyway we get in and I taxi. I get a green light – a lamp. I pushed the throttle open and we're going along nice, fully loaded, torpedoes underneath and just before – I could feel it getting light, but you always check your airspeed, and there isn't any, nothing. It's back on the stop. And it's vital.

35:00 The air speed is vital for the navigation and everything. So we're three quarters down the strip. I pulled the throttle off and I eased the brakes on and it turned away to the starboard and I came to rest. No damage, no tyres burst, nothing. Anyway down came the jeep – "What's going on?" "I've got no air speed!"

35:30 And he went around and climbed on the – you know the peto heads coming out – they stick out – they come down from the wing and smooth around and there's a little hole in the front. They get a bit of wire and they push it down the peto tube head and they buzz buzz – there's a bee down the bloody hole! Blocked it up. Well by the time we got back, got it off the airstrip –

36:00 there was always a reserve crew and always a reserve aircraft. And Johnson said to me, "Righto Cock, are you going to go in the reserve aircraft?" And I said, "No Sir, I've had enough. I've got a bit of a headache and an upset tummy." So he said, "Okay." And he sent the reserve crew. We always had a reserve crew sitting in the little hut. So they went. I don't know if they came home either.

36:30 Anyway –

Can you tell me what happened to the co-pilot Bob?

My co pilot? Yes, well – Dicko, he became a captain himself and they had brand new aeroplanes too. And they went to Portfield in Tunisia. This was

37:00 almost at the end of the war when Rommel's crowd were getting out of Africa. They were at Portfield and I desperately tried to find out what happened, but all they could tell me was he took off this night and they've never seen him since, he and his crew. Bob Thurston was with him as second pilot. He was the West Australian boy they talk about. He was my second pilot.

37:30 We were in the electrical storm. Anyway Dicko just completely disappeared and nobody knows what happened. He was probably shot down. I don't know, but more than likely. And he had a brand new aeroplane. There's one thing possible. It was a brand new aeroplane and it had a different tank system, a fuel tank system. This was vital. You must understand

38:00 you had taps and controls and so on, transfers and all the rest of it. You had to know that pretty well otherwise it was very dangerous. Those engines would gobble up the fuel. We were burning about forty gallons an hour I think, each engine. We used to

38:30 carry eleven hundred gallons of fuel in the early Pegasus, but I think it went up to about fifteen in the later ones.

And what was the worst mission you went on when you were at Malta?

Well they were all nasty, but I suppose the one where we got the two engines coming home. I suppose –

39:00 We put a torpedo into one of the tanker and it opened the tanker up and the fuel runs out on the water and it's alight, and we could see the fellas running around on the deck. I'm turning around – the ship's here and I'm in this climbing turn and Jim Parasine looks out his window

39:30 and said, "Fry you bastards, fry." And I said, "Jim, we haven't got to that stage yet have we?" He said, "They've got all my mates, what do you expect?" It was so terrible. See – and Jim was a religious bloke, very square and decent. He lost his cool that night. They had no hope those people on the deck.

40:00 It fried them in a few minutes. There you are. Those are the things you try and forget.

Tape 4

00:43 **Bob I wouldn't mind just asking you about the cinema tour that you were working with?**

What, the technical side or what?

Where you would go, what you would do?

Oh yes.

01:00 We used to have a three week circuit around showing pictures every night. We selected very popular films. We'll go right back to the start when we had silent films. They were about to go out in 1932 when I joined. Then we got the first talkies. They were synchronised gramophone discs. They

01:30 had to be synchronised with the film as it went through by a certain number of dots. It used to go through at ninety feet a minute. The gramophone record had to turn at a certain speed to get the speech right and so on. It was a hell of a business to synchronise, but however –

So you were telling me that the talkies were just coming in?

It was a bit of a problem. If you got out of synchronisation

02:00 with the record and the film then it used to be a shambles. However we soon got out of that because then they began to record the sound on the film. On the left hand side of the film there was an eight inch strip, variable density method, the variable [(UNCLEAR)] method, but the variable density was the popular one. There was a little strip down the right hand side with the various

02:30 density marks, the frequency, and of course it went through an amplifier and loud speakers behind the screen. And the problem was to get it so people could understand what was being said. The acoustic of the hall changed and all this. Each hall was different and so. But all in all it worked out pretty well.

03:00 Most people loved the talkies. They would be screaming their heads off to up the volume or down the volume – you see we got to know most of the people. We'd have families coming in, and remember it was the Depression years and there wasn't a lot of money about. A fellow would come in off a farm with mum and four kids,

03:30 and he only had ten shillings. And by the way, I must tell you it was two and sixpence for an adult and two shillings and sixpence of tax. And children were seven pence. Sixpence to go into the pictures and one penny tax. So dad would come along – we had policemen in all the little towns,

04:00 usually a young fellow in his twenties or up to say thirty-five. I got to know most of them of course over the years. So we had to be viable and we had to be financial enough to carry on. So what we used to do was we had rolls of film and for about every third person we'd tear one ticket off and put it

04:30 in a little container with a lock on it. We'd put it in there and then the next morning, you'd go to the policeman at the station and he'd unlock it, lift the lid and tip the tickets out and count them – adults and children. So there was only about a third of those who went to the pictures anyway. He knew that as well as I did, but he was a nice young guy.

05:00 That was a little catch. We didn't play the thing to the exact law of the land because we had to be financial and people had to be entertained.

What did you do with those tickets? Was the tax paid to the town?

The tax was paid to the government of the state. The state government. And the policeman used to record what the tax was

05:30 and then the tickets were burnt. But the opposite side of this story is, a man would come in with four or five children and mum off the farm and you knew darn well he wasn't wealthy or anything. He might have ten shillings. Well that wasn't enough for the family, but that's what you got. And they all went in. You had to compromise.

06:00 But that was out in the bush in places like Kinecutter, [(UNCLEAR)].

So Bob what kind of films would you show and how many would you show at one time?

Well we showed always a newsreel for the first ten minutes. Then a short film. It might be a comedy, and then a main feature film, like Gone with the Wind or Sign of the Cross.

06:30 I remember Sign of the Cross because it was a religious film and it was very well advertised. Everybody knew about it. But there was a lot of western stuff too. The country people liked the westerns. James Mason and all those guys. But I used to show it thirty-five times, every night, and I knew exactly what everybody said

07:00 and what they did, and they were my friends. You got to know them that well. You could see the little mistakes in the background. But it was interesting.

And what about the newsreels Bob. Were they propaganda or were they realistic?

A lot of them were propaganda but we had those such as the Melbourne Cup. It was run in Melbourne and it was photographed there

07:30 and dubbed. We would get a copy of the actual film as it was taken. I'll tell you a funny story. It was when Pharlap won the Melbourne Cup and there's a bloke yelling there – it was one of the early sound films. He was yelling "Pharlap will win it, Pharlap will win it." And then another one, "Pig's arse he will!"

08:00 And the old parson came to me and said, "You'll have to take that word pig's arse out." I said, "I'm not going to doctor the film, that's the way it is." Anyway, he goes and gets the policeman and he said he has to take that out. The policeman said, "No, it's uncensored. He can do what he likes with it. He's going to show it." Funny things – we had problems with the religious people.

08:30 Back in the thirties, religion was pretty powerful you know. What was it? Something about D. Maitland, a film. Anyway, one of the Protestant parsons came to me and said "You can't show that film in this town." And again I had to go to the policeman. He didn't want to argue with either of us.

09:00 But he had to make the decision, yes or no. It was always yes. The Silence of D Maitland.

What was racy about that movie?

His actions. A controversial action with some girl, and it just wasn't done in those days.

09:30 I mean it was strictly taboo of course, but everybody did it but didn't tell anyone else. It was a queer old set up. But all in all it was very popular. They would flock to the pictures. Nearly everybody would come and we would advertise. We had paper adverts of the next one. So the next show

10:00 would be plastered on telegraph posts and in windows of the shops and so on, three weeks away you see. So they all knew when the pictures were on.

And were you a one man band Bob?

No there was two of us. The reason being one had to handle the cinematograph machine and the other one had to sell the tickets and look after that side of the story. We used to

10:30 alternate because it got boring just running the machine every night on your own. I was head mechanic, head engineer, head everything you see. I had the licence by the way and strangely I got it when I was about eighteen. Norman Stubbing decided we'd have two sets of cinematograph machines.

11:00 I had been with him for about a year or more. So he took me to Adelaide and one of his friends was the controller of licences. Anyway he took me in and I could handle the damn thing easy enough, so I got my cinematographic operator's licence. The reason licences were so strict,

11:30 was because it was nitrate film and very, very flammable. Dangerous. If you lit it there was no way you could put it out. The light necessary to illuminate the screen was a very powerful arc lamp. You couldn't put your fingers in because it would burn them. Anyway –

Did you have any accidents or fires?

No. Never. I was very, very careful though even if I say it myself. I was scared

12:00 of fire I really was. I never had – you could tear the film away before it got on light if you were quick enough. They had light traps everywhere too. There was two thousand feet of film on a reel up in a box with a door on it. It came out through a fire trap and you would put the film through and close it again. There were quite a few – it was

12:30 fairly safe.

What you were describing then, was that the cinematographic machine?

Yes the ordinary 35 millimetre cinematographic machine.

Is there anything else you can describe about the machine to me?

Well not really, although it had a power arc lamp with two carbon rods together with a hundred and thirty volts and fifteen amps to maintain a fire across which would slowly burn the rods away.

13:00 It had a very powerful mirror behind it. One came out like this and a very powerful mirror – a type of glass and if it got red hot it still wouldn't melt. And then the light was concentrated back to where the film was going through the gate. A very powerful light. If you put your fingers

13:30 on them it would burn them. You couldn't afford the film to stop. There was a Maltese Cross – there was a sprocket which held the film and took it down one exposure each time, and all the others were running all the time together. But this sprocket took each frame down into the light –

14:00 and the others were timed so they never raced ahead or got behind. Then of course it went out through the lens and on to the screen. Of course, we had half a dozen lenses because the halls or the buildings we showed the pictures in varied in length, width and height. We would even show it out in the open air, but we weren't allowed to charge a price on Sunday.

14:30 So it was a silver coin on Sunday. This is back in the thirties. This world has changed so much in my lifetime. Fantastic really. The things we weren't allowed to do. The grip the British had on this country was amazing. We had a policeman in every town who reported back to the police in the city

15:00 and so on. We weren't allowed to have any radio sets. They were all licensed. You weren't allowed to build a transmitter but I did. The greatest thing that ever happened was the Second World War for this country. It broke Britain's grip on us and we became a nation of our own.

15:30 **In terms of cinema in those early days, was that a big novelty?**

Oh yes quite. The early ones, but then it became routine because every three weeks they would get pictures and they got used to them and they loved them. And they used to ask for certain types of films. Would we try and get that film for them, and what's more the kids – I was only young myself but I knew

all the kids from ten to twenty years old, all up

16:00 Eyre Peninsula. I would play gramophone records on the – through the speaker. And the girls would come in and say they would like me to get them that record. I would write out a list on each trip –

16:30 I might have twenty or thirty records that they've asked for. I would send to Adelaide and they would send them back in a box. Two and six each they were.

So were you the coolest guy in town?

No not necessarily no. I knew the girls and the boys. They were good kids too. Great friends a lot of them.

17:00 And if they had no money I used to let them in. Unbeknown to the boss. That was when I was with Norm Stubbing. He was a good fellow. Then he sent me on my own and I was boss cocky. I had my own friends. I picked them to help me. Charlie Chook Tilly – Charles Tillmouth.

17:30 And Ernie Cray. He was of German parentage and he went to the Lutheran college in Adelaide. He was a real close friend. He was butchered by the Japs in Bougainville. Poor bloke. Anyway, what else. The pictures.

18:00 Even after the war, the CWA [Country Women's Association]– a lot of the girls joined you know. My wife's a member and has been a life member in Adelaide. So that's where we stay when we go to Adelaide. Anyway I meet some of them and they're elderly now too, but survivors. But they know. They remember.

So how long did you work doing this kind of a job?

From 1931 to 1938.

18:30 That's when I joined the air force, no 1939. I did the pictures for all those years and I knew every kid from Port Lincoln to Fowlers Bay, a thousand miles up the coast.

You mentioned before that you had a glider that you made with a couple of mates?

Well,

19:00 it was a primary glider. I don't know who designed it but it was used by one of the schools in Port Lincoln. They got tired of it and somebody wrecked it. So it was up for sale. They wanted fourteen pounds for it which was a lot of money in those days. So I raced around collecting but put in most of it myself, and bought it.

19:30 I bought it back to Cleve. I got a carrier with a motor truck to pick it up in pieces in Port Lincoln and bring it up to Cleve which is about two hundred miles, and there I repaired it and covered it and got it into service. Myself and Ernie Cray and Chooky Tilly. It was ours. Anyway I've got pictures of it if you want to see it.

20:00 **When you say a glider, what kind of machine is that? Just describing it to me – you don't need to show me a picture. Can you describe it in terms of what you could do with it?**

Well we had an old Dodge four cylinder utility. It was the back of a car and Charlie Tillmouth's father was a builder and he owned the ute [utility truck].

20:30 So we used to get two hundred feet of hemp rope about half inch and tie it on the back of the ute and the front of the glider and get the glider up about two hundred feet into the air at about twenty-five miles an hour in the ute, then drop the rope off and land the glider. You would glide down to the ground and land it, and then drag it down wind again.

21:00 So you would go down to the bottom of the paddock with the wind blowing that way, you'd come against the wind and do it again.

So how high could you get once the rope was cut on the glider?

No higher but we would glide around in a circle. It descended rather shallowly. You might do two or three turns before you got down to the ground. And then you'd drag it back up the down wind

21:30 fence, hook on and go again.

And how would you actually be positioned in the glider?

You're sitting on the front of it and you've got a control column, back and forth and up and down, sideways and that was it. You're just sitting in a seat with a strap around your tummy.

It sounds like a lot of fun?

Oh yes.

22:00 It was. We would spend hours with it, every weekend. But unfortunately it got burnt.

So with that kind of early interest in aviation, were there other things that you were passionate about that were similar?

Aviation. Yes, my brother and I were building an aeroplane in Cleve but we never had the money nor the resources.

22:30 But we got a lot done. We built the wings and the fuselage, but I went into the air force before the thing was ever finished.

What were you modelling the aircraft on?

The Tiger Moth, well it was a Gypsy Moth in those days. The Tiger Moth didn't come along until the Second World War.

How were you copying the design?

Well mostly guess work.

23:00 But the odd Gypsy Moth did come around and we'd measure bits and pieces and we'd ask questions. And we had books on them with most of the dimensions in them. It wasn't hard. We got them pretty accurate, but the engine was a problem. In those days there were very few engines about especially one for an aeroplane. It was just impossible.

23:30 You couldn't get them.

So what do you think made you so interested in flying?

I don't know. Although the First World War – the early aeroplanes. I had always been mad on aeroplanes and wanted to fly. And you know, I'm grateful to Mr Hitler because I would never have flown without him. He started the war

24:00 and of course they needed lots of pilots and I was lucky I got in. The air force wanted me to go in as a wireless engineer – building sets and what have you. And I said no I wasn't going into the air force unless I'm a pilot. So they granted that.

Did you know much about aircraft from the Great War?

Quite a bit yes. About the rotary engines and the inline engine and so on. But the French Rotary was a very common engine.

24:30 Most of the Pommy [English] aeroplanes had them. They had fifteen hours before they had to be rebuilt. They were pretty primitive stuff.

Where did you find out stories about the Great War?

Mostly in books and newspapers. I'd go to any bookshop and look through for anything pertaining to

25:00 aviation. I would study it carefully. My brother who was a little older than I was – he was more interested in aero-engineering. He took a correspondence course with an American – American Aviation something. I can't remember what it was.

25:30 But he took this correspondence course and he was pretty bright. He would work all day on a menial job to get some money and he'd study half the night until three o'clock in the morning or something like that. He graduated just as Ginnie Gold got three tri motor Junkers aeroplanes from Germany. And Ginnie Gold

26:00 asked the Americans where they could get an engineer to look after them. And they said, Ron Cock had graduated. So in 1936 when these aeroplanes arrived from Germany and he went with them to New Guinea as chief engineer. Not that's an amazing business isn't it? Just how he fluked it. Just as he finished his course the Yanks were asked for an engineer and he got the job.

26:30 Of course he finished up with the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation as chief engineer until he retired. He's dead now.

Did you have seven brothers?

No, one brother and seven sisters.

27:00 The girls are all very healthy, all married and most of them had children. They're still around, quite a few of them. Three have died but the others – I correspond by telephone of course.

Were any of them interested in aviation or being involved with your aircraft?

Yes well Ruth married an air force pilot, Morris Willing. He was Honour Boy 1937 Point Cook. Anyway they were childhood sweethearts

27:30 and went to the same Sunday School and church in Adelaide, married. And strangely enough he was

sent to Darwin on Hudsons, was shot down by the Japanese in 1941 – ’42 was it when the Japs came in. So that was the end.

28:00 She’s still around. She’s quite lucid. She would be nearly eighty now.

Would any of your sisters get involved with the glider?

No they were too young. That was strictly males.

Was it unusual for girls to be maybe interested in that kind of thing?

28:30 In those days it was yes. Girls weren’t interested. That was too far advanced rubbish for the girls in those days. How it’s changed now. They have top female gun pilots now, and they’re real smart too, they really are.

Well what sorts of things would the girls be up to?

29:00 Painting and crocheting and knitting. My sisters – I can remember them painting. They painted roses and gee they did a good job too some of them. But all the girlie things. Strangely enough, I don’t know how it happened, but mother was quite capable of keeping the sexes apart, yet we were a closely knit family

29:30 and lived out in the bush. But there was no liaison from a sexual point of view. They were sort of different some how. We lived on farms and we had a Collie dog. I can remember this quite well. There were quite a lot of brown snakes

30:00 about. Anyway the kids were out walking and the Collie dog grabbed this snake and of course the girls try and make the dog drop the snake. Anyway the snake bit the dog and the dog died a few hours later. Anyway, great wailing and going on. If I wanted to get even with the girls I would chase

30:30 the bloody cat around the house and that used to stir them up. It’s a bit stupid but there you are.

But being country girls in the bush surely they would have been less girlie then city girls?

Not so, although they were pretty capable. They helped my mother a lot, especially the older ones, Joan and Mavis. Mavis is a schoolteacher by the way. She rings me every week about the rest. I’m

31:00 kept informed. Dear Mavis. She was the academic among the girls. The others were girlier than Mavis. And there’s Mavis’ story. She had this boyfriend and he joined the air force as a navigator. He wanted to marry her before he went overseas.

31:30 And of course Mavis had a cold or the flu or something and they couldn’t be married. So he went overseas and he was only over there for a week and he got shot down and killed. So that was the end of that. I’ve got a photograph of him there somewhere.

Did your sisters ever do the same kind of thing as the boys

32:00 **in the house? Like what kind of jobs would the boys do?**

Chop the wood, milk the cows – that’s about it. What else? Do the gardening, help with the gardening. Mother used to grow a lot of vegetables and these kids could really eat. She used to bake eight loaves of bread every second day,

32:30 and we had cows and we had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s [fowls]. We had meat and eggs and things and vegetables in the garden. In those days of the Depression we lived reasonably well. Dad was smart enough to get on a farm although he wasn’t a farmer. The family – while he was away working – building a house or yards,

33:00 we would be milking the cows and collecting the eggs, and we lived pretty well. Ron and I would help milk the cows. We would put the milk on the stove and boil it and we’d get about three quarters of thick cream on the top and we would come home from school and we’d have this big piece of bread with jam and an inch of this scalded cream.

33:30 I can still see it. It was beaut. We weren’t underfed or anything. We walked to school five miles. No boots.

What would you wear on your feet?

Nothing. Nothing at all my dear. I never had a pair of boots until I was about fourteen. Always bare footed. They’re as good today as they were then too.

You couldn’t afford shoes?

34:00 No. I don’t know about afford them, but we didn’t have them. They weren’t necessary. No actually we couldn’t afford them. I think I got them when I was doing my primary school certificate. But we walked to school about five miles as a rule.

Did people expect your feet to be clean?

Well

34:30 I suppose. They were dusty. But you never perspired or anything. You had a pretty solid sole on your feet, and most kids didn't have shoes at school in the early days because the parents couldn't afford them. It was rather good because we were a pretty happy lot of kids together.

35:00 We never had any material things but we used to play a lot of sport. Dear old Hiney Heinrich the schoolteacher – we had two footy teams in the school, and he got so excited. He was the umpire and the teacher. So we would go to school at nine o'clock in the morning and we would have eleven o'clock recess. And at recess he started a competition between the two

35:30 teams, and it's going so well he forgets about going back into school. So we would knock off at lunch. So we lost half a day for school work. But he didn't care. He loved the kids at sport. We had a hockey team. We had this hockey team at school.

36:00 We were very good too. But we couldn't afford hockey sticks – there's a little bush that grows out on the Eyre Peninsula, the Mallee tree. There's usually a little stump about an inch and a half across and the trunk of the tree comes out and then up, almost like a golf stick. Every kid had one until somebody

36:30 with these sticks hit one of the kids in the head and they were out for about three hours and then hockey was banned.

Do you remember anyone having a pair of shoes?

Yes, no not really. Some of the girls did. A lot of the girls didn't too.

37:00 Those families who perhaps had a little bit more money – but none of them had it really. See out in the bush on Eyre Peninsula there wasn't a lot of money about. They were just starting off as farmers and shop keepers and what have you. There were now showers and anything like that. It was all baths. We had a bath twice a week I think it was.

37:30 Everybody in the tub one after the other you know. They were good days though when we were kids.

What subjects did you learn at school?

Well reading, writing, mathematics – I did calculus and trigonometry. We all did that. Grade 8 and 9 we got to.

38:00 But we used to out rabbiting. I must tell the stories of that. We had to go out rabbiting and we'd go from Friday night – after we left school we would go home and get our rations, a bit of bread and jam or something. And we'd head off into the hills and we'd trap these rabbits. We'd shoot them with our .22's. We'd go to the burrows and –

38:30 I don't know if you people can imagine this. In those days rabbits were endemic. There were millions of them. We would get to a great big warren. There would be Ernie Crane, Chook Tilley and myself. We'd all have .22 rifles. This was when we were in our mid teens. And we would be laying away from the burrow about fifty yards from say four o'clock on.

39:00 And the rabbits would come up to feed at night. They'd pop their heads up which they would always do and have a look around and listen. And we'd shoot them. This was when we'd get this very expensive skins. Anyway we did very well out of these skins. Hat makers were requiring them back then. They still do I believe.

39:30 **Would you eat the rabbits too?**

Oh yes. Too right. They called it underground mutton. I reckon without them we would have starved in the Depression you know. It was a major source of food. It was really big business at one stage.

So who would skin the rabbits?

We all did that. You get

40:00 pretty good at it. You can skin a rabbit pretty smartly, no problem. All the boys knew how to skin rabbits.

How would you skin a rabbit?

Well you slit down the two back legs and two front legs and you peel the skin off, you don't cut it down the middle. You get hold of the two back legs and the skin and you pull it. When it gets tight around the two ears you give it a slit and it comes off.

40:30 Then we used to put them on wire. With a piece of heavy wire you bend it like a U and slide the skin over it – a fresh skin, so it could dry properly. They dry and they're very easy to handle then. And you'd hook them up on the fence and they would dry.

How much would you get for a skin?

Four shillings a pound. About twelve skins made a pound in those days. And of course four shillings was quite a bit of money. That's how we young blokes survived.

How would you eat the rabbit?

Boil it or roast it. If you took them home Mum used to put filling in the tummy area, like you do a WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK . The same thing. With herbs and something. And it was good.

Tape 5

00:47 **I'm interested to know what you had heard about the Great War. Any stories?**

Yes a lot because on these picture trips I met a lot of people

01:00 and a lot of returned men. We used to ask questions because we were always interested in the war, and they'd tell us their story. One, Jack Conzag [?]. He went to the First World War and he was a farmer on Eyre Peninsula and he come to the pictures and he was a great friend.

01:30 And of course he would answer all our questions about it. He even joined the air force in the Second World War. He wasn't that old and he was pretty young when he went to the First World War. I don't know – patriotism I suppose. See, the story of Empire. We were brain washed as children and 'the sun never set on the Empire'.

02:00 We didn't know about the slave trade and the problems in India because the communications were poor, and we were told exactly what we were supposed to hear. A lot of it was baloney.

What were some of the things they'd say about the Empire?

Well 'the sun never set on the Empire' and it was 'the greatest empire the world had ever seen', and the Navy would protect – we were told here as children

02:30 that we were to honour the Queen and Britain was the greatest nation in the world – they would keep the sea lanes open and we'd supply the raw materials. This is the stuff right up until the Second World War and we believed it because nobody else told us anything about it. They never told us about the Japanese atrocities in China or anything like that.

03:00 We had to learn those things ourselves later on. As a matter of fact they told us from the intelligence point of view not to worry about the Japs because they can't see very well, they can't hear, their lungs won't take more than ten thousand feet – and when we did get into it the Japs were pretty good. They were better than a lot of the others – their first top line pilots.

03:30 **Did you identify yourself as being British?**

Yes we were all British, not Australian – British. We were brain washed. There's no argument about it now. I don't care if they disagree with me now. We were brain washed. We were acclimatised or whatever. We were told what they wanted us to know.

04:00 **Did you know many actual Pommies?**

Well there were quite a few and they all wanted to go home again. They talked about a thousand pounds a year and a ticket home. We were the colonials, a lower breed or race – until the Second World War.

04:30 The First World War did change things a bit, but not enough. We were still subjected to control from Britain. They sent [Sir] Otto Niemeyer [Bank of England] out here in 1935 I think it was from the Treasury. And he told us what we could and couldn't do. During the Depression things

05:00 were really serious. We were under the thumb there's no argument. The greatest liberation for me was the Second World War. I raced around all over the world and saw how other people lived, how they spoke, how they thought. Plus the fact that we were classed as

05:30 colonials, a less sort of race which I resented very much. To be called a colonial when we were volunteers going overseas was a bit rough. I thought so anyway and I wasn't frightened to say so. I got into trouble a couple of times over it.

As children was it easy to recognise

06:00 **differences between British ex-pats [expatriates] and colonial Australians?**

Yes, and we had a lot of Italian migrants called wogs of course because they were an inferior race, very similar to us. Things have changed drastically, they really have. The Empire has faded away.

06:30 Most people – and the aftermath is the tragedy. India and Pakistan and what have you, and Iran and Iraq and so on. At the end of the First World War Britain and France were dominant. They just cut the world into pieces and said that's yours, that's yours. You go there. The Kurds couldn't have any of

Turkey.

07:00 The tragedy is that they got away with murder in those days, we can't do it now. American rose in two hundred and fifty or three hundred years to one of the biggest nations. The biggest technological nation the world's ever seen. We're following suit. Twenty years from now China will be a super power.

07:30 **Were there any goods things about England?**

Oh yes. Like Dorothea McKellar's story [poem]: 'Green and shaded lands, and ordered woods and gardens and soft refreshing rain." But 'I love a sunburnt country, a land of sweeping plains. Of rugged mountain ranges and droughts and flooding rains." That's Dorothea McKellar.

08:00 But we're different. I spent 9 months in England but I don't like the cold and the wet. I'd rather have the hot sun and the belting showers we get.

Apart from things like nature which I think is really important, how would you describe an Australian?

08:30 Well mostly, free, a rather keen operator in a lot of respects, with a sense of humour, and a sports lover. We're not tired. We don't go on pomp and ceremony like the British with their parades at Buckingham Palace and their coaches

09:00 and teams of horses. They're different to us. We're different. We don't care how many royal sons they've got. They come out here and they can get on a horse and ride just like an ordinary guy. Their pomp and ceremony doesn't interest us a great deal. Not now

09:30 anyway. We've got one of them out here now, a youngster. He's doing alright. He's being looked after very well isn't he?

You mentioned before about the old blokes, the old diggers telling you stories about the Great War, did they only tell you the good stories or did they tell you the not so good stories?

Well they didn't dwell much on the actual combat. They would tell stories about their escapades or the girls on leave and so on. That's

10:00 the way they were. They sort of smothered the rest of it up, the terrible bits which – we lost 100,000 didn't we? Young men between 17 and 22 or something. A major tragedy that First World War – for the sake of the European stupidity.

10:30 When the First World War was over, the Versailles Treaty they didn't even like the Germans there. They stripped Germany bare. They created the field for a certain second world war. The way they treated the German people was abominable. And yet a lot of our pioneers were German blood. First class settlers of the first order.

11:00 You couldn't get better. Yet in Europe they've been arguing for centuries – the Ruskies, the Germans, the Frogs, the Poms. I'll fight you this year and you fight him next year. What a tragedy.

So what were your impressions of those old diggers?

The old diggers? The First World War blokes home?

11:30 They made first class citizens but I think their thinking was a little too advanced for what didn't go, because we were still steeped in the belief that the Empire was the greatest thing that ever happened. I think it's one of the great tragedies if you ask me. But we're learning now aren't we? I mean the Americans are in a very similar situation.

12:00 But it's a tragedy, and you must listen to this because – I'm going to say this even though I know everyone may disagree. If we don't do something about the Jewish situation in Palestine we're going to have a religious war that's going to destroy us – the Christians against the Muslims. There's no doubt about that.

12:30 It's coming. And the Jews never learned a thing in the Holocaust. What are they doing to the Palestinians now – the people whose homeland it is? I was there for 18 months or two years and I found those native Palestinians very fine people, friendly and honest people. Just because they're Muslims is no reason

13:00 to destroy them. The Jewish religion is no better if you ask me. Both of them have got no foundation anyway. It's tragic. And if we don't do something about it, the greatest power in the world today, America – the Americans should turn around with the peace plan and insist on it. [Israeli Prime Minister] Sharon's got to stop murdering the other people.

And did you know this when you were talking to these old diggers – the tragedies of war and things like that?

13:30 Yes, very similar. And yet they were over ruled. But you don't over rule anybody today. This is nearly a 100 years later. This country of ours has changed dramatically and we've got to watch this migration

programme carefully because the [(UNCLEAR)] have declared that the top section of Australia

14:00 about mid Western Australia across to Cairns will be Muslim in the next fifty years. This is a prediction made and it may be so. We've got 220 million of them just north of it.

Just coming back to what we were talking about before, about the tragedies of war – I think we'll go more into the present stuff a bit later on.

14:30 **But just talking about those old diggers, and tragedies, were there any stories that stuck out for you that any of the old diggers told you about their experiences during the war?**

Oh yes. It wasn't as hectic. It wasn't as fast moving as the Second World War. But it was much more brutal – well

15:00 I wouldn't say much more brutal, but more constant. Ours came in flashes quickly but their's was in a hole dug in the ground opposite one another for weeks and weeks on end. I think it was just as destructive even though we did it more quickly and with bigger numbers, it only took a short while. They did it over a longer period.

15:30 And it made a lot of those guys think very seriously about it. They were more compassionate, more friendly, more considerate of the people who didn't go. Even now I can pick people from what they say whether they went to the Second World War or stayed at home. You can pick them as easy as blazes. Those who have this experience. You youngies will never know this.

16:00 I hope you never get in that position. I don't think you will. I think we'll wake up to ourselves sooner than later. But you've got a holy war on your hands if you don't do something about the Jewish question.

How can you pick if someone's been in the war or not?

By their attitude. It's a strange thing, the fellas who didn't go are a little too more British than we are.

16:30 Or more prone to be British than we are. You pick anyone who's been to the Second World War and ask them, he'll tell you. He's not overly keen on the Empire because he knows what's been going on. The things we did in India for a start are absolutely – well Africa –

17:00 They wanted to put the railway from South Africa through to Cairo but the Boers wouldn't allow it so what did they do? They went to war and murdered them. You don't know about these things do you? But there you are.

17:30 Europe dominated everything in those days. Of course we had to learn but I think we'll all agree eventually. And I think we'll finish up with one set of ideas. These religions – you analyse it a bit and you'll find there's no basis for it really.

Can you remember at all where you were when the war was declared?

Yes I can. A little town called Kunjana [?] on the Eyre Peninsula. It's a railway station with about

18:00 two shops and a pub, and that's it. But a big district. Well C.K. Dickson came from Kunjana.

Can you describe the experience of hearing that the war was declared?

Well I was pleased you know because I wanted to fly and

18:30 I knew I'd get in the air force. It was rather narrow admittedly but that's the way it was. We had been brain washed by propaganda you know. How terrible the Nazis were. I saw the War Crimes Trials and most of the evidence and since the war's been over, I've taken a pretty big interest in trying to say why –

19:00 it won't happen again. We'll make sure it won't happen again. But the untruths that were told and the terrible deeds that were committed in the name of good, is really bad. The truth – they don't come out with the truth.

19:30 They don't tell the truth any more and until we do we're going to be in the same situation. In my view anyway. I'm quite concerned about it. I've studied history back to the Pharaohs. And one of the greatest civilisations the world has ever known, for ten thousand years. You mentioned one of the guys, Alexander the Great.

20:00 There's nothing great about Alexander. He was a young fella from Macedon, a little kingdom in northern Greece but what he did through Europe! He had himself crowned Pharaoh of Egypt at Siwa Oasis in 300 BC and destroyed the Pharaohs' empire. One of the great civilisations of all time.

20:30 **That's why I think it's really good to get your story because we can get history down accurately. So just in terms of where you were when war was declared Bob, was it more for you than just wanting to join the RAAF?**

21:00 **Were there other things on your mind as well?**

Well I was partly brain washed with the others – the Empire came into it. But I've learned a hell of a lot since. I was a brain washed kid then. I'm an old man now and I've been through the mill and I've got a really different to tell see, that's the point. This business of brain washing – it's done politically,

21:30 it's done religiously – I think we've got to come to the truth and the truth's got to be told to everybody. No more lying and cheating, it's out, finished. I reckon. We're all God's creatures and we can all be friends together. Although we speak different languages and live in different sections of the globe, we

22:00 can all be friends. There's no reason why we can't. You've seen that happen in Eastern Europe. It's not true enough yet because they haven't taken hold of the whole tragedy, Kosovo and so on.

As a young man how did you think about war – what was war to you back then?

22:30 Well it was a great thing for the Empire. We were being attacked. We were going to win and we were going to fight them off. They were inferior to us. Propaganda again. We were brain washed my dear. We thought we were the superior race. Even with the religion they were telling us we were equal, but oh no, we were superior. We couldn't lose.

23:00 And there you are – [American President] Bush is not as popular as he was a little while ago. There's a lot of people now condemning him because of what's going on in Iraq. And yet we won't learn. We won't see the truth. This Palestine – Iraq

23:30 would be peaceful tomorrow, so would the Muslim world, if we would just go and say to the Jews pull all those bloody trucks and tanks out of the West Bank and leave these people alone.

Bob I'm interested to hear about initial flight training once you did join up. What happened there?

Well very little. We were very busy.

24:00 It was high pressure and you had to perform and what's more there were a few penalties if you didn't. I mean they kept us physically fit with a lot of sport and physical exercise, and we didn't have time to think much about anything. That's why I said when we had this passing out parade on the wings ceremony, when we qualified.

24:30 This girl struck me as something wonderful. She played this Delius on the violin and it affected me way back then. That was 1940 and I can remember it like it was yesterday. I've thought of it through the years and it's sustained me over the period. It was something fantastic. It was better than a desire to be a good

25:00 pilot or anything. It's always had me in.

Were you learning on the Gypsy Moth?

Yes.

Can you just maybe talk me through the Gypsy?

Well it's identical with the Tiger actually.

So tell me about the Gypsy?

Well it was a little bi-plane

25:30 with a nineteen horse power four cylinder engine in it. It was easy to fly, safe as a church really. You have to be practically hopeless to get hurt in it. Mind you it killed quite a few, but there you are. So not everybody wanted to fly and a lot chose to because it was a good idea I suppose.

26:00 Not very capable see and they killed themselves. But it's easy to fly. It had narrow wheels so it was a bit tricky landing. It could tip over a bit. But that was endemic of most of them. It was easy to fly really. We did most of our aerobatics with them. Rolling, diving, climbing.

26:30 Side slipping and all the rest of it. But it's pretty common sense when you get to know it. There's nothing hard about any of it. The hard part is like in Abyssinia – I was flying Wellesleys at seventeen thousand feet with no oxygen and no helmet. That was stupid. I mean I had a piece of half inch hose in the corner of my mouth and a bottle of

27:00 oxygen down here. And my wireless operator, a boy entrant into the RAF, he would be frozen solid in the back of this contraption and when we landed at Addis Ababa he's be half an hour getting mobile again. He was frozen solid.

27:30 The rubbish we started off with was really rubbish. I'm talking about the Wellesley now. The Gypsy was a toy. A very elementary flying machine. It had what was necessary to get the pupils to the stage where they could be put in more sophisticated machines.

28:00 It was a very good training machine.

So apart from the glider that you had when you were a young man, had you had much other aircraft experience?

No none at all. I was completely – apart from the glider I had done nothing. But I had studied a fair bit. I knew what went on but I hadn't experienced it.

28:30 When we got onto the Gypsy Moths it was nothing to it really.

What was your impression of your first flight in the Gypsy?

Well I got a big surprise because we started aerobatics fairly early and I wasn't sick but it used to upset me a bit, my stomach. Air sickness and we got it as pupil pilots. I've seen blokes real green when you

29:00 got on the ground. So you're not as capable or efficient with a disability like that. Some blokes just had to give it away. We had three or four who just had to stay on the ground. They got sick, stomach upsets and so on.

29:30 But they let them off. They said right you can go and do something else. They didn't let them out.

Does your body get used to it?

Oh yes. I got over that airsickness business. I could do anything in the finish. No worries. Night flying is more difficult than anything. You've got to fly on instruments and you've got to use them properly otherwise you could kill yourself.

30:00 So you get used to it. I got to the stage I didn't like flying during the day light.

In the Gypsy Moth have you got an air crew?

No – oh wait a minute. There's two cockpits and you have an instructor sitting in one and you're the pupil in the other. Then he gets out and you're on your own. Most of them just fly with one in them you know. You might have a passenger; say your friend or girlfriend or something. There's two seats.

30:30 **Can you tell me what the purpose of the Gypsy Moth is as an aircraft?**

Two reasons, training and pleasure. As a training machine it was ideal of course because it was pretty safe. You would be half crackers to get yourself killed. And otherwise once you can fly it was a cheap sports machine, slow, reliable. There's quite a few around.

31:00 They've got some big clubs now. They've still got the war time stuff.

Can you describe for me – imagine that you're sitting in the cockpit, can you just describe for me what is where?

On the Gypsy? You've got this hole you're sitting in. It's padded around the edge. You've got this control column – nose down, nose up.

31:30 Sideways. And the rudder. You press the rudder and it turns that way, and press that one and it turns that. You've got a throttle lever which controls the revolutions of the engine. Back here it's ticking over quietly and idle. Push it forward and you get full revolutions. You needed 1900 revs – you've got a rev counter, an oil pressure gauge,

32:00 an air speed metre – that's about all in the Tiger. The engine revs, engine oil pressure, air speed and altimeter for the height. They're illustrated for you. Nice big letters, easy to see. Nothing much to it.

So how long into your initial training did you do your first solo flight?

32:30 About seven hours. Unfortunately in those days – I should have done it sooner, but the pressure was on and the instructors were inexperienced because they had just done the course themselves. You know, they weren't the brightest instructors in the world and they were making mistakes too you see. It took most blokes about six or eight hours to go solo because the

33:00 instructors were green or raw, or new.

That must have been amazing. Can you describe your first solo?

By myself? Yes, well it was a nice calm morning. The instructor gets out and says, "You're going solo now. It will be a bit lighter because I'm out of the aeroplane, so watch your landing."

33:30 Just something to say, away you go. So, I did a circuit and came in and landed and it was no different to when he was in it. But by the time you go solo you're fairly confident. And you've got used to the think leaving the ground and looking down.

What's it like, the experience of being in that aircraft and

34:00 **looking down at everything?**

You get pretty used to fairly quickly, but it's pretty interesting. You can see all the people moving about

and the houses in their back yards. It's quite interesting. You get to be pretty observant which you had to be. And you can gauge distances and speed roughly. You would glance at the instruments, the rev counter and

34:30 the air speed. The air speed was a fairly critical one because coming in to land you had to be just above stalling speed otherwise you just wouldn't get on the ground. So you just let the wheels touch the ground and take a few more revolutions off and it would just trundle along and stop. No problem. The big ones are different.

35:00 **Did you have any mishaps?**

No I never had an accident except being shot up a couple of times. But I've never had an accident due to my own inefficiency. I've been lucky. I've had tyres blow and that sort of thing. I had one in the Middle East. They had brought out synthetic rubber and they put it in the aeroplane tyres and

35:30 I was at [(UNCLEAR)] at the time. I got the job of trying to destroy this synthetic tyre on the Wellington. Well I dropped it in from fifty and a hundred feet real hard and I never burst that tyre. What happened was it drove the legs up through the wing but still didn't blow the tyre. I got out and said, "Look I've finished, you have a go."

36:00 The tyre was so good. Synthetic rubber.

You mentioned though that there were a few accidents with some of the other trainee pilots?

Yes well we had a few. Stupid mistakes like running into the fence, not fully opening the throttle and running into the far fence even.

36:30 And windy conditions. You would tip one wing on the ground and of course it would swing around. Things like that. Windy days and it was just inattention or slow reactions. But as you get older and as you do more of it you get better at it of course. And it becomes routine. Especially

37:00 the night stuff too, you get good at it. I could drop those Wellingtons in at about four inches off the ground. You'd lose flying speed and down and then use the brakes. But you're doing it all the time and it comes naturally.

You described the airsickness, once you get over that what's the experience of flying like?

Well it's a bit boring really.

37:30 You've got all these instruments to look after but you've got a panoramic view – in daylight and very little else to do. You can map read. You've got your map and say you're going from A to B, well you know – you look at your map and know where you are. You pick out the spots. We call that DR navigation.

38:00 Direct reference.

So it's not exhilarating or beautiful to have that kind of panoramic view?

Well it's quite nice but I wouldn't say it's beautiful. No I'd say – you'd get a better view – I mean you've always got a view and then it starts to look like the view depending on how high you are or how large the scale of the map.

38:30 But the navigation's very interesting. You have DR which is just fly by certain points and speed and distance, and you have astro [navigation] where you use the stars. And every second is a mile in distance. So it must be so accurate. And then of course modern day GPS [global positioning system] which is a laugh. A friend of mine,

39:00 a test captain with Qantas, he shows me his private aeroplane, a Cessna. He says, "Look at this." And we get in – it's out here at Kananball. He switches it on and he's got the latest GPS. It's a little screen about so big. He switches it on and presses a couple of buttons, the lat [itude] and Long [itude] of the place, and up comes the aerodrome

39:30 we're on and he starts the engine and he starts to taxi and this little tiny spot starts to move on this aerodrome. That's how good it is today. It's fantastic. It really is. GPS, Satellites.

Tape 6

00:44 **Bob, do you have a nickname?**

Cat's Eyes. In the air force. I seem to be able to see things pretty well.

01:00 I had first class eye sight. Nothing else I don't think. They used to call me Cocko because we had some lovely names for our blokes. Curly Coritz. He never had a hair on his head. His name was Coritz and seeing he had no hair at all, we called him Curly.

01:30 We had another chap named Jack Star. Jack Star was his real name but we called him Twinkle. Another kid who was a sergeant pilot. His name was Fairweather. Well we called him Stormy Fairweather. The boys had a name for everybody.

I've heard there was a lot of suspicion – not suspicion but certain things that pilots and aircrew would do before they'd get in their aircraft?

02:00 Well yes strange enough. I had a bloke who I knew pretty well in the torpedo business.

NO VISION BRIEFLY

02:30 Mainly wheat and Soya beans and sorghum. You've seen sorghum haven't you? It's stock feed.

03:00 **Was there a nickname that you had in the air force?**

Well not really, only Cocko. No, that was it, or Cat's Eyes in the night flying.

03:30 **What about – you were about to tell me before we cut the camera – about some of the rituals for before you would get into the plane?**

Well some of them would be according to their makeup. There was a particular one I knew and his name was Popplestone. The big tyres, they stood so high, and he would kneel against this wheel and pray every time before takeoff. I was a bit of a heathen, and I said, "Now Poppy, if you came down with me

04:00 every day to the maintenance area and we looked after these flying machines, I think you might be doing yourself a better favour." He got shot down a couple of days later so that was that. But he used to religiously have a little prayer against this wheel before a flight. He was a captain.

Was he religious?

04:30 Yes he was. And me the biggest heathen of all survived and those fellas didn't.

What else would pilots or air crew do before they jumped into the aeroplane?

Some of them were very particular about their preparation. Some were careless,

05:00 but they all finished up roughly the same. Some survived, some didn't. I don't know whether any particular attitude was of any benefit. It's a matter of luck.

When you say careless, in what way?

They couldn't care less sort of attitude but underneath they were meticulous. They couldn't afford to be otherwise.

05:30 To handle those machines properly you had to know what you were doing. You had to be on the ball all the time. We would take off at eight o'clock and we would often not get home until five the next morning. So it's a long night of hard slog you know. Cold. You'd shiver to death, and the vibration and the noise. You had two 1100 horse power engines with great big exhaust pipes just here.

06:00 And the vibrations. You would go numb with the vibrations. Those early aeroplanes – they tore the nervous system to pieces and destroyed your hearing, but my hearing is still reasonably good. But a lot of people went deaf even when they were young.

06:30 **So were there any other things that the pilots or air crew would do before they got in their aircraft?**

Not really. Each one had his own secret little thoughts you know. But I notice we were all pretty keen to find out who got home and who didn't. I told you I used to get up – we would get home at five and debrief underground and then

07:00 go to Balute [?] Buildings and go to bed. But in a couple of hours I would be awake to see who else was back. It got to a stage we were losing them so quickly you didn't even know them. So I gave it away.

I read somewhere where the air crew used to pee on their plane?

Yes, they didn't pee on them; they had a nervous pee before they got in them. Yeah

07:30 that was common. Something about your nerves that made you have a wee before you climbed in the thing. There were no facilities for that sort of thing. And yet in the later fighters we had a pee tube. But you were often in the air – well flying to Japan we were flying for six hours so a lot of boys needed something. There wasn't much preparation or anything like that.

08:00 You had to be pretty good and stable and stick it out.

Did you name your planes?

No, but a lot of the Americans did. But we were forbidden to do that in the RAF, the Royal Air Force. Not the RAAF. But we just didn't do it. And what's more, it was only later in Bomber Command did they

08:30 put anything on the sides of the aeroplanes. But one thing about them. We used to polish ours. They were completely clean aluminium. We would polish them with Bon Ami and we could get five miles an hour faster after polishing them. We would increase the air speed 5 miles and hour because of the very smooth surface on the outside.

What did you

09:00 **polish it with?**

Bon Ami. It's a white powder. It's a cleansing powder. You can still buy it.

How would you clean them?

A tin of water and cloth and a block of Bon Ami. It's like a white – it's like soap and you put it on. It's a tiny bit abrasive and when you wipe it off with a clean cloth it's bright and shiny and very smooth. And just that smoothness gave you five miles an hour, less drag.

09:30 Drag was the force that was keeping you back.

How could you calculate the five mile difference?

The air speed metre. They were accurate. We could dive those things at 400 miles an hour. They were a beautiful machine. The Mustang, built in America and built in Australia was probably the superior machine of the Second World War.

10:00 The B 29 was the best bomber machine. It bombed Hiroshima. The Enola Gay they called it.

When you were talking about polishing the machine were you talking about the Mustang?

Yes.

Or was that common with all of them?

Well it was common with all metal. Some of them didn't have a metal exterior. A lot of the English aeroplanes were fabric. The Wellington for instance

10:30 had a fabric covered wing. So you had to be very careful. But we never had anything – we used to get a lot of icing. This is ice sticking to the aeroplane and loading the weight. We used grease. Ordinary axle grease and we would smear it along the wings, so when the ice built up, the axle grease wouldn't hold it to the wing and so it would let go and fall off.

11:00 The Americans put proper de-icing things on their wings and so did the English finally. But it was a problem early in the war.

Why didn't the Australians use de-icing?

It wasn't known here see. We were not allowed to have American machines in this country prior to World War II. We had all English machines and they

11:30 were far inferior to the American stuff. They talk about the Halifax and the Lincoln and all this – they were alright I suppose. But rag and glue jobs compared with the B 29, the Mitchell and Marauder and those American machines. We won the desert war. We didn't win it for any other purpose that we had a predominance of

12:00 machines. America was in the war and the lull at El Alamein when [Field Marshall] Montgomery came along, we had ten to one in aeroplanes and twenty to one in tanks. They were all built in America and shipped over to us. We had superior flying machines like the Mitchell and the Marauder and the A 28, the Douglas.

12:30 And we just couldn't lose. We were so superior. Plus the fact that poor old [Field Marshall] Rommel was out of fuel. He had no fuel left, and even then it took us nine days to break through. So of course he was finished. It was hopeless. But we didn't win it by any prowess. We won it by overshadowing numbers. Superior numbers of everything. We were prepare to lose twenty per cent of the

13:00 tanks which was far more than he every dreamed of.

So what about planes like the Kitty Hawk, the Gypsy Moth, the Tiger Moth, the Wellington. Were they American or British made?

Well the Gypsy Moth and the Tiger Moth were both British made toy things. The Kitty Hawk and Mustang were American.

13:30 The American stuff was always superior in that we had better guns. We had point five machine guns and we had eight of them which ...the fire power was fantastic. Whereas the .303 was practically hopeless. I know a lot of people are going to get up in arms, but you've got to tell the truth.

Now Bob, you were both a fighter pilot and a bomber pilot –

14:00 Flew both yes. The single engine boy, that's the fighter pilot. He's on his own. He hasn't got a crew to worry about. See the bomber bloke has got himself, second pilot, navigator, radio operator, SEC operator, two gunners. So there's seven in a Wellington crew, and you had to look after them all. They were all skilled men

14:30 in their job.

Can you describe the experience of being a fighter pilot and the kind of aircraft you were flying?

Well I only flew the Kitty Hawk and the Mustang. I flew the Wellesley of course. But that doesn't really come in to it. But the Kitty Hawk was superior to anything. Now the Brits will tell you that the Hurricane and Spitfire –

15:00 well they were alright but they were like toys compared to the others. If you pulled the nose up – they were normally aspirated engines. Now normally an aspirated engine is sucking the air into the carburettor and mixing it with the fuel and going into the cylinders. The fuel's coming in to a float chamber but when you put the nose up, you put

15:30 weight on to the float chamber and cut the fuel off and the engine cuts out and if you go down too fast you'll do the same thing, you'll flood it with fuel. Not the Kitty Hawk or the P40, the Mustang. They were fuel injected. Beautiful machines. You would fly it upside own

16:00 for half an hour or all day if you wanted to, and it would never miss a beat. Whereas the others were inferior in technology. The Americans were way in front with everything they had. And you had no fear of losing an engine. That was rare indeed in the American machines yet it was prevalent in the others.

Bob just going back. The Kitty Hawk, can you describe that aircraft for me and the experience of flying that aircraft?

16:30 Very like the P51. As a matter of fact it's just one previous design. It was a beautiful machine.

BAD AUDIO

Once you had control of the damn thing. You could push your rudder – say you push your left rudder and you pushed it five degrees

17:00 you had tail wheel – with the stick back in your stomach, and you had control of the tail wheel, and you could drive it down the strip as though it was a motor car. None of the other aeroplanes had anything like that. These are the late designs.

With the other aeroplanes, what were you restricted to?

All you could do to change direction was use a bit of throttle and rudder and it wasn't very effective because you speeded up too fast and then you had to brake, where as with the Mustang

17:30 you could steer it down with idle revs. You could turn around in circles if you wanted to. Five degrees of rudder movement gave you one degree of tail movement and so the tail wheel controlled the aeroplane.

So we're in the Kitty Hawk and we're on the airstrip, can you describe the rest of the experience?

For take off? Well we usually did it in twos. One bloke here and another bloke there. The bloke here had to be careful he didn't overtake or get

18:00 behind so he had to juggle his throttle a bit. But you went through to about 1500 horse power and the tail comes up and you're level. You've got control of it with your rudder then and you just stay in your place and you go up together. You lift up your undercarriage; your wheels come up and lock. Your air speed goes up to around 240 knots and

18:30 there's nothing much to it. You get used to it.

And what about the interior of the Kitty Hawk?

The Kitty or the Mustang? The Kitty was very similar to the Mustang although the Mustang was neater. Better finished but they had heating. You closed the canopy so you had no wind whistling in. It was sealed. It was a beautiful machine. If you were flying through

19:00 sleet or something you had a control where you were in ram air. Just up the front under the propeller you had a couple of chutes and this high pressure air, say you're going at 200 miles and hour, then it's going down the chute at 300 miles an hour into the carburettor, and yet if you got in cloud and there was thick sleet or something then you pushed a little lever over here, it goes in as filtered air and

19:30 it just took the air from around the engine. There was no rubbish in it see. But none of those things in the English aeroplanes, but they never tell you that do they?

So there was actually heating in the planes?

Oh yes.

So would that effect what you would wear inside the plane?

Well we had – well we wore fairly light suits. Prior to that when we were out in the elements we had big heavy suits on which would restrict your movement and you were uncomfortable.

20:00 But they got the business of war down to a fine art towards the end. And you wanted to ask about the sights. Well we had a little dot out the front with a piece of metal up with a bead and a ring. We had a 50 mile an hour ring or a 100 mile an hour ring and you were looking

20:30 through the ring into the bead and you could turn it and estimate angles. That was a first. That was very early. Then we had an Alders tube, a bit like a telescope. And finally we got this marvellous gyro gun sight. You had a control on your throttle – engine speed, and you hung on to it all the time and you were

21:00 looking through a piece of glass up there and it was bright gold diamonds, and you turned, the diamonds would go in and out. Now if you got an enemy aircraft within the diamonds, then you close the ring around it by this, and you closed it up tight so it was right around him, and then you pressed the button and you couldn't miss. That was the last one we had. The first one was a fluke if you hit him.

21:30 The last one was a bit of a blue if you missed.

So what was the first one like?

The ring and bead – he had a good chance of getting away. Everybody had them. The Americans were always in front. I don't' care what they say. The gyro gun sight was marvellous. They had a marvellous bomb sight too. Somebody stole it and the Germans got it anyway.

22:00 The Yanks had it sewn up really. Technically they were way in front.

The early gyro sights, were they a similar kind of design structure, or were the later ones better or were they totally different?

Oh no totally different. You wouldn't recognise them. Nothing to do with the long ring and bead and those sorts of things. It was a compact business up

22:30 at eye height and you had the canopy coming up. They had designed the thing to suit the person inside. You could raise the seat to any height you wanted. You could lock the canopy and it was all clear. And we had a little mirror up at about that height. It was only so wide but it was curved. And I've never seen a mirror like it. You look into that mirror and you could see an aeroplane ten miles behind you.

23:00 It was a spot. It was that good. Anyone behind you could be picked up easy. This is a P51 I'm talking about, the last we had.

What about in the Kitty Hawk?

The Kitty had them too. It was only designed a year or two before the Mustang.

So what I understand from what you're describing with the gyro sight, they were in order to

23:30 **detect how you were going to shoot down an enemy?**

Yes it made all the calculations. It had bullet trail, we had deflection, that's the angle opposed and difference in speed and all calculated by this sight. So long as you kept those diamonds enclosing that aeroplane, the enemy – it was fairly difficult because you had

24:00 to watch the sight and watch him and close the diamonds at the same time. When you got him there you couldn't miss. You would be flying the bloody thing with this hand and the gun sight with this and looking at the sight and when you got him closed in you would push the little button at the top and all six guns went off. They'd shake the damn thing to pieces those guns. Two second bursts we used to do.

24:30 We had 2400 rounds which we used to save for our own protection going home. I think we had 6000 rounds all up. We would give a short second burst and then we kept 2400 for safety if we were attacked going home.

When you said, when the burst happened it would shake –

Yes

25:00 you could feel the aircraft – the opposite reaction to the bullets going out of the guns. You could feel the aircraft sort of back off a bit. It would shake too with the gun action.

And would these targets be only moving targets in the air or would they also be for strafing?

Well they were easy on the ground. They were stationary see. The hard target was the flying machine, the

25:30 opposition. But ground targets were easy. You could blast them to pieces. Then we had – have you heard

of the rockets? We used to use sixty pound warhead rockets. We had a big tube under the wings. We had eight rockets, sixty pounds of high explosive in the head. It would blow this row of houses off here, really quick.

26:00 You could hit it with one rocket. But they were a different kettle of fish because they had a curved trajectory. They had their own propellant in the rocket with a slight curve. But when you got used to it, it was easy.

What were they designed for?

Blowing up buildings and things like that you know, or any defensive positions and they

26:30 used to really blow them up too. They were a high explosive and they would make a bit of a mess. So we all got used to this sort of thing. You know, daily business. I must tell you, after a couple or three years I was pining for it to finish. I'd had enough. I wanted to come home.

27:00 I was sick of it all. And you didn't know when – I was the liaison officer with 24 Brigade in Borneo the day the war finished. There's me up a tree – the Japs were just in front of us and I got a radio telephone and I was talking to my own squadron in the air attacking the Japs. But they're shooting at us with their

27:30 rifles and their pinging the sides of the tree. It wasn't the safest place to be.

You described before Bob when you left the airstrip you would have another plane behind you. Was it just the formation of two planes, or did you have more?

No, usually two. In pairs. That was number one and number two sitting just a little behind him. And you stayed there because

28:00 – you got used to it. Number One would open his throttle at a certain speed and you knew this so you tried to emulate it. But you could adjust yours to stay with him. As soon as you got off the ground you had to lean forward and grab your undercart lever and lift it up. But a lot of the boys used to put their foot behind it and lift it up so they didn't have to look down or feel down. But you had all sorts of little lurks.

28:30 They're beautiful machines. The Kitty Hawk and the Mustang. A fighter pilot is on his own. He's got his own life in his own hands. But a captain of a bomber –

So differences between bomber pilots and fighter pilots. Sorry about that.

The fighter pilot is an individual. He's on his own. But a bomber pilot has other members in the crew, six men he's got to look after. And it's quite different.

29:00 The freedom. I liked the single engine pilot. You're responsible for your own actions. I mean you flew in the formation of a squadron but when you got into combat you usually broke up and went on your own. But with a bomber you've got six or seven others. In our case we had six others with us, and they had to be

29:30 considered. You had to make decisions for the protection of all of them if possible. It was pretty difficult. I didn't like it much. But that's what I did most.

How many planes usually in a squadron when you were a fighter pilot?

Is it – 24. No, twelve operational aircraft and 24 pilots. Two pilots to every machine.

So how many would go up from the squadron per flight?

30:00 It depended on what you were doing and what the opposition might be. You might fly say eight of the twelve or even ten of the twelve, but not very often. You'd go up in flights of three to five and do a patrol.

30:30 **You mentioned before that other pilots would say a prayer or do a nervous pee. Was there anything you would do before you jumped in your plane?**

No not really. What I used to think about most was the other guys in the crew. Like little George – I was single but a couple of them were married, the navigator for instance was a married man with two little kids in Mount Gambier. George Palmer had just got married before

31:00 he left Australia. And Dougie Orchard the same way and they had different ideas, they worried a bit. We did because we were single blokes. We took our chances. I tell you what, I didn't like it a lot of the time but I got over worrying about it. We'd go and get on the booze or do something else because we may not be there tomorrow. That was the attitude we took.

31:30 **But that would have been when you were a bomber pilot, what about when you were a fighter pilot, did you do anything before you went up in the plane, or did you have the same attitude?**

No I just – I tried to be highly efficient and do everything that was required of me and watch yourself. Never fly half boozed or anything like that. As a matter of fact, 24 hours prior to flying you never drank.

I'll tell you one thing.

32:00 One thing we did, we smoked cigarettes like they were going out of fashion. They gave them to us to steady our nerves they reckoned. Now this is strange isn't it? As a matter of fact the Comfort Fund would supply you with cigarettes. They said they would calm your nerves, rubbish. We found out from the fighters in Japan, if you stayed off the cigarettes for a few days you could pull more G's.

32:30 The G Force as you know, the downward pressure. We could take about 4 Gs drinking and smoking a bit, but you could take 5 Gs if you stopped smoking for a couple of days.

Did other blokes work that out as well?

Yes a lot did. But then we started to get G suits – see the aeroplanes were becoming so powerful that you would overload your body, take blood away from your head

33:00 and into your legs and bust arteries and so on, so we had suits with like bladders in them. You could blow them up; put pressure on and round here so the blood couldn't go down into your legs. These G suits they called them.

So even though you worked out about the cigarettes did people continue to smoke?

Oh yes.

33:30 It's a pretty bad habit of addiction. Some gave it away, I gave it away, but I didn't give it away during the war, I gave it away afterwards.

So even though you didn't do anything specific before you went in the plane, did you have a special lucky charm or something you'd take?

No, but a lot of people did. They would

34:00 carry it with them. I don't know. Some of the guys wore a sash around their throat, but that all went out of course because the aeroplanes got to a stage where you couldn't do things like that. I mean, that was a show off business. And it was ineffective and useless. I didn't use any of those sorts of things. There wasn't anything – but you had to keep yourself reasonably healthy

34:30 because of the stresses and strains of combat flying. You might be pulling three, 4 and six Gs and blacking out and all this which you couldn't afford to do because someone in the opposition might have a shot at you.

Bob I would love you to take me through one of the scariest combat missions that you had as a pilot?

Oh, I won't tell you any of those.

35:00 We had far superior aeroplanes in the last few weeks of the war up in Borneo that we never worried about the Japs. If we saw any we could shoot them down and get rid of them. And I never had any scary efforts at all, only because we had a superior machine. The Japs had the Zero and they had it all through the war.

35:30 At the beginning of the war because of it going on in the UK, we had inferior machines and very much inferior and they dominated the sky. But the yanks came along and produced machines which were far superior to anything the Jap had; the P 51 for instance outdid it. Even with the first burst you could blow the thing to pieces. And with the gyro gun sight we couldn't miss.

36:00 **What was the worst case scenario that you could face as a fighter pilot?**

Well I didn't have any really because we were so superior with the P 51. We flew over Borneo quite a bit and we only saw a few – the Japs didn't have much left see? They only had transports and we soon got rid of them. I never saw a decent dog fight

36:30 in Borneo at all. We were so superior they wouldn't come near us.

You were describing there were a lot of fatalities?

That was back in Malta, yes. Well if you lose an aeroplane then you lose seven blokes.

So that was more with the bombers –

Yes the torpedoes. We had to get down near the water. Yes the torpedos were dangerous jobs. The fighter stuff was like playing compared to that.

37:00 **Ok we're almost at the end of this tape so I'll just stay with fighters and then we'll go onto bombers. But just in terms of the experience of being in an aircraft as a fighter pilot, what were some of the immediate dangers that you could face?**

Only attack by the opposition.

37:30 But things were so good by this time that I never used to worry. I would just look after my own machine.

Made sure it was properly maintained. It was just a beautiful machine I never worried about the motor or anything because it always worked. I never had any real worries except we got a bit too cocky you know. We got to the stage where we thought we were invincible and we didn't worry. None of those terrible days

38:00 of the early part of the war, we were way on top towards the end. The confidence rose with it. Our boys were so superior that it was no worries. The last of the combat up in the islands was all our way and nobody worried. We never lost any. We did lose some blokes because the aeroplanes were too good.

38:30 We would do height climbs. I climbed to 42,000 feet in my P 51, but the air's pretty thin up there but the problem was not getting up there, it was getting down strange as it may sound. Because if you allow that aeroplane to get too fast it gets into compressibility and starts to tumble, then you've lost control, and you go straight into the drink and you can't do anything about it.

39:00 Until we understood compressibility we lost several blokes. One of them was a bloke by the name of Hill and a couple of others. They went straight into the drink and we didn't know why, but they were tumbling and they had lost control of the thing. This was in the early days of compressibility. The aeroplane was getting so good. The P 51 – if you dive a Kitty Hawk which has got a fairly big frontal area, you can dive it vertically and it will come to almost a terminal speed

39:30 and it won't go any faster. But the P 51 was so beautifully designed that if you dived it, it would just keep going faster and faster and of course you got over the speed of sounds, 640 miles an hour and it started to tumble because it got into compressibility. The barrier of air in front of you and the thing tumbles and you can't do anything about it.

Is this something that people were aware of?

40:00 Towards the end of the war we started to wonder what was going on with these fast aeroplanes. We discussed it and talked about it and it got called compressibility. We had this barrier in front of us and we would lose control of the flying machine. Today you hear them talking about breaking the sound barrier which is what they do with a loud boom. All the planes are doing it now but they're designed to do it now. Ours weren't.

What about flacking?

Flak? Oh God! That's ground fire from the ground. They had heavy guns, they had anti aircraft guns. They had 7.7 millimetres, 20 millimetre and the JU 88 was the German one, it was the best gun that the Germans had. But you took your chance. And then they had proximity fuses. They would fire the bullet up close to you and when it got near you it would explode because of the influence of the aeroplane. They got a bit nasty. Luckily it didn't come into it until real late in the war. It was used in Korea.

40:30 **All those types of weaponry that you were describing that the opposition was using, could you actually determine the difference between each?**

We used to – We bombed Canea Harbour in Crete and we knew the air temperature, we knew the speed of the shell out of the barrel of the German guns, we knew our height to almost exactly, so we could calculate how long that shell took to get to us.

Tape 7

00:42 **All those things you were describing, all the different types of machine guns, can you explain for me – you were talking about flak and how you can determine the difference between each of the weapons?**

Yes well – the flak. Light anti aircraft guns – usually they've got coloured projectiles, red green and yellow, and you know there's

01:00 about five that aren't coloured in between the coloured ones. But if you're high enough you can see this coming towards you. It comes in a winding fashion. It doesn't come straight, it comes up like this, and you can hear it pass. It winds up and it's red green and yellow.

01:30 So you know where it's coming from but there's that many of them that you can't get out of it. But the big ones, the heavy guns above the 88, you can see a flash on the ground, a big flash, and that's all you see. And then you might hear it go past, but it goes past with a high speed whistle. And you say, we've been spared. But if there's too many of them – to avoid these guns – I wasn't trying to tell you –

02:00 we knew our exact height, we knew the air temperature outside, we knew the velocity of the shell coming up towards us, we could calculate when it was supposed to get to our height by how many seconds. Then we'd count in seconds and then turn. If there were only a couple then you could always get away, but if there were six or seven big guns, you might as well just fly straight.

02:30 Because they were all flying at different times. Not altogether. Every now and again and at different timing. So there was no sense in calculating where the shells went because you might turn away from

one and into another. So we just flew straight on. So we had all this worked out and we sat up long hours and anybody with any brains was there to work it out. We used every lurk in the book to survive. You had to.

03:00 **Would you work out whether they had certain strategies about where they had placed things?**

No not really because the ground situation was changing pretty well all the time. In Candi Harbour for instance in Crete where the Germans had taken over and we were trying to get them out, every time you went over it was different.

03:30 We just had to take our chances. Fully loaded the old Wellington wouldn't get above 11,000 feet with 8000 pounds of bombs on. It didn't matter. We were in a very dangerous zone there. At 20,000 feet it's a different proposition altogether. It takes longer for the shells to reach you. Anyway we got away with it.

So flak, for a fighter pilot, that must be incredibly scary?

04:00 Yes it was because – in the Korean War, I was talking to the boys about it, my Squadron 77 boys, and these proximity shells were just coming in at the end of the Second World War. They didn't have to hit you; they only had to go close. If they went close they would explode and you would get shrapnel. And they were dangerous because they would scatter

04:30 when they got close to you. They might even get two blokes with the one shell. So you had to be careful. I think they weaved a bit. I came home just before the Korean War. My time expired; thank heaven, because I wouldn't have made it. You can't live for ever in that sort of business.

So as a fighter pilot, did you ever experience any contact with any flak?

05:00 No – oh flak, yes. In the islands a bit. The Japs had flak but nothing really important. Nothing like Europe.

But it must have been incredibly scary anyway?

Yes but you get used to it strangely enough. You get used to most things if you're doing it all the time. I didn't worry a great deal about it up in the islands because it was never as concentrated as Europe was. Europe was

05:30 very, very dangerous.

Did you see any other aircraft in your formation –

No, no. We never lost any to combat. We lost quite a few from compressibility and so on. But not combat, no we never lost any. That was only the last couple of months of the war though.

So going back to bomber aircraft,

06:00 **can you just give me an overview of the Wellington? Was that the only one you were using?**

The only one really. The Wellington with the torpedoes? It was a lumbering old thing. It was the first British bomber. It flew about 1935. It was fabric covered geometric construction. It had a .303, two 7.7 millimetre guns front and rear in

06:30 turrets. They could swing about two hundred and twenty degrees and a hundred and eighty degrees up and down. What else? It would take a lot of punishment because of the geometric design. It was all bolted together. You could blow half the side out of it and it would still keep going. It was very good in that respect.

When you say blow the side out, you mean someone else could?

Yes the enemy could put a shell through and the thing would be just as

07:00 rigid with a gaping hole in the side. It didn't seem to – we got away with a lot in that respect. The fire power though with the .303s was pretty hopeless. The 7.7 millimetres they called them. It's not a quarter of an inch across.

You're describing the –

I'm describing the size of the projectile.

07:30 Where it came out of the gun. The point five, the American was half an inch and it was a very powerful gun. Twice the range and twice the destructive power. We used to have explosive heads on the shells which we never had with the .303. They were too small.

So what was it like inside the Wellington aircraft?

08:00 It was a jumble, a tangle of gear and wires. It had a bloody great main spar through the middle of the fuselage and it went out both sides into the wings. And it was three foot six inside the fuselage and about a foot wide. It was the main beam of the whole thing. All the rest

08:30 was built on it. So that was – if there was any possibility of crashing, everybody had to sit against that

with his head in his hands and take a chance. We had dinghies that carried the whole crew and they would release if the thing was sinking in the water

09:00 and they would be attached to the aeroplane by a rope. You had time luckily, or most people did to get out of the plane and get in the dinghy. As the aeroplane sank it would pull the rope away and break it. So you had the crew in the dinghy if you were lucky. That's if they weren't all killed in the process.

Did you have any experience of that?

No but we used to dinghy drill about three or four times a week.

09:30 You did it automatically. You'd screech out 'dinghy, dinghy!' and they'd all get in the dinghy.

So describe just for my benefit where everyone was seated in the aircraft and how that all worked as a unit?

Well in the early ones we didn't have any intercom. But there were the two pilots. And behind the first pilot – they're sitting like so, looking that way. The front of the aeroplane – you come up to the front turret with the front gunner in it.

10:00 It swings around and up and down and you can see him from the pilot seat. Behind the pilot is this great big beam that I'm telling you about. Behind it was the navigator. He had a little cubby hole of his own with shaded light so he could see his map.

10:30 Back in the bowels of the aeroplane was the SE operator, secret equipment, like the radar and all that, and the wireless operator, and then way down further was the tail gunner who was sitting back where the rudder is and the elevators, right back there. In the early ones we never had communication, but slowly but surely the radio communication came along, RT, radio telephone –

11:00 between all the crew, everyone. Young George Palmer called me up the night we were in the electrical storm and he said, "Hey Bob my guns are on fire." And I said, "Shut up George I'm having enough trouble up here."

That experience with George was that –

One of the most traumatic ones.

11:30 It was pretty terrible. The electricity was so strong that the two air screws – they about twelve feet in diameter, they were bright blue and there were these big drops of rain hitting the front window and flashing like a big fire, an electric fire. The guns were streaming along discharging electricity. And that's what he was screaming about. He was screaming, "My guns are on fire!"

12:00 They weren't on fire; it was just the electricity discharging from the barrels of the guns sticking out. Any projection would discharge. It was a terrible experience. Young George Palmer, my second pilot, he was standing alongside. It was freezing cold and he was perspiring. Poor old chap.

Bob would you be able to talk me through that experience from beginning to end?

12:30 The electrical storm? Well strangely enough it was about three o'clock in the morning. We were over Sicily actually. It's pretty dark and you don't know you're running into a big cloud see because we were flying on instruments. And you fly into this highly charged electric cloud so of course everything is aglow.

13:00 Every projection – streaming fire. Like the radio tower you see in the RKO pictures [he's referring to the icon of a movie studio]. And everything that touches it is alight. You'd swear it was on fire but it was only discharging static electricity. But it's pretty scary business you know because it's not smooth, it's violent. The

13:30 aeroplane's jumping around. I'll never forget that because that's one of the experiences. I started to get scared because I had been an electrical engineer with the radios and so on pre war, so I knew if it started to get into those spark plugs it could destroy the engines you see. But they were so well armoured –

14:00 the word I'm looking for is – stop the discharge, so protected with a steel coating that it couldn't in there and upset the firing the spark plugs. Fortunately the engines were running rough but they settled down after we got out of it.

So that was not an incidence of enemy attack – that was the natural elements?

Yes the natural elements.

What was happening to you? When you told George to buzz off, what

14:30 **was your experience?**

Well I was hanging onto it trying to keep it level in this violent atmosphere you see. I didn't quite know what was going on either. And all the guns – as I said, looking out through the glass, these spots are hitting and they're flashing fire. I had never experienced anything like it before and only once since. I

was flying back from Woomera to Malalar

15:00 in Adelaide – not Malalar, Parafield, and I was hit by lightening and it blew the radio up. Blew it to pieces. That's the only other time I've seen an electrical storm and it was mild. It was in a Bristol Freighter and it was nothing. The old radio – but the first one, everything was alight. The whole show was a glow with that greenie blue glow.

15:30 **Was that during the night or day?**

No, three o'clock in the morning. We were heading for home back to Malta.

And what could you see outside?

Nothing. Only the glow of the electrical discharge. The night was quite black. We used to get a lot of the ack ack. I told you, the red green and yellow.

16:00 Small flak coming up through clouds, it's pretty because it makes the cloud red green and yellow, and it's quite fascinating really, if you're not too scared that is.

Did you ever reach the point where you found it fascinating?

Well it used to intrigue me a bit but I was a little bit scared too. I didn't like it.

So describe what was it was like, those three different colours –

16:30 Well the light flak – you would be looking down. Say it was an ordinary night and you were in a bit of a cloud, and you can see this stuff coming towards you. It doesn't come fast, it comes gently like this and you can hear it go passed. It goes – but it was red, green, yellow and the clouds are changing colour all the time.

17:00 And you know there's five or six in between, but it's fascinating really and then you get used to it. It used to sort of fascinate me, and anyone who says they weren't scared is a bloody liar, but anyone who said he was scared was a fool. That was a saying we had in the air force. Because

17:30 we were all scared and I don't care who he was – even if he said he wasn't.

Was anyone more freaked out than another person?

Yes some of them – the younger blokes. Towards the end we got – especially with the torpedo work, their nerves would let go and they would take them away in a straightjacket. I had a couple of cases. You would get to the aeroplane

18:00 and they wouldn't get into it. They'd be on their backs screeching and kicking around. They'd put them in a straightjacket and take them away and you'd never see them again.

They would be operating in what role in the air crew?

Mainly – one was a wireless operator and one was a gunner. The two I knew of, and they took them away and that was the end of it.

Did that happen at once?

No, two different cases.

18:30 Two different nights.

Is that because you had had some near misses?

They were pretty hairy most of them and two close together. The kids would have to let go somewhere. You would talk to them and calm them down and try and have a little joke. You knew you had to try and calm them down a bit.

19:00 But we lost a few that way but not many. Only two to my knowledge in our crew anyway.

Were there any particular experiences for you that stick out for you as a bomber pilot?

Only the one I was telling you about over Crete, Canea Harbour – Canea Harbour. Because we were heavy we couldn't climb. We were at 9000 feet I think and we couldn't climb any higher because we were too heavily loaded.

19:30 And it was too close to the ground. It was frightfully dangerous. But we got by and we got a bit of flak and a few holes but nobody hurt.

Was that the first time the plane had received any flak and impact?

No we had had flak up the desert, but flak doesn't worry you much. It's only little slugs of steel going through. Sometimes they would hit the frame work with a loud zinging noise and sometimes

20:00 they went straight through the fabric just holing it you know.

How did that affect the aircraft?

It didn't. Even a big hole didn't affect it much. But you couldn't afford to get control surfaces damaged, but this geodesic structure, I'll hand it to the yanks, they had it made.

Did any of the

20:30 **aircrew every get hit by flak?**

I told you we got two bullets – one went through his arm and the other through a thigh. But they were night fighters and I don't know what calibre the Germans were using. I think .50 calibre.

21:00 **When you describe that time in Crete, can you just go through it from beginning to end?**

Yes, well – see they had a fair old – this was when we were trying to calculate the big gun flashes. We were about 9000 feet up. We knew the temperature and we knew the speed of the shell and we knew our exact height, and while there were only one or two firing we were pretty right.

21:30 But when about eight or ten got firing at different intervals then it was useless, you might as well just fly straight. So we got over where we thought the concentration of Germans were and we just let the bombs go in a salvo, one after the other and got out of it as smartly as we could. We were too low. We had too

22:00 many bombs on see. Nine thousand feet is not good enough, it's too dangerous.

These are torpedos, the bombs?

No, no. They were 250 pound anti personnel bombs. They had a rod on the front of them and they went off before they hit the ground.

And is the danger of being that low that you could get shrapnel back up?

Yes a lot of it. That was the point.

22:30 At 9000 feet even an ordinary machine gun could get you there. And the old Wellington wouldn't climb any higher because it was overloaded. Yes those early days were pretty dangerous, but then it got a bit easier with better machines. The single engine ones over the islands and Japan were a bit of a holiday.

23:00 **So knowing that you had the plane fully loaded with bombs, and had to fly so low, what were your feelings about doing that kind of mission?**

Well as I say, we were all scared and there was no use saying you weren't, you were. And we didn't like flying low with a heavily loaded aeroplane because the flak was dangerous. I didn't like it a bit.

23:30 If we were half loaded we could get say four or 5000 feet higher. So you've got a bit of a chance. But that was the orders of the night and we took everything we could carry. The Germans had just taken Crete and they were trying to get them out. Where else – we had several of those. We had one night – I'll never forget. Maximum effort they called it.

24:00 The chance of getting home with the fuel you had was dicky. So we called these 'maximum effort'. We were being briefed and Johnson the CO was there and he finished briefing the boys and little Joey Elliott jumped up. No, Johnson said "Any questions?" And little Joey Elliott jumped up and said, "Yes Sir, why this maximum

24:30 effort on Taranto with NCO pilots?" And Johnson said, "Sit down Elliott, we're all in the same boat." And Joey jumped up and said, "No Sir, we're not in the same bloody boat. You officers are in one boat and we NCOs are in another boat." And Johnson said, "Sit down Elliott or I'll take you off this raid." And Elliott jumped up

25:00 and said, "You take me off and I won't get killed will I?" That was the last of that, but that's the way it was. So Joey Elliott –

So did he have strong reservations –?

Well there was a bit of animosity see. This maximum effort happened to be all NCO captains.

25:30 No officers. Maximum effort, so it upset the boys a bit. Honestly I don't think it was designed that way. Little Joe, I'll never forget him. He came home and he became an airline pilot. I shouldn't say names because he's still alive. He and I were both on the squadron together.

26:00 **You described before that there were lots of fatalities with the bombers –**

The torpedos yes.

Can you describe for me about the torpedo?

Well I can tell you what they do and all the rest of it. It's a naval torpedo, 18 inch. A foot and a half round, oval and twelve feet long

26:30 with a little 4 cylinder engine in the back and 600 pounds of TNT [explosive] in the front and a big tank full of air – 2000 pounds pressure to keep it buoyant when it was in the water. And when it hits the water there's certain things you had to do to get it into the water, the water starts the propellers at the back, contra-rotating so they don't turn one way or the other

27:00 It starts this little engine and it runs through the water at 40 knots at what ever depth you set on the thing. It will run at whatever depth you set and it will run for 2000 yards. But we used to try and drop at 1000 yards, and sometimes it was 700 and sometimes 1100 yards.

27:30 Everything is a great panic in the middle of the night and it's a bit of a hairy business really.

Were they scarier than the other bombs?

Yes because you had to get in pretty close to the ships and they were usually pretty well armoured. You had to get in pretty close

28:00 and you had to be 60 feet exactly off the water and level to get rid of the torpedoes so they would drop in the water at the right angle. And between 700 and 1000 yards and that's not far. The Germans were no fools. Say they had six ships loaded with goods and fuel, a mile out they would have a row of flak ships, anti

28:30 aircraft ships and a mile out they'd have a row of destroyers and you had to get passed all this stuff on the outside before you could get to those ships in the middle. And it was a tricky old business. But we did. We got in and that's where we lost a lot of people.

On your missions?

Yes we lost five one night. Five aircraft so that 35 young blokes.

29:00 **Because if you hit one they would lose the whole crew?**

Well usually they would get shot down with the flak from the flak ships. They were anti-aircraft ships and the Germans had a lot of them. Very powerful guns. Well we found if you flew – when you got rid of the torpedo then you'd drop down on the water or about six feet off the water

29:30 because they couldn't get the guns over the side of the ships and they couldn't shoot you. But if you got up then they could get you.

So how do you get up when you go that low?

You're alright. You can fly around the front of them, around the back of them and you get well out and then they can't have a shot at you. They would shoot their own boat. If they dropped the bombs down to get at you, they're going to shoot into the ship's side, so they didn't do it.

30:00 **Can you describe the kind of trajectory that you'd work within and where the boats were and how that was kind of formed?**

Well I was telling you about the flares we used to light. About two miles away we'd have the aeroplanes concentrate. We'd have a row of these ships we were going to attack.

30:30 I did a lot of this too – dropping these flares. Like so – the attacking aircraft would be here. They would fly in towards the ships – they know where the ships are because we all planned this back at base, and they can see the ships, and these flares are coming down. And they're flying away from the flares but the ship's people are looking into the light. It was really bright and they couldn't see the aeroplanes coming.

31:00 As soon as they got passed the ships of course they could see them. So they used to fly into the next lot of flares so they couldn't see us. We had to scheme all of this to stay alive. It wasn't easy.

Did you work out these schemes over time?

Yes over time. We had all sorts of little names – Goo Fishington – reconnaissance and all sorts of things.

31:30 **And did you work it out by trial and error?**

Yes. We had specially trained blokes – I told you I went to that school – ALT, Air Launch Torpedo strikes.

32:00 We did that day after day, night after night for a month, until we got pretty good at it, even on the blackest night you could do it. And you get used to it.

So how difficult is it to fly an aircraft that low to the water?

The only way you can do it – anybody with good eyesight, and most pilots had to have good eye sight,

32:30 you can see the water even on the darkest night, and you trim the nose of the aircraft up. You're holding it down – if you relax it will climb away, it won't go down it will climb up. But we used to get down there to get out of the radar. You're in the ground cover, the misty stuff close to the ground.

33:00 And they can't see you. So we would drop over – the cliffs of Malta were 90 feet high and we'd get airborne, only about ten or twelve feet. There was nothing between us and the cliffs. We would drop over the cliff and fly six or eight feet off the water straight through the Strait between the toe of Italy and Pand-a-leri Island where they had the radar. Once we got through there, say 20 or 30 miles past, we could come up a bit.

33:30 I was happy enough flying down there all the time because the night fighters would come down to 200 feet too. These JU 88s. It was a dangerous set up because it was vital. Rommel was going to take Africa and we were determined he wasn't, and it was a terrible business really. Yet

34:00 you started to get used to it strangely enough. I didn't mind the flying. I knew it was dangerous. I didn't want to die but I used my own skills and I was lucky. I was one of the very few who was lucky.

When you're describing being that close to the water, what would happen if you skimmed the water?

Well, that happened quite a bit.

34:30 You mustn't bank. When you turn an aeroplane you get centrifugal forces, so to counter act you drop one wing, but there's 60 feet of wing. But at six feet you've only got a couple of degrees and you've got the wing in the water. It spins you around and slides about a bit and stops. We lost a few like that.

And you go into the drink?

Well it sinks and then you scrabble out and get into the dinghy if you're lucky if you haven't been killed.

35:00 But we lost a few until they woke up to what they were doing. We planned it and talked about it a lot you know. Keep your wings level. No skin turn we called it. If you wanted to turn you skidded around, you didn't drop a wing, and you had your nose slightly up holding it down.

And you mentioned before that one of the benefits of flying low was that 200 feet above you were

35:30 **night fighters?**

Yes.

Why was it better to be low?

Well the night fighters weren't game to come below that height see.

Weren't you a sitting duck?

No, they couldn't shoot you down because they would go into the water if they did. If they got in an angle like that to come down, more than likely they would go into the sea. They hadn't practiced flying close to the water. They were scared. We knew that. Two hundred feet was common.

36:00 The JU 88s would come down but they wouldn't keep coming because if they did they would more than likely go into the sea. They were good night pilots but not good enough.

Their machine guns could only operate directionally

Straight out of the aeroplane yes. They used .20 mm

36:30 cannon. That's a cannon not quite an inch, but very powerful with an explosive head. And they were pretty good.

And the aircraft, were you using the Wellington?

Yes, close to the water. No worries. The boys got good at it. Those who did stay.

37:00 **Borderline Kamikaze?**

That sort of thing but you had to stay alive. When I think of those blokes, some of those fellas – I was trying to think of that fella who sank the sub just outside the sanctuary.

37:30 The British Navy were all right. But they were a queer old mob. They wouldn't let us come near them you know, they'd shoot us down but they knew it was a British aeroplane. 1000 yards – if you came within a 1000 yards they'd open up. It didn't matter – you had been talking to them on the radio and they knew who it was but they still opened up if we were within a 1000 yards of one of their ships.

38:00 **So what were your impressions – did you hear any sort of feedback about the kind of strategies that were being employed by the RAF at that time? Because that sounds quite innovative.**

We were the RAF. We were Dominion pilots within the – we were seconded to the RAF. For years I was seconded to them and that was all through the Malta period.

38:30 We were RAAF but seconded to the RAF.

But did you hear any feedback from the Germans or anyone else about the kind of tactics you were using?

No we didn't. It was all top secret stuff all the way. It's only after the war it's ever been mentioned.

What about responses to the kind of things you were doing like flying low and being able to get out of the range of their fire?

No, it was never discussed outside

39:00 the people doing it. It was top secret see. Everything was top secret in those days.

Would any pilots, other bomber pilots have reservations before they went on these kinds of combat situations?

Well they might have asked not to go. There were some concessions made. I know two or three blokes who got so agitated

39:30 that they let them transfer out to daylight bombing or something. They still had to do their job, but in a different field. I knew two they let off who made the excuse that their nerves were packing up and could they go onto bomber command. We were Coastal Command, so they went on Bomber Command. It was just a little easier, daylight stuff see.

Did it have a huge impact on your nerves?

40:00 Oh well it had us all a bit like this. The doctor watched us pretty well. He'd all you and make you stand to attention with your eyes closed and your arms out with your fingers spread, and if he thought your nervous system was getting bad, you'd go off flying for a week, and he'd send you to one of the rest camps. We had seven.

Did that ever happen to you?

No, I never went.

What was your secret?

40:30 I didn't know. Stupid I suppose. I reckoned I was that dumb I had to survive. Dicko my best friend, he got killed there. I told you about C.K. Dickson. He was a bright boy, clever.

Tape 8

00:41 **Ok. Bob can you just explain to me the journey up the Nile, your missions and what happened in Khartoum?**

Well we landed at Sal-u-fa off the boat. We were there until we got posted. We ran away a couple of times and got back. They

01:00 sent nine of us to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan down the Nile 2000 k's [kilometres]. So we sent off from Sal-u-fa on the train to Cairo. At Cairo we got on a train to Sha-lal. A boat there and the boat chuffs up stream against the current – and where did we get off?

01:30 Anyway we get back on the train and we go to At-bar-a, the English-Egyptian railway people, part English, part Gyppo [Egyptian]. The ladies gave us an afternoon tea there. Very nice people, they were good to us. And then we hit Khartoum in the evening. As I told you we walked into the sergeants' mess, nine of us all together.

02:00 We saw this empty table and we promptly sat down there. It was dinner time at night. It's quite palatial with the Egyptian servants with long gowns and beards. It was quite new to us. So we sit down and a bloke comes along and says, "Hey you fellas, you can't sit there, this is the sergeant major's table." Dicko gets up and says,

02:30 "We don't care whose table it is mate." So the sergeant major came and there was a bit of an argument but it finished up and we sat there. Well we were on the wrong foot for a start. So the next day we get organised and we meet all the air crew and pilots who were flying long range Wellesleys and Bristol Bomb Bays,

03:00 and we had a few fighters there – the bi planes – we had a Savoy Machete 79, an Italian bomber which they had captured. Anyway we weren't there long before we started taking second pilot to these Pommy pilots going down to Tac-ar-adi, Lagos, Fort Larmie and those places.

03:30 I think it was a couple of weeks and then they sent me solo in both the Bomb Bay and the Wellesley, the long range Wellesley. I was flying them as captain. But to get to Khartoum. You wanted to know about Khartoum. I thought it was a permanent RAF base and it was fairly good. We had blocks of single rooms with a bed in it and a table and that was about it.

04:00 Dicko and I got one each, close to the mess of course. We were happy there and he started flying and so did I and they pushed us for a while. I was never back in Khartoum very often, always out in the Wellesley or Bomb Bay. Anyway this long range Wellesley had –

04:30 I think it was twelve tanks we had, and we could fill them up and I could fly for 30 hours in this thing. So they sent me off lost finding lost air crew coming up from West Africa. And I had a grand time. Anyway, this flaming – I go down and the old Wellesley packs up in French Equatorial Africa

05:00 near a place called Edea. It was French. So the French come out and take me back to Edea. They brought out one of these little motorised generators, a petrol driven generator. It wouldn't go but fortunately I knew all about it so I pulled it apart and got it going, and the old bloke, the boss of the place was delighted.

05:30 Anyway we're having dinner. I told him what I wanted. He couldn't speak English and I couldn't speak French. But I said I wanted some people to come out and cut the scrub down so I could get the aeroplane in a position for taking off. I had done what was necessary to fix the engine. Anyway next day, I'm out at the aeroplane. It's only about two miles from the camp and I hear this noise, yelling and carrying on and there's

06:00 50 prisoners, black white and brindle and all sorts of terrible pieces of cloth. No clothes or anything, and the big native sergeant, shiny black with a red Fez and a bloody whip – so I thought I won't say anything even though I was cross with him for beating these poor people up. So we separated them up into two lots of 25.

06:30 We hooked them onto the legs of the flying machine and they were so weak, they couldn't move it. Six good blokes could have pushed it. So I got cross and I walked up to this big nigger and I took this bloody whip away and bashed it across my knee and told him to go. He was pretty nasty. When I get back

07:00 the boss gets up me and I was on the outer for a while. Anyway, things settle down and I go to dinner with them. Now in the officers' mess, I was in there as a warrant officer, they've got a line of bodies with all kinds of things to eat, courses. There are about six or eight and I ate it and I couldn't speak French, they couldn't speak English and it looked really good.

07:30 And I'm getting tired. It must have been ten o'clock and I indicated that I wanted to go to bed. So along comes a Frenchman with a lantern and takes me by the shoulder and out we go. We go to a row of huts, thatched roof huts and he opens the door and he hands me the lantern. I duck in there and there's a great big bulge in the bed.

08:00 I didn't like this much so I go over and sure enough, there's a big negress in the bed. So I do my block. I go out and grab him, he comes back, I get rid of her and send him off. They wouldn't talk to me next morning. Anyway – this is a place called Edea. In those old days it was Fort Larmie in French Equatorial Africa. I had never seen

08:30 a chain gang in my life. Anyway I started the engine of this aeroplane and I taxied it to where I wanted it to go, through the shrub and we took off and got back to Khartoum. That was one incident. Then I was going down to West Africa again. There was El Abade, El-Fisha, El-Jenine, [(UNCLEAR)] Fort Larmie, Ash-in-bo, Lagos and Tac-ar-adi.

09:00 And I did that trip a lot of times with Bomb Bays and Wellesleys for the ten or twelve months that I was at Khartoum. Anyway I told you about the blokes dying of thirst – what else was there. But Khartoum itself they had a music hall there and half a dozen girls used to perform there and we Australians of course soon \

09:30 palled up with these girls. I used to fly down to Abyssinia. I would fly over to Eritrea and then down to Abyssinia, and Addis Ababa was being developed by the Italians and I think they should have left them there because they were doing a good job. These Abyssinians are funny people. I'm walking

10:00 along the road, standing watching something and this bloke's singing to himself and I look around and there's this naked native with a piece of string about eight feet long, light rope and he's got a young goat with its two front legs tied to this rope. It's a new road being built by the Italians with rock, broken rock in about two inch square bits.

10:30 This bloke's singing to himself, walking along and dragging this goat, and the goat's bleating because it's torn the flesh off one side. Ok, I couldn't understand. I was nothing to do with me so I didn't interfere. I go to the market in the city and the Italians had just put in a water system with ordinary half inch pipes with half inch taps on them.

11:00 They came up and the tap was here and the roof was up here and they were all sitting down. So I sat there and I'm watching this guy buying chickens. He's got these chickens in a wicker basket and he takes them out and squeezes their beaks and opens their mouth and puts it on the tap and turns the tap on, fills them with water until they're balanced with the weight here

11:30 and until they're balanced he keep adding the water. Then puts them in another wicker basket. Anybody

coming along doesn't argue about the weight. He know what the weight is, it's full of water. At night they go to bed. They got into all the Italian homes and took all the beautiful furniture out of these private homes. Built little houses on the streets and they'd take their goat and

12:00 donkey and the whole family would get inside. They pulled the wardrobe across the entry for the night. I think it was a mistake taking it off the Italians. It's improved now I believe but not much. But little things like that. While I was at Khartoum the Southern Cross Music Hall, I used

12:30 to buy little trinkets down in Addis Ababa in the Italian shops like hairpins and knives and forks and anything else I could lay my hands on, and take back to these girls. They used to have parties at their homes. They were good kids. Oh, I had some clothes made there. Dicko and I and a couple of others, we had a wonderful time there really.

13:00 And that's where I was called out – I took a Bomb Bay up to Wadi Halfa, that's five hours up the Nile towards Cairo, and then 500 miles inland to Kufra Oasis where I picked up food, fifteen drums of Mo-gas, motor fuel, and the mail for the long range

13:30 desert group. And they were based at Siwa Oasis. Kufra is about 400 miles inland from the Gulf of Sirte, well behind, 400 miles behind the German lines. But Kufra was only about 90 miles behind the German lines, fairly close to the coast, and the only way they could get supplied – this long range desert group by the way

14:00 were people who destroyed enemy dumps behind the enemy lines. They were a long range desert group. They destroyed petrol dumps, supply dumps and anything else they could destroy. They were a harassing mob. Churchill's son was one of the officers. So I land this bloody old Bomb Bay about 560 miles from Kufra

14:30 to Siwa but only about 30 miles behind the German lines. Anyway I stayed with them for three days. It must have been getting close to Christmas '42. I took all their Christmas mail in too. They were very grateful. Mostly New Zealand kids. Anyway the Germans didn't see us or attack us. I did a lot of work going out to Kufra.

15:00 I took a lot of pictures of it too. Anyway – what else.

Can I ask you a couple of things? What do you mean by chain gangs?

Haven't you seen a chain gang? These people chained together, these prisoners who came out to pull the aeroplane for me; they had a ring around their ankle with six feet of chain fed between each one. They unlocked them, the twenty-fifth one,

15:30 and made two groups of them. One on each leg to pull the aeroplane. They were in such poor condition that they couldn't move it. So I got cross and took the whip away and abused this big black sergeant. If I hadn't been a white man I think he might have cut my throat. But he didn't.

So what happened to them after?

He took them back to goal. I never saw them again,

16:00 but they were in – those Froggies [Frenchmen], they'd do anything. All the Frenchmen, as soon as they get out on one of those outstations in Africa, they take a native female and they have children with them. I think they do a five year posting at places like Edea and so on. And

16:30 these children – when they're relieved to go back to France, they just walk off and leave them. Anyway –

And the Negro woman in your room? Why was she there?

Well for my pleasure of course. I was a Protestant from South Australia and we didn't do those sort of thing. So anyway they took her away.

17:00 **And the girls that used to hang around near the base and stuff in Khartoum, did any of the boys have children with them?**

No. They were European girls, not natives. They were entertainers and very good. Anyway, we just got friendly and we were just good friends. There was no hanky panky or anything.

17:30 I think they appreciated our company you know, and we got on very, very well with them, and I would help them get things they wanted like toiletries and cosmetics and whatever.

Were there brothels at Khartoum?

I suppose there were but we never went to them. We were too scared because we had had a thrashing of venereal disease.

18:00 The medical crowd were very good. They warned us very carefully about – they had me dead scared anyway. But the girls were – there were no indications of that with these entertainment girls at the Southern Cross Music Hall. They were dears and I had a lot of time for them. They're dead now I bet. They were very nice kids to us.

18:30 After their work they would come and have a drink with us, and they spoke reasonably good English and we got on very well.

So how did the doctors scare everyone in respect to venereal disease?

Well we had films and photographic stuff of the various stages of syphilis for instance which is a terrible disease if it gets hold. It was incurable in those days.

19:00 You didn't have any penicillin then. And the cure was worse than the disease of course. The hockey stick have you ever heard of that? You don't want to either.

Can you tell me?

Oh I could but – what about her [referring to the other interviewer]?

She won't mind.

Well this hockey stick was an instrument they put down the tube and it opened out and

19:30 there's all these little pustules down there and it busts them all and lets the pus out of these swellings. And it's torture. You could hear them yelling for a hundred mile away. We had a couple come back from Tel Aviv with gonorrhoea and they went through this business. They aged 50 years in a few weeks. I've never seen anything like it.

20:00 Dead scared I was. I was as keen as the rest of them but I was frightened. I came home a virgin. One thing – I was just lucky and I was scared early in the piece see because of the medicals. Most of our blokes were. They were pretty celibate. Never forget that. Anyway were told to pack up one day and these boys raced up to

20:30 Tel Aviv and seven days later they were in the 'Jack' Hospital with all the venereal disease. It was only gonorrhoea anyway. We went into their tent because we had to pack their things and we were picking things up like this. No way you could pick it up like that but there you go. We were only straight out of here. We were a pretty innocent mob.

21:00 They laughed at us a bit. But I enjoyed – I had a reasonable CO at Khartoum, Squadron Leader Howsey. He came from Kenya and he took a bit of a liking to me because I did all the rough jobs. I seemed to get there and get back, so I was pretty popular with this squadron leader. He was a settler in Kenya, a reserve officer in the RAF.

21:30 He said to me one day, "We're going down to Nairobi to have an engine change on Bomb Bay six. You're the captain." So away we go next day. He's second dickie. We go to Mal-cal, Duba and so on and we get

22:00 to Nairobi and we flow over his home and drop a message with a piece of cloth and lead and a message to his wife. We get on the aerodrome and I do all the necessaries with the aeroplane and we he takes me home. Nice home too and nice wife. And I stayed with them one day, and the next day a friend of his comes along and

22:30 I'm invited out in the bush to Sav-oo-kia Valley, and the people's name was Ney – and we get out there and they've got this – and I'm a bushie and I know what's going on, they've got this young heifer cow and it was giving birth to a calf.

23:00 And they're in a hell of a state about it and I knew what was wrong with the bloody thing straight away. I said we've got to grab the thing and we've got to do something fairly smart because it's pretty serious. One front leg was turned back and it wouldn't come out. So Ney got a couple of other big Nigs and they grabbed

23:30 this thing and I said, "Put it on its side, sit on its head." So they put a bag over its head and sat on its head and I went around behind it. One of its legs had turned back and jammed, so I fiddled around like I used to do with lambs and things as a kid. So the cow had the calf and we were early enough. The thing was in trouble but we were early enough. So we cleaned the calf's nostrils and

24:00 give it a pump in the chest, take it around and rub it on its mother's nose and said to the others, crawl away and don't make any noise. So they left the bag over its head and crawled away. The cow gives a shake and gets the bag off and it can smell its own calf. Everything's in order so I'm Jesus Christ practically. I'm a bushie.

24:30 What they got us to do was sign up to come back and live in Kenya as settlers after the Second World War. They wanted a lot of settlers see. But luckily we didn't go because the Mau Mau [guerrilla movement] came along and butchered most of them after that. That was in the '50s I think. I had a lovely time. While we were there,

25:00 we were there three or four days see. On the third day I decided I wanted to go and have a look around and told me there was a major over there about three miles through the forest. A nice big property over there. So I get my fitter and rigger and we get a rifle each from the Leys. And we head off. We get to this place, a nice big house, a lot of open ground near it, cultivation. He's got about

25:30 100 natives working there. He's sitting in the palatial house in an arm chair drinking gin at about two o'clock in the afternoon. So I tell him what the score is, have a couple of gins with him and he said to me, "Come over and we'll allot about 2000 acres to every new settler." They wanted to colonise the place see.

26:00 And 'every available help will be given to you' and all the rest of it. And there's this bloke. He's three-quarters stung [drunk], sitting in this chair and he didn't raise a finger himself. The natives did the lot. They even fed him if you don't mind. No wonder they had the Mau Mau later on.

26:30 **Coming back to Khartoum, what were the Arabs like?**

Well there was a big city of Onderman, the largest native city in Africa just over the Nile from Khartoum. Anyway these mad Australians, I'd go down to Lagos and the natives would come along with snake skins. They would be 20 feet long and two feet wide. I'd pay ten shillings for them.

27:00 I'd take them back to this native village – it wasn't a village, it was a big city, and go in and sell them for 20 pounds, 20 Pommy pounds because they made ladies' shoes out of it. Snakeskin shoes and handbags and things like that. We did a wonderful

27:30 trade Dicko and I, back and forth across Africa, unbeknown to the RAF of course. Now what else did I trade? I know there were snake skins and – trinkets and things they made. They were very clever with their hands. The Dinka tribe. They never

28:00 wore any clothes. They weren't shiny black. They were grey black, sort of a mottled – I got on extra well with them especially in the city of Omdurman. We were in great demand with these snakeskins see, because they were luxury goods made from them. Paris and London and the better set. Ladies' shoes.

28:30 Dicko and I made a quid there. And drank it of course.

How did the natives treat pilots that had crashed?

In Omdurman and Khartoum, no trouble at all, but that thing I showed you was necessary to survive outside that area if you were taken by the natives. There was a big possibility they would cut your throat or hand you over to the Germans.

29:00 **And for those people who aren't here, can you describe what that thing is?**

Well we called it a 'Gooley Chit' because they mutilate you and that's why we carried the thing. And it explains what we had to do. We had to treat them properly, never look at their women and things like that.

But just describe for the people who aren't here what it looks like and what it says?

29:30 Well it's a piece of [(UNCLEAR)]. It's a piece of indestructible vellum business. It's written in Arabic and English. It explains very carefully to the Arabs that this person that if this person, a British Army or air force or what is found

30:00 or taken, if he's returned to the nearest British post they would be rewarded. And it states that the reward is 50 Pommy pounds. To the natives of Africa that was a fortune of course. And we saved many lives with those. Nearly all the Poms in Khartoum had one. We got one as soon as we got there. I never had to use it of course.

30:30 I had a little communication book with Arabic – I was 'askari tiara' – soldier of the aeroplane. They were very good. I lived with them for a week at one stage. They fed me and everything. No trouble at all. I lived with them twice as a matter of fact. One was a week and one was about four days.

31:00 That was before we were found. I never had any trouble with them because I treated them as equals, and you got the same treatment back. And a lot of people tried to tell you they were ferocious and all the rest of it. I didn't think so. I found them very friendly. I never had any problems whatsoever.

31:30 **What if the British troops or airmen mistreated the women? What would happen then?**

They would get their throats smartly cut. The men won't wear that at any price. We had a couple of cases in Suez. They were Australians but they disappeared. They were known to be messing around with the native women.

32:00 Port Sudan. They used to get in the native camps and seven days later they'd be in hospital with a venereal disease. They'd get on the arak with all the filthy booze those people used to drink. Some blokes had no morals or pride or anything. It's amazing really.

32:30 You meet all types in the services you know.

So tell me about those blokes who had no morals?

Well I'm looking for a crew of blokes at Port Sudan one day. I've got 25 pounder anti-tank shells loaded and I had to wait for the ship to come in from America. This is before the Yanks came into the war. And

we're there three days and the crew disappeared. This is the maintenance crew.

33:00 So the ship comes in and I go and speak to the captain to get the stuff transferred from the ship to the aeroplane and see it's loaded properly. I've got 8000 pounds of ammunition on board and no crew. So I start looking. Righto I get a tip they're down the native camp, down about a mile way. They're there alright and they had been there for a couple of days and they were half fiddled with.

33:30 I made them come back and service the aeroplane. We got going and anyway we finished up at Amiriya just outside of Alexandria with 8000 pounds of 25 pounder anti-tank shells. We're parked there and these blokes get sick. So the MO [Medical Officer] sees them and bang into hospital, all of them. Rotten. So I'm stranded there. No crew,

34:00 no aircrew. So I fly back to Khartoum on my own and left them there. But while we were there, they underloaded the aircraft and I walk out the next morning and walk up to the cockpit of the flying machine and my key navigation instrument was an eight day clock.

34:30 It took months getting it accurate because every second is a mile see. So it's gone. Someone had chiselled the four little bolts that hold it on, so I do the block [get angry]. I'm a flight sergeant by then. I walked down and see the first bloke I see he's an English major and he's so cross. So I started abusing the army and everything else.

35:00 And he said, "What's the matter with you?" And I showed him and said, "That's a vital instrument. I'm flying this ammunition up to you mob to save your lives and you're breaking my aeroplane up." Anyway he lined them up and they had a search but they never found it. I got a new one as soon as I got back to Khartoum.

35:30 I did the block and I got away with it. But they weren't allowed to touch us colonials. The Military Police – it had to be our own officers, if we were accused of anything. We had to be dealt with by our own officers. Something from the First World War. Apparently the Pommy Red Caps [military police] could do what they liked with our blokes in the First World War.

36:00 They couldn't touch us in the second. It didn't matter how much they tried. I can tell you some funny stories about them too. Do you want to hear it? We went to Alex [Alexandria] was it – anyway, we were in this café drinking and there was a low ceiling like this. It's got lights in it, and this Red Caps were in there drinking,

36:30 and Charlie Richardson said to me, "We're getting even with these blokes." There were six of us. He said, "See these six lights, when I yell, you grab a chair and knock the light out." And he was a big bloke. A big six foot, black haired and would fight like a thrashing machine. And he walked up to this military MP and said, "Don't

37:00 you call me a bastard!" He hadn't seen him before and whacked him under the chin and dropped him. Of course the whistles blow and they're all around and they bring in more jeeps and by this time we've knocked out the six lights and it's dark in there. Our orders are to drop down along the wall, crawl along the wall to the door

37:30 and get out. Which we did. We're standing outside and the Red Caps are rushing in with their batons belting one another on the head to stop the riot see. Anyway Richardson comes crawling out and stands up and they hadn't touched any of us. They're in there in the dark knocking their own blokes down, and we'd started it all. That was Australian. We got up to a lot of that.

38:00 The things they did. Charlie, this Charlie is a Queenslander. He's a real lad. He said to me one day, "I was in Cairo the other day and a wog put his hand under my wristwatch and jumped off the tram. My mother gave me that watch." And I said, "What are you going to do about it?" And he said, "All wogs are the same, red Fez, you can't tell one from the other. I'll get even." I said, "How

38:30 are you going to do it?" He said, "Righto, you blokes, you've got your blue uniform with the lining inside." so we made the lining into a big container. You could put stuff into the lining. So we go into a big departmental store. And they were big in Cairo. Never blacked out, but browned out. There might be ten girls and we go into the

39:00 ladies' underwear section. There might be ten lovely looking girls serving behind the counter. And – 'we want to look at those stockings dear.' So we open it, oh very good, very good. 'What size are these?' There's six of us are doing this. And each of us had our orders. When they're not looking you put them into the inside of the lining of your coat. You could put three or four or five boxes in and when you had those in you walk out. And the others kept on with

39:30 oh yes, that's beautiful. Undies, and singlets and panties. 'Yes, we'll have a box of those.' A little box is flat and they're stuffing this stuff in there and there's two left. We bought one pair of stockings and there's about 500 pair on the desk at this time, and we all walk about and we bought one pair. We get back to camp

40:00 we go and get the paper and make postage packets of undies and a couple of sets of American stockings and old Charlie would yell out, "Any sheilas you know home? Where's she live, what's her address?" And

we'd slip a little note in and say 'hope they fit dear' and send them off. This is how he got square. It was amazing things they got up to.

Tape 9

00:36 **Just a few clarification questions. Who were the guys with the red berets?**

The English military police. We didn't have any in the early part of it.

And where was that story set?

That was in Alexandria – and the ladies' undies and things was in Cairo.

01:00 **Why did the RAF have an airport, a base in Khartoum?**

The RAF, the Royal Air Force. We were all seconded to the Royal Air Force and it was a permanent station because the Sudan was the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, part Arab part Pommy. The Poms were running it of course. They ran everything.

01:30 But it was quite a city, a small city, right on the River Nile. As a matter of fact, the Blue Nile and the White Nile joined at Khartoum and that was the junction of the two rivers. One rose at Lake Tarna in Abyssinia and the other at Lake Victoria in –

02:00 **What is a 'Gooley Chit'?**

Well that's that piece of paper which saves your body altogether, instead of being devoid of genitals or something else. They usually handed these in the early days to the women who butchered you, and they were pretty prevalent in those days. This was back in the '30s and '40s you know.

02:30 **Did you ever find pilots who had crash landed and you had –**

We had one at Khartoum and he had escaped or got away some how but he survived, and this was why they were giving us these chits to save us. What they were offering them was a fortune. Fifty pommy pounds back in the early '40s

03:00 to a native was a fortune of course. He could live on it for the rest of his life.

And what were some of the atrocities that had gone on?

Well they used to bury them up to their neck in the earth and just let them die. They would mutilate them with cutting off their genitals.

03:30 These are the stories we got. I never saw – there was one fellow in Khartoum who had escaped. He wasn't too good either. But I never got into any situation like that. I think it was partly the attitude you took to these people. This superior attitude didn't go over with a lot of people at all. You humble yourself or at least be civil

04:00 I think you can get on with most people. If you go there with a superior attitude, that caused most of the trouble I think. That's what I've learned anyway. I saw a hell of a lot of it.

So you've explained to me how you got the transfer to Malta, I understand that

04:30 **you got a new Wellington and it got commandeered from you. Can you explain that?**

Well I explained to you that I had been sent back to Shall-u-fa to do the torpedo and the lighting course. That took a month of flying every night and when I finished I was to return to Malta to my squadron, 458 Squadron and

05:00 I collected a brand new flying machine, a brand new Wellington with brand new engines. I got my crew aboard and we flew to Benghazi where another torpedo squadron, an English one – I think it was 38 had a detachment. And when they saw this brand new aeroplane, it was a Pommy aeroplane with a colonial flying it, they just took it off me because I was a warrant officer and

05:30 I couldn't do anything about it. I was in a tent for a week. I fixed up one of their clamped out Mark 2 Wellingtons which wasn't worth two bob – anyway it got us back to Malta. The next time it flew it crashed into the sea and that was the end of it. Now they talk about us blokes being anti-anti. Well they didn't give us a go. I had studied that aeroplane, a brand new machine,

06:00 a different engine to the others and I wanted to just put some fuel in it so I could fly it back to base and they take it off me, and I can't say a thing, I can't do a thing because I'm a warrant officer. So I thought to myself, 'ok if you're going to do that I'm not going to pull my weight.'

06:30 That's fair enough I reckon. I mean I was dead keen to get back and do the lighting and do the torpedo work. I got back and had to do it anyway, but I was embittered about them taking the machine off me. I

never had a say in it. And if you ever meet anyone from the squadron they'll tell you today. I don't think there's many 458 blokes left.

07:00 **Which plane crash landed into the sea?**

The one they gave me. A clapped out old thing they had had for years. It was worn out absolutely, and I got it to Malta from Benghazi. That was about 500 miles over the water. And the next time it flew it disappeared and the crew with it. I could have landed there with a brand new aeroplane.

07:30 We all got these aeroplanes but it was quite a long time later. But I would have had the first one there, brand new, all genned up and all the rest and keen to go. But I was degraded and downgraded. A bloody colonial NCO. We can take anything off him. I didn't like it one little bit. I was upset.

08:00 **Now I've heard that the colonials got all the dirty jobs?**

That's dead right.

Can you tell me about some of those?

Of course we're biased a bit but there were others on these same jobs. That Crete thing I described. Being overloaded at 9000 feet over Canea Harbour. Well that was one of them. The maximum effort.

08:30 You got back in the morning but you were lucky if you got back because you were out of fuel. The colonials were all NCOs. Still we're biased a bit. But that superior attitude they used towards us all the time and I told them quite often. 'Hey look, you jokers started this war. We're only over here trying to help out.'

09:00 The attitude they took towards us – the colonials. They've come from some bloody convict settlement way down south. A lot of our boys who went to England got lot better treatment, I know that. Still, I'm not the only one. You've heard it before haven't you – about the treatment

09:30 we got. That superior attitude. I'll tell you, early in the piece – Khartoum. I was racing down to Addis Ababa. This was 1941. And I'm going to fly back to Asmara which is about five hours over the mountains.

10:00 I just greased this bloody flying machine. It's all over greased. I had a pair of khaki shorts and shirts on and I'm greasy too. And a big black staff car pulls up on the strip and out get a bloody Pom officer, all red tags and swagger stick and monocle, and out behind him comes a beautiful female, beautifully dressed. She

10:30 was about my age, 24 with a swagger coat and top quality clothes on. And this Pommy officer walks up to me and he says, "Sergeant, I've got a special passenger who you've got to take to Asmara." I said, "Yes Sir, who?" And he said, "Miss Barbara Hutton." The Woolworth millions.

11:00 And she was a beautiful girl too. So I said, "That's very good Sir Now, if you want me to fly this lady up to Asmara, I'll have to put a parachute on her and tie her down in the aeroplane so she doesn't get chucked out." I went over to Barbara Hutton and said to her, "Good morning, I've got to put this harness on you. It will be very cold over the mountains.

11:30 And you're beautifully dressed in ordinary clothes. You'll freeze to death." I had an inside inner suit with no buttons on the front but legs and arms. It was more than quarter an inch thick. It was sort of fibre – to keep warm. And then I had a canvas outer suit with buttons on it which went over it. So I thought I'll put the inner suit on her

12:00 and keep the outer one myself. There was a broken down hut about 20 yards away. So I said, "Miss Hutton will you please go over and get into this thing." I showed her how – "And then I'll put the parachute harness on you." So she smiled and away she went. She came back with all these beautiful clothes up around her bum and she's holding this shut with her two hands.

12:30 So then I've got to put this parachute harness on her. Now it's an observer's suit. There was two straps that came over your shoulder, and a loop comes up between your legs and two straps go down through the loop and clips into the middle here, into the safety clip. Well by the time I had got this on and she had stopped giggling, it was time to get her in the aeroplane.

13:00 The plane's about top of that picture high but there were indentation foot marks. You could climb up the side and put your foot in. You've seen them I think. But they're shaped so with a flat bottom. You put your toe in, toe in, toe in and drop over the ring at the top. Well we get her up there and she falls into the flying machine. We get her seated down on a box. We've got about three feet of very powerful

13:30 cord with a clip on both ends. And you clip it onto the harness and onto the bottom of the flying machine to prevent her being thrown out. Anyway she's giggling and going on. We put all her gear in and away we go. It was four and a half hours in the aeroplane, bumping around, open cockpit. By the time we get to

14:00 Asmara, she's nearly out to it. Frozen solid, sick as a dog, green. Anyway, we ease her out and sit her down on the outside while I unload the mail bags and other things, and she comes good to a certain

extent. I could see she was improving rapidly. And I'm just getting everything finished and she walks up to me and says

14:30 "Would you come and have dinner with me tonight?" And there's this bloody colonial, dressed in dirty black shorts. I didn't have any decent clothes with me. They're all back in Khartoum, and I said, "No, Miss Hutton. I've got to get back to Khartoum." The most stupid thing I've ever said in my life. I had to get back to Khartoum. I had an invitation from one of the richest women in the world, and knocked it back. How stupid can you get?

15:00 But she was a beautiful woman. She was with the American Red Cross. A very, very wealthy woman of course. But I didn't know. It didn't make any difference to me. She was a dear though. That was her. Barbara Hutton.

Now after Malta you went to Northern Ireland. Tell me about what you were doing there?

15:30 I was still instructing. At Limavady. We had a big airfield there. There were so many trainee pilots they had to distribute them all over the place you see. There were too many for one airfield. But the weather was a problem. It was always foggy, always wet. And the thing was, I being a colonial and not awake up to everything that was going on, they gave me this room

16:00 which was going to be my camping ground you know. There was a bed in it and there was a chest of drawers. And I walked in with my case full of gear. It was about mid afternoon and I thought I'll unpack. So I dumped the case and I lifted the lid up and I go over to the chest of drawers and get hold of the two handles and pull and the front comes out. Nothing behind.

16:30 Only the front. So I tried the second draw, same. The third drawer, same. You know what the buggers had done? Burnt the rest of it to keep warm! There was no good complaining. I was frozen there for a couple of nights, no heating, nothing.

So what planes was your training on?

17:00 Instructing. On Wellingtons. I was the senior instructor. I was the senior instructor at Hallavington and I went to Lulls Gate Bottom. And I did the BAT course, blind approach training. We had – this is in the early days, back in the early '40s. We had a signal coming out of a transmitter at the end of the strip, and on

17:30 one side there were dots. Dit dit dit, dar dar dar dar. And you had to fly down – dit dit dit here and dar dar dar there. You had to get onto this beam, now that was the tricky bit. Once you got on the beam, you flew down the beam and if you got off it went dar dar dar, and if you got off the other side it went dit dit dit.

18:00 So you had to stay in the middle. It took you right down the airfield. It didn't matter what sort of weather it was. You couldn't see out, but you could get there. That was one of the early blind flying courses and it worked out pretty well. It really did. The trick was to get on the beam and do half turns all the time. But once you were on the beam you were fairly safe.

18:30 The height was done with the same thing. The beam wouldn't let you get off – dit dit, dar dar. Anyway – funny thing there. I got some leave and I was going to London, and I got on a highway and

19:00 this Lulls Gate Bottom was only about 30 miles out of London, and there was this old gentleman working in the paddock picking potatoes or something. It was a tarmac road and I walked down and I yelled out, "Hey boss, is this the road to London?" And he said, "No laddie but I don't know because I've never been there." It was only 30 mile away. He was 60 or 70 years old.

19:30 That's common.

So you were in Northern Ireland, how did you get to the Middle East?

Well I was in Northern Ireland and hostilities had ceased. You've got to remember, I went from the Middle East to Britain –

20:00 and while I was away the hostilities ceased in the Middle East. We were building big airfields in Palestine. The weather was good. It was sunny every day and very good night flying. So the RAF called for volunteers to go back to the Middle East. And soon as I heard that I was in like Flynn.

20:30 I was sick of the bloody fogs and cold. So a week later I was on a boat all the way out. We went down to the Pillars of Hercules and the Gibraltar area and through the Strait and up to – where did we get off? What's the second city in Palestine? Haifa. We got off the boat at Haifa.

21:00 Then we went by vehicle down to Ine-shem-a in the Valley of Megiddo where this big new airfield was. And slowly but surely the blokes all gathered and then we got going. We had about 25 aeroplanes in the circuit most of the time – training pilots for the invasion of Europe.

21:30 We were very, very busy. That's where I met Rochelle and Natarn. They were good to me those two kids. They were Jews of course. Palestine is a tragedy. It really is. We allowed – Churchill told the Jews that he would give them a homeland and he allowed them into Palestine against the wishes

22:00 of the inhabitants, and of course they've taken over. And the Americans – I'm a Yank – I'm all for them. But I'm not for them allowing and supplying Israel with every modern machine. All the helicopters and tanks and all the rest of it.

22:30 **Again, what planes were you training with?**

Wellingtons. We had a couple of Ansons and a couple of Austers. But the main training machine was a Wellingtons. The main multi engine instruction machine. It was alright, pretty docile.

So how were you instructing? Was it in regard to bombing or torpedos or just flying?

No.

23:00 We were instructing initially to get them capable of flying a multi-engined aircraft. Most of them were single engine boys sent over there. We had too many fighter pilots left see, we didn't know what to do with them. So we converted them to multi engines pilots, which is a big difference. I had a lot of blokes. I was real proud of myself. I was getting rid of –

23:30 anyway I always got through my crowd pretty well. No trouble.

Bob can you now share with me your experience in the Pacific? Stories of what you did during the Pacific War?

I told you I came home from Europe. I went to the Army Staff and Command School at Kabbala.

24:00 That took nine months. This was when the three services were finally getting together with their movements. Anyway I finished that and I was home on leave and while we were at the Staff School we planned this landing at Labuan – attacking the Japanese in Borneo. So blow me down, I was on a bit of leave and then I was called up and

24:30 told I was going to be air liaison officer for 24 Brigade in Borneo and I was to go on the communication ship the Warsarche. An American ship of course. Anyway we get to Morotai where the invasion started and then we land at Labuan. I went ashore the second day directing our aircraft against any Japs strong points, machine guns and such.

25:00 We swept the Japs out pretty smartly. About the fourth day things had settled down. It was springtime, lovely spring and sunny weather. There was a little township on the rise, Western – anyway they had drainage channels about

25:30 two feet wide and two feet deep. And we occupied the little – Victoria it was. Anyway the first day there's no problem. But the sun and there's a lot of dead Japs around, so the boys said we can just roll them into the drain. But about four days later we couldn't stay there, we had to go. They didn't fill the drains in and the smell was beyond reason.

26:00 Things were pretty bad there for a little while. But then we got the airfield – they were coming from Morotai most of the fliers and we got the airfield fixed up. We were still being shot at by the odd Japanese but we landed our own squadrons there in about three days.

26:30 And we had secured Labuan Island. So then we went ashore on the mainland of Borneo itself. We went up the valley to a little town called Western. And we fronted the Japs there. So we kept them busy until – the war was simmering down pretty quickly then. And we went in and rescued those three survivors of the Death March I told you about.

27:00 Moxson, Stipwich and I can't think of the other fellas name now. Ripley was CO of the SRD, the Reconnaissance Detachment they called them. They were young twenty year old Aussies and by gee bloody good kids too.

27:30 They'd get up to anything. Anyway we took command and marched them off to Jestle-ton. I told you about that, and the scout told me that none of those people would get to Jestle-ton. They had been so terrible to his people that they would murder the lot, the women, kids, the lot.

28:00 I didn't like that very much.

So what plane were you flying during this time?

Well I started off when the war was on, on P 51s. The P40, that was the Kittyhawk and the P51 was the Mustang which we flew to Japan.

So share with me some of the strafing missions?

Well before the end of the war we use to go to Jesselton and

28:30 Ranau and all along those death march tracks, strafing anything we saw. We strafed Jesselton quite a few times. It was quite a native town. Quite a nice little town too. But there were a lot of Japs there and then they decided they would get out of there. They thought we were going to invade there

29:00 so they started marching inland. Baba was the name of the CO of the death camp at Ranau. He was one of the Japanese commanders in Borneo. We got him, took him to Labuan and foolishly didn't watch him. Didn't believe he would do anything silly. Anyway, he cut the two arteries in his neck

29:30 the first night he was there. He committed suicide.

How did you get him?

We just captured him. The surrender see. The war was over so he was ordered down. From Jesselton they came down to Labuan and he was going to be accused of war crimes of course. He knew it. So he topped himself that night. Cut the arteries.

30:00 **When you were strafing were you aiming for towns or transport?**

No we were aiming for individuals – or to do as much damage as we could. We were kicking the aeroplanes around spraying bullets everywhere.

So explain to me the strafe. How you actually do it?

Well you've got three guns in each wing, point fives. They're a powerful automatic machine gun.

30:30 And you've got about 6000 rounds of ammunition to feed into them. You press the trigger and all the guns go off. Two second bursts are plenty because the guns start to get hot. So you don't fire any more. You're just flying around and you dip your nose down a bit and give her a two second burst or one second I used to use because the guns would get too warm. And then pull it up and go around again.

31:00 Anything suspicious or if it likes like the enemy or any concentration of enemy troops, you give them a second burst. You blow the whole place to pieces.

So are you trying to spread your field of fire?

You can. You can kick the rudder a bit if you want to. We had a pretty big range of fire anyway. We were coned at 600 yards.

31:30 All the guns come together at 600 yards, and then they go out see. At 800 yards you might have a 100 yard patch of fire. But at 600 yards they're all there concentrated. If you want to blow anything up that's where you hit it. Bang and it will blow it to pieces.

And how low would you actually fly?

Well you could come down quite low.

32:00 We used to dive from about 4000 feet so you got a fair sort of angle and you would come down pretty low and then just pull away again and go around again. Then the guns would cool and you could have another look. You could see everything moving and it was no trouble. Very little opposition. Their service rifle was practically useless

32:30 against the flying machines. We moved so quickly see.

And did you have to be retrained from flying the Wellingtons?

No, we did all the aiming and distance calculations all the time. You were doing it all the time. Even in the Wellingtons you're learning deflection and all the rest of it.

33:00 Once I got on the Mustang it didn't worry me anyway. It was pretty straight forward as far as I was concerned. It was a long time ago now.

So from there you flew the P 51s to Japan. Just share with me what you were actually doing in Japan?

Well,

33:30 the occupation force in Japan was the Americans, the Pommies, the New Zealanders, the Australians and the Indian troops to watch the Japanese and change them from a feudal race to a democratic race. Preparations were made. We didn't only fly there. We had other duties. Now for instance we showed them how our legal

34:00 system works. We were called in to protect Japanese citizens who had done something wrong and they were charged in the courts. My episode of that was protecting a middle-aged woman who had come out and stolen food for her invalid son. Steeling food in Japan at that time was pretty difficult.

34:30 Anyway I had to protect her in the court and I made up a story that the mother was desperate to feed her son and all the rest of it. But anyway, these were the jobs we had to do. We didn't only fly. While we weren't flying we had these sorts of jobs to do. I told you about the Hagi Prefecture where I was in charge of the polling booths.

35:00 That was quite a big job. I had these fly maps made by the Police Commissioner in Hagi itself, and the

next day I inspected all the polling booths which there were 40 of. And the following day the elections were held and it wasn't a problem at all. No arguing. They all voted individually. And this was a new thing

35:30 to the Japanese because they weren't even allowed to look towards the Emperor let alone look at the bludger. And he was in charge of the prisons of course. So I don't like him very much. He ordered all prisoners be murdered before the armistice. We got in a bit early. So those terrible years are gone and they're over.

36:00 **Why did you have to stand up in court and defend this lady?**

To show them how we did it. They had no idea about the democratic way of life. They were just condemned. If someone wanted to condemn them then that was it. They did have any redress of any description. But we were just showing them how we did it.

So that was military policy?

Yes. It was the occupation forces policy, to

36:30 teach them democratic ways through ever facet of their lives and let them have a say which they had never had before. They were either butchered or told to do something and if they didn't do it then they would be butchered. They had no say in anything.

So the earthquake happened. What year was that?

37:00 That was 1946.

Explain the events surrounding that?

I haven't got an accurate date but I can look it up in my log book. Well, we all went to bed and then there was a terrible rushing noise. I was duty officer that night at headquarters BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupation Force], Eta Jima Island. There was this rushing noise and we thought that's bloody funny and then the ground began to rock.

37:30 These wooden buildings are not bolted together. The Japanese are awake up to these earthquakes and so their buildings sway. But they're all wooden and very flammable. They had 44 gallon drums with one end knocked out, two thirds full of water every ten or twelve feet in the passage ways. They were two stories high and these drums were for fire.

38:00 But the violence of the earthquake had slopped all the water out of these drums and it was running everywhere. A lot of people panicked and jumped out of the second story window. But the big part of it was – there was this rushing noise and then the whole place started to shake. Nobody knew – it broke all the gas pipes and the water pipes, electrical wires. Everything, no light, no water.

38:30 And it drowned 15,000 of them. There were tidal waves after the earthquake. Mother was there. She was a nurse in the hospital. So we got over that no worries. We had a couple of lunatics up there. We built some buildings, nice buildings and one sergeant – I don't know what was wrong. He was around the twist – I know his name too.

39:00 He burnt the thing. It was almost ready to be occupied, the sergeants' mess. And he sets it alight and burns it to the ground the night before they were going to open it. So there was the odd lunatic about. Anyway, you two what are we doing now.

Tape 10

00:40 **Ok Bob. You've been telling some great stories. Can you tell us something about your time at Eta Jima?**

Well it's not a great deal. I never was a pencil man, but the commanding officer of the staff school I went to

01:00 at Toowoomba, the Army Staff and Command School at Kabala, was one of the commanding officers of the occupation force. I was flying with 77 Squadron and had been for months. He came to inspect the air force and there was me lined up with the other pilots. He walked up to me and said, "What are you doing here?"

01:30 I said, "I'm flying with my squadron Sir." And he said, "Not from tomorrow you're not. You're up in my headquarters at Eta Jima." That's how I got there. I wasn't keen on the idea. I don't like pencilling. Anyway I'm G2 in G Branch which is the top branch of the Army. They do everything – plan the operations and

02:00 everything else. And I liked it pretty well. Major Jim Cape was my boss. So I would say to the clerks in the room, "Could you bring me Miss (so and so's) sister, nurse so and so's file." I knew all the girls and

the

02:30 nurses and the typists. I knew them all because I could just order their files. I knew what they did and why they didn't do it. And I knew Margaret but she didn't know me. So I spent – apart from the earthquake, we didn't have any major problems I don't think.

03:00 No. So I spent a year and a half in headquarters pushing a pen, and we organised a new airfield at Mee-how. Anyway we organised – we needed another airfield, so I organised that while I was in G Branch. The Poms with their Spits were up there and the New

03:30 Zealanders took over with their – it was a beautiful aircraft too, American. I can't think of the name of it. And then after a year and a bit I went back to the squadron and I was flying with them until I came home, and the whole thing took three years. So there was nothing much about Japan really. Just instruction – showing

04:00 the Japs how we ran our courts and so on. And anything else. They had to learn the lot because the Jap was a serf. He had no authority, no power for himself or anything. He did what he was told. And I told you about Hagi Prefecture where the polling booths were. And we finally ran out of time and I came home.

04:30 When we got home there was no flying to do so I became CO of the Air Training Corps in Adelaide. That was two years and I got sick of that running around with a piece of paper in my hand. So I applied to 34 Squadron which was flying at Malalar, near Margaret's parents, only two miles from the farm, supplying the rocket range.

05:00 Delicate bits for the rockets, food and booze and what have you. I would fly up there every day or so, every two days anyway. We had Bristol Freighters which is the Bomb Bay all over again. I started off on Bomb Bays and practically finished on the same bloody thing. We flew up there about four or five times a week.

05:30 They would fly the trigger mechanism in from the United Kingdom in a Lancastrian. They would land at Parafield in the middle of night – so nobody could see them but everybody knew. Bloody childish, but never mind. We had top secret passes. It took them months – we had been in the air force for eight years and it took them about six months to pass me for the bloody rocket range. A bit childish but there you go.

06:00 **Where was the rocket range?**

At Woomera in South Australia.

And why was it so secretive?

Well the bombs – the atomic bombs were very top secret at the time. Nobody knew how to make them except the Ruskies and the Yanks. The French were learning, the Poms were learning. What's the island

06:30 off Western Australia? The Poms came out here and exploded their first atomic bomb just off the coast of Western Australia. Then they came to Woomera and we sent off a couple of blasts there. We didn't know anything about it. It contaminated the whole damn country around it, the natives and so, and it's still highly radioactive.

07:00 You're not allowed to go near it. I don't think it was a good idea at all. We should have told them to blow it up on one of their own bloody islands.

So what was your role in all of this?

Well we used to fly the top secret stuff up in these aeroplanes. That's about all we did. We would stay up there and do anything they wanted, shift the stuff around from Woomera to – forgotten now.

07:30 Anyway, we used to fly it from one place to another. That's about all. Fly up all the food for the scientists and all the rest of them. Every couple of days they were coming back and forth you know. It was a big town there. There would have been about 5000 people. They planted all the trees. I went back there a little while ago

08:00 and the little gum trees that had been planted were 40 feet high. Great big gum trees now. The Yanks and the Japs are up there now. I don't know what for but they're up to something.

And while you were in Japan did you ever go to Hiroshima?

Yes. We all wanted to see Hiroshima. As soon as we got there we went there.

08:30 Hiroshima is in a valley, a gentle valley, and it's about six miles across. And the bomb – when it went off, you can see the mark around the edge of the – where it melted the stone in the valley. It melted the stone and you know these great big H irons in these buildings with cement around the outside; it melted them down to a dob of metal

09:00 on the ground. It would be a heap of metal about so high. It had been molten. There was one building left standing and I think they've still got it there. But it was seared rubble about a metre high.

Everything was flattened. You've never seen anything like it. Everything was radioactive and the Yanks were running around

09:30 with geiger counters. I don't know, it was 300,000 Japs or something. A terrible lot of people. Anyway, they would have cut our throats so what's the difference. I don't know if it's radioactive up there now. Margaret's been back since the war and she says that Hiroshima's a beautiful city now.

10:00 **Did you walk around without protective clothing?**

Yes, as is. Shorts, shirt. I don't know – we should be radioactive, but I don't think so. I'm not going to worry about it anyway, at 89.

\n[Verse follows]\n The King Farouk and Queen Ferida in Cairo.\n She's queen of the wogs, the jackal and the dog.\n Queen Ferida, Queen Ferida, how the boys would like to ride her\n

All this filthy stuff. Honestly I don't think I should tell you.

\n[Verse follows]\n There's this street in Cairo, full of sin and shame\n Shire El Burka is its bloody name\n There's Russians, French and Greeks bins\n All around I see\n Come all you air force boys\n Abide with me.\n

10:30 There's a land for batch airmen\n

Down in the sunny Sudan\n The airmen are all batchie\n And so's the bloody old man.\n There's bags and bags of bullshit\n Saluting on the square\n If we're not saluting we're up in the bloody air.\n

11:00 Shy shy summerset shy\n The boys look on it with glee\n They'd have a blue fit\n If they saw any shit\n On the summerset shy.\n

This is my story\n This is my song\n

11:30 We've been in this air force\n

Too Bloody long\n So roll on [(UNCLEAR)] Nelson renown\n We can't have the Hood because the\n Bastard's gone down.\n

That's the sort of stuff they'd sing, and it doesn't hurt anyone.

12:00 **Anything else you can remember?**

Mostly – They've slipped my mind, and some of them are too dirty.

Come on – it's not for me. It's for the Archive.

12:30 **Look how curly my hair is, that's because of all the stories I've heard. Honestly.**

One other – I don't like to tell you this one but there you are.

13:00 It's too bad.

Pretend you're talking to Michael [interviewer].

\n[Verse follows]\nKing Farouk, King Farouk, Queen Ferida\n

13:30 Give it a baksheesh,\n

She's queen of the wogs and the jackals and the dogs\n Queen Ferida, how the boys would like to ride her\n

This is what they used to sing in the cinemas until they woke up to it and stopped them from singing. This is our mob singing in the cinemas in Cairo.

14:00 There's this nasty one – I can't think how it starts.

\n[Verse follows]\n Beneath the swing tit\n Lived a Chinese harlot –\n

14:30 **Is it you can't remember it or you don't want to –**

No, don't want to remember.

So you're saying that in the cinema they were singing?

Oh yes and finally the Gyppos woke up to it and they stopped it and we were told to stop singing because of the Royal Family.

So what would happen? You'd go to the movies –

Well see they'd stop the anthem.

15:00 They were singing the Egyptian National Anthem. We were singing with them but putting our words on

it.

What, the tune of their national anthem?

Yes, their national anthem. King Farouk and Queen Ferida. Well they're both dead now anyway.

Was this the Australian troops?

Yes and the Poms were in it too a bit. But they weren't as boisterous as our mob.

15:30 **So what was that last song, about the Chinese Harlot?**

– I don't know.

Come on Bob.

\n[Verse follows]\n Beneath the sign of the swinging tit\n There lived a Chinese harlot\n By the name of – – shit.\n –

No, no. That's it.

16:00 **Alright thank you for that. I just wanted to ask you, out of all your war experiences, what was the most scariest moment?**

Some of those torpedo shots when we had all the ships shooting at us.

16:30 But as I told you, getting down on the water very low, we were deadies. They had so much fire power. And the trauma of getting passed the flak ships into the transports. It wasn't easy. It was very difficult. It used to take all your energy, all your nervous energy – it was terrible.

17:00 \n[Verse follows]\n There's a land for batchie Airmen\n

Down in the Sudan\n The airmen are all batchie\n And so's the bloody old man.\n There's bags and bags of bullshit\n Saluting on the square\n If we're not saluting\n We're up in the bloody air.\n Roll on the Rodney, the Nelson renowned\n You can't have the Hood coz\n The bastard's gone down.\n

17:30 And it goes on. There's a couple more versus, but that's the main one. I love the old Poms. They'll admit their bloody battle ship the Hood wasn't much good. It went down. It was sunk by the Tirpitz I think.

What kind of man were you Bob when you came back to Australia after the war?

Very desperate. I couldn't sleep. I was drinking too much.

18:00 Had the tat tars. Just as well I met Margaret or I would have been dead long ago. Honestly. It's terribly difficult to adjust and it takes a long time. I had a lot of nightmares, seeing my friends die. It was a traumatic period for several years.

18:30 I would wake up screeching my head off and carrying on. My mother used to wonder what was the matter with me. She would often say to me, "What's troubling you?" And I would say, "Don't worry about it Mum, you could never understand." She couldn't either. But slowly, time heals you know. I got over it. I go to Anzac [Day] and I might have a little bit of a trauma there.

19:00 But we have a few grogs and I might get upset for a couple of days after Anzac Day, but now it doesn't worry me a great deal at all. I don't get upset. I'm pretty right. Those close friends – how tragic. They were so virile, vital and bright – gone, finished and you don't see them again.

19:30 And that's pretty hard. Dear old – well the boys had various methods for getting over it. Dacey – Clem Dacey. He was a navigator and he used to get drunk to get over the trauma. The 9th Division were coming home and we were on the Suez Canal. The 9th Divvy were coming back to Australia

20:00 and they had a lot of Australian beer in these big cases. So we dug a great big hole in the middle of the camp and we put about three tons of this Australian beer in there and covered it with sand. This bloody Clem Dacey's missing one morning. There's a bit of noise and we go out and look, and there he is laying on his side in the sand and he's kicking himself round in a circle.

20:30 He had dug a hole and broken one of these boxes and drunk about six boxes of this stuff. He was laying on his side kicking himself round in a circle at daylight. We dragged him in the cot and dumped him in. We were in tents of course and we had sunk them into the ground because we had sandbags up so high. We were down about four feet in the sand so we were pretty well protected. Just ordinary camps.

21:00 But the reaction of people was different. Each one was different. Jim Paratine, the Mount Gambier boy I spoke about. He had thick black curly hair and he had this wife and a couple of little children at home in Mount Gambier. We would go down the ditch on Malta. They were underground rooms, and we'd be briefed and

21:30 we'd come up and wait for it to get real dark before takeoff. He used to sit on a stone with his head in his hands – I saw him go from black curly to grey hair in about three months worrying. He'd say to me, "I'll never make it, I'll never make it." I would say, "You'll make it Jim, you'll make it." He came to me

one day and he said, “I’ve only got six hours to go.

22:00 We’re not flying tonight are we?” And I said, “No.” He said, “Do you mind if I go with so and so?” It was only a reconnaissance. Not a strike, just a look. He said, “I’ve only got six hours to go, do you mind if I go?” I said, “You know Jim, we’ve got this far together, but if you want to go, yes you can go.” Never saw him again. That’s the way it goes. Tragic.

22:30 I went to Johnson the next morning. I think I told you – I wanted to go and find him and he wouldn’t let me have an aeroplane. Probably got shot down anyway. But I was determined to go and look for him but he wouldn’t let me. Johnson was a good bloke really. He came home. He died in Mackay in Queensland.

23:00 He was a north Queenslander.

Do you think it’s ever possible to convey to anyone who hasn’t been in these experiences?

No. It’s not possible dear. It’s not possible. You have to experience it. There’s nothing like it in civil life. The trauma, the terrible nervous tension. It’s unbelievable.

23:30 I think they might have woken up a bit because all the wars are shorter now. Vietnam was twelve months wasn’t it.

It was ten years.

Yes, but each individual only spent twelve months there, because they would have been like us if they had stayed any longer. It just gets out of hand. Just gets too bad, and yet I was eight years overseas all up.

24:00 **Can you sum up the war experience for you?**

Yes, I’d say it’s almost unbelievable. In combat the trauma is so great that only the most stable can last it out. Most of the kids couldn’t take it. A lot of them couldn’t take it and it was a tragedy really.

24:30 They had used all sorts of excuses like being sick and ill and all the rest. One kid you know, he was a fighter pilot in the desert. I met him in Cairo. He went overseas with us on the Queen Elizabeth. I met him in Cairo and I said, “How are you going?” We had been mates on the boat. I said, “What are you doing in Cairo?” And he said, “They’re going to LMF me.”

25:00 I said, “What do you mean?” Because I knew he wasn’t a coward. LMF means lack of moral fibre. You know about this. I said, “What for?” And he said, “Well to tell you the truth Bob” – he was a fighter pilot – He said, “When I come into land I hand over to Jesus at about 20 feet off the ground. I just can’t see.” And I said, “Good God,

25:30 how have you got away with it?” And he said, “I don’t know. It just drops on the ground and I usually stop.” I said, “Have you seen the doctor?” And he said, “Yes, the medical doctor said there’s nothing wrong with me.” And I said, “That’s no good. You have to go to one of our blokes.” He did and he had an ulcer behind each eye. He went totally blind and they sent him home. They were going to have him up for lack of moral fibre. And they sent him home and he went totally blind.

26:00 There were other kids hit with propellers – they had half their heads – one kid I knew came home and I took a lot of interest in his until he died. He had his face set back about an inch from the other half and he used to have these terrible blackouts. Gee I felt sorry – and yet most of the time he was normal. But they all died pretty quickly. Another bloke, Dick Head.

26:30 I was ordered to take him into the headquarters in Adelaide and let him do as he wished so long as I looked after him. He was a warrant officer. He was at Nagasaki when they dropped the bomb. He was working in a factory. And then he woke up – he said one minute he was working in the factory and then he woke up. He said one minute he was working in the factory and when he woke up the next time he was

27:00 out on the ground and there was no factory anywhere. It had blown the factory away around him. The war was over shortly later and he came home. In hospital. But quickly got cancer of the throat. Radiation sickness and died. But I had orders that he was to be able to do as he liked at the headquarters in Adelaide. So I said to him, “What do you want to do?”

27:30 He said, “I don’t know.” I said, “What about being bar officer?” He liked a few you know. So I got a utility for him out of the public transport part and he used to go to the brewery every couple of days and get the booze for the mess in the headquarters. He’d stay down there most of the day drinking with the boys. He would have a fair bit of booze. Anyway he got sicker and sicker and just passed away

28:00 with a great hole in his throat. It seemed to have effect the throat badly. A lot of people died of radiation of the throat.

How did the war change you?

Well what I got home – I decided I wouldn’t marry. I would just drink myself silly you know. And then I met Margaret –

28:30 and you know, it was the greatest thing I ever did. It saved me. I was quite determined I was just going to give it away. I was in such a state that I was going to give it away. I had no purpose. But I met Margaret and that changed the whole situation. We hadn't been married, two years when Rob came along and then there's an interest.

29:00 Then we got Edwina and I think the bloody sun shines out of the two kids, even now. We're very happy. And we race around Australia once a year, Margaret and I in that vehicle. We go up to Kununurra and Darwin and Perth and all through Western Australia and back across the Nullarbor. We go and see the relatives in South Australia and be nice to them,

29:30 then come back up through the river to New South Wales and back up to Queensland. We're going to do it again this year too. I think we're both well enough.

Has the war been history for you since it finished?

It's been a great – I was a bit scatterbrained – but it's made me think a terrible

30:00 lot about what's going on with the human race and that's why I'm a bit anti-Jewish at the moment. I think their religion is dominating other people to the stage where it shouldn't. I really do. And unless the road map is strictly controlled by the other powers in Palestine or Israel, we're going to have a major tragedy. We didn't learn anything from the war.

30:30 And seeing them bowing and scraping and hitting their heads against that Wailing Wall, it's pathetic. It really is.

If you had something, a message that you would give future generations, what would you say to them about war?

Avoid it at all costs. You must agree among yourselves or you'll destroy yourselves. There is no place for war any more.

31:00 The destructive power among the people who participate – I don't care which side they're on, right or wrong. It's devastating. It destroys that generation and probably the next. That's the tragedy.

Thanks Bob. Are they're any final words you'd like to say? Anything

31:30 **before we finish this interview?**

Well thank you for you two for being so good, as to sit with me these hours and discuss these things because I'm sure if you can get that disseminated amongst the youngsters, they might think about it a bit. And you've put you've put your time in and a wonderful attention to detail, and I'm proud and honoured to be with you.

Thank you.

INTERVIEW ENDS