Australians at War Film Archive

Milton Cottee (Milt) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:54 **Thanks very much for talking to us this morning.**

01:00 **Perhaps we could start with where you were born, and where you grew up?**

October 13th,1926 - I was born in a little town in northern New South Wales, Murwillumbah. We had a house there

01:30 on the Tweed River and I spent the first 8 or 9 years of my life there before moving to Sydney. I am the third of four children, two brothers and a sister. In the early days of my life

02:00 I would describe my first view of an aircraft at this time, but that's probably not appropriate. I started schooling in the primary school at Murwillumbah; can't remember very much about my schooling there but moved to Sydney, to

02:30 the suburb of Ryde and then Gladesville.

What did your dad do?

My father was a farmer to start with, in the Lismore Tregeagle area, and my grandfather developed an industry with casein; it is a milk by-product.

03:00 My father opened a factory at Murwillumbah, near the butter factory there, to process casein. And he moved later down to Sydney to set up a similar factory with the Fresh Food and Ice Company, which was a milk company in Sydney at that time,

03:30 oddly enough in the area that Darling Harbour now occupies. Meanwhile I'm going to school at Gladesville, and then intermediate high school at Drummoyne, and then Sydney Technical High School at Paddington. At Paddington, at the school there, I joined the Air Training Corps

04:00 and became a senior NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] of the Air Training Corps in the school.

When was that?

That was during the war, World War II - that would have been in the early 40's. As soon as I turned 18 I joined the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and ended up on Number 63 Aircrew Training Course

04:30 Did initial training at Bradfield Park and the war was coming to an end at this stage, so we didn't ever get to fly. When the war ended I was discharged, and not having completed matriculation for university I decided to

05:00 enter the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme; and matriculated and then entered Sydney University to do engineering. At the end of the first year of engineering I saw an advertisement in the "Sydney Morning Herald" that had been put in by the RAAF for

05:30 first post-war flying trainees. I thought "OK, I can probably do engineering later, but I won't have the chance to fly probably again unless I take this opportunity," so I applied for the RAAF and was accepted. Was trained to fly on the first post war training course which started at Point Cook and ended up at

06:00 East Sale in Victoria. Then followed a very interesting RAAF career through about 28 years. And I guess we will get into detail on that as we go through.

It's quite difficult for someone of such an extensive career. Perhaps you could you lead us through, perhaps on a postings basis and major activities you were involved with?

06:30 The training courses lasted 18 months. At the end of that, two of us on the course who had aspirations to be as good a pilot as we could possibly be, we jokingly put on preferences from posting from our

training course

07:00 an election to be test pilots. And surprise surprise our first posting was to the Aircraft Research and Development unit at Laverton, in Victoria. It surprised us as well as the CO [Commanding Officer] of the unit who was rather taken aback with getting a couple of young pilots straight off course to be prospective test pilots. He said there was no way he could use

07:30 us as pilots and almost told us to go away. He said, “I have a good idea. If I can arrange to have you two young fellows posted to all of the squadrons in the air force for 6 months at a time, then you can come back and I can very readily use you then because you will be experienced”. Both of us said

08:00 “Whoopee! What a fantastic opportunity.” so the next day the two of us, and the other person was Ray Tabroolco, he died about 3 years ago. We were both posted to 21 Squadron which was a couple of hangers up the line at Laverton. Where we did a [P-51] Mustang [fighter] conversion

08:30 in preparation for being posted to 77 Squadron in Japan as part of the Occupation Forces. So after 4 or 5 weeks of Mustang conversion, we were off to Japan and this would have been at the end of 1949. Ray Tabroolco, the other pilot with me,

09:00 he had been a Japanese interpreter before his pilot training, so it was very advantageous to go up to Japan with someone who could speak fluent Japanese. We were soon into the rough and tumble of learning to be an effective fighter pilot with number 77 Squadron at Iwakuni in Japan

09:30 I had been married on course, on pilot training course and hadn’t seen very much of my wife at this stage. So here am I now up in Japan, and she is still back in Australia. The Commanding Officer of the squadron at the time, Lou Spence,

10:00 he was taking action to get his wife up to Japan, I made application to have Ella, my wife, go up to Japan also and he could hardly disapprove that, so that was approved. In the middle of all that, the Korean War started and no one thought to disapprove the approval that had been given for my wife

10:30 go up to Japan. So she arrived on a Thursday; and on the following Sunday morning I flew out on the first operational sortie [flying attack] that the squadron made into Korea. Having completed a tour of duty on Mustang aircraft in Korea, with my wife in Iwakuni all that time, we were both

11:00 sent back to Australia on what I can only call the hell ship Chang T. I was posted to do a flying instructor’s course. So back to East Sale in Victoria, after some leave in the Sydney area, and I was turned into a flying instructor.

11:30 At the end of the instructor’s course, which lasted 6 months or so, I was posted to Point Cook to start training other young fellows to be pilots. And because my wife was still in Sydney, I applied for a posting to the Sydney area and was surprised to get one to Number 22 Squadron. It was Citizens Air Force Squadron

12:00 with a permanent air force nucleus, and I was then one of two instructors on that squadron. It was a flying squadron still, we had various types of aircraft, and I was involved in teaching what we called cadets to fly.

12:30 **What were the training aircraft?**

The training aircraft was generally the Wirraway, leading into Mustangs and later on the squadron was equipped with Vampires - the first jets that the RAAF had. My expertise as a flying instructor advanced during that time and I was eventually assessed as an

13:00 instructor proficient enough to be posted to the Central Flying School to teach other pilots to be instructors. So the scheme whereby I was to be posted around various squadrons of the air force to get experience to ultimately become a test pilot had gone by the board and in fact I think it got lost in the archives somewhere.

13:30 After a year or so as a pilot on the staff of Central Flying School, teaching other pilots to be instructors and as an examiner of airmen, a posting to the Empire Test Pilots Course came through and that meant a trip to England for a

14:00 year. In those days it was necessary that a posting be longer than 12 months to be able to be accompanied by family. By now I had got family. So once again I had to leave my family behind and go off to England for a year. The Test Pilots Course was at

14:30 Farnborough and that was a big step forward in my aviation career. During the course, on which, there were four Australians, one of which, a fellow called Dick Whitman, was to have carried on with an exchange duty with the RAF [Royal Air Force]. He became medically unfit on the course and I fortuitously

15:00 dropped into his place as the prospective exchange pilot with the RAF. At the end of the test pilots course, I went to Boscombe Down which is the big RAF flight test centre in Wiltshire and my family joined me at that time. After 2 years

15:30 flight testing, mainly on the V bombers which were at their peak at the time, I returned to Australia to the Australian RAAF test flight centre at ARDU [Aircraft Research and Development Unit] Laverton. I slotted into a job there having being promoted

16:00 during the course of my career up to squadron leader. I slotted into a wing commander job actually, which put me in charge of all of the personnel who were responsible for Research and Development in that flight test unit. That kept me busy for

16:30 three or four years and I gravitated from that job to be Chief Test Pilot.

What were the aircraft that you were flying?

Aircraft flying then principally the [Avon] Sabre [fighter], the Canberra [bomber], the Mirage [fighter] and we had a fleet of other lower performance aircraft.

What is the role of the Chief Test Pilot?

17:00 Chief Test Pilot is to supervise all of the flight test projects that the unit was engaged in and to allocate crews to aircraft and supervise their flying and their reporting on flight tests that they were carrying out. A very responsible position as you would imagine.

17:30 Because the safety of the flying had to be carefully considered. Even so there were a few inevitable accidents that we may talk about later. I had a couple of attachments away from

18:00 ARDU to do various other jobs. For instance the pilot doing the acceptance testing of new aircraft out of the factories at that time, a fellow called Bill Scott, he resigned from his position and went off to do something else. And that left the factory without a production pilot test pilot, so I became involved in launching

18:30 brand new aircraft, which is quite a fascinating thing to do. Not many pilots get the opportunity to launch aircraft for the first time. It gives you a wonderful feeling to do that.

What aircraft?

Mainly Sabres and Canberras.

19:00 Another job that I was given was to become a temporary Commanding Officer of an Air Trials Unit at Edinburgh which was the rear base for operations going on at Woomera. This was a support test unit that operated various types of aircraft and

19:30 there had been a few problems with accidents in the unit. I think I was put into the unit to help out with morale and try and stop the accident rate that had started in that unit.

What period was that?

That would have been in the mid 50's, sorry not the mid 50', the early 1960's.

20:00 At the same time there were launch tests being carried out with missiles from the V bombers which had been sent out from the UK [United Kingdom].

What is the V bomber?

The V bombers - there were 3 of them -

20:30 the Valiant, Victor and Vulcan. The Vulcan was involved in Blue Steel trials, firing off stand- off missiles, and the pilots were civilian pilots and I flew a few missions with them principally to give them instrument ratings. Because there was no one else in country with the ability to do that, otherwise they would have to have gone back

21:00 to the UK just to do a simple instrument rating. So that got me back into the V bombers a bit. At the end of my time at Air Trials Unit I was back to ARDU again. That is when I took over as Chief Test Pilot. My family were living on the base at Laverton. As now a reasonably senior squadron leader,

21:30 I'm beset with the problem of doing promotion examinations and so forth, preparatory to becoming a wing commander. I'm getting a bit too senior for the positions at Flight Test Centre at ARDU, so I did what was called the Q examination, which was necessary for promotion to wing commander.

22:00 Lo and behold, the next thing I am posted to do a staff course at the RAAF Base at Fairburn, and promoted to wing commander, before having completed the staff course. The first one to achieve that distinction, if it is a distinction. So I did my staff course

22:30 as a wing commander which was unusual. At the completion of the staff course, which lasted a year, I was posted to what was then called the Headquarters Operational Command headquarters, at Glenbrook, at the back of Penrith and given a two hatted [double] job there. I was Staff Officer for Citizens Air Force Squadrons; also the

23:00 Command Photographic officer. Did that job for two years and then was posted back to a flying job as the Commanding Officer of Number 36 Transport Squadron. Which was then flying A model Hercules [C130-A]. That was a very satisfying job. I enjoyed that very much and it got me to flying in and out of

23:30 South East Asia quite extensively, including in and out of Vietnam.

During what period were you flying in and out of Vietnam?

That was 1968- 69. Towards the end of my tour, tours in the air force usually lasted two years, towards the end of my tour, I was posted to

24:00 Washington to take over the job of Project Manager for the F-111[fighter/bomber] purchase or F-111 acquisition. Took the family across to Washington. That was to have been a tail end clean up of the acquisition program because the aircraft had, some aircraft had

24:30 been accepted, at this stage. I arrived in Washington and did an extensive handover- takeover from the previous Project Manager of that project. Then there was an unfortunate accident with one F-111 where

25:00 the high strength steel that was used in the manufacture of that aircraft became a bit of a nightmare in trying to manage its propensity to cracking and so forth, and the result of all that was the grounding of the fleet for about two years.

Was this after they were accepted into Australia?

We only accepted one aircraft

25:30 and handed that back saying we wont take it yet. That aircraft was handed back. The crews that were under training to ferry them to Australia went back to Australia . The RAAF took on a loan of 24 F-4 Phantom aircraft in the interim. Now I had a tiger by the tail [difficult challenge] over there

26:00 trying to sort out the problems with the aircraft with the USAF [United States Air Force] and the [US] Department of Defence, very cooperative in including myself and my staff in the team to try and sort out the problems with that aircraft, which we successfully did. I self destructed in that job in 1974 when, as was my responsibility,

26:30 I got the last one ferried as far as Hickam Air Force Base in Honolulu. That was the end of my responsibility and I came back to Australia to a staff job in the headquarters at Russell Offices in Canberra. I became then responsible, in an operational

27:00 requirements area to the re-equipment and supervision of the non offensive side of the air force; that is, all of the support aircraft and air fields and equipment.

When you say self destructive, what do you mean?

The job finished.

27:30 **I know it is a little bit of aside, but the story of you meeting (astronaut) Buzz Aldrin at that time?.**

As a test pilot I became involved with a very active society in the United States called the Society of Experimental Test Pilots. That society

28:00 embraced all of the test pilots and all of the astronauts in the States. So there was a week of activity in Los Angeles each year put on by the society and all of the test pilots who could be spared from around the place, and the astronauts, would congregate in Los Angeles in the Beverly Hilton Hotel.

28:30 This was by way of a big seminar and we had briefings from astronauts and other test pilots on various projects. The manufacturers of aircraft and equipment were involved in these get- togethers and General Dynamics [aircraft manufacturers, made the F111] who I was rubbing shoulders with at the time

29:00 had a hospitality suite. One evening I found myself on a little verandah of the hospitality suite overlooking the central square of the Beverly Hilton. I sat down in an empty chair next to someone who had his head in his hands, obviously upset about something.

29:30 I dug him in the ribs and said, “Hey, we are supposed to be in a party mood here, I am getting you a drink,” and he said, “Get lost.” I couldn’t understand that, so a little while later I said, “I am going to get you one anyway,” and he looked around and he said, “You’re an Aussie?” He must have recognised my accent, and I said “yeah”, so we got to talking a bit and I said,

30:00 “What is your beef, what is your problem? Has your wife left you?” He said “Nothing like that, something much more serious.” I said, “Talk about it, it might help.” He said “I don’t really want to”. I egged him on a bit and he eventually said, “Well, I was the second man on the moon, and not the first.” And I turned around to him and said, “I would have given you all of

30:30 of that [indicates his right arm] to have done what you have done”. He smartened up a little bit and I

got him a drink and we yakked [talked] for a little bit and I met Buzz Aldrin. On the Friday evening of that week with the Society of Experimental Test Pilots, Bob Hope [comedian] was the compare at the big

31:00 dinner in the ballroom of the Beverly Hilton and he introduced astronauts to us, one after the other, until there were 27 of them on the stage. Even in those days, that must have been about 1973 perhaps, it was quite remarkable to see

31:30 27 people standing together who had been into space. Following my tour as F-111 Project Manager and getting back to Australia again, I was now in Operational Requirements for the RAAF. My designation was Director of Support Requirements.

32:00 Having been the CO of 36 Squadron before going to the States, flying A model Hercules [transport planes] I was now immersed in another acquisition program, to re-equip my old squadron, 36 Squadron, with new aircraft. It was rather satisfying to go through

32:30 the hoops of re-equipping a squadron with new aircraft, particularly one that I had been personally involved with. And now 36 Squadron is just about to celebrate its 25 years of operation of their new aircraft, the H model Hercules. Towards the end of my time

33:00 in that post. As I said before, postings in the RAAF were usually two years, at the end of that time, and that was about the time that Cyclone Tracy occurred and blew Darwin apart. The RAAF assets at Darwin were decimated somewhat. I did made a trip up there with

33:30 the Chief of the Air Force to have a look over the place, Lo and behold, I am posted up to be the senior officer in charge of the Darwin area. I would have liked to have done that job; however it became apparent to me that my flying days were pretty well over and having had a very extensive

34:00 period of flying I was rather reluctant to take up to ‘flying a desk’ [management] for the rest of my career. So I started to look for other opportunities. Someone told me that there was a job going with an organisation called OFEMA, which was the French connection for aviation in Australia.

34:30 I ended up resigning from the air force and taking on a job with OFEMA.

Can you take us briefly through your post- service life?

That started with resigning from the air force and instead of buying aircraft and re-equipping the aircraft with all manner of things, I was now trying to sell things

35:00 to [the Department of] Defence which was a whole new world as far as I was concerned but very interesting and still related to what I had been doing during my RAAF service. OFEMA was a representative organisation and it still exists, representing French Defence Industries.

35:30 This gave me the opportunity for various trips to France to see what was going on over there and this was during the early days of the development of the Airbus [jet airliner] industries. The first Airbus, the A300, was, the proto-types were flying and a few production aircraft were flying in those days.

36:00 OFEMA became the agent for Airbus Industries in Australia and my responsibility was for the sale of Airbus to Ansett [a domestic airline] and the RAAF. I had interviews with Reginald Ansett [airline proprietor] which were interesting, we’ll go into that a bit later.

36:30 I found myself at one stage at Toulouse in France doing a short Airbus conversion. A bit of time in their simulator and then a few flights around France in an Airbus. I suppose that was the largest aircraft I had flown at that stage.

37:00 **How many hours had you clocked up with the RAAF?.,**

5,000 - plus or minus. Most of those hours, which was a bit unusual, as Pilot in Command. I got very few hours as a second pilot in aircraft because of the way my career went. As I look back on it I

37:30 had opportunities for flying that were really outstanding. I just happened to be in the right place at the right time, with the right abilities, to be able to do everything that an aviator could ever want to do. My only regret, if I do have any regrets, is that I didn’t get into space [travel]. The time frame that my career

38:00 occupied was such that, as I look back on it, I now believe that I had more opportunity to advance aviation and aircraft in that time period, than I would have had if I had been younger and had the opportunity for launching into space.

38:30 **You got married - how many kids?**

Four children - two of each. The first one, made in Japan, the last one born in England.

You finished up in Canberra. How did you come to be here?.

39:00 On returning from the United States, following the end of the F-111 acquisition program, I was now responsible for a family of four. We bought a house in Canberra preparatory to further RAAF career in the area, and we have been here ever since.

39:30 **During that very busy professional career, what were your hobbies or outside interests outside the RAAF?**

Hobbies? Right across the board on a technical engineering side of things, I have always done my own maintenance on cars, I have raced a motor cycle at Bathurst [raceway], tuned engines,

40:00 was involved in electronics from a very early age, crystal sets up to whatever. Electronics mainly, but not too much in the way of sports – the usual things, a bit of cricket, tennis and swimming, not so much football.

Outdoor activities?

40:30 Not too many.

Pretty busy getting outside and flying those aeroplanes around?

Yes, an avid interest in aircraft and everything to do with them. And that persists and it has never stopped and it goes on today. I am currently the Secretary of the Flight Tests of Australia. I continue to be associated with

41:00 retired and active test pilots. I am very interested in all matters aviation.

Tape 2

00:34 **We are going to go back to Murwillumbah. What sort of bloke was your dad?**

That is a hard one.

01:00 **How actively was he involved with the family? Was he a hard worker or what lessons in life did he pass onto you?**

Quite a few. He was right at the beginning of technology advancement, I would call it. His father was the first

01:30 person to have a car in Lismore and it was a Stanley Steamer [steam car]. I can just remember that car with great interest. Then I can remember my father's first car, which was a little two cylinder Jarret and he used to do all the maintenance on that and involve us children with that. That was the start of my

02:00 education as far as engineering was concerned. He used to do overhauls on the engine and I would be intrigued with that and little did I realise that basis he gave me was really the basis for my whole career in the future. It developed from that and I recognise that now.

02:30 The interest I had in what he was interested in was really what set me off. As a youngster, I can remember seeing my first aircraft fly over Murwillumbah on the mail run from Sydney to Brisbane. This was very early in Australia's aviation and I don't know how I recognised it as an aircraft.

03:00 It was the first one I had seen. I must have seen pictures of them in a newspaper or whatever, rushed inside to tell my mother that I just seen an aeroplane fly over and she said matter of factly, "Yes, that is the mail plane to Brisbane." A little while later, my father, because of his interest in that sort of thing, heard that Smithy [aviator Charles Kingsford Smith] was bringing his Southern Cross to Murwillumbah for a bit of barnstorming [exhibition flying].

03:30 I sensed the activity and excitement with my elder brother and my father in preparing to go down to see this aircraft. I wouldn't be left out. I joined in and they took me along. I well remember driving down the road near our place to a landing field,

04:00 just an open paddock, and seeing this aircraft out in the middle of the paddock surrounded by a mob of people, who had come in various means of transportation, including horses and carts, and many horses and not too many cars in those days, and wandering across to this aircraft and looking at it and thinking how big it was, and seeing

04:30 someone doing some repairs on the cockpit; actually someone was rebuilding the pilot's seat which was made of light plywood. And during that process, the repairer threw a piece of plywood down on the ground and it was immediately seized upon by all the local young fellows, including my brother. He actually managed to come away with a piece of that plywood,

05:00 which was a prized possession for some time. I looked at this aircraft and one of the engines was leaking a bit of oil and the oil was dripping down on to one of the main wheels. I thought that was a terrible thing to be happening. I never did see that aircraft fly at that time, I only saw it on the ground.

But that was my first

05:30 approach to an aircraft and it impressed me very much. Little did I think that I could be ever be involved in aircraft and aviation at that time. That didn't come until much later.

How old were you?

I must have been about 6 or 7 at the time. These little things - my father's introduction to engineering – and, for instance, he had a big steam engine in his

06:00 factory and I was most impressed with the flywheel governor which controlled the speed of that steam engine. I wouldn't rest until I could work out how it all worked. Ever since that time I have been of the opinion that you can't fix anything until you know why it is broken, or why it works or the, how it works,

06:30 That is the philosophy right through my flight test career. You have got to know how it works before you can even test it, or do anything with it.

What other things did your father involve you in?. Was he in the First World War?

No.

07:00 he wasn't involved in World War I. A couple of his brothers were, but he wasn't medically fit for World War I.

What did you know of Australia's involvement in World War I as you were growing up?

Very little.

07:30 I can't recall how I learned about World War I except by reading about it. I can't recall ever having talked to anybody who came back from World War I, even though I had a couple of uncles who had been over there.

What sort of things were you reading as you were growing up?

08:00 **The usual things that school children read. Biggles [flying adventure books]. I had a peripheral interest in aviation at this stage, which started with that first sight of an aircraft and then sight of Smithy's aircraft and it wasn't until we moved to Sydney when I was about 10**

08:30 **that my father, because of his interest in that sort of thing, decided to go out to an air display in about 1935. The RAAF was putting on an air display at the RAAF Base at Richmond. We set off in our car from Gladesville at that time, and joined the long queue of cars**

09:00 **out to the RAAF Base at Richmond. I found myself as a young fellow, (how old would I have been then - 11 or 12?) sitting in front of a rope barricade to keep people back on the edge of the air field and my distinct impression is seeing three Hawker Demons taxi out**

09:30 **from the other side of the airfield, tied together with tape. They had tape attached to wing tips and they taxied out in formation, they took off in formation they did aerobatics in formation, and landed in formation, still tied together. Very impressive. Once again another big boost to my interest in aviation. That is about all I remember**

10:00 **of that air display. It had a big impression on me, to think that pilots could do that.**

Did you ever want to do anything else other than being a pilot?

Yes, I had my heart set on engineering and that is why I ended up going to Sydney University to start doing engineering after World War II. There was this basic

10:30 interest in engineering all the way through.

What were your impressions of war time Sydney?

War time Sydney? Building an air raid shelter in the back yard. I did a lot of digging there, and because of my interest in electronics and electrics, I put in a power supply for the air raid shelter with a car battery.

11:00 I was now going to Intermediate High School at Drummoyne. The war is going on, the war didn't have a great affect on the local population as I saw it, except for food rationing and clothing, petrol rationing certainly. It wasn't until my elder brother

11:30 joined the army that it started to dawn on me that we were personally involved.

Where did he serve?

He served initially with an Armoured Division in tanks. He was a wireless operator in the tank and

12:00 the Japanese were at this stage advancing through the islands and there was a distinct possibility of an

Australian invasion. Things like the Brisbane [defence] Line came up, and my brother was involved in preparation for defence along the Brisbane Line.

Were you worried at the time?

Not worried, fascinated with all the

12:30 military things that were going on. It didn't worry me all that much, but I didn't think that it would go on for long enough for me to be involved.

How keen were you to get involved?

I was very keen to become involved, if there was the opportunity. I wanted desperately to join the air force

13:00 and learn to fly. As soon as I could, I investigated joining a group called the Air League, which was promoting young fellows into an interest in aviation. I didn't join the Air League. I joined the local school flight of the Air Training Corps instead, as soon as I was able to.

13:30 That was at age 16.

Which school was this?

I was then going to Sydney Technical High School at Paddington. It was a bit of a long trek from Gladesville to Paddington, involving a couple of tram rides. However, I think I became more interested in activities with the Air Training Corps than in my school studies.

14:00 There was some concern at the time about what the Japanese were doing, so I became obsessed with joining the air force at the first opportunity. And as soon as I turned 18 I applied to join the air force and was soon accepted.

14:30 Activities with the Air Training Corps were a preparation for that. I had a uniform, I ended up as a flight sergeant in the Air Training Corps in charge of drilling the school flight, and that sort of thing. I became involved with learning Morse Code and

15:00 the theory of flight, and so on. I was so keen that I was also interested in photography; and having borrowed my brother's camera, I was using that quite a lot and developed a capability in the photographic area. Because of that interest, I became an assistant to the Air Training Corps officer who

15:30 handled photography for the Air Training Corps and that gave me access to a fully equipped dark room and printing capabilities, and I enjoyed that very much. So that became another hobby in a constructive sort of way. Left all that behind when I joined the RAAF when I was 18.

Where were you when the war finished?.

16:00 Let me progress this through my first time with the air force which started at a rookie [recruit] school at Cootamundra, that is where most of the RAAF rookies went to, to learn the rudiments of being an airman. I had about 6 weeks there

16:30 before joining Number 63 Initial Training Course for Air Crew at Bradfield Park, in Sydney. There was the possibility of learning to fly with the air force, but I recognised that the war was coming to an end and things were simmering down as far as training was concerned.

17:00 I finished initial training at Bradfield Park on Number 63 course. The last course to go through on initial training was Number 65, so it was quite near the end.

To what stage did they take you to at that time?

All of the preparation for flying, the next step, would have been into an aircraft like a Tiger Moth [biplane] to learn to fly. One was given

17:30 much grounding in the mathematics associated with aviation, aerodynamics, and at the same time, all of those things that go to the making of an airman.

Did you ever get to go through flying training at that stage?

Not at that stage, no. One thing is important here. I befriended

18:00 two fellows who had the same desires that I had. Name of Don Armitt and Ron Mitchell. We became a trio of young fellows interested in the same sorts of things and we stuck together very closely through ITS [Initial Training School] and subsequently throughout

18:30 my air force career, as far as it went with them. Following ITS at Bradfield Park, the requirement for us to do flying training had diminished and there were enough aircrew around to handle the tail end of the war. So we were pushed off into other jobs, and I ended up at the big Stores Depot

19:00 at Dubbo for a while. Because of my interest in electrics and electronics I ended up as an assistant to the Barracks Electrician, which was very interesting to me. Along came another posting to Eastern Area

Maintenance Headquarters, which was in a big house in Darling Point (Sydney). I

19:30 got a job in the Technical Library, amending technical documents and so forth. That gave me an insight into the technical control of air force maintenance, and so forth. Which was another plank to my eventual career. The war ended whilst I was based at Maintenance Headquarters

20:00 at Darling Point, and I was demobbed [demobilised - returned to civilian life]. The two other fellows I mentioned before, we stuck together very closely in civvy street [civilian life] and we looked for a means of transportation. You couldn't buy a car in those days; cars weren't being produced again, and

20:30 they were in very short supply. So we thought we would end up with motor bikes. We each bought ourselves a disposal Army Harley Davidson. They were new, they were in crates. We had fun assembling them; they didn't need much assembling, you had to put handle bars and wheels on them, that was an exciting thing to do. And then we each

21:00 had a means of transportation. Petrol was still pretty hard to get so that curtailed our activities more than somewhat. Because of our mutual interest in things technical we got into intricate maintenance of those motor cycles. Then I thought well, because of

21:30 an interest in getting more power out of the engines, we pulled them apart we put them back together again, we pulled them apart, we polished their interior and got more performance out of them. One thing led to another, and we ended up forming a motor cycle club, which we called the Sydney Harley Davidson Motor Cycle Club.

Was that like a motor cycle club as we know of today like

22:00 **the Hells Angels [bikie gang]?**

No we didn't involve ourselves in that sort of activity but we did do a bit of touring. Half a dozen of us got together and did a major tour of southern New South Wales, Victoria on our motor cycles. We camped out as we went around and we utilised the

22:30 hammocks that the US [United States] Army had developed for war time operations, which were now available through disposal stores. These hammocks could be slung between a couple of trees, they had a mosquito net all around, they had a little roof over the top, and they were ideal for that sort of thing. They would roll up into a small bundle that we could put in our saddle bags and we were pretty well self contained, we had a ball.

What sort of things did you get up to on that trip?

Just sight seeing, mainly.

23:00 Just touring all the places of interest around the country, it was fascinating.

What was post war Australia like then?

Production was starting to boom in those days. All of those things that had been curtailed during the war were starting to take off again.

23:30 Jobs were easy to come by. I ended up in a job with a restore glove and bag company for a while, in between periods of furthering my education.

Where did that ambition to further your education come from?

It grew out of my desire to get into

24:00 engineering. I didn't think there was much opportunity to get back into aviation so I had set my sights on engineering.

How much support from the family did you get in your aspirations to further your education?

Very good support. I was still living at home, although I spent a lot of time with Ron Mitchell, one of the friends from war time training.

24:30 He lived in a house at Bronte close to the beach. It was a very nice place to visit and we had a garage there that we used to use to work on our motor cycles. That developed into a desire to actually try out a bit of racing with a motor cycle. I had realised at this stage that I had a natural co-ordination,

25:00 an ability to handle the machine. How I recognised that as being better than others, I don't know, but I realised that I was a bit better than others in that respect. It is a very hard thing to quantify, but that went on throughout my career.

How much of that is also confidence and a certain circumstance of fearlessness?

Don't know about

25:30 a sense offearlessness at that stage there was a bit of that, but that grew on confidence in one's ability. It was difficult to see the edges of ability and calamity, that is the cross over point.

26:00 It came home to me on one occasion after having formed that motor cycle club. I was then trying to teach another friend how to ride a motor cycle and we were doing that in Centennial Park in Sydney. I thought I would go for a bit of spin on his machine before I started to teach him to ride it.

26:30 And I'm riding down one of the roads in Centennial Park , the last thing I remember is a car taking a turn across my path. He was doing a right turn across me and I had no way of missing him. I ploughed into the front of him with this friend's motor cycle. I went over the handle bars and slid along the bonnet of this car and poked my head through the windscreen and

27:00 knocked myself out and cut an artery in my head. Wouldn't be here today except for a nurse in the park happened along and put her finger on a pressure point. I came to [regained consciousness] in an ambulance on the way to St Vincent's hospital floated off into unconsciousness again and came to again on an operating table where they were considering sewing me up. I had knocked a couple of teeth

27:30 out and had a big hole through my lower lip and a big gash in my head. I was bleeding profusely and the nurses were complaining about the blood dripping over the floor. I recovered from that pretty quickly, inside a week, and that incidentally led me to meeting my wife, meeting the girl I married. That is an incidental.

28:00 I ended up with blood stained clothes. I was living at Epping at this stage. Took those blood stained clothes across to a dry cleaning place to have them cleaned and there was a beautiful little girl there who I fell for and eventually offered her a ride on my motor bike and one thing led to another.

You have got a bit

28:30 **to thank for that?**

At this stage I was a student and I was being assisted by what was then called the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme. And incidentally, back in the RAAF, when I was an aircrew trainee,

29:00 with a white flash on my cap as they wore in those days. I think I was getting 7 shillings a day. Now I was getting 27 shillings a fortnight to exist on, still running my motor bike and now I was riding my motor bike to other places of education. I went to the Tech College at

29:30 Ultimo in Sydney, to matriculate. Matriculated and then applied for and was accepted by Sydney University. It is towards the end of my first year at Sydney University that one of the trio that I mentioned before, Ron Mitchell in particular, pulled out a piece of paper which was the ad out of the

30:00 Sydney Morning Herald saying: "RAAF requires aircrew trainees for their post war flying training". So the three of us applied for acceptance on that course. I believe because of my additional educational qualifications, that is, almost completed first year engineering, that they accepted me but they didn't

30:30 accept the other two. The other two, Ron Mitchell and Ron Armitt applied for the second course, and they were accepted. The three of us ended up back in the Air Force again, much to our delight. Having finished the first year of engineering I was now on my way to Point Cook to start an air force career in

31:00 earnest.

Can you tell us about, back in the air force - the first time you had flying experiences?.

Oddly enough, during my time with the RAAF during World War II, I didn't fly at all. There wasn't an opportunity.

31:30 Always keen to do so, but the opportunity didn't come up. However I had flown with the RAAF as an Air Training Corps Cadet. We used to make visits to bases and at one stage we had a week long camp with the RAAF, at their base

32:00 in Uranquinty, down near Wagga. That allowed us to mix with aircrew who were learning to fly there and we even assisted with the maintenance of the aircraft. There is one little amusing incident there, the Wirraway, in those days, some of them were fitted with two

32:30 forward firing guns, that fired through the propeller arc from over the top of the fuselage. There was an interrupter mechanism that was supposed to prevent the gun from firing when there was a blade in front of the barrel. However, that used to malfunction occasionally and some of the propeller blades ended up with holes in them. Instead of throwing the blades away in those days they used to very carefully

33:00 polish out the hole so that it was neat and wouldn't be a source of fatigue cracking. They would usually then fit three of the blades that had holes in them together to preserve balance. Wandering along a flight line at Uranquinty, I found that…an

33:30 urge to poke a finger through one of these holes in a propeller blade. Having poked my index finger through the hole, I found that I had got it past the knuckle and I couldn't get it back out again. And the harder I tried the worse it got. This is a real predicament. There I am,

34:00 feeling such a fool, with my finger stuck in a propeller blade and everyone around making jokes about it, including a sergeant who came along and said “We can’t wait any longer, we are going to do an engine run”. Eventually someone called a medic and the ambulance came from the sick quarters and a doctor and so forth, and he looked at this and he said, “You idiot.

34:30 I am not going to cut your finger off.” He had some ointment and he put some ointment around the finger and tried to work it back into the hole. He tied a piece of string around the finger and as he unwound the string, I pulled the finger out. That is one time I was very glad to pull the finger out!

What was your first experience of going up in an aeroplane?

35:00 That was also with the Air Training Corps, a visit to RAAF Richmond. We lined up for a flight in an old Avro Anson. It wasn’t old then, but it seemed to be a pretty modern sort of an aeroplane to us. I well recall the feeling I had in manoeuvres

35:30 and seeing the ground for the first time from the air. It wasn’t as I expected. I guess this is the impression that most people have; it is not what they expect when they first fly.

Can you talk a bit more about that feeling, what else did you feel?

An exhilaration and this

36:00 furthered my desire to be involved and at the end of the war I felt a sense of disappointment at not having progressed far enough to actually fly. Inbred in me at that stage was the fervent desire to do it if I ever could, but I didn’t think I would ever have the opportunity. Thanks

36:30 be, it happened.

What were your main motivations in joining the air league and then the air force. Were they centred around flying or around serving your country, or was it a mixture of the two?

It was a mix of interest in the latest technological things and a sense that I would love to be able to control machines like that.

37:00 That came out to some extent with the motor cycle riding and that also instigated me into getting a CAMS [racing] license and racing one of those motor cycles at Bathurst. That was the nearest I could get to flying at the time. That’s, when I reflect on

37:30 that, that’s my incentive then, to get as close to flying as I could. I still didn’t have the sense of satisfaction that flying gave me later and still does, but it was an introduction.

For someone who had never flown an aircraft, or someone to the future watching,

38:00 **what is that sense of satisfaction, what does flying give you?.**

Initially before I became in Flight Test, flying was an exhilarating thing to be able to get away from the ground and get into that next dimension and be free to manoeuvre in all manner of ways.

38:30 To be above the earth and seeing it so readily, to be able to fly around clouds, to go in and out of clouds. And the…what shall I call it?...

39:00 the way I feel the brain churning around

39:30 trying to bring all these things out - I can almost feel that.

Tape 3

00:31 **How you got trained to fly?**

The flying training was preceded by yet another initial training course which lasted six months. Having already done initial training at Bradfield Park during the war, I suppose I had an advantage over the others on the course. Although there were a few

01:00 ex-war time RAAF young fellows on the course. I already had had the training that I was now to embark upon again, and that was an advantage, so I did pretty well on the initial training course which lasted 6 months at Point Cook. Very interesting days. Eager to get into that first flight in an aeroplane

01:30 eventually assigned a flying instructor and off we went. Now a peculiar thing arises here, I still had my motor cycle and I had been riding a motor cycle for quite a few years; and here I am in an aeroplane for the first time and I find to my surprise that the rudder in the aircraft operates in the reverse

02:00 sense of the steering of a motor cycle. And that has always been a problem with me, that is that aircraft rudders operate in the reverse sense to the normal instincts. If we have a billy cart, or a motor cycle, or

even a car with a steering wheel, or a vehicle with hand lever controls, they all work instinctively in the right sense. But

02:30 too many people realise that aircraft rudders operated in the reverse sense. All pilots will be astounded at this because they have been all retrained, one of you as a pilot, you probably haven't realised this yet, that was an initial difficulty for me and I had to overcome that. That probably

03:00 took me a couple of hours to turn my instincts around, to use the rudder in the opposite sense. Having mastered that, I then progressed pretty well. I went first solo in the usual amount of flying hours, 8 or 9 hours.

What was it like being in control of an aircraft for the first time?

The fascination of it,

03:30 wasn't apparent during those early flying hours because one was intent on learning as much as possible and comprehending what was going on. When I look back on it, it is a fairly intensive mental effort. It's complex; you are now operating in three dimensions

04:00 and the flight controls of a Tiger Moth are very sensitive and to get down to that level of sensitivity in control of a machine is quite a challenge. So the fascination of the flying came later when one could put aside all of those things that you are trying to learn and master, to the time when that

04:30 happens automatically, like the way you drive a car and you don't think about how you are driving it, you are just driving it. That comes with an aircraft as well. In those early days of training you haven't reached that stage yet, so it is a very mentally and physically demanding time.

Apart from this problem with the rudder, which you already mentioned, were there any other things that you found particularly difficult in your early training?

05:00 No, I didn't find anything particularly difficult in flying training all the way through. Because of my basic understanding and comprehension of things mechanical and electronic, none of those things were too demanding. However, some of the things that happened

05:30 in the training had a vast effect. We had an aerodynamics instructor who tried to teach us that the forces acting on an aircraft in a turn were such and such. He was wrong, he was absolutely wrong, and I questioned him and he maintained that what he said was right and from

06:00 then on, I had a basic mistrust of everything that I read and was taught. I always questioned everything that came my way. I think that saved my life on a few occasions.

Can you tell us about some occasions in your career where that mistrust as you call it, that desire to question things came into play?

06:30 **Don't worry if they are not what we are talking about now.**

Often a flying instructor would tell you such and such a thing. I would think, "Hey, that is not right," and I would go out of my way then to determine what was right. I am still doing that. There are

07:00 still a few things that I see going on in aviation that I want to put right.

Were there any orders or directions you were given later on in your air force career that you questioned and perhaps did save your life?

It is hard to think of specific instances, but I may do that as time goes by.

What aircraft did you progress on to after the Tiger Moth?

07:30 At the end of the Tiger Moth phase, which was a year into the flying training course, there weren't enough flying instructors in the RAAF at that stage to cope with our course at Point Cook. So we were split in half. Half of the course went to East Sale in Victoria, to the Central Flying School, and

08:00 the other half remained at Point Cook. I was in the half that went to East Sale. We were fortunate going to East Sale because then we had instructors of instructors , Central Flying School pilots, and they were a lot better at flying instruction than the ones that were at Point Cook. So that was a bit of an advantage. We then launched into Wirraway aircraft

08:30 for that part of the flying training course. The Wirraway was a big step up from a Tiger Moth. Big radial engine, constant speed propeller, all sorts of additional complications, and an array of instruments which was to us mind-boggling [amazing]. How are we ever going to know what all those instruments

09:00 are about? Little by little, or quantum jump by quantum jump, this all came into focus and in next to no time we were managing the Wirraway. It is interesting, the progression that a trainee pilot goes through. The aim being to get a pilot trained to not just be able to

09:30 fly an aircraft around the sky and from A to B, but to be able to use it for what it is made for. The air

force wanted crews to utilise those machines for their purpose, rather than just fly them around. That is a big difference in philosophy of flying civil and military.

10:00 **In military flying you have also got weapons. That is the use of the military aircraft, what other training then came into play once you have mastered the initial flying?**

I haven't got my wings yet, so it is still pure flying. Navigation, understanding the machinery of the aeroplane, the engine, the radios, all of the equipment,

10:30 the instruments, and how it all works. And learning about the atmosphere, the medium into which you are going to be engaged, that was a very important part of it. That atmosphere out there, the average person doesn't know very much about the atmosphere. I am always surprised how little. We had to absorb all of that and

11:00 it was a fascinating process. Eventually the RAAF decided that it would be advantageous to have us also trained on another type of aircraft, that is to get some experience on the multi engine side of aircraft operations, which is a whole new ball game again.

11:30 Where, if you have a multi engine aeroplane you can shut down one engine, or one engine might fail, then you have got the other one to rely on. But the flying of a multi engine aircraft on less than it's normal complement of engines is another problem. We were given some instruction on the DC3, or the Gooneybird as we liked to call it, or the C47.

12:00 I had about 4 hours instruction on the DC3 and then we students were launched off solo in the DC3. We were the only course and the only pilots I have ever heard of who were launched off solo in the DC3 before we actually got wings. And those who were posted off course to those aircraft

12:30 then had to be content to sit in the right seat as the second pilot for maybe a year before they got to sit in the other seat again. They had already done that, which was a bit unusual. Along came Wings. Wings parade was an adrenaline producing event where we were presented for the first time with silver wings.

13:00 Up until that time the wings presented to a pilot gaining his wings was a fabric wing.

Can you take us back to that moment, you said it was adrenaline producing. Where were you, and who was presenting your wings, and what was the situation?

We were practised on a parade for the presentation of the wings. The parade ground at East Sale was used and

13:30 we had many practices to be smart on this parade, which was to be the wings presentation. An air vice marshal from the headquarters in Melbourne came down to Sale and pinned these things on us. I had married on course,

14:00 which was something that was generally forbidden, and I had proposed to my wife-to-be during my flying training and we decided that if we were going to get married we may as well do it now anyway. So I disappeared one long weekend,

14:30 made my way from East Sale in Victoria to Sydney. We were married in Sydney and then I came back on the job on the following Tuesday morning. She came down for the wings presentation and I marched out with great pride to have this pair of silver wings pinned on me. I can remember trying not to look at it too often.

15:00 It was something that was a real achievement. We all felt like that, and I guess anyone who has had the same experience knows what it is about.

What happened after that?

Preceding the end of the course, we had all been issued with a form to fill in, what are your preferences for postings and

15:30 the course members were all a close knit group at this stage, sharing experiences very fully. I don't know what first prompted me to think of flight testing, but I thought that at the time that

16:00 it would be the ultimate, and I guess it still is for a pilot. I think I recognised an innate ability to be able to do that sort of thing, so I wanted to get into it as soon as I could. Another pilot, and myself,

16:30 the other pilot, Ray Tabroolco, we applied to be test pilots. That was a flippant thing to do. It was almost silly. But we thought we may as well put it down anyway, not thinking that any notice would be taken of it. And lo and behold! When the postings came out for all the pilots off course,

17:00 we were posted to the Aircraft Research and Development Unit [ARDU] at Laverton, extraordinary. As I look back on it, I still think, well everybody thinks it is extraordinary. I would love to know the thinking of the people in personnel who made out that posting.

Your engineering background would have come into that?

Ray Tabroolco, he wasn't engineering but that probably

17:30 caused him to adopt a different career path. But my interests were right down that line and perseverance with natural abilities and recognition of natural abilities probably caused it all to happen.

18:00 When we arrived at Laverton the Commanding Officer at the time was a famous test pilot called Joel Cumming. He had been right through the war as a test pilot, flown multiple aeroplanes of both sides, including Japanese aircraft. We threw him a smart salute and he looked up from his desk after a while

18:30 and said, " I don't know what air force headquarters is doing, sending a couple of young whipper snappers like you to me. I don't have any flying instructors, I don't have any training hours for my aeroplanes. I can't use you. Go away." We could have sunk through the floor, it was a bitter disappointment. We didn't really know what to expect but we didn't expect that. He

19:00 then smiled and said, "I've got a proposition for you. If I arrange to have you two posted to all of the squadrons of the air force, for 6 months at a time; and then you come back here. I can then use you very well, let me know what you think about that?" We could have told him there and then it was as though

19:30 someone very beneficial had bestowed the best that one could possibly think, imagine two young fellows off course, being offered the chance to go and fly everything, fantastic. He soon got the message the next day, and that day we were in fact posted on the first stage of that plan,

20:00 to do a Mustang (fighter) conversion with 21 Squadron, at just the next hanger up at Laverton. Equipped wit Mustangs, preparatory to going to 77 Squadron in Japan as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces. Another nice posting to have, here we are being posted overseas almost straight away to the envy of all other course members.

How did your friends and people you told

20:30 **react to your sudden rise in careers?**

Incredulous.

Were they jealous?.

Yes very much so. That continued. It just didn't stop at that time period, it went right on, "You lucky b……

21:00 getting that sort of an opportunity".

Looking back on your entire career, was that the one opportunity that had more influence than any others? Are there other turning points like that for you?

That was a major one. With some follow-on disappointment, that it didn't follow through. And then other opportunities came along, one after the other, almost as

21:30 a natural progression of ability in flying, and so on.

You went to Laverton to convert to Mustangs before being sent overseas?

Yes.

Could we talk a little bit about the Mustangs?

A step up from a Wirraway to a Mustang, not as big a step as a step as from a Tiger Moth to a Wirraway during the training course, but now

22:00 we were young pilots, we have got a few old and bold World War II veterans teaching us to fly the Mustang. There is not much teaching that can go on in teaching one to fly a Mustang, because there isn't a two seater, so you learn a lot about the cockpit and you learn a

22:30 lot about it's engine, a lot about its flying characteristics, before you launch yourself off in one. You ask a lot of questions and you are given a lot of information by those who have done it. Eventually you strap into one and again it is adrenaline producing, it is exciting and you push that throttle

23:00 forward, and you hear the noise and it wants to swing to the left a bit and you correct it and you roar off down the runway and you are in the air, and "Hey, this is great!".

Can you describe the Mustang for us? For the archive as well, Can you take us through each part and how it was used?

23:30 **Maybe start with a physical description from the nose to the tail?.**

The Mustang was an aircraft produced in a hurry by the Americans in response to a British specification for a long range fighter to protect the long range bombers flying over Germany which were being hacked about a bit by German fighters.

24:00 So they needed a good fighter that could go a long way and perform as well as possible. The culmination of all the war time development was really the Mustang. You could put the Tempest in the same frame. The Mustang was a sleek aeroplane with the best engine available at the time, then it was the Packard Merlin, later the

24:30 Rolls Royce Merlin. A big liquid cooled engine with a 4 bladed prop [propeller] and constant speed prop and retractable undercarriage, radiators for cooling under the belly with a scoop under the cockpit area, lots of fuel,

25:00 two fuel tanks and a fuselage tank behind the cockpit. Six machine guns, 3 .5's [6 .50 calibre machine guns in total] on each side in the wings and a nice cockpit. Good performance, fairly fast for its time.

25:30 In fact, I only read the other day that a hotted up Mustang competing in an air race in the States had gone round its air race at 500 mph. Pretty slick and slippery, good manoeuvrability, good stability except when you have a fuselage tank full of fuel, when it became unstable, and that was a dog [bad] then.

26:00 **What about inside the cockpit how was that laid out?**

The seat was made for a sit on parachute, sort of a bucket type seat, fairly clean inside the cockpit compared with aircraft I had been familiar with before.

26:30 Nice set of instruments, good view from a semi bubble type canopy, gun sight there in front of you, for you to hit your head on if you came to a sudden stop. The flying gear that we wore in those days was pretty elementary. We didn't have hard hats,

27:00 it was a long time before they came in. That is basically it.

What was the elementary flying gear you had in those days?

It varied a bit. In Australia the flying gear we used included an oxygen mask with a microphone in it,

27:30 a fabric helmet, I suppose you would have to call it a helmet, it fitted over your head, earphones around the ears, flying suits weren't very good compared with the modern suits. In fact I will be telling more about the flying suits we

28:00 used in Japan and Korea later on, which were unsatisfactory.

What made them unsatisfactory?

They just weren't fitting for the task. They were too light, they were the wrong colour and that sort of thing. But I'll go into that a little later. If we were going over water we would wear a

28:30 Mae West [inflatable lifejacket] which was a bit bulky, the old Mae West. I could go into a more detailed description of the cockpit fit out.....

Go ahead.

There were the usual air speed indicator, altimeter

29:00 and then engine instruments, rpm boost, which is the amount of super charging of the engine. The supercharging of the engine was quite high. Being an American derivative aircraft, it was measured in inches of mercury. The British measurement was always pounds of pressure. So

29:30 inches of mercury was twice the British pounds. And for take off we would use 61 inches of boost and 3,000 rpm [revolutions per minute]. That was engine rpm, which was reduced - I don't remember the reduction ratio to the prop,

30:00 But at 61 inches of boost on take off, you needed to keep the tail well on the ground, which was steerable with the rudder, until you pulled the stick back, just to keep straight because the torque of the engine would want to pull you off to one side.

30:30 As soon as you got flying speed the rudder would take over. A nice aeroplane to fly, a bit noisy but a nice noise; you got to like it after a while.

Can you describe in what way it was a nice noise, what sort of noise was it?

You couldn't quite hear the nice noise from the inside but from outside.

31:00 If I hear a Mustang fly over now, I know it is a Mustang. It is a particular noise that the propeller makes, the propeller engine combination, and just as I can recognise a DC3 when it flies over. The nice noise that we pilots used to call nice was the noise that

31:30 the propeller would make when you wound up the revs to put the propeller into the finer pitch, ready for landing. And that was a very easily recognisable noise from a Mustang.

What was ‘nice’ about it though?

It is nice in comparison with the noises

32:00 that other aircraft make which tend to be a bit grunty. You hear more of the exhaust noise than the prop noise. Impossible to define a pilot’s definition of ‘nice’ in that respect.

A fine machine?

Yes.

It was a nice aeroplane to fly, can you tell us a bit about its strengths and weaknesses from your point of view?

32:30 Strengths, in its handling qualities. That is, each aircraft has different handling qualities by design and by deliberately making them fly as they do. The stability of the aircraft was such that you could get a feel for its speed,

33:00 you could feel what it was doing, and this to most pilots is an essential part of flying, that is to be able to feel what the machine is doing. It is not a purely mechanical operation, you are in the loop of control and the little messages that come

33:30 back from the aircraft through the flying controls seems to become part of your nervous system and you end up having the aircraft as an extension of your brain to some extent. And if you want to make it do something, you know instinctively what to do to make it do it. Some aircraft are difficult to

34:00 allow that to happen. You have to either exert too much physical force to do that or there are abrupt changes in the control responses that make you dislike what it is doing, it is not doing what you want it to do. The Mustang in most respects,

34:30 except for rudder trim that is directional control, was as near as you could get to being a perfect ground attack aircraft. I didn’t have too much experience with it in the air to combat arena, but enough mixing it up with friendlies to be able to appreciate its limitations.

35:00 The limitations on an aircraft are another factor in the whole scheme of controlling. If you over-control, you can get yourself into trouble. And reaching the limitations of control in an aircraft is another vital part of being able to properly manage the control of all

35:30 aircraft. The Mustang, I said, was a good ground attack aircraft. That’s because you could point it at a target fairly accurately without it wandering around too much. Its directional control left a bit to be desired because

36:00 it changed its trim in direction with change in speed, and that was a pity which doesn’t really happen with a jet aircraft. You can change your speed and you don’t change your lateral direction. With any propeller driven aeroplane that is an undesirable affect. So you had to continually trim the out of trim

36:30 directional ability of the Mustang as you changed speed, which was bad in a dive, for instance, where your speed is increasing, and that’s when you want greatest accuracy when you are delivering a bomb or a rocket, or even strafing. It didn’t take long to discover the flying abilities of

37:00 the Mustang. When I first stepped into one I could appreciate how good it was compared to my only other experience, which was in a Wirraway and a Tiger Moth. Now I was off to Japan…

It also was the first time you used weapons in training, is that right?

That didn’t occur until I got to Japan. The conversion at 21 Squadron was just to enable me to

37:30 fly reasonably well in a pure flying sense, not to actually utilise the aircraft for the purpose for which it was designed. It wasn’t until we got to Japan and got involved in formation flying, in air to air manoeuvring in battle formation, and in delivering weapons.

38:00 Now I am up in Japan.

Can you tell us a little bit about your first impressions of Japan?

Ray Tabroolco, the fellow I went up to Japan with, had previously been there. He was a Japanese interpreter so he could speak the language, so he was a big

38:30 benefit in my introduction to Japan. Japan turned out to be a place totally unlike Australia in its topography, mountainous in the extreme, teeming with people. Japanese people, who I expected to be belligerent and

39:00 resentful of our presence, which turned out to be completely the opposite. The Emperor had said, “Behave yourselves, you are occupied, don’t cause any disruption”. I expected when I got up there to be armed when I was amongst them for my own protection. But we weren’t

39:30 allowed to take weapons off the base, it wasn't necessary. They were servile. I soon recognised that the male was more aggressive than the female. The female was very much in the background as far as the male was concerned, but at no stage did I see any sign of

40:00 aggression or belligerency from the Japanese male. Which surprised me, they almost became friendly. We had room girls and so forth to look after us, and they became friendly. It was totally unexpected. It wasn't even talked about

40:30 before I went up, so I didn't know what to expect.

How did that friendliness of the Japanese affect your preconception formed by the war -the hatred of the Japanese that was common in Australia at that time?

My attitude to the Japanese changed a bit because of that. But never has it changed to…

41:00 it changed from some concern. I still maintain a concern about the Japanese way of life, the way they view us and what may be in the future.

41:30 **Were there any particular Japanese locals that you did have a lot of contact with that you remember specifically?**

No. There wasn't any encouragement that we mix with them, nor was there any ready acceptance by them of us. It was just the fact that

42:00 we were there and they were trying to ignore us.

Tape 4

00:32 **We were talking about the Japanese and your relationship with them. You mentioned room girls, can you explain that what was that all about?**

They were just maids who did one's washing and looked after the tidiness of your room and that sort of thing; mainly clothes washing and general assistance in

01:00 living in quarters.

Did your mate Tabroolco have a wider relationship with the Japanese, having spoken their language?

Not that I can recall, no but I can't expand on that.

Can you describe the set up at Iwakuni?

Iwakuni was a war time Japanese base for their navy.

01:30 I think they had a kamikaze [suicide pilot] squad at one stage. The hangers were the old Japanese hangers, there were a few bullet holes in the doors and so on. There wasn't as much sign, or there weren't as many signs of the war-time damage as I expected, most of that

02:00 had been repaired by the time I got up there or Iwakuni just wasn't attacked as much as other places. I certainly paid a visit to Hiroshima and there are a few signs of Japanese naval presence at Kure. But the way of life of the Japanese was totally different

02:30 to ours, their food and culture and everything about them, was different. The countryside was different, so it was like being transported into a whole new world. Very picturesque, and to fly around the Inland Sea which Iwakuni was on the edge of, was like a sight seeing

03:00 tour. When I went up there first, I was in the NCOs mess, and should at this stage, make some observations about the ranking system that existed in those days. Because it was most unusual and to some extent degrading and

03:30 injurious. I may be able to explain those words a little better. You probably are all aware of the ranking system that occurred within the RAF and the RAAF during World War II? Where there were officers and NCOs. The NCOs being corporal, sergeant, warrant officer, flight sergeant in there somewhere.

04:00 The RAF in their unwisdom, not wisdom, brought out a new system post- war which we were subjected to. And when we were doing our flying training, our rank, instead of being AC1, Aircraftman 1, as I was during the war, I now found myself

04:30 having a rank of Trainee Pilot and I wore on my left sleeve a laurel wreath, peculiar ranking insignia. And the step up from that in various steps was a one star in the middle of the laurel wreath, which makes you a pilot 4, two stars for a pilot 3

05:00 three stars for a pilot 2, four stars for a pilot 1 - and I have forgotten what it was for a Master Pilot, because I think the RAAF only had two Master Pilots. Here I am in the Sergeant's Mess as they still called it. They didn't call it the pilot umpty umpt, they called it the Sergeant's Mess

05:30 at Iwakuni and my rank was pilot 4, so I had one star in my laurel wreath. Officially I was a corporal, equivalent corporal, with the use of the Sergeant's Mess. It was almost as though I was there on sufferance. Corporals in the RAAF

06:00 usually get duties as guard commanders. So soon after arrival we almost had a revolt or a mutiny when the administration wanted to put us pilot 4's on guard duty. Here we were supposed to be training as fighter pilots, being side tracked into

06:30 that sort of thing and we objected very strongly. Our commanding officer supported us and he wouldn't have a bar of it, so we never did do guard duty. It almost got to the stage when I was later flying in ops, flying on operation and coming back and doing guard duty. That stupid ranking system

07:00 persisted right through my time in Japan and Korea. I was later promoted, after 6 months of service, after wings, to a Pilot 3, so I now had 2 stars. That had undesirable side effects, the fact that there were NCOs and officers.

07:30 And the fact that the officers were the more experienced of the pilots, prevented us from mixing with them in a way which was unsatisfactory from the point of view of them passing on their experiences to us and I regret that.

08:00 a lot of things that I could have learned as a young 'boggy' fighter pilot. The term 'boggy' that is a term used in the air force unofficially to describe a young guy who is wet behind the ears [juvenile] and hasn't learned much yet. The other word that is like that is 'knuckle head'. In

08:30 those days, the word knuckle head hadn't been introduced, so we were 'boggy fighter pilots', eager to learn, but without that capability of learning from our peers. So the only learning that we did was in a formal sense, by them telling us at briefings what we were supposed to do, or be doing. "You didn't do that right, you should be doing that.".. and so on. The value

09:00 of mess life in those circumstances is probably unrecognised. The amount of useful information that passes from the experienced to the inexperienced in the bar while having a drink after work is not

09:30 recognised very well. The current air force, with less and less mess life, is losing out on that. That was significant in those days, to me. It was further undermined, I suppose, by the fact that six months after arriving in Japan, I was able to have my wife go up and we ended up in a

10:00 married quarter on the base, all be it two of us with 3 Japanese housemaids, which was great from a housekeeping point of view. And that took me away from the mess, even the Sergeant's mess, so that was a bad thing for me. My learning curve was

10:30 lower than others, who were in that other situation.

How much frustration did that cause for you at the time?

It wasn't significant in a peace time operation, but it became very significant in a war time operation. I was able to

11:00 overcome the impediments to learning from my peers by going out of my way to talk with the older and bolder as often as I could, in a crew room environment. I soon found that the ex-war time pilots of which we had a few who were

11:30 very much revered, one in particular Bay Adams. He was Flight Lieutenant Bay Adams then and he eventually became an air vice marshal. He was the 'Top Gun' around the place and he had proved himself in that respect with weaponry with quite a few weapon competitions and he was good.

12:00 He started to become worried when I, as a young boggy fighter pilot, started to equal his scores in weaponry. And it was then that I started to believe that "ok, what have I got that others haven't", and I started to do a bit of self analysis then, and that was one thing that led me back towards flight testing.

12:30 **You mentioned Bay Adams. Who were the other older and bolder pilots that you looked up to at that stage?**

Lou Spence the CO [Commanding Officer], he had flown in South Africa in the war, and he was a veteran of World War II. It is hard for me to

13:00 pull a lot of names out of the hat, but there are a couple. There were others. There was one there that surprised me in that he had never had a car, and he didn't know how to drive a car, and here he was a flight lieutenant fighter pilot. That astounds me, and I think if you dug deep you might even still find a few pilots

13:30 around the place who don't know how to drive a car. I can't comprehend that, what could be easier than

a car compared with an aeroplane? If you can drive an aeroplane you should be able to drive a car.

There is no problems with adjusting to the rudder. Was it a mixture of World War II pilots and new pilots? What was the situation in 77 Squadron at that time?

14:00 I suppose we were the only two who hadn't had operational experience. So there we were, mixed in with a lot of experience, however it was clumsy experience. There wasn't a great deal

14:30 of passing on the experiences down the line, from one to the other, unless you really asked particular questions. I think most of them were somewhat under-confident about their own abilities, and that led to a reluctance to talk about their actual war time experiences.

15:00 I think the training during the war was pretty slap-dash [erratic]. Get these guys into operations as soon as possible, and that left them without as a firm a basis as I had in training.

15:30 It must have produced in them a lot of under confidence, and that showed. With my then developed attitude of don't believe anything unless you are sure it is right, I started to question a lot of their advice. However, I always looked up to Bay Adams with some reverence, because he was revered by all the others, and a very good operator a very good leader.

16:00 I did become his Number 2 in combat.

In peace time what was 77 Squadron's role in the BCOF [British Commonwealth Occupational Forces], what were they there for?

It was just a presence, a very visible presence. We flew around their countryside,

16:30 we had to show them that they were occupied and they were being steered in a different direction by [General] MacArthur and the Occupation Forces. So we were an important visible presence of their occupation. That is the closest I can get to it.

What new skills did you learn at that time?

17:00 Weaponry, being able to fire the guns accurately, drop bombs accurately in a dive bombing role, and fire rockets. Not enough air to air training. Getting back to the experience of the World War II fellows, they

17:30 themselves weren't very adept at air to air tactics. Air to air tactics is an art and it developed really, more than any other time, during the air to air battles that occurred in Korea. It was almost silly the way that

18:00 air to air tactics were used in World War II. When the experienced air to air tactician looks back on World War II, they did stupid things in comparison with the modern fighter pilot. That existed amongst the senior guys at Iwakuni,

18:30 senior pilots. We two, as two young guys trying to learn from them, there was a limitation as to how much we could learn from them. Talking about the air to air training, when I say air to air, this is related to air to air combat. If you mix it up with another aeroplane, trying to shoot it down, you have to know the basics

19:00 of manoeuvrability, and how you can get on top of the other guy in a manoeuvring sense. Our air to air training at Iwakuni was more along the lines of how to manoeuvre a basic unit of aircraft. I have to describe a basic unit of aircraft, that is the minimum number of aircraft

19:30 desirable in a fighter sense, is four. You have number 1 and his number 2, and you have a number 3 and his offsider which is number 4. When you are flying around without any air to air opposition, you normally manoeuvre in what is called battle formation. That is still used today.

20:00 It is a very good concept because when you are formatting on another aircraft that is about 200 yards away, you are looking across at him, so you are covering his tail. Everyone is looking cross ways across the formation, covering each other. You are swivelling the neck a lot to look back behind to see if you are being attacked and

20:30 in the event of an attack, whoever sees an attack coming in, will call a break it will either break left or break right depending on the direction from which the attack is coming. So you always try to break into the attack so that the guns can't be brought to bear on you as you fly away from him. We spent lots of hours

21:00 flying around in battle formation over Japan just manoeuvring, and if you wanted to do a 90 degree left turn you, the leader would call, "90 left, Go!". The two pairs would then do a cross- over and change position so that each aircraft travels the same distance to end up going 90 degrees going the other way.

21:30 If you called a turnabout left or right, you would do a double cross over. There is always a collision risk in that situation, so you had to keep your eyes open on the other guy that you were crossing over and under. You cross usually cross under to take up this different position. As you can imagine, doing a 180 degree turn you are crossing over twice

22:00 **What accidents were there during training?**

I can't remember any. We were pretty safety conscious. No, in the 6 months that I was there before the war, I can't remember any accidents.

22:30 Back to weaponry training, we had a little island off the Inland Sea a bit, only a mile or two off the shore, which we used as a target. We had bombing and strafing targets set up on this little island. By using a couple of distant points with theodolites [survey markers] on it and so forth, they could

23:00 take bearings on where our bombs hit and they could compute the error. We did a lot of that. The first time I fired guns in the Mustang, it was interesting in itself in that I really didn't know what to expect, who would? The best description I can get of it in my mind is

23:30 the same sort of noise and vibration you would get in a car if you were driving along a paved road and suddenly ran onto rough gravel. That is about the same feeling. The noise is not all that much, but there is the vibration that goes through the aircraft that you can feel.

Is that slightly disconcerting for you the first few times you experienced this?

24:00 Not disconcerting, just an eye opener, "oh, that is what it is like". Dropping a bomb is a bit different. Nothing seems to happen. You press a button on the top of the stick and it is gone. You are then busy pulling out of your dive, normally a 60 degree dive, and it feels as though you are vertical. But if you feel as though you are vertical, it is 60 degrees.

24:30 What you then have to be conscious of is the spread of shrapnel from a bomb which you hope won't come up and hit you, so there are safety heights. When we were training we were only dropping practice bombs, which are little 11½ pound bomblets which let off a puff of smoke when they explode.

25:00 The rockets. The Mustang was a good rocket aircraft, carried 6 on racks under the wings, and a 3 inch motor, about 4 feet long. And on the end of that, for practice we would screw on a big block of concrete similar to the real thing

25:30 which was really a navy artillery shell, the real thing. Which was a 60 pounder which had a fair amount of oomph [explosive force] which is more than I can say for the American rockets which were much faster with a 5 inch motor and shaped more like a pencil without the bulbous thing on the end. Their war head was smaller so we preferred our own rockets

26:00 which were slower, but then had a much greater gravity drop. That is what you had to contend with, the gravity drop. That brings me to another side issue, I could never and I haven't been able to work out today, why we persisted in Japan with aircraft fitted with old

26:30 gunsights. When I say old gun-sights, the old gun sights we used up there were Gyro gun sights for air to air. That is they had inbuilt gyros with reflecting mirrors and so forth to give us the angle-off in air to air fighting, but they weren't fitted with the enhancement to allow us to use the same gyros for launching rockets. And yet, all the gun sights back

27:00 in Australia were the later gun sights. We were never fitted with them and there we were using them in anger. And why Dick Cresswell didn't say "Hey fellows back home, we are doing the fighting. Send us up all your gun sights!". It didn't happen. That's extraordinary, those things that happened in war time, as other extraordinary things happened

27:30 **77 Squadron was caught a little bit by surprise by the Korean War. Can you speak about that how that news came through and how things changed immediately at that point?**

I well remember it. There were plans to, well they were more than plans, they were in execution, to bring the squadron back home, we were getting out of the place. We had our last flight in the aircraft. We had put them away in the hangar

28:00 and said cheerio [goodbye] to them. We had a big wind up party in the Sergeants mess. It was called a ship wreck party, come as if you were shipwrecked. So we dressed ourselves in all sorts of funny clothes, and walked the plank to get into the mess, and had a brig [jail cell] to lock the CO into, and all that sort of thing and we had a fun night. The next day, that would have been mid July 1950,

28:30 the next day, my mate Ray Tabroolco was the duty NCO on the base. It was a Sunday. I was down in a club photographic section developing some photographs I had taken. I came out of the photographic section and someone says, "Why aren't you down at your aircraft?"

29:00 I said "because they are all in the hangar." No, they are all out on the tarmac, they are loading their guns." "What?" That was my first inkling that the balloon had gone up [war had started] I didn't know why it had gone up at this stage. "Why are we arming our aeroplanes?" I race out of the place and down to the tarmac to see what is going on. "Hey, what is going on fellows?".

29:30 "North Korea has overrun South Korea." Where is Korea? It was almost that, I knew it was over there somewhere, but I didn't know much about it, "what are they doing?" "They have run across the

parallel". "The parallel, what's the parallel?" "That divides the north from the south". Now a steep learning curve of what is going on

30:00 in Korea, why are we involved. I go to my aeroplane. We were allocated particular aeroplanes and we used to do servicings on them and that sort of thing and got to love them a bit. Mine was 775, and no one was loading its gun bin, so I…and it is not a normal thing for a pilot to load the gun

30:30 bins, but we enjoyed doing it, it was something to do under these circumstances. Ray Tabroolco had received a telephone call from a USAF [United States Air Force] Base at Unazuki further down in the country. He took the message that the North Koreans had run over the South Koreans and the Americans were

31:00 fighting a rear guard action. "You, being part of the umpty umph Fighter Group…" which we were in Japan, we were part of an American group… "You are on a stage of alert". Now to go from a period of putting our aircraft in virtual storage in a hangar ready to be taken home, to a state of

31:30 immediate alert was quite a big jump. We were very keen to load our own guns. I had never done that before. I started to ask, questions, "when were my guns last harmonised?". Now there's a new term, Harmonised: we have got 6 guns; we want them all to, each one of them to fire their bullets to go through the same point at 300 yards. That is

32:00 the harmonisation point, that is an optimum sort of harmonisation. To do that, you have to prop the aircraft up into a flying position on the ground and use a little mirror to look through the bore of the barrel and line it up on a particular point which allows for gravity drop onto that particular harmonisation point. "When were my guns last harmonised?

32:30 I don't know". I had to look that up and it was a bit out of date, but satisfactory for the occasion and here I am now, draped in belts of ammunition and helping the armourers to load up the gun bins and doing a servicing on the aeroplane and making sure the glycol [coolant] tanks were full, and the fuel tanks were full. We didn't know whether

33:00 we were going to be launched immediately or not, and we didn't know much later, maybe a day or two, that the Australian Government was still considering whether we would be involved. We then went into a frenzy of organisation for an immediate response to a requirement by USAF for our participation.

33:30 If we had been allowed to go straight into the war I guess we would have been into it a day or two after that. Then there was an immediate need to gather intelligence. "What is going on? The amount of information coming down the line was very sparse and not very good. It was enough for us to get maps out and

34:00 start drawing on the maps, this is in the operations room, and in our crew room, just what was going on, and what the bomb line was. The bomb line being the demarcation between them and us, which is pretty important from our point of view because we didn't want to attack friendlies [allied troops]. Although it did happen.

34:30 What sort of aeroplanes have they got? How many tanks? What is the strength of their Army? What is their objective? What is our objective? Why are we in it?. All those things were rattling around in us and wanting answers. Do I have to send my wife home? Just as an aside,

35:00 my wife wasn't even there then. She hadn't arrived yet. To keep this story in sequence, that is what went on immediately on the base as soon as we got word that we were on alert.

How did the squadron pull together in your view?

35:30 Very well. There was a general eagerness to get into it. The mentality of the fighter pilot, all the training he is doing all the time, is intent on bringing him up to a mental situation and a capability

36:00 whereby he can go and do it. And having been trained to do that for so long, he is then keen to put it into practice. And that's about the only point of view, you might think that initially he is wanting to go and shoot someone up. But that is not the thought. It is the wish to get

36:30 into operations and employ the training that he has been through, and do it to the best of his ability. However there is trepidation because the other side is trying to do the same thing.

Did you have any views one way or the other, on the situation when it started unfolding, when you started to learn about it the North Koreans and the threat of communism?

37:00 One has to consider the general feeling about communism at the time. There was the yellow peril coming down from the north, out of Russia. There was the spread of communism which would eventually engulf us, we thought. How do we stop it? Where do we stop it? We all had the desire to stop it as far away

37:30 from home as possible. That was our motivation initially. Later our motivation changed a bit as we got into it, we were more intent then on giving support to our allies who were being chopped up on the

ground. It was more a matter of saving their skin as much as we could, than the big picture of

38:00 why we were all fighting? There was always that overlying thing we have got to stop this thing coming south. We don't want it. That persisted right through into the Malayan Emergency and the Indonesian Confrontation. It all seemed to be getting closer to home and we don't want that.

38:30 **There was a period of inaction before you were put into action how long was that?**

It was too long really, it went on for 2 weeks. With the [Australian] government here, trying to make up its mind. I don't know why it took so long.

What happened at the base during those 2 weeks?

A bit of despondency. "What the hell are they doing back there?"

39:00 "Here we are. We have now got Army gun emplacements and aircraft gun emplacements around, there is one near my house. I have got a wife up there now. She came a week after that, the next DC4 Qantas aeroplane, a weekly aeroplane in from Australia, which brought in an Air Commodore Charlesworth to take over air operations for the

39:30 Australian Air Force. He saw my wife on the same aircraft and said, "You are going up into a war. How did anyone allow that?" No one thought to turn her off, so she just came. She arrived on a Thursday evening and I carried her across the threshold of the married quarter and

40:00 on the following day… had the local radio station play a record, I have forgotten what I requested, but they played the flip side, which turned out to be "You may not be an angel." She hasn't forgiven me for that yet.

How long after carrying her across the threshold were you off?

Thursday night she arrived.

40:30 The following Sunday morning, about 3 o'clock in the morning or maybe earlier, the phone rang and I leaned over sleepily and answered the phone, "Who the hell is calling me at this hour?" It was the ops [Operations] room and the Ops Officer said, "Milt, we are into the war. You are off on the first mission, there will be a Jeep round in half an hour to pick you up, all you need is

41:00 your flying suit." End of phone call. How did that affect me? Wow! Part of me said, "Whoopee! I am a fighter pilot about to go out and fight." The other half said, "I mightn't come back,

41:30 how do I tell Ella?" I've forgotten what I said to my wife. I think it was something like "We are into it, sorry. I have got to go to war." And went.

Tape 5

00:31 **What did your wife say?**

I really don't remember. No, I can't remember. You would have to ask her that. I don't think she will remember. Those things became very unimportant in what was about to happen.

01:00 **In some detail what did happen?**

It is a little bit of a blur in that I wasn't really prepared for it and I had very distinct feelings of apprehension and under-confidence. I thought, "I haven't been trained enough for this".

01:30 The Jeep came around and now I was in a stark white cotton flying suit. When we first went up to Japan, we were sent to a tailor and the tailor made white cotton flying suits. Someone's idea of the post war fighter pilot,

02:00 fitted out in white, flying around importantly. They were a good looking thing but very light but, very exposing. And a pilot in that situation always has in the back of his mind the fact that he can become a victim, that is, he can be

02:30 shot down, he will have to bail out. And what good is a white flying suit under those circumstances? They were some of my immediate thoughts. "I'm exposed". That is all we had. I don't think the equipment store had any others. And there was a general

03:00 lack of planning. "Why should there be any planning , because we didn't plan to be in a war?". It came so swiftly that there wasn't any time to really prepare for it, except to load the guns. Two weeks after the North Koreans invaded

03:30 we had a reasonable idea of what was happening, and what was happening wasn't good. The North

Koreans were in force. They started out with 250 odd tanks and that is a big lot. And they were rolling them across, and they were rolling everything before them, and the Americans who were trying to prop up the South Koreans,

04:00 didn't have any anti tank weaponry, nothing that was effective against a T34 tank. They were a good Russian tank in their day in fact, some of them are still in use. We didn't know anything about the tanks except that I knew it was a T34. I don't think I saw a picture of one. But you can't mistake a tank when you see it from the air, a tank is a tank.

04:30 We didn't know what sort of operations we would be fragged for [A 'frag'order is an order that comes down from headquarters to tell you what sort of a mission you are on]. We knew little of the communication arrangements. Our aircraft

05:00 were only fitted with a 4 channel VHF [very high frequency] set, so we only had 4 channels of communication. We could only be on one at a time. Certainly we could talk to each other on any of those channels. You only had to press a button and you would go to transmit. I was picked up in a Jeep, I can't remember actually being driven down to the Ops [Operations] Room, but

05:30 we were given a briefing by someone or other on the battle situation.

You've got your white flying suit on at this time. Is this the first time you have worn those new suits?.

No, these were the flying suits we wore for 6 months prior. Had a couple of them. The Intel [Intelligence] Officer came up

06:00 and told us what he knew. "These are the sort of aircraft you can expect to see, because what you are doing is giving top cover, top fighter cover to prevent enemy fighters from shooting up the C47's, the Gooney birds [transport aircraft] that are evacuating American civilians from an air field called Taijon.

06:30 You are to fly over there, establish communications with the locals on such and such a frequency, and fight off any fighters. Because in the last few days, when there have been other evacuations going on, there has been fighter activity in the area.

07:00 Yes, the North Koreans are active in the air, albeit with propeller driven Yaks [fighters].

What were you told of the position?

Not much, not much was known.

What did you know of the Yak?

Nothing, except that it had an inferior performance to the Mustang. That is about all.

07:30 All this information was pouring into you. Maps, mark the maps, draw a line on the map from here to there, what will we do for survival? And here is a big Smith and Wesson [pistol] in a holster that you

08:00 wear on the high side of your chest under the Mae West, which made it an impediment. It was always pressing in on you and a little bit uncomfortable but recognised as being a necessary thing to carry. A little first aid kit, we stuffed into our pocket, "and here's a blood chit."

08:30 **A blood chit, what is a blood chit?**

I have got one framed down the hall. That was a thing written in Korean and maybe Chinese too. I don't know the languages. And a bit of English at the bottom saying, "I am an American airman,

09:00 I need you for your assistance. You will be rewarded if you assist".

Australian airman - as the case maybe?

No we didn't have them. We hadn't had the opportunity to prepare anything like that. I don't know whether anyone had even thought about out it. But the Americans had, and they had produced these things and handed them down to us.

09:30 That is about it. No preparation for what we would do if we had to bail out, no briefing on what to do except that there would likely be an attempt to rescue us, if we were shot down.

10:00 Escape and evasion, that never did really amount to much all the time I was up there and yet some of my mates who were shot down were treated abominably. I don't know whether you have interviewed any, but Ron Guthrie is one who has just produced a book and I have just finished reading it. I think

10:30 the privations those poor guys went through, and but for the grace of god, I could've, I don't know how the human body can put up with it.

That was the scene. It is still dark. I have not yet flown a Mustang

11:00 at night, never. The last aircraft I had flown at night was a Wirraway. I didn't do any night flying at 21

Squadron at Laverton. So here I was to launch in a Mustang, on the first operation of the squadron, for the first time at night.

11:30 We groped around in the dark a bit to find our aeroplanes. They were in a long line and I thought, “Why” are our aircraft in a line? If we are going to be attacked, they are all gone. Why aren’t they scattered around the air field?” That was another weakness in our preparation for war. We were within striking range of enemy aircraft and we could have been hit, they were in a long line.

12:00 **What were you armed with?**

We were armed with 60 gallon drop tanks full of fuel, a full fuselage tank full of fuel, and 4 main tanks, and guns, only guns, because we were expecting air to air activity. Imprinted on my mind now are the wing spans of expected enemy aircraft,

12:30 so they’re settings I have to feed into my gun sight for it to give me the right angle off in a curved firing situation. A little bit of recognition, but at that stage we knew that any other prop driven aircraft was fair game

13:00 because the Americans were all flying jets.

Can you recall those specifications at this point?

Specifications, no I can’t remember the wing spans, 40 odd feet, or whatever it is. So many other numbers come into my brain since, in that respect.

13:30 Wing spans? I have flown about 92 different types of aeroplanes, I can’t remember all their wing spans. If I had only flown a few I could probably remember them, but not with so many. Here I am still a young boggy fighter pilot being

14:00 projected into a potential air to air confrontation. Totally under confident, how am I going to be able to mix it with the other guys if they’re experienced? Hadn’t had much rough and tumble of air to air [combat], even

14:30 with the other pilots in the squadron. We didn’t do that very much, it is almost a game that you shouldn’t play, it is a bit dangerous. It is not dangerous though, but it hones you up to manoeuvres you can do to the maximum of the aeroplane, to either bring your guns to bear on the other guy or to

15:00 escape from him. It is something that the pilots do a lot now but we didn’t do much then, which was a pity. So with all of these thoughts, you dismiss these thoughts from your mind, you have got so many other things to occupy it. You are wondering whether the rudimentary navigation that you worked out

15:30 in case you get separated from the others. Bear in mind, it is still a basic section of four aircraft. We never launched less than four. Sometimes on this first mission we reduced to three, because one turned up with radio problems. You always had to allow for being separated from your mates and having to make your own way.

16:00 You always wanted to know if you jumped out, where you were going to land. These were all thoughts that kept regurgitating through your mind as you even walked out to the aeroplane and climbed into it. It is dark and I am not familiar with the night flying switches in the aeroplane, the nav [navigation] lights and the landing lights and

16:30 mistakenly I only put my nav lights onto dim instead of bright so the guy behind me had trouble following me through cloud after take off. Where to stash [put] my map? We had… maps were in very short supply. Initially we were

17:00 borrowing each other’s maps because there weren’t enough to go around. That didn’t last for long, but the first few missions we were that short. Thoughts on what Korea looks like from the air? What is the weather doing? We have got cloud cover, we are going to have to climb through cloud, I have never done that at night.

17:30 I will stick real close to the Number 1 [flight leader]. My Number 1 at that stage was Graham Strout. The squadron was divided into two flights, Graham Strout had one, and Bay Adams had the other. He has chosen me

18:00 as his Number 1, which is a compliment because he has chosen me over all the others. I felt that I sort of felt I had to live up to it and do my best. So we get round to the time of starting and we all press the starter button.

18:30 The engines roar into life and it wasn’t until then that the rest of the base knew that we were into the war. Afterwards I asked questions around and I was startled to learn how they learned we were into the war. It wasn’t until we started the engines at 4 o’clock in the morning that they knew instinctively that this was it.

19:00 Careful taxi out and take off, join up in close formation, and then into line astern to go up through the cloud. Emerged on the top of the cloud and then that Number 3 declared something wrong with his

radio and

19:30 went back. So that left us three. We formed up in battle formation with three, about 200 yards apart, it wasn't until the light, the sun came up, the dawn approached, that we went out into battle formation and we were in battle formation when we saw the coast of Korea coming

20:00 up. Tom Murphy was the other pilot, he was out on the right and I saw him surging forward a bit just before we came to the coast and I thought, "What the hell are you doing, Tom?" Graham Strout called him up and said, "How are you going Tom?" and he didn't say anything. And then the penny dropped [we realised]. He was the first one

20:30 into Korea as we crossed the coast. We flew over a big river which our maps tended to tell us was the big river in South Korea called the Naktong and that seemed to put us on track reasonably well I think Graham Strout called a little alteration of course and eventually we came to

21:00 a dead reckoning position where we thought the airfield should be, that we were supposed to be flying over and giving top cover. Now we were in full defensive mode, we're looking over our shoulder continually to see if we were going to be jumped [attacked] because that is what happens. If you are going to attack someone who is just flying along, you hit

21:30 them from the rear and preferably out of the sun, so that they can't be seen, so they can get into a firing position before you see them. But with a battle formation you are getting cross coverage. We are doing that a lot, and the old neck muscles are getting a lot of work. The aircraft is still unstable as we are down to about half our fuel.

22:00 We had drop tanks on and a full fuselage tank. Normally we use the fuel out of the drop tanks first and if jumped we drop the tanks. It makes us more manoeuvrable, that leaves us with a full fuselage tanks. Now we have nearly empty drop tanks and still got a full fuselage tank, so we are unstable. That is, any little disturbance in pitch, will run away,

22:30 not violently, but if you let the stick go it would become violent, either pitch up or pitch down whichever way it wants to go first it will tend to want to go further. It is like driving a car that wants to wind up in a turn, instead of come out of one. Instability. We had not flown with fuselage tanks full

23:00 very much before. I think I might have had two flights, so it was a battle all the time to stay with it. Graham Strout is now on the radio on the assigned channel, trying to contact people on the ground at Taijon. Not a peep, we didn't hear anything.

23:30 Eventually we find a little air field. We didn't know what Taijon looked like, but we found an air field with a couple of hangars on it. No activity on it, nothing around, nothing moving. Way down deep in South Korea, "where are we?" Can't make out from the map where we are. We soon come to the conclusion that it is not Taijon.

24:00 but where are we?. We can't find Taijon until we know where we are. We never did find out where we were. After flying around for half an hour or so, wearing out our neck muscles, Graham calls it quits [finished] and we go back home. That was the first mission. A good thing from my perspective in that

24:30 it was an introduction, it was a lead in.

You must have felt a bit like Buzz Aldrin though?

Yes, not… some initiation, but not much of it yet, that was still to come. By then the Americans had set up a

25:00 central control centre which had the call sign 'Mellow'. Where they get these code names from I never know.

When you got back, was there some consternation that you had got lost?

No, we were greeted by the rest of the squadron,

25:30 "What did you see? What did you do?" We were whisked off to give a formal debriefing to the Intelligence Officers which didn't amount to much because we didn't do much, but at least it was a start. The others were very anxious to know of our experiences and how we felt and all that sort of thing.

What was the ferry time across the sea?

26:00 **It was about a 45 minutes haul, and all of our early missions were flown out of Iwakuni. It was a bit of a grind to go across and back. Especially later on, when we would fly as many as four missions in a day and it would be a long day and we would have to make that long haul back again.**

26:30 **I am left wondering how that equates to a European operation. How far do you go in 45 minutes in a Mustang? It would be 300 miles, like getting back from the centre of Germany. A lot of questions and not too many**

27:00 **answers from the others in the squadron. Later that day others went out on their missions and I think there were two other missions in the day. Later, I ended up asking them questions, "How did you get on? What did you do?" so there was that interplay between us trying to learn from the others' experiences,**

27:30 **because at that stage we didn't know much.**

What was it like flying over the coast of Korea knowing that you were flying into enemy territory?

Not much time to think about that, a general appreciation of the topography of the country, pretty flat where we entered it,

28:00 and mountainous further north. Not much activity on the ground. I expected to see people going every which way, but not much. I think everything was subdued because the North Koreans had advanced fairly rapidly and they were

28:30 pushing back the bomb line pretty fast which was their objective. As yet none of us had been up there to the bomb line, but that came pretty soon. I think my second mission.

You mentioned "Mellow" control,

'Mellow' was a central

29:00 communication centre and control centre for fighter operations. Very soon it became our practice to launch out from Iwakuni with whatever we thought we should carry. Sometimes they would tell us what to carry in the way of weapons. Because we had a choice of… always carried guns, full gun bins,

29:30 We didn't always carry drop tanks, we only carried drop tanks occasionally if we wanted to extend our range. More often it was napalm [jellied petrol] if we carried tanks because the bomb racks would only carry the drop tanks or bombs. If we had tanks, we couldn't carry bombs, and if we had bombs we couldn't carry tanks. Usually always rockets,

30:00 on that first mission we didn't think we needed rockets, in fact we didn't want rockets, we were air to air. We weren't expecting to fire things at the ground. The mix was guns, or bombs or napalm, rockets, and that's it. We were set up for ground attack really more than

30:30 air to air, and that is the way we were used because the Americans decimated the aerial opposition very early. I never did see an enemy aircraft in the air. I shot up one on the ground. I don't know whether it had been shot up before, but I think I can claim one on the ground, damaged another.

31:00 The one I shot up on the ground caught fire so it was claimable. "Mellow" control - we would take off from Iwakuni with a load of whatever and the flight leader would check in with Mellow control. Our call sign incidentally was "Dropkick" which is interesting, going back into the 1950's -

31:30 a call sign called "Dropkick".

What was your individual call sign?

I think it was "Dropkick 44" or maybe we changed that every now and then. I can't quite remember the individual call sign but it was Dropkick

32:00 and a number

What was your nickname?

Milt. Some of the pilots took on particular nicknames, but not many. We used to generally use our call sign because it was an identifier of our position in the formation.

32:30 If you start using names you don't know whether he is a member of some other formation or whatever, so those little things start to become important. We would check in with Mellow, "Mellow control, this is Dropkick of flight whatever, 4 Mustangs with guns, rockets and bombs." and we would wait a little while

33:00 and Mellow would come back "Dropkick go to position 2643 4212 or whatever..." (This was a map reference) "… and call Mosquito Charlie, he's got targets for you". Today they are called Forward Air Controllers, in those days that wasn't a term in use. They were called mosquito aircraft,

33:30 which were light aircraft which were spotters [observation planes]. They had particular areas of concern. The same Mosquito pilot would cover the same area for several days at a time and he would become familiar with it and he would see any changes in it from day to day. He would pick out targets and then,

34:00 after we had contacted the mosquito aircraft, he would guide us in onto his designated target. He had the ability to fire off little rockets with smoke so he would try and land his smoking rocket near the target he wanted hit, and say, "Your target is 100 yards north of the smoke," and that sort of thing.

34:30 Other times we would be assigned to ground controllers, the American Army guys, and the Australians had what would be now called Forward Air Controllers amongst them with radios, and we would get onto them. And they would tell us what they wanted us to do, how we could help.

35:00 One funny story that comes to mind, while I am talking about that sort of thing, was one time we were attacking the enemy across a gorge. There was a river running down this gorge and we were firing into the gorge at the enemy who were entrenched or hiding behind rocks, firing at Americans who were across the other side of the gorge.

35:30 The bomb line ran down the middle. It was our normal procedure to always attack from the friendly side towards the enemy side and get out of enemy air as quickly as possible, back over to our own. Each time we went over them they would be firing at us. You couldn't hear them firing at us, but occasionally you could see [gun] muzzle flashes.

36:00 Talking to Army fellows who had seen us doing this, would say to us, "No way would we ever get up there and do what you do. You should hear what goes on when you fly over them". That is poor consolation. We would occasionally get hit. When firing the guns from the Mustangs, the empties [used bullet casings] and the links that hold the rounds [of

36:30 ammunition] in a belt, come out of slots in the bottom of the wing, and just fall away. They are thrown overboard. We found that whenever we were flying over our own [allied troops] making an attack on the enemy close by, our empties were clobbering down on the back of the heads of our own and they would sometimes call up and say, "Hey, Aussie we are wearing your empties."

37:00 We would make an adjustment to our line of attack. Humorous little things like that would come up. That was the general way we were operated. We would report out of Iwakuni into Mellow. Mellow-, "go to mosquito aircraft so and so at so and so, and he will give you a target; otherwise go to map reference so and so and call Army Comms [Communications]

37:30 on the ground on such and such a frequency call sign yuckity yuck." And under those circumstances we were very impressed with the artillery fire from the Americans. They were using or they could use what they call phosphorous shells to mark a position. These phosphorous shells would go off with a great

38:00 white plume and set fire to anything in the area. Their artillery could fire off four rounds of this stuff and put it down on the side of a hill in a nice rectangle, I was very impressed and they would say, "Hit anything that moves within that rectangle". Which was great for us because it was fairly difficult to pick up camouflaged troops on the ground.

38:30 Unless they moved, we could see them moving, if they were dug in, we could also see their entrenchments and we always endeavour to fire along their trenches rather than head on.

39:00 They [the North Koreans] had 250 tanks at the start of the war. We were into tank busting [attacking] fairly early on. We didn't do it right. It wasn't until some months afterwards that I learned in idle chatter in the mess that the best way to attack a T34 tank

39:30 was in a 35 degree dive from the rear. Up until then we had been making stupidly head on attacks against tanks, where their armour is heaviest. It didn't occur to us that they had a naked back end, and as soon as we got onto that we were knocking tanks out left right and centre. Prior to that we were using sometimes American 5 inch rockets with an armour piercing

40:00 head, the shaped charge which if you hit a tank, direct hit, it would punch a little hole in the side of their armour and keep on going through. Made a mess of the tank. Early on the most effective weapon against the tanks was napalm; you would drop a tank, you would always drop two tanks together. You could hardly hold one up on its own,

40:30 with full aileron. You would punch off a couple of napalms ahead of the tank if it was moving, or even if it was stationary, because the stuff would splatter forward and they usually carried spare fuel in external jerry cans, or similar, and these would make them burn very nicely. I recall seeing a column of tanks moving down a

41:00 mountain road, one occasion that wound around the mountain as it went down, and it was a bit hard to get into position to drop a couple of napalm on the lead tank or ahead of the lead tank, but I managed it. I nearly hit the mountain pulling up and pulled up steeply, and rolled over until I was upside down and I could see the effect. I

41:30 could see this tank unable to stop rolling down the hill. And it rolled into the fireball of the napalm and it rolled out the other side of that fireball off the road, down into the ravine. It rolled down. It was spectacular; it blew up at the bottom. Classic movie stuff makes you feel good, when you know……

Tape 6

00:32 **You had a throat microphone used in the Korean War. Can you put it on your face and show us how it worked?**

Two little pick ups here and they go on the throat with a strap around your neck. It provides you with fairly good audio into your radio

01:00 Because it is noise cancelling, it doesn't pick up the noise of the engine or the aircraft or any extraneous noises, it works quite well. In hot flying conditions, as we had early in the Korean War, the heat was quite high in the cockpit, which leads me onto another story, a little side issue story I can talk about there.

01:30 These (microphones) were good except that they caused a little bit of rashing around the throat. I used to wear a silk scarf with this over it. That prevented the rash on the neck. In the hot cockpit conditions, at low level, we didn't really need to wear an oxygen mask that was the other means of microphone communication, so

02:00 of all the aircraft I have flown, the Mustang in Korea was the only one where we used the throat microphone. They were developed during World War II. This one was built by Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation I find, in Melbourne.

How did you keep that all these years?

The strap broke. It was not required that I hand it back, so it is a souvenir.

02:30 Brings back a few memories for people up there.

What else did you carry with you on operations, you wore a silk staff what else did you carry with you?

That gets us back to the flying suit. The flying suit we started ops in was a white cotton tailor made suit that was pretty flashy when we were flying in peace time but totally unsuitable to war time.

03:00 It is all we had at the start of the war until others were sent up from down south. I soon became very aware, as did all the others, that if we had to bail out into a paddy field we would stick out like the proverbial thingamy [be very obvious]. I can remember going into the village of Iwakuni and buying a couple of packets of dye

03:30 and put this into a big saucepan on the stove in the married quarter and boiled it up and put flying suits in it. And I came out with a beautiful motley green that would have been very good camouflage if I had to go down into a paddy [rice] field.

When did you first realise the inadequacy of the flying suits you had been given?

Almost on the first mission. I thought, "Gee this is no good.

04:00 We have got to change this somehow." Talking around amongst the others we all agreed that we would have to dye them, and that is what we did. There were very few white ones left after that.

What other problems did you have with the heat?

At low level over Korea the summer is pretty hot and it is almost

04:30 impossible under normal circumstances to stop a bit of hot air from the air intake to the cockpit, leaking a little bit of hot air in so it becomes hotter. What is more, you are sitting out in a bubble of Perspex and any sun impinging on that is going to heat it even further. Sometimes almost a gasping stage, and you drank a lot and perspired a lot

05:00 and came down in a lather of perspiration, quite often. One time when I was waiting for a refuel/rearm at a base we used to do this at, I had a look up the radiator inlet of the aeroplane where there is a hole where air is drawn in for the cockpit, and I thought, "If I can block that up I won't get anymore hot air from there".

05:30 I searched around for something to block it with and I found that the Coca Cola cans the Americans were drinking was just the right size, so my aeroplane then flew around with a Coca Cola can stuffed up the hole.

One good use for coca cola…..

Yes and it made my cockpit a lot more comfortable. Apart from that, on our long hauls [flights] we found that the pilot's

06:00 relief tube was a pretty good asset to take along with us so of course it was part of the aeroplane. If an airman on the ground didn't like you, they had a habit of turning the outlet from the pilot's relief tube round into the air flow, and that had obvious consequences.

Can you explain to someone in the future, what this pilot's relief tube looked like and how it worked?

It is pretty hard to get away from a little funnel.

06:30 **It sat in the aircraft though at all times? Where was it located?**

Down under the seat there somewhere, you had to grope around for it and pull it up on a tube and hope that the airman liked you.

What was your relationship with the ground crew?

Very good. They were so supportive, couldn't be better. I am sure most of them would have changed places if they could have.

Was the division you mentioned

07:00 **between different ranks of pilots and how the hierarchy influenced you, did that at all influence your relationship, or their relationship with the ground crew? Was there a big difference?**

No it didn't come into it. It was only an inter-relationship between various aircrew gradings, that was the problem.

Did any of the people in

07:30 **77 Squadron have particular traditions or superstitions that they always followed relating to flight?**

I think you will find that most pilots or aircrew don't entirely dismiss superstition, it is a kind of not leaving anything to chance. Whilst I am not

08:00 superstitious one iota, I still recall my wife gave me a little cast dog for good luck and I made a point of just throwing that into my flying suit pocket each time I flew a mission up there.

08:30 I didn't think anything drastic would happen if I didn't do that, but who knows. The other, not a superstition, but a thing that I regularly did, was to carry with me the silver set of wings I was first presented with. I did that right throughout my air force career, so my wings have pretty well flown as many miles as I have.

77 Squadron had a tradition for decorating their

09:00 **aircraft. Was that still in play when you were in Japan?**

No, it wasn't permitted. We started off with red white and blue spinners on the props and the CO on his particular personal aircraft had a red spinner so we could always recognise him in the air. Quite often

09:30 in conflict that is a no no, because if you are a presumed ace they will go for you, they will try and get him, so it is not a good thing to do.

What was you relationship with the aircraft you flew? Did you have particular favourites or ones that you disliked?

Yes, you tended to make sure it was serviced

10:00 to the maximum and we used to do a bit of that ourselves. We always did daily inspections and checked the levels of fluids and so forth around the aircraft. You got to know it pretty well and I think this was the idea. A good idea really, we didn't go to the extent of putting our names up the side of the aircraft as often is done. That is an extension of that sort of thing,

10:30 which shows the crew's pride in that particular aircraft, therefore it gets better attention. I went so far as to think well the open gun ports in the wings of my aeroplane probably produced a little bit of drag [air friction] so I played around with little streamlined covers that went

11:00 over the gun ports just to reduce that drag a smidgen [little] and maybe get a little extra speed out of the aeroplane, or lower fuel consumption. We were always concerned about fuel consumption because some of our hauls were pretty long. I think the longest flight I had in a Mustang was 5½ hours and that is a long time to be cooped up in a hot cockpit. Most of my flying in Korea was in the heat.

11:30 I never did experience the extreme colds when the squadron moved north to Hamhung.

Can you lead us up to the events of the third mission you operated out of Japan into Korea?

That was a bit unusual that one. We launched out of Iwakuni.

How did it all start? What was your briefing start at the very beginning? What were you

12:00 **going out to do?**

As was the practice then, we weren't aware of our targets at take off. We were only aware of our target or our prospective target when we checked in with Mellow Control in Korea, the ground station that

controlled all the fighter ops in Korea. Having checked in, and incidentally took off as a section of four and one dropped by the wayside

12:30 with mechanical problems of some sort, so there were the three of us -Ken McLeod, Les Reading and myself, Milt Cottee. We checked in with Mellow and we had rockets and guns. We were almost immediately given a high priority target or high priority mission.

13:00 “Go there as fast as you can, people are in trouble, help as much as you can,” something like that. Given a map reference, position was about 30 miles - so it was going to take us a little time to get there - so we traversed at high speed, low level and we were within about 5 miles of the position when an extraordinary call came up from the mosquito aircraft.

13:30 I think it was mosquito…, no I have forgotten the call sign, as soon as we checked in with him, he said, “Yes, got targets for you, come as soon as you can,” Didn’t know what they were yet. It would have been half a minute later and he called up in high agitation you could tell by his voice, he used the old

14:00 World War II term for the Mustang which were aptly named by the bomber forces they were protecting, ‘Little Friends’. He said, “Little Friends come hubber hubber, I am being attacked”. They were his actual words and he repeated that and we responded and said, “We are nearly there”. I thought

14:30 “Here is a bit of air to air [combat] coming up”, prospect of getting a kill. I think I set in 42 feet on my wing span scale on the gun sight, anticipating it would be about that and even turned on the master arms switch and the gun switch and fired off a couple of rounds [shots]. Couple, it is hard to fire off a couple, you

15:00 fire a minimum of 6, if you are quick. We were in battle formation at this time so we were spread out a bit across the countryside and I first saw both aircraft, I saw the spotting aircraft and I saw another one flying as though away from it, down a valley, and it was closest to me, so I called up

15:30 and said “Enemy aircraft in sight. I am after him”. I didn’t wait to be told to do that, I wanted him. I piled on the power and was overtaking this other aircraft at a fairly high rate. I was up around 350 knots at this stage and he wasn’t so fast and all I could see was the tail end of it, a little dot in the distance which was growing bigger rapidly. Put my gun

16:00 sight pipper on him and thought, “I will really get in close so there is no chance of missing this one and let him have it.” And that is what I proceeded to do and I got in within about half a second of pulling the trigger for the guns, what you would expect the trigger to be, on the front of a stick and it would have

16:30 been a half a second to a fireball for him. He had a guy in the back seat, it was a two seater and I could see a face starting to take on shape and it was looking back at me and I think there was a bit of arm waving going on. And the pilot yawed it out to one side as though to escape. He obviously knew my intentions

17:00 and as soon as he did that, I caught sight of the South Korean markings on the side of the aircraft, and I thought, “Oh how close was that!” My next thought was not to fire of course, but to pull up and get away from him, because my thinking went something like this, very quickly, “He has got friendly markings, I can’t shoot him down.

17:30 But he might be an enemy in friendly markings and if I am not careful he might get a shot off at me”. So I pulled hard, in a hard pull to the right and rolled up and over, so I could keep him in sight. I was almost upside down at this stage, looking down on him, well down and back and I pulled power off at this stage and I am slowing down to keep him in view, or to try to, and I hear

18:00 Les Reading call up. He calls up on the radio and says, “Milt’s missed him, he’s mine”. So now Les is boring in on what turned out to be a South Korean T6 and it is now my job to stop Les from doing that. The way we worked our radio was a little button in the end of the throttle twist grip which controlled the gun sight,

18:30 which you pressed in to cause the radio to go to transmit. I went to push in the button. It wasn’t there. An extraordinary situation that had never ever had happened in my whole Air Force career, before or since. To think that it should fall out at that particular time. I looked down to see the hole where it came out of and I could see the two little

19:00 contacts in there that needed to be pushed together and I couldn’t quite get my finger in. I thought I might get a little shock if I did, but that wasn’t going to worry me. And I usually carried a pencil to one side of the cockpit, a grease pencil for marking maps, and I thought “that’s just the thing.” I grabbed the pencil, poked it into the hole heard the click and I said, “Les don’t shoot. He is South Korean!”.

19:30 Just in time again, that two crew just lost two of their nine cat’s lives. Ever since then I have had a resolve to try and find those two people and I am still trying. I have got a bit of a link going now back in Korea and I might track them down, I would love to talk to them. That was very close.

20:00 Now it is back to the real purpose of the mission. We berated the mosquito pilot more than somewhat for calling an enemy, when it was really a friendly, but the T6 [South Korean] had thought that the

spotting aircraft might have been an ‘unfriendly’ [enemy]. It had come at him out of the sun to have a look at him, giving the distinct impression that it was an attack. As an aside,

20:30 before I go on with the rest of that mission. It was our practice when flying around in the early days in Korea to keep a damn good look out for any other aircraft in our vicinity, because many of the American pilots now all flying F80 Shooting Stars [fighters] and jets, they had the impression that anything with a

21:00 propeller on it was fair game. I think I had a total of 5 attacks from American aircraft, two of them firing past us. We saw them all before they got to us and were able to wait for that magic time when they are close enough not to be within firing range, but close enough for us to turn inside their capability of turning.

21:30 And that is the magic moment when you call a “Break!” and you break hard. You pull it around and he can’t then get on to you, so you escape and then you try and get onto his radio frequency and give him a few words.

How close did instances like that come to Australians, or non American pilots, being shot down?

They never did shoot

22:00 any of us, but they certainly made a few attempts. I had 5 attacking passes. Don’t take that too badly because normally if you see another aircraft that you think is unfriendly you don’t just go up and have a peek [look]. You

22:30 make an attack ,and during the attack you hope you find out whether it is friend or foe. Otherwise he can then gain the advantage if he is an enemy. You handle that sort of thing carefully, and you can’t blame the Americans for doing that.

What methods of communicating between two aircraft where there, if you couldn’t get onto the same radio frequency?

There wasn’t any. You could waggle your wings,

23:00 that is about it. It is very difficult to communicate without radio.

What would waggling your wings try and signify?

Just that you wanted to express something, that it was an indication of displeasure. I suppose you could interpret it different ways,

23:30 but that is how we interpreted it.

Back to your mission.

Back to the spotting aircraft and he said, “OK Aussies, there is a little bridge down here at Piong Pek. There is American Armour coming down the highway from Suwan, unknown number of tanks

24:00 with troops in support. All friendlies have just been pulled back from across that bridge. We want you to knock it out”. We didn’t have the right weapons for that, we only had rockets and guns. Guns are no good against a bridge. We thought we could weaken the bridge with our 60 pound headed rockets, but we didn’t think we could knock it out. Nor did we. We hit it a few times, which may have weakened it to the extent that it may have collapsed when a tank

24:30 got on to it, but we never did hear the result. By the time we started to make our runs onto the bridge, bear in mind that we couldn’t hear enemy fire from the ground but we knew it was around us. Sometimes we could see muzzle flashes, but we couldn’t hear gun shots nor machine

25:00 gun fire. So we were always wary of being hit and this caused us to adopt a sort of team work. We always tried to share fire, so we always endeavoured to have more than one aircraft on a

25:30 run into attack. To minimise enemy fire, we always tried to attack from our side of the bomb line, across the bomb line into them, and then back as soon as possible across to our side of the bomb line. We knew we were taking some ground fire from the troops around the tanks, that we could now see coming down the road towards

26:00 the bridge. I can remember firing a few bursts of guns into the lead tank I could see some sparks fly from the tank as I hit it, the 50 cal was pretty ineffective against the front armour of the T34 and I could see the machine guns on the tank firing back and

26:30 troops around the tank doing the same thing. So it wasn’t a good place to be, but the effect I had on the tank was to stop the column. The lead tank stopped, otherwise the gunner couldn’t get good aim, and we were pleased to have them a few hundred yards back from the bridge which we proceeded to

27:00 attack. But each time we did attack the bridge, they were able to bring fire to bear on us, but they didn’t succeed in hitting us. Either they didn’t appreciate the lead angle, that was necessary to allow for our speed. I guess that was their problem. It always is with ground troops - they just don’t appreciate

how far ahead of an aeroplane you have got to fire to actually hit it. Or conversely how slow the bullet

27:30 goes .

What kind of effect would that light ground fire have on you flying through it in the air?.

Some concern, the pukka factor's up a bit. You just keep your fingers crossed a bit. Actually it makes you get angry.

28:00 It did that with me. It had an angering effect, "I don't like this!" and any opportunity I got to fire back I would, and occasionally I did have that opportunity. I seemed to be more effective than they were in venting my anger.

What would you see of the ground fire coming at you? What would it look like?

Not much, unless the light was dim and they were using

28:30 tracer. You would rarely see any rounds coming at you. We are pounding away at this bridge with our rockets and getting a few on. Our rocketing ability early on was low, our errors in rocketing were low, although we had a reasonable amount of practice before the war.

29:00 When you are training with weapons like that, you do a standard sort of a circuit so that you rule out a lot of the variables that have to be taken into account when you are firing weapons or dropping bombs. So you try to get yourself into a similar situation everytime at weapon launch so that those variables are eliminated as far as possible, but when you are in operations, rarely do you have

29:30 the opportunity or the inclination to use a training lead up to weapon release. So it then becomes more a matter of firing from the hip. When you have done enough of it, as we did, doing it every day, it almost becomes second nature. It is a bit like a John Wayne movie -

30:00 you pull out your 6 shooter and 'boing' you've hit the target. A bit like that with rocketry, not so much with gunnery, but with rocketry you have got to allow for the gravity drop of the rocket which means you try and eliminate the range factor by always firing off the rocket at the same range and at the same speed, if you can. Then your dive angle has to

30:30 be taken into account. I got into the habit of putting the cross of our gun sight, which is your bore sight, onto the target and just pulling back on the stick a little bit to feel the air speed. I didn't have time to look at the air speed and then do a mental calculation, it was a feeling thing. I would pull back, and I think "I am at about that speed, that means I've got to pull it up about that much to allow for gravity dropping," and 'bing' it's away

31:00 Almost immediately you have to do a pull out, because you deliver the rockets in the dive. You pull out pretty hard to get away from any blast that you are going to set off on the ground. It is a 60 pound shell that is going off, which is pretty potent. We were delivering these rockets in pairs, which means three attacks on the target each.

31:30 I was so disappointed on one occasion to see each of my rockets go each side of the bridge. It would have been nice to have seen them both go onto the centre of the bridge, but one went each side, so that's a waste.

How much could you see of your rockets going down?

Very little, unless you launched early

32:00 It was a bit of a no no to do that because you were flying into your own blast. Usually you would pull up and roll and sometimes you would go right over upside down. You would be looking at your target upside down as the rocket went off. You had a fair chance of seeing your hits.

How was the Mustang at flying inverted?

No problem.

32:30 Depends whether you have positive or negative G [force caused by gravity] on. If you have positive G on you are still sitting hard in your seat, but if you go to negative G which you rarely do under those circumstances because it is uncomfortable. It is an uncomfortable situation to be in, you don't want to put yourself into that situation. It is just that the world is upside down and you are still sitting in your seat.

33:00 We didn't wait around to see if the tanks crossed the bridge because, as we had advised…, I'll just back up a little bit, before we were given the target of this bridge, we were down to bingo fuel. Bingo fuel is where you have just got enough to get you back to base again. We are now in a situation where we are passed bingo fuel.

33:30 We told the spotter aircraft and he said, "Aussies, if you have to land on the highway down the road a bit, or bail out, it is still warranted in trying to stop these tanks because they are going to be amongst our people tonight". And they were, and that is not so good.

34:00 We had advised the mosquito aircraft and he came back with that, so all right we went along with that.

34:30 We didn't intend to land on a road, we would prefer to find an air field. He then said, "on second thoughts, you might be able to get into my little air field at Taijon." Taijon was the airfield we tried to find on the first mission. I was rather keen to have a look at it. That was the plan we were going to go back to Taijon and get some fuel and go home. So mission's now over,

35:00 we are trying to keep pace with the little spotting aircraft by weaving backwards and forwards over the top of him. We get back to Taijon at dusk. There is a great queue of aircraft lined up to land. Looking down at the airfield we did a fly over the top. It is just chock-a-block [full] with all manner of light aircraft, not

35:30 so many heavy aircraft. It is a PSP strip, that's pierce steel planking [covered runway] and it is not very wide. Unfortunately whoever organised the parking of the aircraft hadn't done a very good job. Because they were just wherever they could leave their aircraft anywhere down the side of the runway. If any aircraft had run off the runway it would have created mayhem, it would have written off

36:00 so many aircraft. However that was the situation we were forced to accept and it was just getting dark as we were on final approach behind some other aircraft. I was number 2 to land and Ken McLeod went in first, stood on the brakes, and pulled up fairly well down this little short runway. I saw him disappear into a

36:30 potential parking space. I adopted heavier braking and pulled up a little earlier and I thought "Well gee, I have Les Reading coming in behind me. They are pretty close, the civil controller would have a fit." I dashed off into an open space and in next to no time I have got my wings over

37:00 the top of smaller aircraft wings, we are jammed in that much. I closed down, having advised my leader, Ken McLeod that I am closing down, and telling I will come and look for him in a minute and stand up in the cockpit. I don't have any headgear except a flying helmet, so I leave that in the cockpit.

37:30 I think I have still got some ammunition left in the guns and I have to safety [make safe] the guns. So I hopped down on the wing and opened up the bins and take the round [bullet] out of the firing chamber and settled everything else down and closed up the canopy and now I have got to find my leader, and it is dark.

38:00 "How am I going to find him?" There were people milling around the place in the most uncoordinated way you could ever imagine, all sorts of people. Most of them were USAF airmen, although let me back up, it hasn't become USAF has it? It is still the United States Army Air Force and quite a lot of Army and a lot of South Koreans in various garbs.

38:30 I soon learned that there was active preparation going on for getting out of the place because it was only about 30 miles south of the bomb line which was rapidly coming south. I even began to wonder whether - if we didn't get off that night - and now I recognised that we weren't going to get out of there that night, whether we would be run over [by the enemy] during the night.

39:00 We had the problem of 3 of us joining up in the dark in this sort of pandemonium and I hit upon the idea of using the old Australian "Cooee!". It was the only thing that I could think of that would be readily recognisable by the other two. We soon found each of us, "cooeeing!" ourselves to each other, and we joined up.

Tape 7

00:32 **You have just arrived you - have found each other again?**

The next thing of priority in our book was to try and let home base know that we were OK. We were approaching the time now when bingo fuel would have run out so back at base at Iwakuni.

01:00 There would be the start of the process of recognising that we were missing. That is always a worrying time when you are back at base, Where are they? What has happened to them? Did 3 of them get shot down? We are conscious of that, so we want to get a message back and the only way we think we can do it is if we can find any sort of

01:30 communications centre on Taijon. We asked a few Americans wandering around whether there was such a thing as a Com Centre and they pointed to a tent up on a bit of a rise. We recognised antennas and so forth at the tent, so we thought we would make our way to that. On the way, I suppose we had several attempts by

02:00 worried USAF officers almost grabbing us physically and giving us an order to do something. They were doing that with many people to get jobs done, and they seemed to be co-opting anyone they could lay their hands on including us. And they would go through a funny double take,

02:30 they would almost physically grab you and be in the process of giving you an order to go and do something when they'd take a closer look at us. Here was I, in a dappled green flying suit that looked more like a paddy field, no head dress, no badge of rank, wearing a .38 [pistol] on my chest because I'd left my Mae West

03:00 in the aircraft but I took my gun along with me, and little slides on my shoulders saying "Australia". The first one to approach us like this, did this double take and looked at the shoulder patches and said," "Is Australia in the war?" Bear in mind we had only been in it for 3 or 4 days

03:30 so this was news to him, and that surprised us too. The usual retort then was, "Good on you Aussies," and that tended to make us feel a bit proud. Here we are making our way up to the Comms tent and we get there and McLeod makes himself known as

04:00 best he can to a Major who was in charge of Comms, and says can he have a message pad please? So a message pad is produced and he writes a message back to Iwakuni and puts its operational 'Immediate Priority' on it which is almost as high as any airman can give a priority to a message. That means that it is of operational significance

04:30 and the Major looked at it and tore it up. He just tore it up in front of us. He said "I am terribly sorry, but we are so snowed under with higher priority messages that yours will wait there until the day after tomorrow. I am sorry". We could appreciate their problem because they were

05:00 really scared of being overrun that night and that sort of passed onto us, too. Now we had the trouble of…we were hungry at this stage, we had the trouble of finding something to eat. Nothing to eat with, we found a field kitchen producing food and I can remember ratting around in a garbage bin to find some

05:30 tin cans that had the lids still attached to use as a sort of a spoon, something to contain some food with. I was able to clean one and I think we all did much the same sort of thing and got into a queue to this field kitchen and got ladled out some good old American food which included corn and a bit of chicken. Not bad food.

06:00 We had to eat that with our fingers. Got something to drink somewhere, a drink of water and incidentally we never did carry water with us. I would again but it never did occur to us to carry water. I suppose it is a heavy thing and it takes up space in a small cockpit and it would be hard to handle.

06:30 **What was your night spent amongst the Americans like?**

That was fascinating, the whole thing, because we asked a few of the locals where was a good place to doss down [sleep] for the night and they kept pointing in the direction of the now vacated married quarters that were on that base, American houses. We found the street with these American houses in it

07:00 and looked in the first couple and they were just full of people. There was no furniture. They were just empty rooms, floor boards, full of people just lying down for rest. Most of them by now asleep, and you couldn't find a place to put a foot between them. We went down almost to the end of the married quarter line before

07:30 I found a place I could doss down in. The others went onto other houses and we agreed to meet out the front of one of these houses the next morning. I remember I still had my Mae West with me because I used that as a pillow, so I must have been wearing that when I got out of the aeroplane. I have still got my gun in this holster so I take that off and put it under my pillow

08:00 and put my head on the Mae West. Half expecting to maybe use it the next morning because you could hear artillery fire in the distance and it seemed to be getting closer, and it was. I think the enemy got half way between where they had been when we saw them, and where we dossed down during the night. There was

08:30 a risk, I suppose. I don't know what we would have done if they had over run us. I suppose there would have been an evacuation effort from the base. They were some of the thoughts going through our minds. It wasn't hard to sleep though, and I woke up the next morning as the dawn broke and

09:00 I listened to noises around me and thought, "Where the hell am I?" for a few seconds and listened to people talking. I heard an Australian voice and it was from the fellow next to me. And I thought, "It is not Les, it is not Ken," the other two. It is another Aussie. How on earth could I end up under these circumstances,

09:30 sleeping next to another Australian, another incredible coincidence?". I looked at him before I spoke to him and he was in a very dirty blood stained RAAF uniform, you know the old blue, more mud stained than blood stained.

10:00 He was talking to yet another Australian who was in an army uniform and this was very puzzling because at no time had we been briefed that there were any Australians in Korea. I said, " Hello Aussie, what are you doing here?" and he looked at me an incredulous expression. He could hardly believe it and asked the same question.

10:30 He said “We are in it are we?”, he hadn’t heard at this stage. He was a member of a United Nations team that had been observing in Korea before the invasion and he had retreated in the face of the invasion all the way back to there, and was still going south.

11:00 His name was Dubbo Rankin, a flight lieutenant. The army fellow, I have forgotten his name, I’ve got it written down somewhere, I know the War Memorial has records of that team, and he went on to give me a list of clothing that he would like

11:30 to be dropped to them sometime later from an aircraft further down the line somewhere. That eventually happened. Didn’t have much time to talk to them, had to meet up with the others and we made our way back to our aircraft. Then we had the job of finding fuel. We wondered whether we would be able to. We would have liked

12:00 100 octane, but we would have taken lesser at this stage even if it damaged the engines. It only damages the engines at high power, so we could have used lesser power except for the take off. We found a US Sergeant with a tanker marked 100 octane, so there was some around so we put the hard word [request] on him. It was almost like wheeler dealing [trading]. He didn’t want to give us any

12:30 to start with. He said it is in very short supply, and if I give it to you I am going to go short on others. It looked as though we weren’t going to get any for a while. I said, “Are you souvenir hunting?” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “How about I swap you this .38 [pistol] for

13:00 some fuel? He said, “Done!”, so I lost my gun. I haven’t been court martialled for that yet. It is almost a court martial offence.

You did use your gun in the morning?

To good effect.

What happened when you finally got back?

We got just enough fuel to get us back to Iwakuni.

13:30 I have forgotten how much that was now, and it wasn’t until we got within radio range of the base that they knew we weren’t missing. In the meantime the CO, Lou Spence, had been around to see my wife and reassured her. She said, more or less, “He can look after himself pretty well. He will be right, you will find”. Reassuring words

14:00 Les Reading wasn’t married. His parents lived in the Dandenongs in Victoria; they got the telegram “Your son is missing in action” even though it was an overnight. So the whole system was working.

Better than the American retreat; by the sound of things chaos, over there?

Yes.

There was an instance not long

14:30 **before that in which your squadron’s planes had shot up an American train. What happened there?**

That was about the same day as we had shot up the bridge. So we didn’t hear about it until we got back and everyone was a bit boot faced [embarrassed] about that, you can imagine the feelings that are generated when

15:00 you impose friendly fire. Fortunately there weren’t too many casualties in that, the engine of the train was blown up. But it was a train that was out of place. It was rushing reinforcements up to the front and the fluidity of the bomb line at that stage was such that we anticipated

15:30 a movement from the time that we were briefed and it was beyond what we expected the bomb line was so it was thought to be a North Korean train and was treated accordingly. That was most unfortunate.

What are the feelings back at the squadron, when that kind of thing has happened?

Dismay. It is almost like

16:00 losing someone out of the family. It is a terrible thing.

Was there a name for that kind of thing? I know it wasn’t called friendly fire in those days.

No I am not aware of us having a name for it. There were occasions when the visible bomb line on the ground, which you hoped was correct,

16:30 would be overrun and not moved. So you had the situation where there were coloured panels and there was a different coloured panel for every period of the day or whatever. If the coloured panels were overrun by the enemy, you then had a false bomb line and there were occasions when the North Koreans overran the bomb line, the visible bomb line on the ground

17:00 and we were called in specifically to destroy trucks of American equipment that had been left behind. It gives you another funny, strange feeling when you are deliberately attacking, knowing that you have got to destroy it, otherwise it gets into enemy hands. But it is our equipment. That becomes another

17:30 funny set of feelings. You take so much care to make sure that it is not a friendly that you are hitting. Often, where we

18:00 would see the action going on on the ground, and we could make out what was happening and we were trying to assist our side on the ground that was poorly equipped to combat the enemy, so anything we could do for them was of great value. We were limited to how much we could do. Guns were

18:30 perhaps the best weapon, that could keep the heads down of enemy troops, and normally we flew around with - I am trying to think of the number of rounds we had in the guns, I think it was 2400 - but the inner guns, because of the increased thickness of the wings, had about 200 rounds of extra rounds than the outer guns.

19:00 Whenever we were using guns we would always stop firing when we got down to two guns remaining. You could soon tell from the noise of them, and we would stop firing and keep those 400 rounds for self protection. Often we were in situations where we were talked into using those 400 because it was vital that we use everything we had,

19:30 plus more if we could. More would sometimes consist of being out of ammunition and diving at enemy troops who were obviously over running our own troops on the ground. And what they would do when they overran our own troops was, well I don't want to describe it.

20:00 It is something I have got to put out of my mind.

20:30 It is not a good memory. You would see them put down their arms and surrender, the enemy would then

21:00 just use automatic weapons and mow them down. Here you were flying around over the top with the knowledge that those on the ground knew that we were out of ammunition. We could do nothing about it and a more frustrating situation you can't imagine.

There is nothing you could do.

21:30 We tried diving at them and almost trying to cut them up with our props. They would just duck and carry on with what they were doing. It is that sort of thing that makes you very aggressive towards them. When you see that sort of thing going on on the ground you then become

22:00 very intent on doing whatever you possibly can to help your mates on the ground. You lose sight of the overall purpose of the war. You are there just to do your bit as best you can to help out with the situation. The big picture disappears and now

22:30 you are immersed in assisting your mates.

Korea was a very different war, it was very ferocious from what we've heard.

Yes.

How desperate?

To give you an example of the desperation at that time. It changed its texture after awhile and got

23:00 back to more conventional warfare. But in those early days it was the situation where the North Koreans were intent on pushing everyone they could out of the country and taking it over as quickly as possible. That is why they had so many tanks, that's why they had so many troops and they came so close to doing that.

23:30 And in the process, they were creating a terrific surge of refugees that were going forward before them and being over run. And the North Koreans weren't very kind to their fellow South Koreans either. They were ruthless with them and to some extent you could see that going on too.

24:00 A lot of these bands of refugees would have nowhere to go. They would just camp out along ridges and you would find a great group of them, I don't know why they chose ridges but I suppose it was better to have the high ground. You would have situations develop such as

24:30 a spotting aircraft, a mosquito controller, trying to get you to shoot up this mass of humanity down there, knowing full well that amongst them were mainly South Koreans. So why did they ask us to shoot them up? Because the North Koreans were infiltrating amongst them and using them as cover.

25:00 You would get a mosquito controller saying, because we were reluctant to do that, "Come on Aussies, give it to them because tonight, the guys hidden in amongst them will be playing merry hell with our fellows on the ground." And that was happening. It was a terrible situation to be in to get

25:30 a spotter controller like that imploring you to make mayhem with the refugees, when you might only

knock off a very small proportion of North Koreans in the process. A very hard thing to do and few of us could bring ourselves to do it. One particular

26:00 example of that if you are interested, was a little village on a ridge, paddy fields all round. There was a square in the village, community square of some sort, crowded with white robed people and funny hats. A spotter aircraft on the side

26:30 saying, “That is your target, get as many as you can. We have observed a whole lot of infantry go in there and dress in white clothing, they’re probably all North Korean.” We thought that they may have been, but we weren’t sure. So Tom Murphy, the fellow who got

27:00 first into Korea, and incidentally we are now down to two guns, we had been on another mission, he runs his two guns up through them, and we expected them to run. If they had we would think that was the normal reaction of troops trying to get away. They didn’t run, they stood there and each time we flew very low

27:30 over them, there was no fire coming from them because they were obviously trying to hide, or the North Koreans amongst them were trying to hide, and realised that there would be a proportion of them. They didn’t run, and each time we came over they bowed to us. We quit. I don’t know whether that was the right thing to do. That leads me to another point,

28:00 And the point I wanted to talk about is Rules of Engagement. You have heard a lot about Rules of Engagement, of late. We had none, that is none that I’m aware of. I was never briefed on Rules of Engagement. I was briefed you can do this, you can’t do that. Which, was something lacking, I would have preferred to have had Rules of Engagement

28:30 decided by others, rather than have to decide them solo. There were lots of decisions to be made along those lines. It was easy when the targets were readily identifiable as military. It was hard when a village was being occupied by

29:00 our friendlies, including on one occasion we were supporting Australians on the ground, which was a thrill really, going into a little village from which enemy fire was pouring. We could only subdue that by setting the village on fire and firing everything we had into it and there was a very unfortunate incident

29:30 associated with that particular mission. We had napalm and the napalm was in drop tanks that had been made in Japan and the dimensions of the support lugs that attached the napalm tanks to the bomb racks were just out of dimension a little bit so that

30:00 we often had hang ups. They wouldn’t drop off .So we got into the habit of pulling a little bit of extra G and jerking at the release point. That would usually shake them off. We didn’t know what that would do to our rough old aim for dropping napalm, which was drop it a bit short and let it spread. The leader of our

30:30 section on this occasion had a one tank hang up, which made it hard to fly and he climbed back over the veritable bomb line, because with our troops, Australian troops advancing, they were pushing them along with them.

31:00 It was our habit to always try and stay over our side of the line to reduce any firing at us. He naturally pulled around to our side of the bomb line and unintentionally did an overfly of our own. He’s climbed up to about 3 or 4,000 feet at this stage ready to come

31:30 in and try and shake it off, and it falls off. I watch in horror as his tank tumbles down and I thought, “Whoops! it dropped about 200 yards off in a paddy field”.

This was the first time napalm was used in warfare, wasn’t it?

32:00 No, it was used in World War II.

What did you think of dropping napalm as a weapon?

A very effective weapon but very, under some circumstances very cruel. I wouldn’t like to, it is hard to deliberate on something like that. On the one hand

32:30 you can be killed by a bullet or a bomb, on the other hand you can be unmercifully burnt. Which is the better way to die? Napalm was useful in that scenario because of its effectiveness.

33:00 And bear in mind, in my time up there we were mostly in retreat, we were falling back until we were pushed back into a little corner of South Korea, with a threat that we were going to be pushed right out. Considering the things that we had observed going on in the ground early on, we had no compunction

33:30 about using it as best we could for most effectiveness. Effective on trucks and armoured vehicles, tanks, certainly a great tank buster. Very few tanks survive a napalm attack. Against troops, entrenched troops

34:00 you wipe them out. What more can I say

You mentioned a story off camera, about running guns. You were asked by the Americans to take guns up or something you were not too sure?

No, that was my

34:30 reference to the controller asking us to run our guns up through that group up on the top of the ridge. I used the expression run the guns up through there. That is what that was about. Thankfully we didn't have to do that very often. Then the situation became

35:00 static, where we had enough fire power to hold the line. Not until it got down to that corner of South East Korea. And most of our operations were then. Bear in mind we are still flying out of Iwakuni in Japan. By now we have got a system going whereby we are operating out of an air field as well, called Taegu,

35:30 which I think is still the formal capital of South Korea, I think instead of Seoul. It is still Taegu. The South Korean Government had moved down that way and had been pushed out of Seoul.

Before we get to that stage, what were the losses on the squadron?

They were mounting. The first one to go was Graham Strout, my

36:00 Number 1. I wasn't with him because I would normally have been with him and maybe circumstances would have been different then, but I wasn't with him because I had gone missing the night before, it was at that time. So four or five days into the war we lost Graham Strout. Not much of an explanation as to what happened,

36:30 he just became a fireball in the ground, probably hit by ground fire. It wasn't long after that we lost our CO, in the same sort of situation, Lou Spence. A very sad day.

What happened on that particular operation?

37:00 I am not terribly familiar with the details of it. It was a ground attack mission on troop concentrations and I think the fire from the ground was pretty intense and he just didn't pull out of a dive. Before that we had lost Bill Harrup. Bill Harrup bailed out,

37:30 was seen running around on the ground, rescue attempts were made, didn't find him. I don't think anyone ever found out what happened to him. So very early on we started to lose people.

Were you there when he was injured?

No I wasn't with him.

38:00 I wasn't close to any of the losses. I wasn't in the vicinity, if that's what you mean, although that is not quite right. A Tasmanian flying with me over Wansun harbour took ground fire

38:30 bailed out, and it was our habit, in getting out of a Mustang, to get out with our parachute still attached. Four straps coming up into a connector box, with a quick release on it so that you could half turn the knob on it and give it a

39:00 punch, and all the straps would fall out of it. To allow you to get out quick when you landed. We used to get out of the cockpit with the parachute still on, it was the easiest way to get the parachute out of the cockpit, and take it off on the wing, standing on the wing, we would give the quick release box a half turn and out of the parachute, catch it before it fell to the wing, and that was that. He did that when he bailed

39:30 out. The RAAF closed the stable door [prevented] on that one, by bringing out a modification which was a spring clip that went in under that wheel you turned. And if you turned it and tried to do that, you would have to deliberately pull that ring out first.

40:00 **Why on earth did he jettison his parachute?**

He was getting out of the aeroplane and he just went through the motions as though he was on the ground.

What could you see of that situation?

Just a parachute with no one in it.

How sad. That is terrible.

40:30 The loss rate in the squadron was as high as you would ever see, it was pretty high. Various reasons: a few accidents, not too many accidents, mostly enemy effect. The two friends I started training with

41:00 way back in World War II, Ron Mitchell and Don Armitt. I was coming back from Korea when they were on their way up, having completed their flying training on Number 2 course post war. They were converted to Meteor [fighter] aircraft. Don Armitt was shot down, and not heard of again, by a Mig. [Russian Fighter Jet] Ron Mitchell was in a mid air collision,

41:30 a terrible collision where two Meteors came together and both were lost.

Tape 8

00:33 We were talking about the losses of my two close friends, who I had known since World War II time, Ron Mitchell and Don Armitt. Don being shot down by a massive attack by Migs on the squadron now equipped with Meteors. I think 3 aircraft

01:00 were lost in that encounter. Back to Ron Mitchell and his loss. It was after a mission. A mission had been completed, the squadron was now based at Kimpo near Seoul, and 4 Meteors were returning from a mission to land. Coming towards the base they were in

01:30 battle formation, spread apart. Dick Whitman, the leader, calls them to close formation which puts them in what we call a vic, like a V of four like your fingertips, and he his approaching the air field. His Number 2 is on the right side,

02:00 and he is an RAF pilot who was in the squadron for experience, for the RAF. There were a few of those, I don't know the number, it is probably 8 or 10. The RAAF at the time unfortunately had a different method of changing formation to the RAF and I can only use my fingers

02:30 to explain this. My friend is number 3 and his Number 2, which is then Number 4. The basic element in those days was the 4, and if you divide that up again you never get below 2.If you can help it

03:00 because you always want someone to look after you from behind. So they are the two pairs and they form up to be a 4. Dick Whitman, the leader called echelon left, which means that this guy [the RAF pilot at No. 2 position] has to get over this side and then they all formate on the Number 1 in a line across there, and that is preparing to peel off to land.

03:30 They are in close formation, Dick says, "Echelon right go." This is the RAF fellow. In the RAF, he drops down with his leader in view all the time slides over and in the RAF these two [No's 3 and 4] move out to let him up in here [between 1 and 3 positions].

04:00 In the RAAF this guy [No.2] goes to here [the No.4 position] so what does he do? He drops down, pulls across under his leader. He is looking at him all the time because he is formatting on him and it is fairly close and pulls up into what he thinks is an empty space.

04:30 It wasn't empty. Broke his tail off on Number 3 and spun in. Ron, in this aircraft appeared to be OK and slowly dropped out of the formation. He must have been trimmed slightly nose down and just dived straight ahead into the ground despite pleas to bail out. He had an ejection seat, he could have pulled the handle and bailed out.

05:00 But we think he was injured in the collision, must have been. Yes, I lost my two best mates.

05:30 **There was one thing that you mentioned earlier on, trapping the train in the tunnel?**

Well, it wasn't so much as trapping a train, there wasn't a train in the tunnel. That was a very interesting mission. It was very short and sweet

06:00 **Who was on the mission with you?**

I can't remember the others in the mission. I would have to look at the squadron records to find out. There are a lot of little tunnels through the high ground in Korea and we used to often do road reccies [reconnaissance] and railway reccies, looking for targets of opportunity.

06:30 **Did you call them targets of opportunities?**

Yes. Early on, and I'll get back to this tunnel story after a little while. Early on we found too many targets. The North Koreans had no idea initially of camouflage, no idea of how to hide things from the air, and we

07:00 saw all sorts of foolish things and almost laughable. A boat in Wansun Harbour covered in branches. We would see vehicles on roads covered in branches. You would fly down the road and you would see a haystack, what is a haystack doing on the road? That made it easier to burn. Fire a few rounds of incendiary bullets into

07:30 that, made it go up nicely. Then they got a bit wiser and they would start hiding armoured vehicles by driving them across a paddy field up into the side of a house, and put it inside the house they would just bore through the side of the house and there were two tank tracks leading up to the side of the house, with no tank tracks coming out. Very visible from the air.

08:00 Very easy to set the house on fire to burn the tank. They were a gift. Then they started to use their brain

a bit and they started camouflaging nothing to look like something, and set up a flack trap.

08:30 So they would set up gun emplacements all around and put a haystack in the middle of a road, and everybody now would think it's a juicy target and we'd have a go at it and fly into a lot of fire. I don't know whether we lost anyone but we got damage from that sort of thing. They used to hang cables across valleys. I saw a B26 Invader come back to Iwakuni.

09:00 with a great length of wire trailing behind it and another bunch wrapped around a prop which had been shut down, came back on one engine. They used to run into those things at night. So those things started to be done. Here we are down in our little what is left of South Korea, down in the corner with the bomb line all the way around

09:30 us, about 10 miles from Taegu, which is our major refuelling rearming base. What we used to do would be to fly across to Korea with a weapon load, deliver that to some target, and then land at Taegu and get into a queue of aeroplanes. I could never understand the way they did that queue,

10:00 because it was almost like being in a queue of cars .Where, when the front one moved up a space or went out at the head of the queue, we all had to then start up and move up another space and this was a silly way to do it, but that is the way they did it. At the head of the queue there would be a team working hard

10:30 to refuel and rearm you. When the four aircraft in the mission, would be ready again, off we would go on another mission. We would do that up to 3 times in a day and then fly back to Iwakuni, back to roost for the night. That was the procedure before we actually moved the squadron over into Korea. The bomb line was so close to that airfield that we hardly

11:00 had our wheels tucked up and we were into an attacking situation. Targets were numerous because we were surrounded and it came to the knowledge of the intelligence around the place that there was one little railway tunnel that was being used to hide troops and supplies during the day, and whatever else.

11:30 I don't know the full story of what was actually in the tunnel when we attacked it, but we went after it with rockets. It was a steep little hill, I suppose about 500 yards through, and there was this big tunnel mouth at the base of the hill and a railway line leading up to it and another one out the other side, the same one out the other side. We found that

12:00 the mission was to try and collapse the tunnel mouth. We worked out the best way to do this was to fly up the railway line at low level and let off a pair of rockets just before we started to pull up to go over the hill. It was a fairly

12:30 close bit of judgement to know how you could handle the pull up, and not hit the hill, and yet get reasonable accuracy with the rockets. And the closer you could get to the tunnel mouth the more accurate you were going to be. We were juggling this sort of problem and the first person to get a rocket, I think one rocket out of the pair

13:00 hit the tunnel mouth, and the other one went up the tunnel. And we thought "that is pretty good, that will go off up the tunnel," and it did. People behind, including me, saw this great big smoke ring come bursting out of the tunnel. It was a fabulous thing to see, almost a perfect circle of whitish smoke

13:30 come hurtling out of the tunnel and you could almost fly through it. And from then on it was a competition to see who could blow the best smoke ring. The mayhem we were causing up that tunnel must have been terrible. There wouldn't have been anything left in it.

Did you manage to block the ends of the tunnel?

No we didn't collapse the entrance but we certainly did a lot of damage inside of it.

14:00 Which is a funny thing to claim, how do you damage the inside of a railway tunnel? Fire rockets up it. That reminds me of another mission, not much after that one, where we as a squadron were assigned a particular target that we wanted to keep an eye on.

14:30 We did that because we were assigned this as a target. It was a rather high railway bridge across a gorge which ended up at one side into a tunnel into the side of the gorge. So a train coming out of the tunnel would go straight onto the railway bridge and down across to the other side, which was flatter and

15:00 we knocked that down initially and then we went back to see what was being resurrected from it some time later, and they were rebuilding it. So we kept an eye on it and the Intelligence people did too and they determined that it was just about to be put back into operation, so "Why don't you go out and knock it down again?" Two of us went out to do this and we

15:30 had rockets and bombs. Sorry, backup we only had rockets and guns. I think it was to be a reconnaissance of it to see how close it was to actually being completed and we flew up this gorge and here is this bridge with little figures all over it,

16:00 rebuilding it. And as we approached it I started to experience the first time that I had heavy anti aircraft

fire go off close to me. I'd had it go off before a fair way off and on one occasion, early on, I had been shot at by 40 mm self destroying

16:30 ammunition. Didn't realise that it was self destroying, saw it going off way up there above me and decided to ignore it because it was so far off. I was matted [reprimanded] by Bay Adams after that mission in words such as: "Milt, didn't you know that was self destroying 40 mil

17:00 and it was going up very close to you with proximity fuses on it?" "Oh no, sir, I thought it was just self destroying and it was going off away up there." Perhaps if I had jinked as rapidly as he had wanted me, to I might have flown into one, I don't know, we'll never know. But he was worried that I wasn't taking enough evasive action.

17:30 Now I am being fired at from this railway bridge with heavy stuff and there is a pair of guns firing at me, and I would hear "woompf woompf!" They must have had some communication between the guns in salvos. There were just two guns firing and I must admit to a surge of anger under

18:00 that situation. It wasn't fright, it was just anger. "They're firing at me and I wanted to hit back" and I was able to so. I was in a good position. I pulled over into a dive. I could see the gun emplacements, I started firing from a long way out of range with the guns, and saw the peppery effect as the bullet groups

18:30 spread out all around the gun emplacement, certainly kept their heads down. And then I let go with a couple of rockets. I think I fired them all, because I didn't want to make another attack. I think I fired them all off in ripple, we could select intervals that we could fire the rockets, but I fired them off in minimum time, so that all the rockets had reached their target

19:00 almost simultaneously. On the pull out, there was this huge explosion and when I looked back to see where that weapon pit was, it wasn't there any more. At the same time Jack Murray, in the other aircraft, is being fired at too from the other gun, and he gets himself into a position and does almost the same thing, a splatter of gun

19:30 fire followed by all the rockets, and another big explosion which is bigger than the first, it must have hit a pile of ammunition. It was a big explosion and he had to fly through it and I watched him go through that burst of debris and whatever, and said, "Please Jack. Come out the other side," and he did.

20:00 He had a few little dents in his aeroplane, but he made it. That was exciting and productive and it wasn't long after that the squadron went in and knocked the bridge down again. Then the thing turned around, MacArthur did his landing at Inchon and cut the

20:30 North Koreans in half. Cut a lot of them off, a brilliant thing to do.

How were you involved in the Inchon landings?

Indirectly we were giving close support to the area around the landings when they were occurring, targets of opportunity again, anything we could find.

21:00 We had previously done a lot of damage to the big air field at Kimpo. I think I showed you some pictures of the big terminal building there that we almost knocked down. It was made of 3 floors of reinforced concrete. We never did knock it down completely but we made a real mess of it. I had dropped a couple of 500 pound bombs on the main Kimpo runway

21:30 and I got hits on the runway. Big craters that took a lot of work to fill in; and about 10 days after I had dropped those bombs and now we are operating from a base at Pohang on the South Eastern corner of Korea - just a concrete bare strip, living in tents.

22:00 We put up our own tents after a mission, things were a bit rough and ready and then flew the next day. Shortly after that, we mounted a mission led by Wing Commander Dick Cresswell. Took 8 aircraft into Kimpo for an overnight, having flown 3 missions that day, we

22:30 landed at Kimpo at night with makeshift flares down the runway. I can remember rolling over a bit of rough stuff on the landing roll out and thinking "they were my bomb craters," which is a funny feeling. We taxied into a position not far from the old terminal building that we had destroyed

23:00 and it wasn't long before we determined that that was the only accommodation around the place that was worth anything to stay the night in. That was a funny situation too, to have knocked down the very building that we spent the night in.

What was your sleeping arrangement there?

There weren't any. I won't mention what we slept on.

What did you sleep on?

23:30 The only thing that one could use to sleep on were body bags, and I didn't dare climb into one. It was a cold night and we had a fire going, anything that would burn, slept by the fire.

Did anybody sleep in the body bags?

No. Anyway, the next day

24:00 Things were really on, I think it was the, a famous United States Army parachute division, I think it was the 81st ,they were across there with all their transport aircraft and the airfield was crowded out with

24:30 transports, and it was our mission to support them in a monster paratroop drop. I think it was larger than anything that was in World War II. The aircraft used were mainly twin boom Packets, C117 [transports] I think they are called. There seemed to be hundreds of these and lot of

25:00 other Skymasters I think, four engined Skymasters. The Packets [C117s] were were 2 engines. Incidentally as an aside, one time I saw a Packet aircraft touch down at Taegu on a pierced steel planking runway and just as it touched down both the booms to the tail broke

25:30 and this aircraft ended up on the rollout with its tail dragging down the runway. Over a couple of weeks, I saw that aircraft repaired and flown out again. They were the main sorts of transport in those days. The place was chock- a- block with these paratroopers and I did take my camera along and got a few shots of them embarking on these

26:00 aircraft, and flying out of the place. I understand, having communicated with them since that, they are the only photographs that were ever taken of that operation, because their photographers, who were supposed to be along, didn't make it. They all jumped out and floated down to earth. We were in amongst them, watching them floating down. We were almost waving to them

26:30 as they were floating down. They were taking a bit of enemy fire from the ground, but not much. Their parachutes were multicoloured and it was almost a pretty sight to see all these mushroom like things all over the drop zone. We were there long enough to see them mop up any opposition that was there and it was their mission to

27:00 chop off another big slice of North Korean who were now in retreat. As time progressed the North Koreans were forced right up back out of Korea. The bomb line went right up to the Yalu River, almost. Our missions out of Pohang right

27:30 in the south, were again fairly long and we were attacking railway marshalling yards and North Korean armour wherever we could find it. At that stage targets were fewer because we had destroyed a lot of their hardware.

28:00 It looked as though the war was pretty well over with a bloody nose to the North Koreans.

How did the squadron recover from the loss of its CO?

It is something that you grieve about at the time, but for a relatively short time because,

28:30 fortunately the memory is such that it rapidly goes into the background in the face of what is in the foreground. That is the operations you are still flying and the support you are giving to those people on the ground

29:00 becomes paramount and after a while you accept it as one of those things.

How hard was it for you personally, because your wife was also well known to Lou's wife?

He was such a grand fellow, Lou Spence. A very hard loss. I didn't feel it any harder than the loss of my Number 1,

29:30 the first loss Graham Strout because I got to know him pretty well, both on the ground and in the air. Maybe more personally than I had got to know my CO. To me as a pilot 4, or pilot 3 then, the CO as a Wing Commander, was way up there on a big pedestal, and it was "Yes sir, No sir, three bags full, sir" with him.

30:00 Something that I thought a bit about when I finally ended up as a CO myself. It was not long after, that the North Koreans were pushed way up north that we were doing road reccies and rail reccies up there

30:30 We flew over Pyongyang on one occasion. We were looking for targets. It is pretty hard to look for targets in a city, that are worthwhile. It is much better to find something that is obviously military equipment out on a road somewhere. Sometimes on these low level missions we were wary of the high tension lines that were strung all over the country. They were

31:00 pretty well electrified in those days and sometimes we would go under the high tension lines and sometimes we would go over them. I used to amuse myself by occasionally firing off a burst at a high tension pylon and try to hit an insulator and bring the wires down. And sometimes I would be successful at that and there would be fireworks and that gave me some satisfaction. Over Pyongyang on this occasion

31:30 I am looking for something that would be valuable as a target, and I spot a big electrical substation with 3 big transformers in it. And I think, "There is a beautiful target. I can shut down most of Pyongyang by

hitting those transformers. I proceeded to do that and they burnt very well, their cooling oil was

32:00 on fire and dirty black smoke was roaring into the air. Lord knows what it did to the electricity supply for Pyongyang but it had a most unusual sequel. I got back to base and we were debriefed on what we had shot up and so forth. “Milt Cottee shot up these 3 big transformers in the substation” - and back down the line from Macarthur’s headquarters comes a

32:30 a rocket. “That target was off limits. We are going to occupy Pyongyang and we want to use electricity.” Funny little things like that happened occasionally. Some of the bridges were off limits too because they wanted to preserve them so that they could cross them themselves.

Extremely optimistic though?

Yes but it happens.

33:00 That was the sort of nature of the operations that I was involved up there in ground attack.

What happened to your aeroplane?

The one I had befriended and incidentally, I seemed to be beset with co-incidences of numbers.

33:30 Here I am in number 77 Squadron my allotted aircraft was 775; my parachute number is 8888; I am married to a twin; I have got 2 t’s and 2 e’s in my name; and there is another one. My service number on enlistment during World War II was 446011. Most people can remember

34:00 their service number. However there was a reissue of service numbers during the time I was in Korea and it became a conversion from 4466011 to A22222. Incidentally I have learnt since that my mates’ numbers

34:30 were the next to me. I was the middle of three numbers which were in succession.

They were the two friends who you joined up with?

Don Armitt and Ron Mitchell, which is another coincidence. I was going to describe what happened to my aeroplane. I am at Pohang and I am asleep in the tent;

35:00 Aircraft taking off close by on the runway, we are not far from the runway, don’t wake you up when you are living that sort of a life. You sleep through that, but on this occasion there was an aircraft taking off and suddenly the noise stopped and I remember waking up and thinking, “What happened?.” I

35:30 don’t remember hearing the noise of the takeoff but it stopped and I remember that and I didn’t know what had happened, which is a strange thing. What had happened was that another pilot taking off in 775 had an engine failure and it stopped abruptly and he ran off the end of the strip - and that was the end of my aeroplane.

36:00 **How was he?**

He got out all right.

Did you ever have to do a forced landing?

Not in Korea. I did a couple of forced landings back home in the Mustang.

Were there any situations of LMF [Lack of Moral Fibre] while you were there?

I don’t like talking about that, but

36:30 there were some on the verge and some all the way, yes there were occasions. It is hard to put oneself in their place. I suppose

37:00 it depends on how scared you are, in what you are doing, and how much control you have over the situation yourself. If you are very good at flying and delivering weapons, then you get satisfaction in achieving accuracy. You get a feedback of satisfaction which keeps you going.

37:30 If you are actively and knowingly assisting with the war effort and knowing that you are saving the lives of guys on the ground, on your side, that give you a feedback of very good satisfaction and that almost leads to an eagerness to do more.

38:00 For someone to suffer LMF, it is a reverse thing. They are not getting satisfaction out of what they are doing and that is a runaway situation. That all comes from the individual’s personality. They probably

38:30 weren’t suitable to be trained as fighter pilots in the first place. And maybe the system hadn’t got around to enough psychology to be able to sort those people out in the first place. I think you would find a different situation now.

How were you handling your own fear?

I didn’t have much.

39:00 My fear, if any, was in having to bail out and having to become a POW [Prisoner of War]. I knew that the Koreans were terrible in looking after POWs and I didn’t think I would survive if I had to bail out, so there was always that fear.

Did you have colleagues who became POWs?

39:30 Yes. One in particular who I have got to know his story very much in detail, Ron Guthrie. He bailed out of a Meteor having been shot down by a Mig early in Meteor operations. His was a very high altitude very high speed bail out.

40:00 I think he held the record for quite some time in the altitude and he blacked out a bit on the way down through lack of oxygen and the cold. He was soon rounded up and put to all sorts of, you would have to call it torture. And that continued for over 2 years. And

40:30 when the armistice came along and he was selected to be one to be handed over in exchange, in the prisoner exchange. Incidentally, not all of the POWs were released. I understand there were something like 900 that weren’t released and they never have been. I don’t think any of them would have survived today but it was a terrible thing for

41:00 North Koreans to do. What their motivations are for doing that I will never know? But they are not like us, their culture is totally different. It just so happens that Ron Guthrie’s release from captivity

41:30 was exactly 50 years ago on 3rd of this month. His most valued possession throughout his captivity were a pair of American combat boots that he happened to be flying in at the time. He is sorry to this day that when he was released and re-kitted, he didn’t hang onto his old beloved combat boots.

Tape 9

00:35 **Tell me how it came that your tour was up in Korea and how did you get this information and what was the system of missions of missions and stuff there?**

As happens in most air force operations, there is a laid down recognised

01:00 tour defined by the number of missions one flies. The number that is decided upon by the hierarchy usually represents to a large extent the amount of personal effort that one has to put in

01:30 to those missions. If they are routine missions that don’t add up to much, then the tendency is to stretch out the number. In my time in Korea the going was pretty stiff and the loss rate was pretty high, so they kept the number down. I ended up completing 50 missions which was the

02:00 magic number then. Where a pilot gets posted out of operations back to something else after he has completed 50.

On your 50th mission did you know that would be your last?

No, I didn’t, but I never counted them up to see if I did accurately fly 50. Someone was counting and someone posted me. I think it was pretty close to 50 it might have been

02:30 a few over I don’t know but later on it became a thing. For instance, the USAF, the United States Army Air Force flying back in their Sabres into Kimpo, after their maximum number of missions would very much know that they were flying out on their 100th mission and they would

03:00 come back to a place like Kimpo and say “OK, I am on this is my 100th mission priority to land” so everybody else would be told to go away while he landed. There is the amusing situation that arose out of that, where one of our pilots in Korea, name of Ken Murray totted up a world record

03:30 total of missions in jet aircraft, which is 333 missions. That was composed of 3½ almost successive tours. He just didn’t want to stop, he wanted to keep going and the system allowed him to because he was pretty adept at doing what he was doing by then. He happened to be in the circuit at Kimpo when an unfortunate

04:00 US pilot came back and demanded his priority to land and Ken piped up on the radio and said “Do you mind if a 300 mission pilot lands before you?” That would have been totally deflating to the poor guy doing his 100th. It would have destroyed him.

04:30 But Ken was that sort of fellow, he couldn’t help but get a thing in like that.

Did you want to go on at 50, what was your view on that?

I would have if I had been single and I didn’t have a pregnant wife on my hands.

Your wife was pregnant by this stage?

Yes. Between missions that is. We had enough crews,

05:00 had enough pilots to generally fly every second day it would have been a bit willing to fly everyday so every second day was not bad and that would be interspersed with the odd bit of leave. There was a beautiful leave centre up near Tokyo called Kuana. Ella and I went up to that during one of the leaves for a week,

05:30 a well learned rest. It is now a world renowned golf course. You have probably heard of it, they have golf competitions there. That is where I had my first game of golf and I have been threatening to take up golf when I get old. I am 77 next month, so I haven't got much time left.

There are a lot older golfers around, you have still got plenty of time yet. Your wife,

06:00 **she was living in the married quarters at Iwakuni, what happened when you moved the base to Korea?**

She was then on her own.

In Japan or in Australia?

On the base at Iwakuni, she stayed on. I could have requested that she be sent back but I had paid her fare up there. The air force didn't want to hear of paying her way up, but somewhere along….and incidentally,

06:30 she went up there as my house guest, not as my wife because the air force had a policy then of not moving any dependants for any posting less than 12 months. Now my posting up there was to be less than 12 months. The accountants down here wouldn't permit her being subsidised to travel up there, so we paid her fare ourselves.

07:00 Somewhere along the line - and I can't put a finger where it happened - she was declared a dependant and we were then shipped back to Australia together by ship. I think I had the choice of going back by air by Qantas, but quite a group of us decided to go back by ship. The actual ship turned out to be a little, about a 7,000 ton

07:30 cargo liner. I was still an NCO, some officers were on the same ship. They were in 1st class accommodation. We weren't and because all the cabins were 3 berth cabins someone in their wisdom decided that 3 males or 3 females would occupy the cabins. So I wasn't even in a cabin

08:00 with my wife. That is after having just fought a war. But they were the circumstances of the time. We went via Hong Kong and went through a bit of rough weather in getting to Hong Kong. Had a few days in Hong Kong, then to Cairns and then into Sydney. We docked in Sydney at Circular Quay, quite close to where the Opera House is now along the

08:30 side of Circular Quay there, and what confronts me when I arrive, but a big hammer and sickle [Communist badge] drawn on the end of the wharf building. And advice not to go ashore in uniform. That was a shock. I felt then like the Vietnam vets felt when they came home.

09:00 I well remember that.

What was the situation with the wharfies [wharf workers] or what was the reason for that?

There was a very strong element within the wharf labourers at that stage, of Communism. Because I had been up there, believing that I was stopping the spread of that down to Australia.

09:30 It was a bit of a shock to come home to that.

What did you do?

There was nothing I could do about it. Except I got off the ship in civilian clothes and tried to hide the fact that my luggage, which was unloaded onto the wharf, belonged to a military man.

How did that make you feel when you had just been off risking your life?

A big let down. It wasn't long that I caught up

10:00 with what was going on back home here and had to accept that as part of our freedom, which was another thing we fight for.

The Korean War has been subsequently called the 'unknown war' or the 'war that got missed' by the Australian populace. What was the reaction to it when you got home in the middle of the war?

The best reaction

10:30 that occurred to me personally was a strange one. My wife owned a house in the suburb of Carlingford

in Sydney and it had tenants in it and we were intent on returning and living in our house. But we found out on

11:00 arrival back in Sydney that the laws were still such post World War II, that housing arrangements were difficult and it would mean a court case to get a tenant out of a house. And then one would have to have good grounds to get a tenant out of your own house. I now have this problem, my wife is pregnant and I want to settle

11:30 her down in her house, and we take the thing to court. The lawyer who I employed to try and get us into our own house thought that it would be an advantage to have a barrister briefed. Along came his nominated barrister and

12:00 Gough Whitlam [former Prime Minister of Australia] did a very good job. He was then up and coming barrister in the Sydney (law) field and he took one look at my flying log book, where I had put little drawings in the log book of targets destroyed, like trucks and tanks and things, and he said we should show this to the court. The court saw my log book

12:30 and the fact that I had just been through 6 months of fighting in Korea and it was a fait accompli [an accomplished fact], we moved into our house and I have Gough Whitlam to thank for that.

You moved into 22 Squadron training for awhile and later on you ended up at ARDU the Research and Development Unit?.

13:00 There is a bit goes in between those bits.

You went to England and Farnsborough and Boscombe Downs with the V Bombers came in between that. We will just pick through a couple of things out of that career. What do you think was your most interesting posting, or the one that was the highlight of your subsequent career and war career?

Without a doubt my 2 years with the RAF at their Flight Test Centre. That was the ultimate culmination of any pilot's dream.

13:30 **What was your role, you were working with the V Bombers. Can you explain what your role was and what you were testing?**

After a years course at Farnborough doing the Test Pilots' course and having my family join me in England after that course, we settled into life in Wiltshire

14:00 and I was assigned to B Squadron at Boscombe Down which meant that it was the heavy squadron. This suited me pretty well, because a lot of my previous flying experience had been in fighter type aircraft. Now I'm doing a switch to bigger and better aeroplanes.

14:30 Fortunately for me the V Bomber development was in its heyday and I found myself in the thick of it. As an embryo test pilot I was a little under-confident about my abilities to handle the tasks which were

15:00 fairly complex and demanding and requiring a great deal of skill and knowledge of aircraft systems and the basic designs of aircraft. There was a modicum of handling. When I say handling, how does this aircraft

15:30 fly? Are improvements possible to the way it flies? And if so, what can be done? Suddenly I am presented with a great personal challenge of background knowledge and ability to handle different aircraft.

16:00 I think I went to Boscombe Down having flown…the test flying school added quite a few aircraft to the list, probably 20 aircraft. I left, having flown about 85 or 90. And a lot of that grew progressively,

16:30 the ability to do that grew progressively from experience of previous flying, some time at Central Flying School. Where pure flying is honed to the limit, well not to the limit, but extensively and a long period of instruction, where once again where pure flying is brushed up and teaching other people to fly is a great

17:00 way to teach yourself too. Then onto a Test Pilot's course for a year and straight into it. I had visions of the attempt I would have to make to live up to my then peers. There was a very experienced test pilot, Cardray, there

17:30 on the base and there was a lot going on. The Valiant was the first of the V bombers, it was soon that I had that under my belt. Then generally into the big Delta, the Vulcan which was a challenge again, a very satisfying challenge because it was a fairly complex big aeroplane

18:00 with plenty of power and up and go and very good manoeuvrability. I was very fortunate to fly that aeroplane as extensively as I did. And for my last year at Boscombe Down I was Chief Test Pilot Vulcan.

You mentioned in your time there you were involved in testing the UK's nuclear delivery system, is that right?

18:30 Most of the flying at Boscombe Down, the experimental test flying where most developments to airframes and that sort of thing occur, is done by the manufacturer and their test team. By the time it gets to Boscombe Down it is really a going concern and the emphasis is then on making that aircraft

19:00 do its job. And if it is a bomber you have got to make it drop bombs. Most of our flying at Boscombe Down was involved with weapons clearances, that is getting hold of 500 pound bombs and carrying a big load of them and dropping them to see if they clear the aircraft satisfactorily, because bombs often do funny things when they come out of weapon bays.

19:30 Some of them can come back and hit the aeroplane some of them can collide with each other and set themselves off and that sort of thing. Nearly all of the weapons that we dropped at Boscombe, into the sea generally were inert, and they were just throwaways. But the main task was to determine whether they came out of the weapon bay satisfactorily and didn't cause any mayhem. Some of them did and we had to

20:00 find a way around that sort of a problem. The Vulcan was really designed as a nuclear delivery system and the bomb that the British had at the time I think it was referred to as Big Boy. It was a big 10000 pound bluff shape. Not the conventional shape of a bomb and

20:30 it didn't have very good ballistics. But then it probably didn't need very good ballistics. The task I was given was to determine whether it dropped from the aircraft OK. Oddly enough it was still termed a top secret item even to see it, and my general security clearance didn't go that high.

21:00 at Boscombe, it was just generally Secret. Here was the only Australian on the base being tasked to drop this thing, which was top secret. On the aircraft we had for viewing the release out of the weapon bay, we had closed circuit TV. It followed that I was going to see it on TV anyway. We had a vertical camera and a camera looking backwards

21:30 along the weapon bay and another one from a wing mounting pod to look at it sideways on. The plot was to drop this thing at maximum performance, which was at high speed at high altitude and see how it came out. When I approached the aircraft, which was in a quarantined area on the base, there was a big tarpaulin around the

22:00 bottom of the aircraft and I went to duck in under the tarpaulin to do what I normally did in the weapon bay, to do a pre flight [check]. Security grabbed me and said, "You can't go in there, you are not cleared". How they knew I wasn't cleared, I don't know, however they did and I said, "OK, we don't fly". I took my crew back in and fronted up to the Commanding Officer whose

22:30 name was [Sir] Clive Saxelby, Wing Commander. I didn't learn until recently that he was a member of the great escape team from that German POW camp where they dug a long tunnel. He was just about to emerge from the tunnel when the Germans discovered it and started firing, so he did a smart about face

23:00 in the tunnel and went back inside again. He never did tell me that, I only learned that recently that he had done that. I wish I had known and I could have debriefed him on it. He then said, "Damnation, I should have really taken steps to clear you to fly that load." So he had a yarn with staff in London and after an hour or so, got clearance for me to go out and duck under the tarpaulin.

23:30 So I took that thing up and went up onto a bombing range up the coast of England, and dropped it. I suppose it is on the bottom of the sea there somewhere.

How did the test go?

It went very well. It dropped cleanly. I was expecting, because it weighed 10,000 pounds, I was expecting a little bit of a lurch on the aeroplane. It was imperceptible. I could feel it, but when the button was pressed it was

24:00 just a little bit of a hiccup, but not much. Because we were at high speed and the stability of the aircraft was high at that stage.

To move on from Boscombe Down, you did a number of things in your career but if we can pick out one or two of them…?

Just before we leave Boscombe, let me tell you of another unusual thing that happened there. It is worth recording because of its unusual nature.

24:30 I expect that I am the only one of 3 survivors in the world today who have had a main spar of a large aircraft break under them. I say that because mostly, when a main spar breaks on a wing, the wing fails completely. That broken wing then slaps the other wing as the aircraft rolls around.

25:00 They clap hands, as the saying goes, and usually the crew are squashed in the middle. Fortunately that didn't happen, otherwise if it had, I wouldn't be here. The circumstances surrounding that are interesting in that the aircraft was the second Valiant prototype and because it had a lower all up weight than the production aircraft,

25:30 Vickers, the makers, had built a strengthening piece along the top of the lower main spar cap to bring it up to production strength. But they had discontinued that strengthening bit about in line with the

undercarriage well, and that caused a bending point for the wing

26:00 which on every flight, then bent further and further and started a fatigue crack. Which grew and grew, unbeknown to anybody. Next thing I know, I am on a trial with this aircraft which is to be a measured takeoff. A measured takeoff is a takeoff under instrumentation conditions under very close control, so that

26:30 the measurements made can be related to all sorts of other conditions of take off. It becomes a standard for the aircraft. To get the all up weight for the aircraft I was carrying two 1600 gallon under-wing tanks full of water, which were jettisonable, and 10,000 pounds of water in a container in the weapon bay, which was also jettisonable.

27:00 Instead of 5 crew we were down to 3, 2 pilots and a flight test observer who worked the instrumentation to measure what we were doing. And as an extension of that, this was to be rocket assisted takeoff, utilising what were called Super Sprite units which were latched on rocket assist units that burnt

27:30 high test peroxide and kerosene to give it an extra 4,000 pounds of thrust each. Each of those was jettisonable for reuse, so they were reclaimable on parachute. The trial consisted of a measured take off of all up weight, and a drop, an observed instrumented drop of the super sprite units for recovery to see how they separated from the aircraft.

28:00 The red line speed, which means the maximum you should ever fly with these things on, was, I recall, 215 knots and the drop was to be made from about 1000 feet above ground. Having done the measured take off with these rocket units burning, which burnt for about 50 odd seconds,

28:30 giving the aircraft additional take off performance, and in company with a Meteor 7 chase aircraft which was supposed to observe my aircraft from afar to see if it could see anything unusual in this string of trials,

29:00 with a photographer in the backseat to record whatever went on, including the drop of the super sprite units. He was close to me on the right hand side when I was doing a left hand turn onto the drop zone to drop one of these things. I was in about a 15 degree banked turn pulling a little G in bubbly turbulence. When ‘Bang!’

29:30 this almighty explosion. It was bigger than flack [antiaircraft gunfire] that I had experience with. It was bigger than I would expect if another aircraft ran into me, and that was my immediate reaction, “the Meteor has hit us.” Knowing who was flying the Meteor I called up on the radio and said, “Splash are you all right?”

30:00 He said, “yes, what is your problem?” and I said, “You didn’t run into me?” “No, I wouldn’t do that”. “Well I have just had a huge explosion on board. How do I look?”, he said “Your right speed brake is proud [standing out]. I suggest you don’t operate it.” The speed brakes are finger things that come up into the air flow on top and bottom of the wing.

30:30 When the main spar broke on that wing it started to twist, to come off a cross brace within the wing held it on, only just. And the twisting of the wing caused this extension of the speed brakes. Didn’t know what the problem was. It needed re-trimming, it wanted to roll a bit, so I trimmed that out and

31:00 wondering what has happened. I have got closed circuit TV on this aeroplane too, looking at one of those rocket assist units I thought one of those had an explosion. But they have a nitrogen purging system at the end of the rocket burn, any high test peroxide, that is left is purged out of the system. Unlikely to have an explosion, so not knowing what the problem was I elected to continue with the trial and drop the

31:30 two units on their parachute, just to get rid of them really and start jettisoning water at the same time. Here I am driving around the country side with water streaming out of me and throwing off these two rocket units. By the time I was ready to land, and I wanted to get it on the ground if possible, the water was pretty well gone, so I was down to a light weight. As the wings drooped on the

32:00 landing the big gap that had occurred in the main bottom main spar had closed up. But that was after a fair amount of skinning on the wing had torn away from that area where it had been pulled apart, it rivets had been just pulled out. When I got out of the aeroplane there was a crowd of people underneath. I looked up into the wing. I could see right into the

32:30 wing and I wondered what was in the wing there. What has caused this, it was a most unusual event. It wasn’t long before a fitter got a ladder and climbed up inside the wheel well and found, the main spar was the rear wall of the wheel well, he found evidence of this crack running right up the main spar. We defuelled it and

33:00 jacked it up with wing jacks, in the hangar and the crack opened up about an inch and a half and I was able to get a dental mirror in and look at the metallurgy of the crack. I could see it had fatigued for about a third of the way through and it had just broken under tension. That was the last time that aircraft ever flew. It really spelled the demise of the Valiant fleet.

33:30 They were subject to fatigue cracking in the spars and they didn't fly for long after that.

How did you reflect on how close you had come to buying it on that occasion?

It gives me heebie jeebies today. I have got over having nightmares about it, but you can appreciate that to have come so

34:00 close to having a catastrophic thing happen like that, when it shouldn't have, is a bit mind bending. But oddly enough, that gave me an added interest in metallurgy which set me up very nicely to be a

34:30 pseudo expert in handling the F-111 recoveries when I was subsequently Project Manager and they were having their problems. The same sort of thing was happening, cracking in high strength materials.

You were in 36 Squadron during Australia's involvement in Vietnam.

35:00 **What is your one memory of the operations you ran to Vietnam - and that period of your career. What is the strongest memory you have of that time?**

A couple of things come readily to mind. Flying over Vietnam was fraught.

35:30 One was conscious of artillery firing going on and the fact that an aircraft had been brought down already by an artillery shell. Those shells used to go pretty high, and not many pilots appreciated that they were flying through the air as well as them.

36:00 When we flew in that area we always monitored the emergency distress frequencies and it was fascinating to hear emergency beacons going off on the distress frequency. They had a very unnerving affect, and one always wanted to be

36:30 able to do something to help someone in trouble when one heard those things go. On the ground, always conscious of the possibility of being taken out by someone coming in through the security fence. The most lasting memory, which is not a very good one, was the time I was tasked to

37:00 fly out of Phan Ran where the Canberras were based, down to Ton San Nhut, which is the airfield for Saigon, and pick up freight. I wasn't told even though I was the CO of the squadron at the time, I wasn't told what the freight was. You rarely are, you lob [drop] into a

37:30 place and pick up whatever they have to load on you. When I discovered what they were loading onto the aircraft I was rather put out, because there I was carrying 17 caskets [coffins] back to Australia, taking some of ours home. That was a sad trip.

How did you feel about the war in Vietnam?

38:00 That is a tough one too. As I believe now it shouldn't have been, it was something that could have been handled differently. It was a pity that it was handled the way it was.

How do you compare it to Korea?

Korea was different in that it was a

38:30 more conventional, if that's the right word nowadays, war and the objectives were clear and there was a reason for us to be there, or a perceived reason by us to be there. Whereas the same could hardly be said for Vietnam.

39:00 Once again, flying in there in support was a little bit different also in that we felt we were supporting our own. When you get into that frame of mind it is a different perspective, you get away from the overall total scheme or aim of the war to concentrate more on

39:30 the immediate purpose that or the immediate job that you are doing. That gives you some satisfaction. The modern pilot in the military needs that sort of satisfaction to think that he is doing a worthwhile job, if he is not, he is not going to do it very well.

What happened when you unloaded those bodies in Australia, those caskets…

They disappeared from my mind, they just went away.

Tape 10

00:32 **You said you had some nightmares, what have you had nightmares about?**

One was the main spar failure, that had a very sobering effect on me.

How did that come up in a dream?

Well, it was almost a re-creation of the event and sometimes it would have a follow through of

01:00 the wing failure. I would reconstruct in the dream the effect of the wing failure, which wasn't very happy.

What else, in the things you have seen, you have seen some amazing and horrific things during the war in Korea especially, does any of that come back to your mind in dreams or

01:30 **other ways?**

There is I suppose I would have to call it a touch of PTSD [Post Traumatic Stress Disorder] in relation to some of the things that went on in Korea, things that upset me today and are now again. When I am reminded of

02:00 it, it takes a little time for me to send it away again.

These problems that you now identify as PTSD - did you recognise that immediately after coming back from Korea? What happened and how did they come on in your life?

I suppose I did it to myself.

02:30 When I started writing my memoirs, it was a case of digging back into my memory and digging as deep as I could. And it was that which really caused it and now it won't go away, not readily anyway.

The effects of war are really important subject

03:00 **for posterity and one of the things the Archive is trying to get hold of. If you don't want to talk about, this that is fine. What are the main things that you can't forget or the things that are hardest for you to deal with, even this far from the event.**

It has to do with loss of life.

03:30 The loss of close friends - that doesn't go away. The memory of nasty things being done to your compatriots that you can see from the air being

04:00 imposed upon them. They are vivid memories that are hard to put aside. I don't know why the brain doesn't allow it to be put aside, but it is almost impossible. Little things trigger it off. Your question can trigger it off again and

04:30 then I find it difficult to recover from it, it takes me a little while to dismiss it from memory again. There is something in the brain that indelibly puts it there and once it is there, nothing you can do can make it go away.

05:00 **Have you sought any counselling? How have you tried to deal with these things?**

I did go to the extent of bringing it to the attention of

05:30 Department of Veterans Affairs and going so far as to see a psychiatrist to see if any assistance could be offered in that respect. But after a couple of visits I realised anything to be done could only be done by me. There wasn't anything available outside

06:00 to offer much help. Actually talking about it is a help. It seems to unload it a little bit and maybe that is the best medicine. Maybe if I talked about it more I would get used to it, but right now I am not used to it.

06:30 **Why haven't you talked about these things?**

They are not the sort of thing that one cares to talk about with other people. Unless you can find someone of…in a similar situation and you can share their experiences with each other that may be an easy thing to do,

07:00 but how you find someone in the same situation I don't know. I have been able to share other people's experiences, some Vietnam vets [veterans] that I have met, we have talked about that sort of thing and I think it is a help on

07:30 both sides to talk about it. But one would have to be very selective in who you talked to. And if you try and unload this on a psychiatrist they will come up with all sorts of things they say to try and get round the situation, but it doesn't help much. The mere fact of going to one to talk about it is

08:00 a regurgitation of it that you don't want.

How do you feel about the Korean War all these years on? Your role in it?

What a useless thing it turned out to be. It certainly stopped them in their tracks but that is all it did and we are still at war with them. There hasn't been a

08:30 cessation of the declaration of war yet, it is still live, it is only a cease fire. The prospects of it busting out again all over is very real, only the next time it will be a real ding dong affair.

In some ways in terms of your career and

09:00 **the experience you were able to have was a positive thing. In other ways you having to deal with some of the things that it brought up it was a negative thing for you personally. How do you reflect on your own personal experience in that conflict?**

If I hadn't had the experience in Korea, I wouldn't have ended up being as well

09:30 rounded in experience as I did end up being. There would have been a gap in there, in a military aviator's experience. So in one respect, to have been involved in those sorts of operations in Korea, where an aircraft was utilised as it was designed to be used,

10:00 set me up for, from an experience point of view, for a greater appreciation of further design and improvements to aircraft and their operation. It was a stepping stone of some sort, a valuable one.

10:30 As was all of those things that I had experience with. It is odd that I end up with a peak of capability when I am at a stage where my advancement in rank in the Air Force is such that all of that capability

11:00 then starts to be thrown away, not used. And I look back on it as a great waste. Today I am still capable of contributing to the advancement of things in aviation because of that past experience. But the system is such that the young fellow comes in from the bottom and the old fellow goes out the top.

11:30 And when you go out the top, you are a throw away, pretty well.

How did your career in the air force mould you as a person?

I suppose completely. I don't know how I would have turned out if I hadn't gone into the air force. I don't know. It is,

12:00 I have been moulded into a person as I have gone along through all of my experiences. So at the end of all that I am the product of all those experiences. To a large extent I have been self motivated to do a lot of additional

12:30 research and looking at technological advancements and that sort of thing, because it was of great interest to me. That goes hand in glove with being a test pilot. You can't help yourself do that, unless you are a poor test pilot, and there aren't too many poor test pilots.

How do you feel about war today?

13:00 **I would have to say that there have always been wars and there always will be. Different cultures and different types of people just can't help it. Unless there can be a melding of all those cultures and whatever into one, we will always have them. So we**

13:30 **have always got to be prepared for them. And to be prepared for a war these days, you have got to start about 20 years back. Now we are dropping behind. My air force for instance has done a whole reorganisation which in my opinion is contradictory.**

14:00 **I'd hate to say it, but I feel that if we were ever put into a World War II type situation again, unless the other side was worse, we would lose. The capability to organise military aeroplanes into a combat force**

14:30 **effectively, to operate under war time conditions, has almost been lost. It has been sub-contracted out, if you like. The air force bases are, in my opinion, not bases any more. They are just a place to operate aeroplanes from.**

15:00 **They are not a place to organise people into a cohesive group. They don't mix together except on the job, it is just like a civilian job. They go to work and some of them fly aeroplanes and then they go home. Unlike in my day**

15:30 **when we had the opportunity to mix together after the job and kick it around and improve our capability. That doesn't happen any more, and I fear for it. When it happens slowly as it is happening now, although it seems to be happening more rapidly than ever now, it**

16:00 **is accepted as the way to do things, when I don't think it is the way to do things. I am being super critical here.**

Do we need wars in some ways?

If you want to preserve your way of life

16:30 yes, because someone will try and destroy it for you. If ever we get into the situation where we try to destroy the other person's way of life, then that is what we don't need. But while ever the other group is trying to destroy yours and my way of life we will fight for it,

17:00 and it seems to be almost an inevitability.

How do you feel about the future?

I fear for my kids, I suppose that sums it up.

Is there any optimism at all there in some respects in any areas?

17:30 Not a great deal. I think we are looking down the barrel at a situation where if we want to retain Australia for us, we will have to fight for it. I don't see a way around it, the way the world is going now.

18:00 **This Archive is kept for posterity. It will be around in 50 or 100 years time. If someone were watching this in that time, is there anything on a personal level, based on your own personal experiences, some of which we have talked about today, you could offer them, by way of advice, or a message, or any**

18:30 **thing you would like to say?**

That takes a bit of pondering doesn't it? What would I say to someone 50 years down the track when they pull this tape out and have a look at it?

19:00 50 years, I hope you survived the last war.

INTERVIEW ENDS