

Australians at War Film Archive

John Kessey - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 25th August 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/868>

Tape 1

00:37 **We'll start with an introduction to your life story: where you were born and where did you grow up?**

Right, I was born in Newcastle at Hamilton, August 30th

01:00 1918, and my father was a fire chief there at the fire station and my mother was a school teacher. When I was two, my family divorced and I went to live with my grandparents in Moree in New South Wales. When I was twelve I went to Sydney and lived with my mother

01:30 who had remarried. We lived in Sydney for a while, going from areas where she was teaching. Finally I went to school - Petersham, Leichhardt, and then to Ultimo Tech [technical school]. While there I went along to the architectural

02:00 department on a suggestion from some teachers who said they thought I should do architecture. And so about 3 weeks later they contacted me and said there was an architect, Carlyle Greenwell in Sydney who would like me to go along and be articled to him. I did that for about 2 years. Then with the war coming on, I thought I didn't

02:30 want to rubble in the mud and didn't want to sink in a tin boat, so I joined the air force. I was accepted originally as I was an air gunner. Then they said they'd like me to wait for another interview. I did that and then they put me through as a cadet, an officer cadet. I started on January 16, 1939, and graduated in October that year. I went through various

03:00 stages - was in the squadron for a while, then I was instructing, and then I was sent to Operations. After the war I came back and joined civil aviation - with ANA [Australian National Airlines]. A year later TAA [Trans Australia Airlines] started up and I joined them with the air force fellows I knew there. I later transferred with TAA management through to BCPA [British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines], which was operating the same aircraft we had flown previously from Sydney to Vancouver in Canada. I did that for quite a few years and then joined the family business in Sydney. After 10 years of that I

04:00 got a taste for the cockpit again and joined Air New Guinea and I flew up there for another 17 years. I finished up back in Brisbane, and after I retired at the age of 60, I went into travel agencies. I did a course and then I

04:30 went over to America and we set up an inbound tourist agency there for Americans to come out to Australia. Then back to Australia and ultimately I retired and here I am.

Now if I can just take you right back to your childhood years - if you can just

05:00 **tell us in a little bit more detail what life was like, living with your grandparents ?**

When I was at the fire station, my mother informs me, I used to regularly get my bottom tanned because I liked climbing the ladder where they had the hoses dried out and they had to send a fireman up to get me down, quite often.

05:30 I suppose that started me off with the air. When I went to Moree to live with my grandparents I had more of a country life. We were living in East Moree. My aunt was a schoolteacher and her husband was a schoolteacher also; so I was well and truly under the knuckle at school. On one occasion,

06:00 one of my aunts - who was only 11 months older than me - and I were looking through a little hole in the tin fence at the showground which was opposite our house. We were intrigued watching all these showgrounds and didn't realise there was a team of bullocks coming down the road. When we did, we turned and headed for the other side of the road to get home. My aunt

06:30 got ahead of me and shut the gate and the bull was right on my heels. I had to turn and run, and went right down the corner. We had an aboriginal yardman named Snowy, which was an apt name, and he ran

across and got me by the seat of my pants as I ran passed and he yanked me over the fence as the bull went – boom!

07:00 My Grandad gave me a set of boxing gloves and had boxing practise whenever my friends would come along. A number of them failed to do so after a while; they didn't like to have the boxing, I think. But we had quite a good life there and I used to go across the Gwydir River to the school.

07:30 After I went to Sydney, I was picked out as a country yokel and the fellows started to muck around with me. I said, "Well let's have a fight!" And one fellow there said, "Great!" And he was unable to sit for his intermediate exam that year.

Because - ?

Oh yes, yes,

08:00 I didn't get picked on any more. But then, at that stage, I was becoming interested in bilycarts and I had a very good one; but it had noisy wheels and as I was going down a concrete road, out near the Lewisham Hospital, the police came after me – chasing me in my bilycart. But they just put me off the road. I had a

08:30 scooter then and I used to go out to Mascot [Aerodrome]. In those days there was a railway line going across the river that we took the scooter on and carried it out onto the aerodrome where I used to watch all the aircraft, Kingsford Smith and all the fliers. And that was good fun that gave me a good idea of things. But going back to Moree –

09:00 a barnstorming fellow came round with a light aircraft and my aunt and I went up. We were only small and it was only a two seater, the pilot and one other cockpit, so my aunt sat down and I sat on her lap and we did a circuit around the town and I tried to move my position and put my arm out. I pulled it back quickly because the exhaust pipe was right alongside there and I burnt my arm on it.

09:30 But we enjoyed the flight and it gave me a bit of a taste. I later met that particular chappie in the air force and he was a group captain and I was a wing commander. We had quite a good old chat about old times. But then more about Sydney – I

10:00 was dux of the school at Leichhardt and then went to Ultimo for training and ultimately finished up in architecture. I had been working previously, while I was still going to night school,

10:30 in a radio factory, which was called Raycophone and Ray Alsop owned it. We also had talking machines, which we called them then; now we call them sound equipment. My first job was actually there in the factory. And then I graduated from that to the

11:00 drawing office and then my job turned to installing the sound equipment in the theatre and that's how I came to see the architectural fellows – about the architecture of the building and putting these installations in – and thought it might help me. So that led onto the architecture. Then I had the opportunity

11:30 to apply for a job with the air force and I didn't quite know what any of them were. But I put my name down and after the exam, Wing Commander Pittendrigh, I think it was, said, "Well you're successful here, but we'd like you to wait for the next interview board, which is the cadet board, and

12:00 if you fail there you can still come in on this one." And so I waited and ultimately I was accepted into the cadets. There were only 42 selected throughout Australia for the cadet course so I was a bit fortunate there. I joined the air force on January 16, 1939. We were at Point Cook and I did my flying on

12:30 a Gypsy Moth, which is the one before the Tiger Moth.

Can I just pause you there for a moment, John? I want to talk about the planes and your training in a lot of detail.

Yes

But before I do that, if I could just take you back to growing up again. I wanted to ask you a little more about your boxing and what drew you to it?

13:00 My grandfather.

Can you tell us a bit about him?

Originally he was a barber but he left and sold his shop. And he got a couple of horses and a dray and became a wool buyer, wool and skin buyer. He used to go out to the properties buying wool

13:30 and skin and then bringing them into town and selling them to the wool merchants. On holidays, I used to go with him and there's one thing I have lovely memories of. A lot of people think I'm rather silly about it. We spent the nights while we were away in the shearing shed

14:00 with the lovely smell of the lanoline and oil and so on. And the standard meal, which was a pretty easy

one, was black pudding and Holbrook sauce, and I loved it. And I can't get it now, I'm not allowed. But that was really a lovely time. Then he

14:30 got a Capital Model Chevrolet truck and I can still smell the newness of that truck. You know, you go in to a car showroom, not all of the smells are the same, but you can pick out this one. On one occasion my uncle was driving down town and

15:00 he collided with a fellow on a motorbike. My grandfather's name was Slater. When the case came before the police, the motorbike fellow said, "Mr Slater came tearing down the road and I just couldn't miss him. He just hit me." The Police Sergeant said: "Laddie, Mr Slater never goes above 15 miles an hour,

15:30 that would never be." So we always held that up to my grandfather. He was a delightful old bloke but he said in self-defence you've just got to learn to look after yourself, and that's why he gave me the boxing gloves. And we used to have quite some good times. After school we'd

16:00 go down the fence between our place and the property next door, at the end of the orchard. The family got a bit tired of this all the time and they were always looking for us. So one afternoon I went down to see this other fellow, his name was Victor Schutt, and there straddled across the fence where we always sat, was a goanna tied to the fence by my grandfather. And so

16:30 we didn't chat for that day.

Why was the goanna tied to the fence?

They wanted to stop us from going down there all the time so we'd come up and do some work. There was a bit of a work to be done in the place there. He thought it was a joke anyway. He loved animals, he loved snakes and things and he took an orange box along to

17:00 the local greengrocer and inside it were some snakes and that cleared the shop out. He only did that a few times. But I enjoyed my time in the country. We used to go down to the river and we made a little boat out of galvanised iron

17:30 which we bent up and we sealed it with bits of bitumen from the road. And we'd go out in this thing. We'd capsize more than often, but we had a lot of fun there. I enjoyed the country.

Can you tell us a little bit more about your fight flight in the Tiger Moth with your aunt?

Very little I remember of that.

18:00 Before you knew it you were up, and you were looking down at the country. And of course it all looked so sort of much like a dream. And then we were back on the ground before we knew it. But, it was a memory that stays with me forever.

A good one?

Mmmmm. I was just thinking when my Dad used to go out in

18:30 the country with the Chevrolet truck, on weekends or holidays, I'd go with him. Moree is a very bad area for black soil, which clings to your wheels on the car and builds up. If you don't look out, it builds up so much that your wheels stop. Anyway when we got into this stuff it used to be my job to grovel in the mud and put these chains on. I didn't like the rain. But apart from that I enjoyed the rest of it.

How much rain would you have gotten in Moree in those days?

Not all that much. But the river flowed fairly well.

Did you see much of your parents at all during that time

19:30 **in Moree?**

My mother used to come down on holidays by train and I looked forward to that. I don't know that I went to Sydney at all until I was twelve and that was when I went back to join the family.

No contact with your father at all?

No.

20:00 At this very time I'm trying to find out if I can get his death certificate because the only memory I have of him and the only time I ever recall having seen him was when I was about twelve in Petersham. I was on a scooter and he called at the front door and asked for Mum

20:30 and she came along and we went up the street, the three of us. He pushed me up the hill, Crystal Street, Petersham, on my scooter. That's the only time I ever recall having seen or felt my father, which is a thing I've always been sorry about but I'm now

21:00 trying to see if I can find and locate some of the family.

I I understand divorce was pretty rare in those days. Was that something that you thought

about, or you were aware of at any stage?

I wasn't aware of it at all but apparently my father was a great alcoholic and I would assume in that

21:30 he was pretty much under the influence excessively. My mother was a person that could take a lot of things but when she calls a halt she calls a halt. So that broke the whole thing up but anyway.

22:00 **Can you tell us what it was like coming back to Sydney after being a bit of a country boy and re-adapting to life in the city?**

Well my uncle was also a schoolteacher and he had a Morris Cowley car and he stayed with us one weekend. I used to go with my grandfather's truck, in the paddocks,

22:30 get in and drive it a bit and my Uncle had this Morris Cowley and parked it in a garage down a lane before the flat or units where we lived. And I went along with some of the local little boys with me and got in the car. The key was in it, so I started it up and I backed out of the garage into the lane and I got it in a position where I couldn't

23:00 move it. I couldn't move it out from where it was. So I left it there and went home and got under the bed and waited. I really got a tanning that time. I didn't do it again.

Did they know where to come and find you?

I just don't recall but they found me.

23:30 They found me, but that's the only horrible thing I did I suppose.

And the fight at school, settling in at school and being labelled a boy from the country?

Oh that was settled that day. I never had any more problems.

24:00 No, that was good.

So you learnt how to take care of yourself at a young age?

Well yes, you had to. I, with the aboriginal boys and the others at the school, we used to get down the horse paddock and they used to have a bit of a go, just to have a bit of a play you know, just box around. But when my

24:30 aunt was looking for me they said, "Where's Jack - ?" I was called Jack then, Jack Slater, the same name as my grandfather, because that's where I lived. My aunt would say "Where's Jack? Oh he's down the horse paddock having a fight." So I got a bit of practice.

25:00 **So how did you size up against all the other boys down in the paddock as a boxer?**

I didn't have any trouble. I didn't pay them.

So you had quite a few friends among the Aboriginal kids?

Yes, yes.

Were they mainly

25:30 **the boys that you'd play around with?**

Oh no, no. They were just the boys from the school there. We had quite a good sort of mix up with the association with the lads there, and it was quite good. We'd get down to the river with the boat and they'd all muck in with us and so forth as well, it was quite

26:00 good. There was no segregation or anything like that; you're all boys together so that's that.

It brings up an interesting point, were you aware of any segregation at all between black and whites where you were living?

No.

Even in the adults?

No

So everybody got on alright?

Everyone kept to their own things and you never had a problem. But no

26:30 I didn't notice anything, maybe I was too young.

Yeah

I was just interested in boy's gear.

Can you tell us a little bit more John, about living with your mother again and your stepfather?

Well that's more or less recent. We lived in Marrickville and she was teaching there.

27:00 And then she was posted to Petersham and so I went across and went to Petersham School. While I was at Petersham we adopted my stepfather's sister's child. She had died and this little one was only about 6 months or 3 or 4 months old. So we adopted

27:30 this little lass and she has since passed on. I'm not too sure on that period.

28:00 No the aunt, or my father's sister, passed on and we had the little one. That was when we were living at Petersham and then we went to Leichhardt, because my mother was posted to Leichhardt

28:30 school and then we lived near the school. My stepfather was in transport in the government and so it was quite easy for him there as well. When I graduated from

29:00 or finished at Leichhardt I was dux of the school there and that's when I went to Ultimo.

Did you know much about World War I?

Oh not at that time. It's a big sorrow to me that I was not more interested in it, because my father was in World War I

29:30 and he went across in the light horse from Queensland. Then he left the light horse and went into the Gallipoli invasion and I heard him talk about Pozieres and Lone Pine and so forth. They were just names to me and I just let them wash off and didn't put much importance to them.

30:00 But now I'm realising that after my war, which is over 60 years, the younger folk are taking an interest in my particular phase and I'm only sorry now that I didn't take more interest in Dad's to learn more about it.

30:30 But I didn't and that's one of my regrets.

From what I understand it's fairly rare for many fellows to talk about their experiences in the war -

No, Dad didn't. He was gassed and he had a lot of time there, he was in the Middle East and then in Gallipoli

31:00 and so forth. But he didn't talk very much about it; you just knew that he was there and he'd been there. Then he'd get with some of his friends and they'd chatter on, but you'd only pick up little bits from that.

Did you know much about the trouble that was going on in Europe as a lead up to World

31:30 **War II, while you were training?**

I kept conversant in that, yes. But we were thrilled in September when war was declared. We were really delighted. We thought, "Whacko, now we're really into it."

Can you tell us what you were doing and where you were when war was declared?

Well I was at Point Cook as a cadet and

32:00 **we were still doing our flying and training and so forth and so we thought, "Now we've really got a purpose so it's really going to happen, we're really going to get to Europe." And I never did. I thought, "I'm really going to get away and go over and really do something worthwhile." But it didn't happen that way.**

32:30 **Was it about the adventure of being in the air force or was it to go over and fight?**

Well it's indoctrination I suppose. I always felt that the Germans indoctrinated their population, and we were never indoctrinated.

33:00 We were never under any false apprehension or misapprehension. We felt that this was a chance to really go and do something for the country. The Germans were in your mind as the people you've just got to go and

33:30 do over and so put some sense into them, and we all wanted to do that. But when we graduated, part of our course went across to London. They were supposed to go over and get some Short Empire Flying boats which formed up into 10 Squadron

34:00 and fly them back to Australia and they were to be based here. And they were only going over to bring those back. But by the time they got over there the war had really hotted up and the Royal Air Force said, "Hey, we can't let you fellows go, not with those boats, we need you here, you've got to go out in the Atlantic." And so they stayed in England for the entire war. And

- 34:30 I was posted to 2 Squadron which was at Laverton, just five miles down the road from Point Cook. And Freddie Thomas was the wing commander and CO [commanding officer] of the squadron, and he later became Lord Mayor of Melbourne. John Ryland was the flight
- 35:00 Commander for the flight I was in, B Flight. And he later was group captain of the Royal Australian Air Force and the one that was to become operations manager for TAA – the one who asked me to come over and help start up TAA. There were a number of others there that
- 35:30 did a terrific job during the war. Kim Bonython I think is a name most people know, particularly in the art world and music world. He's also a motorcar fan too. But he was there and he took some films of various things in 2 Squadron and later on in the war at Milne Bay. I
- 36:00 have those films and, pardon me saying it please, but the title is the Bullshit Films – .
- Can I ask why they're called Bullshit Films?**
- That's the type of bloke he is. No, he's a terrific bloke but that's the title on the film.
- 36:30 We were flying Avro Ansons there, going out into the Bass Strait and doing some escorting of convoys and so forth. I was only there for a few months and then I was posted back to Point Cook. Having been checked out on the Ansons
- 37:00 I then went back to Point Cook and flew the aircraft for a navigational course that was being conducted there. Rollard Kingsford Smith was one of the fellows on the course and I was flying him around and Derek Kingwell, possibly you'd remember him, he was the ADC [aide de campe] to the Governor here for a number of years. He was a Flight Lieutenant at that time and retired as an Air
- 37:30 Commodore. And Dick Cresswell. When I was a Cadet, Dick Cresswell was my senior. When we were cadets it was the old English system and the juniors had to look after the seniors. Dick Cresswell was the senior that I had to look after and I had to make his
- 38:00 bed and clean his room out and dust it up and have everything spic and span as well as my own. And if at any time his room was found defective, a bit of dust – they came in with white gloves on and ran them everywhere. And if they've found a bit of dust then the cadets got into trouble and
- 38:30 his junior gets into double trouble. And on one occasion they found something wrong, I forget what it was, but I got into double trouble with Dick. That was OK, because we then knew that we were going to become seniors and we would get juniors to do our work. But that never happened because the war
- 39:00 came along and everyone had to do things a different way. We never had seniors and juniors after the seniors left, and we were on our own, and a whole new system came into operation so I missed out.
- That's terrible. Can we just pause?**
- 39:22 **End of tape**

Tape 2

- 00:30 **John - the kind of mischief that you got up to in training as a cadet, can you tell us?**
- Well I can't tell all the mischief of course, a lot of that's confidential. But if we did anything untoward one of the big things
- 01:00 was we had to strip off and grovel through the fish pond which wasn't very deep, through this slimy area and you had to catch a frog and you weren't allowed out until you caught a frog. And then when you came out you had to run down a line with all the seniors there with their towels flicking your bottom as you went past.
- 01:30 So you went as fast as you could. It was quite good fun.
- So did you end up in the fishpond at Point Cook?**
- Oh, yes I did.
- Did you catch a frog?**
- Yes I did.
- Then you're OK?**
- Yes, yes we had to that.
- I'm just going to bring you back before your training day in the air force; you were talking to us about the old Moreton Bay fig**

02:00 **at Petersham Railway Station. Can you tell us what you did on Saturdays?**

Well on Saturday afternoons at Petersham we'd go down to the picture theatre and we'd enjoy the film and then after the film we'd climb up, a little group of us, into this big Moreton Bay fig tree near the station. No one could see us and we bought a packet of Havelock

02:30 cigarettes for sixpence and we'd take them up there and we'd all have a share of these and puff away. But one day I climbed up a tree in our backyard and I didn't think anyone could see me and I had a cigarette there. My father came along and found me and didn't rouse on me or

03:00 hound me at all. He said, "Look why don't you come inside? If you're growing up to be a man now, come in and have a smoke inside." So I went inside and I thought, "Oh at least I'm being recognised." Then he got a pipe and stoked it up and I lit it and then he said

03:30 "That's it, enjoy it, relax," he said, "It's good for you. Just relax," he said. "Do the deep draw." And I thought, "Oh this is really something, I'm really being recognised." And for the next five or ten minutes I was as green as any cabbage; and I was straight out to the backyard. I was sick as a dog and I've never touched them since. So that was that.

Cigarettes and pipes?

Yep.

04:00 **He taught you a good lesson then?**

Yep

I've heard stories about getting fathers giving their sons lots of drinks to turn them off alcohol as well.

I didn't have that problem. We just didn't have any drinks, any liquor or anything like that. In fact I promised my mother when I went into the service that I would not touch drink until I was thirty

04:30 and I didn't. I just kept that promise. And it was no problem. I was quite a popular bloke during the war because, particularly in New Guinea, we used to get an issue of beer and I had people waiting to have my beer.

What did you get in return?

Oh, I just got satisfaction

05:00 that's all. No, they liked their beer. I like a beer now too, just now and again, a nice cold one. But no, I just didn't do it because that was a promise and you stick to it.

Were you teased for being a teetotaler?

No, I use to get malted milks more than anything and ginger ale and so forth -

05:30 but no, I didn't have any problem.

When you turned thirty, did you go out and have a lot of drinks?

No, but the very first time I did have some alcohol was rather amusing. Many years later, when I was flying on the Pacific run and I was in Honolulu and we'd been invited to Trader Vic's [bar] with

06:00 a friend, a navy chappie. He and his wife called and picked my First officer and myself up and drove us to Trader Vic's and they ordered a Zombie and said, "Here have a taste," and I tasted it and it tasted pretty good so I said, "Yeah I'll have one of those."

06:30 So my first taste was a Zombie. It consisted of three different types of rum and some other concoction. Then this chappie and his wife took ill and they'd just ordered another one. So my friend and I

07:00 shared that, and we had another one, and then we had to get back. We had to catch a bus back and I went out on to the main road. The traffic just kept going, so I thought, "To heck with this!" So I just went out and put my hand up. There was a screech of brakes

07:30 and we just wandered across and then I waved them on and that was that. But that was my first introduction to alcohol; I wasn't very well that night.

That's why they call it a Zombie?

That's right. Yeah, so I got a bit more cautious after that.

Can you tell us about growing up in the Depression years in Sydney?

Well my parents,

08:00 both being government employees, were in quite a safe situation for us; but nevertheless we were well aware that other people weren't as lucky as we were. And we weren't as lucky as we'd liked to have been, but we had no complaints.

08:30 My parents were both working and life just went on more or less normally.

Growing up in the country with your grandparents, did you eat lots of rabbit and dishes like that?

Rabbit, yeah I loved rabbits, we had lots of rabbits, even when we came to Sydney we got rabbits. Oh the old rabbitoh [rabbit seller] came around in those

09:00 days and he had his horse and little sulky [cart] and it was packed with rabbits and you'd hear him calling down the street and you'd go out, picking up your rabbit and have rabbit stew and rabbit pie. It was great, I loved that.

How would you know if it was a good rabbit to eat? It just looks nice and plump and smells good?

They were all good.

09:30 **I heard chokos were a big vegetable in the Depression, do you remember those?**

Yes I do. We had a big vine of them growing in the back yard and we always had a good supply. In fact I still like them but you don't seem to get them any more. But no, they were very very good. We had a lot of them during the depression but of course we had them growing

10:00 down the back fence there, lots of them which was handy. We also had a lot of passionfruit too and I look at the prices of things now and it staggers me to think how much. When I got my job, my first job with Raycophone, I started off I suppose on about 15 shillings a weeks and that's a dollar fifty.

10:30 Then I was promoted to the drawing office and I was getting 30 shillings a week which is 3 dollars. When I went to the architect as an articled architect I dropped to 10 shillings a week, which is one dollar. And I existed on that - your affairs and lunch and things like that. Haircut for sixpence;

11:00 bus and the trams a penny, and so on. And it was quite good.

What about the movies?

I didn't worry much about movies; I'd go to a few but I wasn't a great one for movies.

I was just curious because later on you said you worked on

11:30 **the talkies?**

That's right yes. Well, with the talkie machines we had the equipment there, which we would make in the factory but also we used to make radios, the ordinary radios with the valves and so forth. We'd put in the chassis and then put them into their cabinets.

12:00 But the sound equipment was installed in the movie theatres and it was very very interesting. I quite enjoyed that. But going from 30 shillings a week to 10 shillings a week was quite a drop. But I thought at the end of it I was possibly going to join a

12:30 profession, which is bigger rewards ultimately. It's rather strange, my son went into engineering and he was dealing with the factory. They had refrigerators and that sort of equipment,

13:00 Westinghouse, that's right, and a fellow he was talking to said, "Kessey? That name rings a bell," They called me Joe in the factory and he said, "Did you ever know a Joe Kessey?" and he said, "Oh, yeah that was my Dad." He said, "I was the chief draftsman at Raycophone." And that's not all that long ago, no about 10 years ago.

13:30 **You've had a few incidences like that in your life it seems?**

Yes, yes.

You seemed to be climbing trees a lot when you were a kid, did you ever fall out?

No. no.

14:00 I was as good as a monkey.

I wonder if trying to go higher meant you were going to join the air force?

Yes, it was better to get in an aeroplane than to get up there.

So no broken bones or in hospital or anything like that?

No, nothing like that. The only broken bones happened when I was going with my mother and my sister,

from school in Petersham into Newtown. We got off the tram at Newtown and

14:30 that was on the bridge over the railway line, in the wide part of the street there. And I went behind the tram and I went to dash across and there was a truck that was coming along the tramline

15:00 and I didn't see it. It clocked me and threw me quite a distance apparently. I had a skull fracture or some problem and some bones and so forth and I was whipped into Prince Alfred. That was quite a

15:30 time when I just had to lie still for a while.

How old were you then John?

I think I was oh about 13, 14, or something like that.

It was a good thing your ears and eyes wasn't damaged for being a pilot later on?

Yes. I did tell them about the incident when I was doing the interview but they didn't worry about that.

16:00 **Is it true that if you're going to be a pilot you need 20/ 20 vision?**

You'd have to have reasonably good vision, yes. But in those days, even if you were colour-blind, you couldn't go into commercial flying, but now it's permitted. You weren't allowed to wear glasses, for instance, but now you can wear glasses. And so things have changed, progressed.

You went to live with your grandparents when your parents separated. Could your mother not be a single mother or did you have to go

17:00 **and live with your grandparents because she couldn't afford to look after you?**

I have no idea of that, but it was a much happier arrangement for me to be with my grandparents because I was happy there and my mother was free to shift from Newcastle to Sydney and set up a new life for herself, unencumbered with myself.

17:30 I think that worked out much better than it could have.

And did you have a good relationship with your Mum?

Oh yes, excellent.

And when did she die?

Oh I forget the year now but it was around about 1958. And she died in Sydney and

18:00 I'm just trying to think of the time my Dad came up to New Guinea when I was flying up there and my sister was in Melbourne. He'd go there for the summers and then he'd come up to New Guinea for the winters. I think he passed away up there about 1964 or something. But

18:30 he had emphysema and so on and things from the gassing during the war. But he did smoke extensively and caused his own demise, I think, to a degree.

Did you become close with the little girl that your parents adopted?

Oh yes. The reason we adopted her was because her aunts were going to put her into a hall or an orphanage,

19:00 but we took her for 6 months. At the end of that time they said they'd put her into an orphanage. When the two aunts came to take her and put her into the orphanage, I opened the door and I realised why they were there. I slammed the door in their faces. And then I said, "No!" Margaret was her

19:30 name - I said, "No, Margaret's not going with you," and the family realised I was quite happy about that, so that's when we adopted her.

Now you would have been about 12 is that right?

About that

So, after being dux of the school at Leichhardt did you go to a special school in Ultimo?

No, it was just a tech college.

But you could have gone to James Ruse [a selective high school] or something like that because you'd done so well.

20:00 **How did you go in your secondary education?**

I went on to do the architecture then the drawing and so forth. And that's when I left Ultimo to join the air force.

What made you join

20:30 **the air force in January, because the war didn't start until September?**

I joined when they told me to join. I had the interview and then as a result of the interview you were notified of whether you were accepted or not and if you were accepted you were told what to do and

21:00 that was the beginning of air force routine and discipline. And that was when the next course was beginning, the next intake of cadets. There was 42 of us; and 36 of us graduated.

21:30 In 1999 we held our 60th anniversary of the commencement of the cadet course and there were only five members able to attend the reunion. One of them was in London. He had medical problems and he'd been a pilot with British Airways and he was one that went over with 10 Squadron

22:00 and went on the Flying Boats. But there were about two others that were unable to come due to medical conditions, but that was all. And since then two of them have passed on.

I heard you mention the Flying Boats before. Can you just clarify what a flying boat is?

22:30 Actually it's a hull, it is a boat, it is a hull sitting in the water with wings. They had areas where they had the guns on these particular aircraft for the air gunners and they had

23:00 four engines. And they had to have a very good knowledge of seamanship to handle them because it was like sailing a boat. You had to manoeuvre them according to the wind and use your power to manoeuvre with the wind or against it, and so on. And when you started the motors up, you'd start your number one

23:30 and then that would start the boat going around in a circle; and then you'd start number four and that would start the other way; and then you'd start number two, and then start number three, and all the time you're going round. My wife actually went over from Sydney to

24:00 London on a Flying boat when Qantas were flying them after the war and she said on several occasions she took off under bridges. They went hurtling along under the bridge and continued on until they got to the take off speed and then they left the water. But there was a lot of seamanship associated with the airmanship. They had to

24:30 be refuelled in many occasions on those runs, and on lakes and rivers. All the passengers had to come off while they were refuelling, for safety. And once they did a forced landing on her trip to London. They were running short of fuel going against headwinds and they landed in a lake and they

25:00 all had to go off and wait and then come back on. But when they got to Egypt it was the time of the Suez problem between Britain and Egypt. They were put in quarters which had Egyptian guards and floodlights because they were enemy

25:30 in a way, apparently. They just kept a close guard on them and then they were off the next day to London.

You don't fly like that anymore?

No, no.

Is that why Qantas stopped flying them, because they have to refuel?

No, it was uneconomical. Uneconomical, and the [Lockheed] Constellations came in at that time, and they cut the time

26:00 down to two days instead of seven days. At that time I was flying across the Pacific to Vancouver. The flying boats were so slow and expensive it wasn't a proposition to keep them on as an air transport. Though they operated

26:30 out to Lord Howe Island quite successfully and did quite continuous work there. Ansett [Airlines] did that, I think.

Can you tell us about, in your training course at Point Cook, what were the things that you were actually taught? Was

27:00 **it called officer training?**

You were told you were lower than the lowest grade airmen, we had to earn our way up and work our way up. But that was just so you didn't get too big for your boots. But you were taught aviation law, there was commercial law and there was

27:30 navigation and meteorology and engineering and all the aeronautical things that you need to know. We were just continuously doing those subjects. And then at the same time doing the flying and putting a lot of that into practise with the navigation. We'd do flights out to various places and we were flying on

28:00 compass heading and things. And magnetism - you had to allow for variation, deviation and so on. And it was a very sound training, very good.

Was it an eclectic bunch of people, were you from everywhere - ?

From all over Australia, yes. One of our good friends was from

28:30 West Australia and others were from Sydney; but they were from all over Australia.

You mentioned something before about being with Rolard Kingsford Smith, was he in your year?

No he was in my senior course. He was doing a navigation course at Point Cook and I just happened to be flying the

29:00 aircraft on which he did the navigation. He gave me the courses to steer when he was doing his Nav Training. That was a specialist nav training, not just the training we were doing when we were on that course. I don't think it was Astronavigation; it was more or less just ordinary dead reckoning navigation where you were working on the wind speed and the direction

29:30 and we had to do different legs, do what we call a 'cocked hat' - from the headings and the drift that you were doing and you'd calculate your wind speed and your direction from that. In modern aircraft you just push a button and there's your wind speed and directions in the computer, it's staggering.

30:00 **That would have been handy for you?**

Oh yes, it really was, it's spoon-fed now, yes.

Can you tell us about the first time you went up and flew?

That was an A727, a Gypsy Moth, which I did my training in. When I got off the ground, we had communication between

30:30 the cockpits by speaking into a tube, a mouthpiece. The fellow in the other cockpit had headphones on and you'd just bellow into this thing. I unplugged that when I went out on my solo and I just sang as many songs as I could think

31:00 of to myself and just kept on singing and singing and singing until I came round and it was time to come in and land. But it was just a fabulous feeling, you're up there on your own and the world's your oyster, it was terrific.

So you weren't singing out of fear, you were singing out of joy?

Oh that's right yes, it was great.

When you say solo do you mean there was just

31:30 **you and a Gypsy Moth, no one else?**

Yes, the instructor just got his parachute and slung it over his shoulder and got on the ground and said, "O.K. she's all yours bring it back in one piece." So that was my aim.

Obviously you did?

I did. Yes.

The Gypsy Moths were before the Tiger Moths is that right?

Yes it was, yes, yes.

What did they look like?

32:00 They were very similar to the Tiger Moth, just a different engine. But the Tiger Moth was the one that really served during the whole of the war really. For the initial trainer.

After training you didn't have to fly another Gypsy Moth again?

Oh no, no, no, but

32:30 there were two aircraft we could have been put on to, depending on what flight we were in. I was in the flight that had the Gypsy Moth. But there was another flight that had Avro Trainers and they were a similar aircraft but they had a radial engine, a round engine, whereas the Gypsy Moth is an inline engine. And

33:00 I flew the Avro Cadet when I did my instructor's training later on.

Does Avro stand for something?

It's A-V-R-O-E, the name of the firm and it's just AVRO, as the AVRO Anson -

33:30 another very popular old aircraft we had lots of training in. When war began it was our wartime bomber, the old Avro Anson, it was the only thing we had in Australia. And it was a most delightful

aeroplane, delightful, very safe. But

34:00 it had two rotary engines, what they called the Cheetahs, a Cheetah type engine. I had so much time flying the Avro Ansons that when I went onto the Beauforts, particularly up in New Guinea, I put a

34:30 Cheetah on the side of the fuselage and that was my symbol because the Cheetah engine in the Anson had served me so well that I wanted to stay with the Cheetah. I'm possibly jumping ahead here but when I was instructing I went out

35:00 and found the survivors of the Kormorant [German raider] when it sank the [HMAS] Sydney. I was well out to sea and this was in an Anson and it's a very very nice aeroplane.

You can tell us the story; I'm assuming Avros weren't made after the Second World War?

After the Second World War?

35:30 Well we were using them during the Second World War.

Yes but afterwards they weren't used anymore, is that right?

As a matter of fact, East West Airlines started their airlines using Avro Ansons and the very first one they used is in pristine condition in a special building

36:00 at Tamworth airport.

You know your stuff.

I know Tamworth.

Actually could you tell us about that, when you were looking for the survivors from the Sydney? Can you tell us about that?

Well I did a flying instructor's course

36:30 previously and ultimately I finished up over in Geraldton. I was the only one on Geraldton Station that had been in a squadron and so with that distinction they said to take the only lifeboat they had, sort of a plastic rubber one, and

37:00 they sent me out looking for the Sydney survivors. I went up to Carnarvon and then we went out from Carnarvon and the first day we went out and had our track to have a look at a certain area and then back into Carnarvon. Then on the second day I went out on a different area and I found two

37:30 lifeboats and I was quite delighted and elated. I thought, "We've really found them at last." So I came down in a flying pass, and as I came down I thought,

38:00 "Now, these fellows don't look to be Australians." If they'd been Australians they would have been up waving their hands and so forth and no these fellows got down behind the gunwale. I thought, "This is the Germans, and these are the fellows from the Kormorant." Before we left I had a position report of the

38:30 Centaur, which was a ship that was doing a regular run from Perth to Singapore and back. And this time it was on its way back to Fremantle and it was close by so I flew over, intercepted it and with the Alders Lamp I gave the position of these boats and they altered course and threw a line out to them and picked them up.

39:00 I have a book there which has a photograph of the Centaur towing these two boats back to base which is a photograph I took. That's in the book written by an English fellow called "Who Sank the Sydney?" And so they, the German officers, demanded to be taken on board the Centaur. The captain

39:30 refused them point blank; the reason being they didn't realise he had been sunk in the Mediterranean by the Germans before this and he wasn't going to have any damn German on his boat. So he towed them in.

So ironically you saved peoples lives

Yes, yes

They just happened to not be Australians

Mmmmm, yes.

40:00 but when we went out the next day we went out looking for the Sydney hopefully and, while we were going on our heading, I looked at the waves and was surprised to see a bit of froth and bubble on them,

40:30 and I thought, "Gee, that's a bit of a different wind." I did a wind check and found the winds changed and much stronger and the tail wind was pushing me well up further than I had planned.

41:00 I did this trick and then went on and finished at Onslow that day.

Hang on John.

41:10 **End of tape**

Tape 3

00:30 **O.k. John we're going again. If you could continue your story.**

We had a totally different wind to what was forecast and what I'd worked on. Working back to where I thought the wind had started, I calculated that if I continued with this

01:00 wind on this heading I wouldn't get back to land. So I altered course immediately then for Onslow, and then when I came in towards North West Cape I came into a very big dust storm. I could only see my wing tips but nothing anywhere else and passed over North West Cape on ET [estimated time] I hoped.

01:30 I thought I'd give another twenty minutes and hope that we could come out of this. Well, we came out of it but we were over the sea and still couldn't see any coast and there was still a bit of dust storm and then I thought I'd give it another ten minutes, Australia should be south-east of us now. And

02:00 then at the end of the ten minutes I came on an island and it looked like nothing that I had on the map. But the map we had was written in about 1850 and the Japanese had modern ones, done right up to the day. I altered course and assumed this was going to be

02:30 Barrow Island and I altered course. Nine minutes I think it was that I estimated for the flight time to the coast and at the end of nine minutes I saw mangrove trees coming up, so that was the coast. Then I felt if I was at this island, Onslow must be down to the right. So down to the south

03:00 west I headed, back down the coast for Onslow, hopefully. But the petrol was getting a bit light. When I got to what I thought where Onslow should have been, the town was on this side of the river instead of there, and the river was here instead of there, and everything was completely changed to what was on the map. But I saw a big clearing and I thought, "Well, to heck with it" so I'll land and I

03:30 landed on this area and the motors cut just as I landed. Next thing I had a thump thump on the side of the cockpit and a voice said, "Get this thing off the runway!" I fortunately had found Onslow and the runway - but a number of other aircraft landed in salt pans that day and they didn't get back

04:00 safely at all, the wind really sprang up and they didn't pick it out.

Your instincts were very good?

Oh, caution. yeah

If I could take you back to some of your initial training, you went from cadet through to flight commander in a fairly short space of time, about 12 months. Can you just step us through that process -?

04:30 It was a bit longer than that but I did the course and I went to 2 Squadron as I mentioned. From 2 Squadron I went back to Point Cook, flying the Ansons. From there I was posted to Camden to do the flying instructor's course and there I was flying on Avro Trainers and then we

05:00 did instruction training on Avro Ansons. Then we did training on Wirraways. And at the end of that course at Camden I was posted back to Point Cook and I was instructing there on Avro Ansons for a couple of months. And then we went along

05:30 and a number of us picked up Wirraways and we flew them up to Amberley via Sydney. And then we opened up Amberley as a training school and that was in 1940. I had a student who had come through with very good results from Tiger Moths and I was looking forward to good flying training with him. He'd done well with a lot of the work although I took him up on a spin in training, we got up to 6000 feet and then I did the first spin

06:30 and I said, "Righto, now all yours. Go up and just do one spin, just do one spin and come out and we'll leave it at that." So we went up and when you put it into the spin, you ease back on the controls, back, back, back, back, back and the aircraft slowly gets to the point where it's just not going to fly. The Wirraway was noted,

07:00 with the square winged tips that it had early on, for stalling viciously. When you get it up to that point she'd flick very quickly, and the control column - you're easing it back like that - it comes back and hits you in the groin. While I was doing my instructor's course, I had a flight sergeant instructor at the back and I

- 07:30 was an exalted rank of a pilot officer. This chappie was a fairly outspoken bloke, delightful bloke in a way but very outspoken. He'd been very strong with the fellows who had been training with him previously during our course. I was doing the spin and my
- 08:00 training and I felt this thing go whip back in there and I thought, "That beggar, he just couldn't wait for me to bring it back so he's whipped it back on me." So I sat there and he said, "Righto pull it out," and I said "No, you put it in, you pull it out," and he said, "No, pull it out." and I said "No, you put it in, you pull it out." So we went three, four (spins) and then he thought, "Well, alright I'd better pull it out," so he did. And it climbed up
- 08:30 and he said, "Righto, now I'll hang onto the stanchions," which are things up here, "and you can keep your eyes on my hands and then we'll see what happens, o.k.?" I'm pulling it back and back and back and then suddenly it went wham! Back in the groin and his hands were still there. I did one spin and came out and said, "I apologise." But this is what happened with this young lad,
- 09:00 Crosby was his name. I was prepared for it, but not for what happened because I'd shown him how to do it and he pulled the controls back and it stalled and it flicked back. I said after the first turn, "OK, pull it out." The next turn, "Right pull it out." The third time not quite so gentlemanly.
- 09:30 Fourth turn, a little bit worse. After that I thought, "I'd better do something," because I then realised he had frozen on the controls. He's just like this, couldn't budge, and I had to overcome his strength and I found it very very hard and all the time we were going vrrrrm, vrrrrm vrrrrm and thoughts go through my mind,
- 10:00 "If I jump and leave him to it I'm going to be forever picked as the instructor that jumps out and leaves his students to it." So I thought, "That's not for me," so I really put some pressure on and I finally overcame his power and we came out at treetop height, practically. Then I climbed up and he'd relaxed by this time so I gave him
- 10:30 a stalled turn and a slow roll and a few aerobatics and things just to loosen him up and then I let him fly back to Amberley. But when we got there everybody was going round and round, "Not allowed to land" and red Very lights being shot up into the air and ultimately we got green Very lights and things from pistols.
- 11:00 When I came in, my engineers and staff were white faced and I said "What's happened why couldn't we land?" They said, "When the tower saw you spinning down you went behind a mountain and that's the last they saw of you, so they just sent the only ambulance and fire attendant that was serviceable out to pick up your remains."
- 11:30 Then they had to hurriedly get the other ambulance and fire attendants on the line so that other aircraft could come in and land. So that was quite a little experience there - but I well remember the Wirraway.

Did the Wirraway have any other peculiarities about it?

No, that was the main one. They rounded the wingtips later on and it was much better.

- 12:00 I had another fellow on the course there, Don Eisenhower. He was from Sydney. Actually he'd been on my Cadet course and we'd formed quite a good friendship, Don and I, but he always made an 'armchair' of the undercarriage. In other words
- 12:30 he pranged[crashed] the aircraft in some heavy landings and beggared it up each time. So they advised him to go and join the army. But now here it was a year or so later, I'm over at Amberley and I see his name on the list of students and I think it must be Don. Lo, and behold, it was - and I took him as my student. But
- 13:00 I couldn't get him solo because he just couldn't land. Squadron Leader Speed Le Goode was the chief flying instructor at Amberley at that time, an English RAF [Royal Air Force] officer and he asked for the names of the pilots who
- 13:30 had not gone solo. So I gave him the list which, I didn't know, included Don Eisenhower. I just had to get Don off, so at 4 o'clock the next morning we were up. We went round and round and round and round until Don did some good landings because there was no disturbance
- 14:00 of the wind. It was just a calm day, calm morning. And we finally got Don doing good landings. So I got out and my heart in my boots and I said, "Look Don, go off but for heavens sake, bring this thing back in one piece," and off he went and he just did one beautiful landing. And I was very happy and Speed Le Goode came down
- 14:30 later on that morning and said "Right John, where's this fellow?" and I said, "You needn't worry about Eisenhower. He's gone solo." He said, "How come?" "Oh" I said "I did circuits with him this morning." "Were you the fellow keeping us awake this morning?" So anyway that was Don and he got over to Europe and did quite well but he got
- 15:00 shot down ultimately. And strangely enough I flew in TAA with his brother. But I didn't know he had a brother before, but I flew in TAA with him.

Can you tell us what it meant for you as a pilot, in the Wirraways, when they actually rounded the wings, what was the difference in flying the thing?

It was just the stall, just the stall. Your training was to land them, three points; you had the tail down and land them on three points [tail and 2 front wheels]. And you're really landing them on the stall. With the rounded wingtips, the wingtips didn't stall faster than the rest of the plane. And this gave it a better sit with the rest of the aircraft.

16:00 And they were much easier to fly.

Now you were flying another plane before the Wirraways as well weren't you? A Westland - ?

A Westland Wapiti.

Yes.

A Westland Wapiti was our advance trainer when I did my course. It had a thirteen-foot diameter propeller on a Bristol

16:30 Pegasus engine, a rotary engine, and it had a big tailskid about that long and about that wide, of metal, that just sort of dragged on the ground as the tail. And this aircraft was a bi-plane, two wings, like a Tiger Moth but an overblown Tiger Moth. And it

17:00 was really easy to fly. It was built in 1926 for the Indian uprising by the Royal Air Force and 1926 was a long time before. And so she was a really out of date airplane, but the only one we had to train on

17:30 for advanced training at the beginning of the war. That was altered later, but they were a nice heavy aeroplane.

So the only choice you actually had was to do advanced training in that 1926 aircraft?

That was it, yeah. That was it.

You've talked about a number of different engines from each of the planes you flew. Can you

18:00 **give us a comparison on how they compare or rate? Is that a fair enough question - from the Tiger Moths through to the Ansons?**

The Tiger Moth - only a little aeroplane of course; but the Wapiti with the Pegasus was a much more powerful engine but an interesting thing when it's idling.

18:30 The prop looks as though it's almost stopping as it goes. One of the engineers was adjusting the engine one day and after making the adjustment he just stood back about four paces and listened. Then he suddenly realised he was looking

19:00 at the airscrew, at the propeller, which means he had walked through the propeller while it was going and didn't realise it. And he fainted. But that's how slow they idled. You wouldn't like to try it, but he did it. But no, the Wapiti was good, we did sort of dive-bombing

19:30 practise with it and machine gunning and so forth. It was good for that. But it was soon outmoded and other aircraft used.

Did you have, with the Ansons and the Wapitis and the Wirraways, a preference?

The Wirraways, I like them because

20:00 they were the more modern aeroplane and there's a lovely throb to the engine when you're sitting there behind it, it was quite good. The reliability? The Anson takes a lot of beating. But I have no preference for either because they were both good aircraft for their job. It was quite

20:30 pleasing to fly them. We started Amberley and I was there for 6 months or so. Then we were posted over to Geraldton and that's when we opened up Geraldton as a flying school. I went down to Melbourne and picked up an Avro Anson and flew that over to Geraldton, as a number of others did also, so that we could have the aircraft there.

21:00 Then we set to with flying, training there with these advanced aircraft, as it were, in Geraldton. Kojarena was the name of a sheep property, they had a big paddock there that we used as a satellite airfield and it was about 15 miles away from Geraldton. We did

21:30 our circuits and bumps there and it was quite a good training area. Geraldton was a nice flat area to do your navigational trips out round the area and so on. It was quite a good school and I had quite a happy time there. While I was there I

22:00 married my wife, whom I'd met while I was at 2 Squadron in Laverton through Archie Longden. He was the entertainments officer for the air force and he took me one day to have dinner with some friends of his, one of whom happened to be the chairman of the National Bank.

22:30 His daughter was there and she was at the university studying science and living at the University but came home at weekends. I went there a few times on weekends and met up with this lass. And we were going to get married in June

23:00 the next year. But with the war, the transport to Western Australia was restricted to permits only. VIPs [very important persons] were the only people to go over there on the train. Bearing that in mind, and I happened to be in Melbourne on other work for the air force, and I was there over the Christmas

23:30 period, I suggested that we get married so she could come back with me on the train with my priority. And so she had one week's notice to get married. The day we were married was the day she had her degree conferred at the university, so she was a flat out little girl. Had her Bachelor of Science degree conferred on

24:00 her, that afternoon. Later on we were married and then a few days later we went over to Perth and Geraldton.

Can you tell us how you organised a wedding within a week?

I don't know how she did it. I was staying with another friend of mine, with his mother. There were two lads

24:30 Ron and Jeff Cornfoot. Jeff was my cobber [friend] and Ron was a bit older than Jeff. But Jeff was my type of fellow. We liked mucking around with cars and we liked flying and so on. He was flying at that time and so

25:00 Mrs Cornfoot took me as another son and whenever I was in Melbourne after that I always stayed with them. So I was married from her unit. It was quite a nice place there in Toorak [Melbourne suburb] and Joan was married from St George's Court, her street. They're beautiful buildings and

25:30 my wife lived down St George's Road in another home, with big land and so on. And so we went down to St John's Church in Toorak and that's where we were married. I think we went to the Windsor Hotel on the first night there. And it was

26:00 quite, sort of a cyclonic period of activity.

And were you in your uniform for the wedding?

Yes, yes.

And was your new bride able to pull together a wedding dress of sorts?

Oh yes, yes, yes.

With rationing and all kinds of things?

Oh yes, that was no problem.

26:30 She worked that in with her university work and so forth, I don't know how she did it.

She must have been keen?

Yeah, yes.

I wanted to take you back to some of the training we were talking about earlier. Could you describe for us, as a flight instructor,

27:00 **taking up a cadet for the first time in a plane?**

At the stage they'd come along to us, they would have gone solo and they would have experience with the Tiger Moth, so they would have

27:30 a reasonable attitude towards flying and certain responsibility and ability to handle things. We had to just show them the difference - the aircraft's bigger, a bit heavier, and more power and so on. And you had to control it, not it control you. And

28:00 just had to try and polish off the edges and teach them a bit more in so far as aerobatics was concerned with the Wirraway and you'd do stall turns and spins and slow rolls. Then you'd do your dive bombing and

28:30 that gave them more ability to respond to the aircraft and to handle it and feel part of it. That's the feeling that I get and then coming in to land,

29:00 the thing that you just had to concentrate on particularly with that aircraft. With an Anson it was much easier. You just fly them on and they were a lovely gentle old lady, beautiful things to fly, you know for that vintage.

What was it about them that made them so good?

They had a light wing loading and they stalled at a lower speed and they were much more

29:30 gentle and they didn't flick. They were like an old lady lifting up her skirt and sitting down and so on; whereas the Wirraway was like a skittish young girl, flipping around and you had to control it like you do a girl. So it's just a feeling you get with it.

I'm curious - were all

30:00 **planes to all pilots always women?**

It's a funny thing, same with ships too. Always a thing of beauty. Yes it's always the thought when you think, "She's a beauty." It's strange that, but you always think of a ship as a

30:30 girl too. Just a thing of life I think.

Were there a lot of crashes in training?

31:00 Well people have a problem getting their altitude, or the height from the ground, and they can't possibly relate their movement of the control to the movement of the aircraft. Sometimes they'll ease the controls back and stall the aircraft while it's still about

31:30 three or four feet up. But you've just got to sense it. This is what I used to do with the Beaufort Bomber. You were supposed to 'three point it' also. I didn't do a bad job, but it was still a bumpy landing

32:00 that you couldn't avoid a lot of the time. And I'd look at the DC3 aircraft. They come in with the tail up and just sit on their front wheels, their main wheels, and then run along as the tail sits down. I thought, "Heavens why can't we do that?" I don't know whether it was against rules or not, but that's what I did, after I got on my own I always did that wheel landing

32:30 and it was as smooth as I could make it, and the tail set down as gently as I could put it down. And I always prided myself on that.

But you were instructed differently, originally?

While I was instructing I was instructing. When I was on my own, I was on my own.

33:00 **For the record, could you**

33:30 **lead us through some of the general terminology that you'd actually use in training? Like for example circuits and bumps. Can you describe exactly what that means?**

Well it's just exactly what it is. You do a circuit and then you come in and

34:00 you just bump as you land because you're always thinking a student would never 'greaser', never sort of slide on the runway They'll always bump onto it, so it's just circuits and bumps - that's the normal terminology. It's not official, that's not the official terminology.

Well it's the unofficial stuff that I'm interested in because none of it's written down.

34:30 No, no that's right.

So if they skid they'd be doing a 'greaser'?

My very last landing I did in civil flying was a greaser, well and truly. I was a landing on Eagle Farm and it had been raining and the runway was wet and I was in a Fokker Friendship.

35:00 I just had it nicely situated and I put her onto the ground and the water was there and she just sat and you didn't know you were on the ground. That was a greaser, so it was a nice way to finish a career. Yes, so I'll always remember that one.

It sounds beautiful. So if you've done a greaser then you've done a really good landing?

Yes, yes, yeah.

Are there any other

35:30 **particular names of some of the tricks that you would do, that you'd be teaching some of the pilots - that you would call certain manoeuvres and things like that?**

They're mainly just the aerobatics. The others were more or less straight and level flying and navigation and

36:00 bombing, holding it steady on courses and so on. And then air to ground machine gunning and strafing and so on. They were the things that you used the ability that you had to control the aircraft to perform the duty. There's nothing more to it

36:30 than use the aircraft as the tool. It's just a machine there for you to use to do a job.

Can you talk us through how you'd set up a strafing exercise for example. Would you have something on the ground or moving or stationary?

As a pilot?

Yes

With bombing you'd have a target for dive-bombing

37:00 and you'd have practise bombs on. It's rather interesting with the Wapiti; it had wire struts and as you were coming down on a dive bombing attack the struts would vibrate and cause a note and when you got to the right note you knew you were just the right speed

37:30 and you'd drop your bombs and off you'd go. There was music to hear the wires hum out there and that was quite interesting, the dive-bombing with those. But with the Wirraways you just came down straight at the thing and the Ansons they were the same.

38:00 With air-to-air gunnery, that was done by the fellows in the turrets. A Fairey Battle towed a target and they used to aim at this target in the air, so that was the air gunners.

The hum in the struts of the Wapiti,

38:30 **can you describe what that sound was like just before you'd release your bombs, was it a low or a high-pitched sound?**

It was a low, it was a low whining hum. I've only had it with those planes because they're the only aircraft I've flown with that particular

39:00 wire structure.

Coming into position before you drop the bomb, how would the sound, how would the hum be at that stage?

You wouldn't - not until you got down in the dive speed.

So it would only be there at that moment?

Yeah, just when you get to the speed. You'd have, needed

39:30 that wind resistance to cause the vibrations, doing that one sort of speed. But anyway that was a long time ago.

39:45 End of tape

Tape 4

00:31 **I was very interested in asking about your wife coming over to Western Australia. Is that when you'd just finished your instructing course and you were then based at Pearce?**

No, I'd been instructing in Amberley on Wirraways and then I

01:00 went down to Melbourne and got the Ansons and then flew an Anson over to Geraldton. We were doing instructing out at Geraldton. And then I had to go to Melbourne for the air force. During that period, that was in Christmas '41, the 20th of December, we were married. And then we went back to Geraldton

01:30 and it was not until '42 that I left Geraldton and went on to Beaufort Bombers.

And that's when you went to New Guinea?

No, after that I came over to Perth again to 14th Squadron.

How was it having your wife with you over in Western Australia? How often did you see each other?

Oh everynight,

02:00 it was quite quite good. We had a very pleasant time there. And while I was there I saw a light, I'd done some night flying and I saw a light from an aircraft upstairs when all the aircraft were in. I checked with Perth and they didn't have any. It turns out when they then reported it

02:30 to the navy, the navy said, "Oh, the air force are always reporting things, but don't worry about that." But that aircraft was from a submarine and later flew from the submarine over Sydney, about 6 weeks or so later on. It took a survey of Sydney and then the subs, little subs came in and did their job. But

03:00 I saw the little light to begin with, and realised something was wrong.

When did you find that out about it actually being a reconnaissance for the Japanese?

I didn't know that at the time. I just saw it up there and I thought it was strange and then I contacted Pearce who was [RAAF] headquarters for Western Australia. They said they didn't know of anything out there so they contacted the navy and the navy did nothing about it. But

03:30 we thought it might have been something, but there was no proof. Later on it was proved when Sydney got a bit of a visit.

So where were you when the war broke out, do you remember?

Yes I was a cadet at Point Cook. And we rejoiced at the news and we graduated a month later.

That was good timing?

Yes it was, it was.

04:00 **So can you tell us then what happened after your wife joined you then in Western Australia?**

I was there for about 10 months, and then I was posted back to Cressy in Victoria, and we did a general reconnaissance course in Navigation and that was for

04:30 three months. After that I was posted from there to Bairnsdale and did a conversion on to Beauforts. We were all put together and we sorted ourselves out. Two wireless operators got together

05:00 as pals and said they would like to pair, team together. They then looked around and found the navigator and they seemed to get on together and then they looked around for a pilot, and they nailed me. And I think that's the way they did it. So one of them went right through the war with me. Of the other two, one died or was killed in a motor accident; the other one was not able to go into operations so he stayed back in Australia, instructing on wireless operator/air gunner work. I got another replacement

06:00 for him.

Who was the chap that went through the war with you?

Alan Lorimer. He was very very good navigator and an excellent chap. I've learnt since he'd been previously with an American squadron navigating for them. He came on to the Beauforts and he was with me then at Pearce on

06:30 14th Squadron. Then he came up to New Guinea with me to 8 and 100 Squadron. Then at the end of the war, he did architecture at Sydney University. One of my wireless operators/ air gunners, a fellow named

07:00 Arthur Goodall, was living in Adelaide but he's now living in Noosa. So we see one another quite a bit but he's the only other one of my crew left alive now. Alan, after graduation, practised architecture for a while in Sydney and then he went over to London

07:30 for a while and then went to Toronto and to some other place in Canada. He must have come back to Toronto because there's a number of public buildings there bearing his name as their architect. Apparently he was very

08:00 prominent in the architectural world. And he passed away with a heart attack about 15 years ago now. My other wireless operator, who wasn't able to come up to New Guinea with us, also died of a heart attack about 15 years ago here in Brisbane. The other, the one that lives at Noosa, has been with me

08:30 all through - from Pearce right through. The chappie who came through with me to the war, died somewhere near Dubbo I think. He worked on the railways there, so that was it. But Alan Lorimer's sons came out from Canada,

09:00 and he came out to visit his aunt who lived out near Auchenflower. They came here for lunch one day and Arthur Goodall and his wife Cynthia came up and we had quite a happy gathering. And we showed Alan's son some photographs of Alan the navigator and he said

09:30 "That can't be Dad," I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because all we ever remember of Dad was the whiskers." Apparently he grew whiskers when he went to Canada and when they were born he had whiskers, so they'd never seen him without.

Maybe he grew whiskers to keep warm?

I don't know - but he looked quite good, I've got a photograph of him there.

So this little crew that assembled themselves

10:00 **for you, how did you all get on?**

Very well. We went over to Perth, 14 Squadron on posting, and some of the lads went up to Milne Bay to 100 Squadron up there and they had a torrid time. It was the time of that Milne Bay action and the Coral Sea Battle and we were itching to have been up there but

- 10:30 anyway, some of the lads made it up there. And we went to 14 and I went over and became Flight Commander for B Flight in 14 Squadron. We had one fellow as the CO
- 11:00 John Moreton, and later we had another CO - Wing Commander Charles Learmonth. He earned a DFC, a Distinguished Flying Cross, in the Middle East on Bostons. And he had been up in New Guinea also on Beauforts, so he was quite experienced. But
- 11:30 he went out on a training mission with two other aircraft in the formation of three just off the coast here at Fremantle, exercising with a Dutch submarine on anti-submarine work. After they'd finished they were coming back, they were only about a mile or so off the coast of Fremantle, and he called the wing folk in and said, "Have a look at my elevators. I'm finding it difficult to hold them."
- 12:00 He was told by them that the trim tab on the elevators, that's a little part of the elevator which assists in trimming the aircraft, was flapping and it should be firm. And he said, "I can't hold the thing." Then they noticed that it was stuck in the 'up' position. That meant that it pushed the
- 12:30 rudder down, pushed the elevators down and that pushed the nose down. And from a thousand feet he went straight in. That was one of the problems with the Beaufort, the trim tab activator was faulty. I took command of the squadron then because I was next in seniority and my immediate action was to ground the squadron,
- 13:00 cancel flying. The immediate response was a warning from Air Board with a threat of a court-martial, if I didn't get them flying again. I said, "You send me over the bits and pieces and we'll be flying." We had signals backwards and forwards but finally we got the parts and I took one up on my own and did some silly flying, aerobatics with the Beaufort, which you shouldn't do.
- 13:30 I did it right over the aerodrome in front of the boys and it gave them confidence in the aircraft and that's what I was wanting to do. I didn't realise just how much that had been until I was talking to Colin King, he's the Secretary of the Beaufort Association here now and quite a good friend of mine. He was also in 14 Squadron and came up to 100 Squadron. He's been sort of
- 14:00 associated with me for a long time. He's quite a good friend of mine. He said that when they were standing on the tarmac looking up at the 'Boss' or the 'Old Man' as they called me, I was all of 22 or 23, and I was sending this thing through it's movements. When I came in and
- 14:30 landed they all turned to one another and, it seemed to be in one voice, more or less intimated to one another, "Well if it's good enough for the old man, it's good enough for us." And that's exactly what I wanted to do. He told me that about 10 years ago. I didn't know that had happened until he told me about it. Another interesting thing: he and his crew were scheduled and were in that aircraft that Learmonth took out. They were asked
- 15:00 to get out of it to let the CO take it away because he wanted to do the exercise - and that's the aircraft that he took. Colin King and his crew can rest assured that they also would have gone if they'd taken it out. So he thanks his lucky stars in a way, but it's a sorry thing. Learmonth was a very well known and a very good type of bloke.
- 15:30 And in recognition of him, Learmonth Point, Learmonth Airstrip up the west coast is named after him. So that was a very interesting thing, 14 Squadron.

You said you'd asked for some bits and pieces for the Beauforts before you got your men out flying again. Can you clarify

- 16:00 **what you mean by bits and pieces? Were you going to try and change the trim tab - ?**

There was just one particular part which was a sleeve and a piston, shall we say. The piston fits into the sleeve and then there's a pin that goes through and positions them. That should be stainless steel, some of them were found to be dural which is aluminium. That means

- 16:30 it was a fifth column activity, someone put that in, expecting something to happen. The others were put in and they were raised, they had different diameters on the length, they were very small diameter and they had varying diameters as it went
- 17:00 in to fit in to a particular fitting. They were too small, which reduced the strength of the pin, and that's what broke and released the piston or the cover, and it just came off. The fluttering of the elevator trim tab was moving this up and down and then it came out so much and stuck on
- 17:30 the end of the piston and couldn't go back. And that's why the thing stuck in the up position, pushed the elevators down and that was it. And just one man could not control that, it just went. And it was just fortunate that the only American navy ship that could handle

- 18:00 searching stuff under the water, the Chanticleer, happened to be just a mile away from this position where the plane went in at Fremantle. It was able to connect with the aircraft and pulled it up; but the current tore the rudder from the fuselage and the fuselage and the rest went off. They brought the rudder up and the elevators and they were able to find that problem.
- 18:30 **So they would have fixed the other Beauforts and not just yours?**
- When I said I wanted the parts over and we were grounded, they immediately sent them across. We found out later that signals had been dispatched to us about these problems, they had found it out but they were being sent by surface mail instead of by an aircraft
- 19:00 and we didn't get them for five days. If we'd had them in time we could have checked all the aircraft. There was a fellow in Maribyrnong, he was an instructor from Bairnsdale, and he had a dual aircraft and he took off from Maribyrnong for a particular flight, had a sort
- 19:30 of movement in the elevators, did a circuit and came and landed; had a look at the elevators and couldn't find anything wrong. Said, "Well, let's give it a go." They took off again and it really stuck. He landed straight ahead on the golf course and was fortunate that it was the first occasion of that fault. The next occasion was
- 20:00 Blackjack Walker, he was a group captain and a very well known bloke, made quite famous during the war period and after the war as well by the silly things he did with aeroplanes. And he had this problem somewhere around Goulburn on his way into Bankstown. He had a
- 20:30 dual aircraft, so he had someone else that could help him. He reduced the speed and the two of them held the aircraft near the stall actually to reduce the amount of flutter and they finally made Bankstown and did a belly landing. If they'd put the gear down, or the flaps, they'd not have controlled it, they'd have gone in.
- 21:00 That was the second one, and the one that we had with Learmonth was another one.
- You've done exceptionally well, John. You've been able to make me understand that.**
- That's good. And we lost an awful lot of aircraft at Bairnsdale during training.
- Was that a common occurrence in the war? Were they**
- 21:30 **able to take the planes out of the water to reuse?**
- No, no. That was the only occasion that I've heard of. But it just happened that day that ship was there. But during training with the Beauforts at Bairnsdale we lost an awful lot of aircraft that just went out on exercise. I looked in my log book the other day and I said to Joan, "God help the poor crew." Our first trip was a night trip out to sea and this is where we lost so many fellows. Really they were not completely up to instrument flying and I had been instructing for so long. I was an experienced pilot and we had no worries. But other people who are not thoroughly trained on instruments can start looking around on a pitch black night and lose their situation as to where they are. In the meantime, they come back to their instruments and they find they're in a turn, a deep turn and possibly
- 23:00 try to correct it. They can't, they go into a spin - and that's what happened to so many. Others went through with the tail problem; and also we lost another batch we believe, from carbon monoxide. When we were doing the training at Cressy for the GR [general reconnaissance] work, one of the fellows dived straight into the lake at
- 23:30 Cressy. Boom! that was it. They pulled the bodies out and they did a check on the blood systems of the pilot and a few of the others and they found they had an excessive carbon monoxide. That was feasible, in that the aircraft was an English design and in England they had their heaters fitted from the exhaust.
- 24:00 In Australian manufacture we blocked that off, but in some of these it was not blocked off completely and the gas seeped through the leaks. We were advised during the war, always fly with your cockpit window open to keep ventilation. But some of the fellows went in because you're just completely ignorant of what's happening and you're just sort of literally
- 24:30 drowsy and boom, in you go. There was a fellow at Bairnsdale, I think it was Bairnsdale, but Bull Garing was the group captain in charge of the training school there and
- 25:00 this happened. Everyone was a bit dubious about the aircraft and one fellow, a Flight Sergeant, was posted and he turned up a fortnight later than his posting time. He was reported to the CO and Bull Garing called him in and said, "Now look, just tell me why you're so late." He said, "Well sir, when you come to fly flying coffins you went to have a bit of time with your
- 25:30 girlfriend before you go." And Bull said, "What do you mean flying coffins?" He said, "You know the reputation, sir", and they had a talk. Bull said, "If that's the attitude of everybody towards this aircraft - right, we'll get one aircraft and pull it to pieces." And they cured the thing and
- 26:00 that was that. It really was a problem aircraft in a way, but I'm fortunate that I managed it. I had good ones.

It's a horrible thing to realise that so many men were lost in training.

We did lose an awful lot in training. Down at Bairnsdale,

26:30 in the cemetery there, there's a whole list of the crews. There were four crewmembers in each aircraft that went in.

Did we lose so many because the training was quick because of the war, that doesn't usually happen does it?

No, no, that's partly it and the other part was either of these two things that I mentioned, the carbon monoxide and the trim tab actuator.

27:00 But another instance where I was out doing an exercise. I was supposed to go down and do a square search looking for a ship coming in from New Zealand. I was well down in the south and I

27:30 couldn't find anything. It could have been a fictitious thing just to do the exercise, but we were looking studiously for the ship, hoping we could pick one up, but we couldn't. And then we got word that Bairnsdale had been closed with fog so we couldn't go back home and I didn't have a map of Tasmania,

28:00 the only place that I could go. So we went, we altered course for Tasmania and we picked it up on our radar and we were in some bad weather and I came down underneath, got to about 500 feet and I came under it and we found the coast and I said, "Right we'll head down to Hobart and see if we can find that," so we went down and found Hobart and I saw some

28:30 Tiger Moths doing a lot of circuits and bumps there and I thought, "Oh well, the DC3s all go up to Launceston, that could be a bigger aerodrome, I think we'll go up there and stay there." As I said, I didn't have a map. That didn't matter; we'd get on the train line and follow it up. So we got on the train line from Hobart and it's a funny thing but

29:00 trains go through tunnels and we came to a mountain range. The tracks went in the tunnel but we had to go around and then we had to find the train line again. And we finally found the train and we were sitting on treetops at this time because the weather had really closed in. I said to the wireless operator in the turret, "If you see

29:30 an aircraft, an airport or airstrip let us know", and I was flat out just keeping the thing below the murk [cloud] and watching the train line. And somebody suddenly sang out, "There's an airport, Skipper!" I did a very sharp turn, very low and came back and there was Launceston Airport and I landed there.

30:00 And we were grounded there for five days with the fog in Bairnsdale. But I was just thinking, - heaven knows what really could have happened to inexperienced blokes in a similar situation. But that worked out all right, we had a look around Tassie.

So once you fixed this elevator part in the Beaufort, you felt more comfortable in one. Did you always fly with the same crew?

Oh yes.

31:00 The only problem I really had was when I was well out in the Indian Ocean, about 300 miles out, and we were doing a run up over the convoy checking out for submarines and they had the radar going, 1500 feet was the height to do that.

31:30 And we flew at this height and went past the head of the convoy for some distance and then we did a procedure turn, which is a 360 degree turn, and then came back down. But while I was doing that, both my motors cut dead and at 1500 feet I looked at all my instruments, I looked at the fuel gauges, everything looked perfect. And

32:00 I just couldn't work out what had happened and I thought the only one thing for it is to make sure I sit on the water properly. So we had to ditch in the sea, knowing that the ships coming through were told not to stop for us, or for any reason at all. Because if one ship stops, then they've got a problem with the convoy. And so

32:30 we were going to sit there, and God knows what would happen to us. But when I was about 150 feet off the water the motors came good like a lot of tin cans and they made funny noises and slowly they got into a rhythm and I was able to very gingerly ease the throttle forward. At about 100 feet I was able to maintain height and then I was able to climb up again and we continued our

33:00 patrol and went in. But we didn't have any radar. What had happened was the aerial had come off, the high frequency aerial from the mast above the cockpit to the rudder. It had come adrift at the rudder and then with the vortex of the propellers had wound itself around the fuselage and had earthed the radar aeriels to the fuselage which in turn had cut out the ignition

33:30 and the wireless. The fellow in the turret, a very quick thinking little Brisbane bloke, Alan Eadie, immediately sensed what had happened, saw the thing happen. He came back and then the next I knew was he came alongside me. A little idiosyncrasy of

- 34:00 of his was whenever anything was right, he'd just lift his little thumb with a twitch. I always remember poor old Alan came alongside me there in the cockpit and the motors were purring away now and I said "What happened?" And he said, "I turned the radar off." Of course that let the engines operate and we were in business again. But
- 34:30 that was close.
- When you say ditch, what do you mean exactly?**
- Land the aircraft on the waves.
- You had a close shave then?**
- One-hundred feet from it.
- What is the minimum height that the Beaufort can fly; you were talking about the treetops before?**
- 35:00 Over the water, up in New Guinea, we'd be able to look in under the trees because the Japanese put barges in under the trees and put trees over them to camouflage them. We'd get down as low as we could so we could look inside there, and the tail gunner would keep an eye on the tail because I would get so low that I would churn up a wake from the slip
- 35:30 stream of the propellers.
- Can you explain that, churn up a wake - ?**
- When a boat goes you've got a wake behind the boat,
- Yes**
- Well that's what I had from the propellers, I was that low. Another foot and I'd have been in the water. But you just say
- 36:00 he was telling me, "Hold it skipper, hold it!" And I would just hold that height. And then the other chap and the navigator would check in on the coast, checking for the Japanese.
- So that would be the navigator's role, to check out where the Japanese were because obviously you're busy flying?**
- Yeah
- And the**
- 36:30 **wireless operators role too?.**
- You'd sit about 5 feet up and that would be still be OK. But there was a fellow that was in 100 Squadron, this was a few weeks before I went there,
- 37:00 I was in 8 Squadron at this time. He was in a similar thing but he got shot down and they ditched in the water. They got their dinghy, a rubber boat, out of the wing. The Japanese, they were only 100 yards off the shore and they riddled the dinghy and that sank. The Japanese then killed
- 37:30 three of the crew and this one fellow had half his ear shot off. He dived under the water and went for as far as he could and kept going and finally came ashore near a big jetty. Later on he dived into a bomb crater filled with water. He had a straw and he just breathed through the straw as the Japanese milled around.
- 38:00 This was late in the afternoon and he came out that night, out of the water. The doctors say that the water being absorbed in his skin saved him with the ear, otherwise he would have died. But he got out and the next day or so he
- 38:30 robbed one of the Japanese tents of a uniform and got himself fitted up in the uniform. He took eight days dodging the Japanese. Each time he saw a car or a truck or something like that, particularly at night, he would take the ignition out and throw it into the jungle and then put sand in the carburetors or the
- 39:00 petrol or something. And he just kept on doing this, getting information on their positions and where they had troop concentrations. He went to sleep alongside a tree and woke up to find two other Japanese asleep around the tree with him. So he
- 39:30 slowly got up and wandered off and was approached by another fellow with two buckets, going to get some water from the river. He just behaved as though he was just completely mad and irrational you know; he was what we called 'nong nong'[idiot] and the other fellow got so annoyed and exasperated he went off in a huff,
- 40:00 he wasn't going to talk to this idiot any longer. So he continued on for eight days and on the eighth day came to the final river, the Danmap River. He couldn't cross it, so he went out on the beach. He still had

some white parachute silk and

- 40:30 he saw two fighters, they were American fighters upstairs, and waved the parachute at them. They came down and the first one had his finger on the trigger, ready to go at this fellow on the beach. Suddenly the pilot thought to himself, "If that was a Japanese, he wouldn't be standing there waving a flag like that." So he took his finger off and, as he went past,
- 41:00 he saw on the beach 'SOS' [call for help]. Then the pilot behind him, his number two, had the same experience. Within three hours two PT [torpedo patrol] boats came along from base, one started firing at the Japanese on the shore and the other one took another boat to pick him up and brought him out and then took him back to base. And -

Tape 5

- 00:30 located the two boats. On November 27th 1941, and November 28th was when I went out on the third day, finally finished up getting back into Onslow.

Yeah.

Things went very well indeed because when I was in Bairnsdale we had our son, and he was born on September 28th

- 01:00 1942 - and so we had a little responsibility with us then.

And you were able to be close by?

Yes. But in those days we weren't allowed to be close by. No, I was told to just get the heck out of it. So I wandered around Melbourne then, my wife was in the Freemason's Hospital in Melbourne, and so later on in the afternoon I was allowed to come up, but that was that.

A good day.

Mmmm

You were talking to me earlier about how you were looking forward to

- 02:00 **getting into action, to defend the country against the Germans. But can you tell us where you were when the Japanese entered the war?**

Friends of mine were up in

- 02:30 the islands; we decided that we had to look out for ourselves. A friend of mine, Oscar Diamond, was on Hudsons [bombers] just out from Singapore and he sighted the first of the Japanese warships coming. He went in

- 03:00 to attack them and got some bombs on them but got shot up himself and got back to Singapore OK. But that was the start. The Japanese bombed the area around that place a few hours before Honolulu, in fact.

- 03:30 So they entered the war a few hours before the Honolulu episode [Pearl Harbour]. Which is not sort of realised by many.

So do you think there was a

- 04:00 **real fear of invasion at the time - that the Japanese would get to Australia?**

It was a big possibility the way they were coming down, yes. We thought we just had to stop them, but we didn't think they'd have a chance in the world. But when they sank the Repulse and the Prince of Wales,

- 04:30 the two battleships, the English ships which were supposed to be the guardian of Singapore and the rest. The Japanese just sank them and that was that. And when that happened, we knew England wasn't able to offer us any more assistance, we realised then we were on our own, well and truly.

I meant to ask this earlier, did you consider yourself at the time a

- 05:00 **British Subject entering into the RAAF?**

We were on British passports. And all the time we were on British passport everyone recognised themselves as being more or less British subjects.

Were you defending against the Germans for King and Country or for Australia?

- 05:30 Basically for Australia out here, because we had to preserve our country, that was the whole thing. Once the Japanese came into the war we were well and truly in it. While we were after Germany, if I'd have

gone over there that would have been for King and Country, but this is a different kettle of fish.

- 06:00 When it's your own area and no one, such as England, is able to help you, that's why we were able to get into building the Beaufort. In 1937 they thought it would be a good idea for Australia to build these aircraft and they were going to
- 06:30 send out all the tooling and the machinery to help us do that. The war accelerated in Germany, in Europe, to such an extent that they didn't have the chance to do that, to send the things out to us, they were flat out themselves. We then had to make our own engineering
- 07:00 arrangements and the first aircraft came off the line about 1940 and were very good actually. A point to remember here is the workforce in making the Beaufort, 35 percent of them were women and in those days. That was really
- 07:30 unheard of. But they did a hell of a good job and they were rather funny in the factory. I've got a film of it here, of the manufacture of the Beaufort. They'd come in and take their outside clothes off and be in their factory uniform. They'd pull up the line and all their clothes would go up
- 08:00 so that they had more room to work in the workshop. Then the whistle would go at the end of their shift and their clothes would come down and they could – but it was very good. Some aircraft were lost on testing trials and so on, but they did a very good job and they built
- 08:30 700 Beauforts and then towards the end of the war, modified some of them, took the turrets off and made them freighters. After they had done the Beauforts they made the Beaufighters or were making them at the same time towards the end. And they made the Beaufighters, which were a very very good aircraft for their job. In fact the
- 09:00 Japanese call them 'Whispering Death' because they were there before you could hear them, because of the particular engine. They flew at treetop height and they did the same work as a Boston. They'd do strafing and with very big machine guns.
- 09:30 They played a very big part in the Coral Sea Battle with the shipping there too. They were a good aeroplane but the factory also produced the Boomerang which,
- 10:00 within six week of deciding to make it, they produced the first one. And the day they brought it out of manufacture, the first one, it was the most powerful fighter in the world at that time. Within a few months the Americans had built the Thunderbolt which was a much more powerful motor and a big aeroplane.
- 10:30 But we were able to do that and it became an army co-operative aircraft, and we used that up in New Guinea too.

And I guess you made lots of requests to get into action?

When we finished up at 14 Squadron,

- 11:00 I lost one wireless operator, Pat O'Donohue. He had a motor accident helping fix a fellow's car. He was leaning over the car's engine on the roadside and a fellow came and swiped him and killed him. An accident – but that just took him away and so I had to get a replacement for him.
- 11:30 And then Alan Eadie was medically unable to go up north. So I went up with new wireless operators/air gunner and we went up to Sandgate to what they call the hardening course. We did a bit of gym and extra training there and then we went up to Townsville and there we picked up a Beaufort
- 12:00 and we flew that up to Port Moresby and then over to Lae and Nadzab and joined in with 8 Squadron there. And then I earned my spurs by going on operations with 8 Squadron and operating up around the Aitape area, Wewak
- 12:30 area and so on. Ultimately, after the Americans took Aitape, we went in with 8 Squadron and then a short time after I got there I was appointed Commanding officer of 100 Squadron. And
- 13:00 then I took over command and we had a very successful and a very good period. We felt we were the best squadron there. In one particular episode, we were told we had to go and
- 13:30 saturate the Wewak Airstrip – because there was talk of an influx of Japanese aircraft and so on. And so we had aircraft going out and back, out and back about 4 or 5 trips in the day. And as soon as you come back you'd refuel, bomb up, boom, off you go again and so forth.
- 14:00 And at the end of the day we had a padre you may have heard of – Sam Ramsden. He was a Member of Parliament here for a while, but he's passed on now too. And he was my padre in the squadron and that's another tale too.
- 14:30 Lost my trail of that.

The padre? Coming back from operations -

I remember now. He

- 15:00 had another fellow, his assistant who was actually a technician, but he helped him. He was very well versed in racing parlance and he knew the terminology so he made each exercise appear as though every plane was a horse
- 15:30 and every pilot was a jockey. And so everytime you went out and if you got some bombs on the strip - it depended upon the number of bombs you got on the strip - you went forward or back, you see. And you were regarding each trip as a furlong and so he had the whole day as though
- 16:00 you'd gone around about a five furlong race and the winner was a fellow named Hovenden. He was a bit of a foxy bloke so we called him Guy 'Fox' Hovenden. We had a public address system in the squadron and so he put this over as a racing commentary.
- 16:30 I, being the boss, was quoted as number one possibility - and of course they lost their money on me. But the others were coming up, and then the others, and so on and it was really great. I've got a story of that and I've given it to the War Memorial.

How wonderful.

And it's called the Wewak Welter and that was good. Another thing the padre

- 17:00 and I only learnt about 10 years ago - I was asked by Wing Commander Cooper to check on the squadron because it had been reported that my squadron had some sly grog [illicit alcohol]. And I said, "It couldn't have been mine." And they said, "Well you'd better check." So I thought who
- 17:30 could I get to check that's bipartisan, that would be best at it? "Well the padre's a good one." So I got the old padre and I called him 'Bish', and I got the Bishop in and said we had a problem. I said, "Look, check around and let us know as soon as you can." So at the end of the week, he came along to me and said we had no problem here in the squadron. I
- 18:00 said, "Oh that's good. I'd better let them know then." And it was only five years ago, another fellow's eightieth birthday I think, he was telling me that, "Yes, we did have a still," - because the padre needed wine for his services on Sunday.
- 18:30 But he made a profit out of it and he was the one that had the still. So he got rid of it all.

He'd taken care of it?

Yeah. But that was good.

Can tell what your first impressions of New Guinea were like

19:00 in terms of having to fly?

Frightening; the weather was crook and the clouds would build up on the mountains there very very smartly after morning. In the afternoon you had really lots of cloud, rain and so on. And fortunately we were

- 19:30 on the coast and that really didn't affect us until we started doing work inland and then I had to go and drop supplies, food supplies to some of the 6th Division boys who were inland, well inland. And one occasion I was lucky to pull out of the valley I was in because the weather caught us, sucked in
- 20:00 and I had to get over a ridge and it was closing down on it. It was touch and go. The weather was a bit dicey up there now and again, and a lot of people got caught out. Some American fighters going up to New Guinea were flying [Lockheed] Lightnings and they were very very good airplanes. When they left
- 20:30 Cairns or Townsville they were told to just keep Australia on the left and they'd be right. So, keeping Australia on their left, they got up to Cape York and then they came down and ran out of petrol around Weipa, poor beggars. There were, I think, ten of them.

21:00 That's a wonderful story.

Just keep Australia on your left. One of them rolled his aircraft over and fell out because they were a bit of a problematical aircraft to get out of. But you'd get chewed up, it would kill you, if you got out.

These were the Beauforts?

No this was the Lightning, no, heaven knows how I would get out a Beaufort. There's a latch, just alongside the cockpit. But how you'd get up to go through there, I don't know. It would be better to try and struggle out the back; but by that time you don't know where you'd be. But

- 22:00 no, I never had that problem. Fortunately.

John can you tell us of some of the first operations that you were flying in New Guinea with 8 Squadron?

Yes, if Heather [interviewer] will bring me my logbook, which is alongside her, on the other side.

23:30 My first trip - Strike number one was bombing enemy over Mann Plantation

24:00 up Markham and Ramu Valley and down the Sepik River. That was quite a trip, 4 hours and 5 mins on June 9th, 1944 and that was my first one. And then I did a trip from Nadzab to Moresby and my

24:30 port engine cut out; but later I was able to get it going again. And then Strike Number Two was on enemy troop concentrations 25 miles away; and then another one was enemy troop concentrations in the same area, so that's on the following day.

25:00 And harassing the enemy motor transport overnight in the Wewak area. We'd go there and one of the things would be to get beer bottles and put a razor blade in the neck of it and just drop those over the side. They sounded a screeching noise as they came down, you'd think all hell had let loose, and you'd think one hell of a big bomb's coming down. We used to throw a lot of those out

25:30 and they'd give a hell of a fright to them. And that keeps them awake too, of a night time.

Would you do that at night to keep them awake or would you actually do that as a tactic to keep them quiet?

Oh, that wasn't official, that was just a thing

26:00 that we designed, that worked. If you kept them awake and deprived them of sleep then that was good. They'd be sleepy the next day and the 6th Divvy [Division] could have a much better go at them.

Were there other little tricks and tactics you picked up along the way that proved to be really useful?

Ah little ones yes.

26:30 I'd been on a bombing mission from Aitape up to Maprik, which is behind Wewak, and I had General Stevens on board. He was the officer commanding the 6th Division in that area. And he wanted to see the area itself. As we were coming down one of the rivers there, I was right down on the water more or less, trying to give him a bit of a fright. And

27:00 we were coming along and suddenly we saw some soldiers having a swim and a bath and washing clothes ahead of us. They were waving madly to us and we waved back to them. After we got back, ten minutes later, I got a phone call from General Stevens who said they weren't our boys, they were Japanese, get your boys up.

27:30 We got the Boomerangs [fighters] up there but the fellows were all gone.

You learn quickly. Were there any

28:00 **particular operations that you did with 8 Squadron that stand out as particularly difficult ?**

No, they were all much of a muchness. We were operating from Nadzab initially but then we shifted over to Aitape later on. And then 100 Squadron was more or less

28:30 the same thing. But it was jolly good; there's Brandi Bridge. We had to bomb that for a particular reason and we took movie shots of it and strafing and recce [reconnaissance] and we demolished the bridge. But

29:00 we were told on Karua Island there was some concentration of troops. We went and apparently smashed it completely and we killed about 50 blokes, so that was the report. But that's the sort of thing.

As a pilot in operations like that, when you know you're flying low and strafing, what's a pilot's

29:30 **picture of an operation like that ?**

How do you mean?.

Well in terms of what you would see?

I had guns myself in the wings and the navigator had two guns in front as well, so we go in that way and then

30:00 the gunners would take the side as we went past. They'd have a go at the rest of it as we went along. Other times we'd go along the coast and we would just be sailing straight ahead, we wouldn't shoot at anything we'd just leave it for them. But they have a waist gun and then there'd be the turret gun.

30:30 **You mentioned that you had a very steady crew. How did they all get on with the ground crew?**

It paid you to get along very well. Because they ensured you life, they looked after your aircraft;

- 31:00 you regard your aircraft as yours and they regard that aircraft as theirs, also. They want you to bring it back as good as you can but they will do everything they possibly can to rectify any damage that may have happened to it so that their aircraft is up to the mark again. It's a loyalty to their own aircraft. And between the two, the crew
- 31:30 and the air and the ground staff, it was good. So it was a very good point if you had an excellent ground crew. You can picture the effect on the crew, because you get very close in association with them,
- 32:00 when a crew doesn't return. And I had my share of that too. I had a crew that got shot down and something happened; they just never returned. Those fellows waiting for their aircraft, it was sad.

Can you talk us through some of what you saw during operations like that?

They get to know the pilots, the crew, the gunners, the armourers, the wireless operators/ air gunners are well versed in the armourer's job as well, and they get very

- 33:00 close, and you're a little family. Each individual aircraft has its own individual family and if you lose that aircraft, you've lost a big part of your family, that's the feeling. And I was very fortunate
- 33:30 in that I didn't have to encounter the feeling. After I left the squadron another friend of mine took command, Hughie Conaghan. I might add, there was another fellow who posted himself to my squadron who had been in Postings (a headquarters position). They were told that the senior officers
- 34:00 have to get out and get experience in the field and he posted himself as a group captain to me in my squadron. At the time I was a squadron leader and there's quite a jump between a squadron leader and wing commander up to group captain; so you owe a hell of a lot of difference to your group captain. But he came as a pilot. He said, "I'm just an ordinary pilot." But he put a tent alongside mine
- 34:30 so that he would have a tent there, and also have a tent down the end in the line for his crew. And he said, "Where are my crew sleeping?" and I said, "They're in the crew line." He said, "Is your's down there?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Is everyone else down there?" and I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, I'm going down there too." So he went down and all his crew were flight sergeants and flying officers or something of that nature. And he
- 35:00 did a hell of a good job there. But after I left, he was flying in a formation with Hughie Conaghan leading it and there were five of them in the formation - the leader, two, and another back here.
- 35:30 A friend of ours, one of the pilots, his name's Fowler - we used to call him 'Chookie' Fowler - was just flying along sitting there and they came to the time to release their bombs. He released his bombs and the next thing, his whole aircraft went up. Instantly
- 36:00 it left the aircraft it ignited the bomb and blew the aircraft to smithereens; and this group captain had to fly through the debris, which nearly took him down too. That happened to three or four aircraft with faulty bombs, just after I left. They were old bombs that they had decided to use. Now you can just imagine the
- 36:30 feeling in the squadron. And then going up the next day to do bombing and wondering, are my bombs going to be the same? Some more blew up as well. But no, you get know very close.

As a Squadron Leader or commander of such a large group, how would you personally deal with the crew that didn't come back?

Conaghan immediately recalled his whole flight back to base and they had a survey. In fact they went so far as to come back down to Melbourne

- 37:30 and we went through armaments and armour tracings and they finally located what the problem was. And the group captain and Wing Commander Hugh Conaghan went down to Melbourne and sorted that out; and then they came back and they got on with the job. But that was disastrous.

I can tell

And the brother

- 38:00 of that fellow Fowler, he's retired now in Canberra and he is doing a lot of work with the Beaufort in Canberra, looking up records and things, and he's doing a very good job. We've just had a Beaufort unveiled down there that they've reconstructed
- 38:30 for static display. And that aircraft is one that I've flown during the war. We're very disappointed because they put it up as a display, just the shell, the motors and so forth, Now they've taken it back to the workshop, taken the wings off, and they've got onto other things and they're leaving
- 39:00 foreign aircraft in the war museum. We're very unhappy about that. But I'm chairman of the Beaufort reconstruction group for A9141, that another aircraft I flew during the war. We're rebuilding that
- 39:30 out here at Nundah. They've been on the job for 15 years and all they need is money. That's coming slowly and slowly. And a lot of the work done on the aircraft in Canberra was done

40:00 by us here and sent down there. That was the work done to earn money to finance the building of our own aircraft.

Can we just pause there?

40:20 **End of tape**

Tape 6

00:31 **While you were in the 8 Division, did it occur that a couple of the men you trained as students had died; did you hear much about the students that you'd trained during the war?**

No, no, most of them went to Europe and I didn't hear much of them.

So other than

01:00 **is it Don Eisenhower - ?**

Well Don was a personal friend, but the others - I put through hundreds of students. But it was interesting that just recently when I was awarded the Ancient Aviator Award for having achieved 85 Orbits of the Sun.

01:30 I was presented it in front of the Retired Airline Pilots Association annual general meeting at the Gold Coast. As I was going back to my seat, one of the retired pilots stood up and said, "Captain Kessey, you mightn't recognise me, but I was one of your pupils in Geraldton."

02:00 Another one stood up and said, "Captain Kessey, I was one of your first officers." When I was a first officer after joining civil aviation, a few of the others also notified me, so it's sort of made me feel - well it's nice to be around.

Did you remember any of them?

No, no.

02:30 it was a long time ago.

Did you have any particular favourites though? Other than Don?

Not really, my favourites didn't finish the course. One of them Buzz Benson he went off,

03:00 I think he joined the army. There was another chappie, Don Johnson. He was flying Wirraways soon after our course and he spun in [crashed] at Laverton. It was only a few months after our course which

03:30 was sad to me because we'd been together for so long. Other fellows went over to London and I didn't see them again. You know, you just take things as you go.

As such a very experienced instructor, was there a certain kind of personality that made a good pilot?

04:00 Yes, I think you had to concentrate and have some judgement; judgement was the main essential I think, and patience. And if you combined those then you're a fair way

04:30 to becoming a reasonable pilot. Experience taught you the rest.

Can you tell us more about New Guinea and what happened there?

Well I can tell you more from 100 Squadron

05:00 point of view because I was only with 8 Squadron for a couple of months. But I was with 100 Squadron close on a year. And flying with 100 Squadron in New Guinea at Aitape was pretty constant. We were always on the job because when we first went there the Japanese were only about 5 miles

05:30 or so out of the airfield and there were a lot of crocodiles around too. When we first went there we'd take off, get the gear out, bomb bay doors, bombs away and bomb bay doors close; then come round, gear down, flaps down, land. And then you'd bomb up again and say they were really close on and we just had to support the 6th

06:00 Division soldiers who were forcing them away. Actually it was the American forces initially, and of course they took Aitape and then the 6th Division came in later on. The Americans, when they got the Japanese back to the main river - about 10 miles away - they held

06:30 the position there and that was what they were told to do. Every so often the Japanese would attack from the other side and come across and the Americans would retire to what they termed 'prepared

positions'. They would leave the Japanese to go into their camp take everything they wanted, then they'd go back.

- 07:00 The Americans would come back again and the next morning urgent calls back to base saying, "Please supply such and such things, urgently required." The Americans would then send a DC3 back with supplies to drop down for these fellows and this kept on going. I
- 07:30 asked the Americans why they needed so many constant supplies and they said, "Man it's rugged out there. The Japanese come along and they take all your gear and you've got to go back" and so on. When we found out, one of our fellows went out on patrol and saw what was happening. When the 6th Division came in we told them what was happening.
- 08:00 They went down and took over from the Americans under cover of night so the Japanese didn't know there was a change in personnel. Then when the Japanese came across again, the Australians in 6th Divvy just withdrew around the camp and put an encircling arrangement in and they ambushed the Japanese and not one of them got back over the river.
- 08:30 And a funny thing, nobody ever tried that again. They were quite happy to stay their side of the river but we never lost equipment that way anymore. But 6th Divvy did a terrific job going through there. When I had General Stevens on board and he saw these fellows
- 09:00 swimming in this river where they shouldn't have been, he said, "Look they shouldn't be up this far." I had a faint suspicion they were coming up before they should and then asking could they do it. They'd go up and take a hill or a position, and then radio back to base and say it was unoccupied, could they take it? Permission would come back and they'd take it - yet they'd have it already. This is how
- 09:30 they leap frogged all the way. Of course they were Japanese this particular lot that we saw with him. But that's the way the way they (the 6th Division) went ahead - apart from the general progression of fighting, getting towards Wewak and so on. But now and again they got the opportunity they'd go out and take a hill,
- 10:00 and that was it.

I've heard a few stories of the Australians being sent in in the eleventh hour to help the Americans out at certain points That's another incident.

Yes, I've often heard it said that the Americans are extremely good if they've got British on one side and the Australians on the other.

- 10:30 **You went from the 8th Squadron into the 100 Squadron. Why was that, and why in such a short amount of time?**

I was only sent to 8 Squadron to get experience before I took over command of a squadron so I could command the squadron with a certain knowledge of what was necessary.

- 11:00 That's why I was with 8 Squadron. When I had done the operations, I knew what was necessary and only with that knowledge can you be in command of that situation. We were asked to bomb an anti-aircraft gun site, which had a nest of twenty
- 11:30 guns, some very large guns, at the back of Wewak, at Boram. The main task would be to drop a smokebomb on the target area and that was a bit of a dicey [risky] job. You can't ask someone to do a job that you haven't done yourself - so I felt that was my job. I had the squadron go upstairs -
- 12:00 6000 feet - and get organised for the bombing. I came in over the hills at the back of the site much faster than I should, but I thought the faster I go the less chance they've got of getting me. I dropped the smokebomb and as soon as the navigator said "Bombs gone!"
- 12:30 my starboard [right hand] engine stuck. I had to close the bomb bay doors and feather this airscrew and then decide what I was going to do - whether to stay down low out of range of the anti-aircraft gun, or possibly run out of steam [power] because of the extra weight of my bomb load.
- 13:00 Or I could go up and be a sitting target, but take my chance. So I went up and I climbed to about 1350 feet roughly. I was able to do that with the speed that I had in the port engine and I levelled out and we went over then to
- 13:30 what we term the second target, or a target of opportunity, over on Muschu Island, just off Wewak Point. We lined up on this target with the navigator steering me onto it. We released the bombs and it was just on jungle. We couldn't see anything, it was just jungle, but it was a map reference. Working on just that, it showed how good the navigator was.
- 14:00 We dropped the bombs on this jungle and up came the fuel; it was a fuel dump and it went exploding everywhere and everyone was excited. But with only one engine I now had to try to get home. I told the crew that now was the time if they wanted to jump, while we were over land.
- 14:30 They said, "What are you doing Skipper?" I said, "I'm going out to sea. I'll try and get back to base, but

I don't think I will." The aircraft wasn't known to fly very well on one engine because of the weight. They said, "Well, we're with you." I said, "Everything out you don't want." My wireless op, told me at Noosa, he took great delight in getting rid of one of his radio sets that he hated.

- 15:00 He threw it as far as he could. And then he tried to get through and tell Aitape what had happened and what we were doing. He tried Moresby, he tried Aitape, and strangely enough Townsville came up.
- 15:30 Townsville caught his message because there's a certain skip effect in the atmosphere to that particular type of transmission at certain times of the day. They relayed the message to Port Moresby who replied to us, but we couldn't hear them.
- 16:00 Then Merauke came into it. Merauke's on the south-western part of New Guinea and they came in and tried to get in touch with us, Finally when we did get word through to Aitape we were in their circuit area. It took us about an hour to get word to them. And when I got to Aitape, normally you land from west to the east, but
- 16:30 I didn't have the height and the ability with the one engine to manoeuvre and turn round and come in that way. I asked the tower to clear the place and let me come in from the east, but there was an aircraft coming in from 8 Squadron and they were told to go round again. But obviously they weren't listening out and they just kept on coming in and then I had to
- 17:00 make a decision whether to land on the crash strip and bugger up my aircraft, or try to land on the runway that was left behind this aircraft. I elected to do that. I dropped the gear and the flaps and I side-slipped the aircraft, which you never do with a modern aircraft. But I had to lose height quickly and I just pulled out of the sideslip as I went over the top of this aircraft.
- 17:30 The first thing the tail gunner on that aircraft saw was my tail. It had come right down past his rudder. And we were going a bit fast at the end of the runway but I was able to turn it and come in on the taxiway. And we sort of got home OK. But it was a quite interesting flight.

What does slide slipping mean?

Well it means

- 18:00 you put the aircraft on it's side and it slips down and you lose a lot of the lift. You're slipping down and you're still going forward. Then you level out and that brings you back into your lift on the wings and it takes over again. You don't normally do that in a modern aeroplane but
- 18:30 this was a different situation.

Were there a lot of cries of joy that you landed safely?

Yes, yes we were very happy about that.

Did you figure out why you only had one engine left?

Yes he shot it out with a bullet. It went right through the cylinders and ruined the engine, just stopped on me. It was from the

- 19:00 anti-aircraft gun, using one of those shells.

Luckily nobody was killed.

Yeah there would have been four of us.

So how long were you there in New Guinea?

I think it was about 9 months or 10 months, something like that.

And were you operations getting more and more risky as the

- 19:30 **time wore on?**

No they were all more or less the same

Can you share with us any other experiences like the one you just told us?

Well I'll think of those as we go along.

And during this time also you'd had a son?

Yes

Was your wife still back in Perth?

No she was

- 20:00 in Melbourne.

And how were you dealing with being so far from your family?

It had to be acceptable but some of my activities were reported in a Melbourne paper, where my father-in-law was the chairman.

20:30 So she was kept in news of me through the paper itself. They had their reporters up there.

Did you get to know any of the men of the 6th Division?

I've been in touch with

21:00 a number since the war and some were with the 10th Squadron Commandos with the 6th Division. I went to the 50th anniversary of their formation down near Coffs Harbour. They gave me a beautiful painting of a Beaufort which is on the wall there

21:30 and I've also joined as an honorary member of the 17th Brigade of the 6th Division. They meet up the Sunshine Coast. My wireless op/air gunner, Arthur Goodall, came with me to one reunion

22:00 and he was talking to the secretary of the 17th Brigade about their experiences during the war. It turns out that Arthur Goodall, as my radio op, was talking to the 6th Division fellows down below when we were coming in on a bombing mission. The secretary of 17th Brigade was actually the person

22:30 to whom he was talking during that landing. They were quite amazed to meet up with one another and of course very happy about it.

23:00 **How was it that you were kept in contact with this particular 6th Division? They were obviously in New Guinea at the same time you were, so were you often doing support for them?**

We were doing a lot of army support for them, yes. They would want to take a position and they would give us the reference point for that position and we would come over

23:30 and bomb it. The 6th Division fellows would be up in the dust as it was settling. The

24:00 Japanese, who'd have gone down the side and escaped from the bombing, were coming back up after the bombing. But the 6th Divvy boys would have been there before them and they just took command of the position and got rid of the Japs. And that's the way we co-operated with them quite a lot. Of course we'd come in and do strafing as well.

24:30 We were doing an awful lot of army support work with the 6th Divvy. As a matter of fact, it's in one of their books; they've quoted us as being the field artillery that they couldn't have during New Guinea campaign. And I went on board

25:00 HMAS Shropshire which came up to shell certain positions of the Japanese and we were bombing as well. It was quite a concentration and I went along as an aviation representative on the Shropshire to co-ordinate things with them. It was really good because I had a marvellous meal with them,

25:30 a bit better than bully beef, which we had, it was pretty rough tucker. [poor food] But you're mentioning another incident, the one of Tisattoe [?UNCLEAR], attacking the anti-aircraft gun nest.

26:00 That was quite an important one for the whole of us because it got rid of the anti-aircraft up there. They were so accurate with their bombing, with their anti-aircraft work, that they invariably got practically everything they went for. But some of the Americans coming to Aitape were mistaking Wewak for our

26:30 place Aitape which was a hundred miles further on. As they were coming into land they suddenly saw a Japanese aircraft on the strip. They'd open up the throttles and go off, but a number of them were shot as they tried to get away then. But the Americans were not known for good navigation. And there was one fellow, Cam; he was coming from Hollandia,

27:00 which is now Jayapura. They were going to Finschhafen and they landed at Madang and it was a coral strip and he landed in a B25 and he got out. He was a colonel in the American Air Force and he started to roar hell out of everybody

27:30 saying "What the hell have you done with the Marsden matting on the strip here? What have you taken it away for?" And they said, "Excuse me sir, but where did you want to be?" He said, "I know where I am. I'm at Finschhafen." They said, "Sorry sir, this is Madang. And Finschhafen's 150 miles further down the coast." You come into Madang and then you go out

28:00 and into Finschhafen. He'd taken the wrong turn. But that happened quite a bit.

Was that your primary concern as a pilot, as a flier, the anti-aircraft guns?

With us up there at that stage, yes, but before that when they had been fighting over in Rabaul and from Goodenough Island and that area

28:30 we'd had a lot of opposition from the Japanese Air Force and the Zeros and the bombers. Particularly in

the Milne Bay do [operation] as well. One of the fellows on my course, Peter Turnbull, CO of 77 Squadron, unfortunately ran into the tops of coconuts when he was trying to get into the Japanese at a particular part in

29:00 the Milne Bay offensive. And that's why one of the strips up there is now named the Turnbull Strip after him. They did a very good job up there and that was quite a hotspot.

Did you come across any opposition in the sky?

29:30 fortunately I didn't encounter that because it had been done away with, they'd killed them all, or shot all their aircraft out. We had a period there with aircraft on the Wewak strip; but we went and shot them up before they could become active. And then we bombed the strip completely and

30:00 it wasn't possible for them to bring any aircraft in there. And whenever we'd see that happening we'd go and bomb the strip again. So that we mainly were doing army support work for the 6th Division, helping them get along all the way through to Wewak.

Was there a time John where you were close enough to see the

30:30 **Japanese being killed by the guns on your plane?**

Not really. Might have seen a few sort of ducking, they might have been shot I don't know. Don't always get results because

31:00 it's difficult to find out what happens in the enemy's lines. When the 6th Division boys moved in, then they can see what the devastation was that we caused and that's when we find out what damage we did. But generally, we didn't know what we were doing, we were just given a target and we'd attack at the target and we didn't see any physical result

31:30 except the whole thing being blown up or something. And as to whether we hit people there, Japanese, and we got anybody in particular, then we wouldn't know. We'd just wait until we had the 6th Division boys go through and find out.

It must have been a frustrating process to a certain extent, going in and

32:00 **taking orders and doing what you needed to do and then not knowing exactly at the time - ?**

Well you just get conditioned to that, you do your job and what's the next one? That's the way it goes. Where do we go next?. Sometimes you had to go back and do the same place over and over again. It's gotta be quite a hot spot and they wouldn't leave it all together. But

32:30 anyway it's just the way it went, you'd do the job and hope that you did some good for the war effort.

Did you write to your Mum and Dad and tell them that you got promoted to wing commander?

I don't know that I did. I might have told my wife

33:00 but I told them when I got the Distinguished Flying Cross.

What did you get that for, John?

Well it was for attacks on Wewak and the one engine performance and general operation of the squadron. Actually I think the squadron earned it more than me but it was really

33:30 a top squadron. I have a feeling, I've got no proof of this, but I have a feeling that the group captain from postings that was in the squadron there would be the one that initiated that. He was with me and came out on quite a lot of the missions and saw what I was doing and so on. And he would be in a position

34:00 to do that. He later became air marshal and Sir Valston Hancock was his name. He got knighted and became chief of the air force. As Air Marshal. he used to fly a bomber or fighters,

34:30 so he was able to go round to all the various units, particularly the front line ones. In the Malayan conflict, the Communist [Insurgency] and so on after World War II, he would fly himself up there. He loved flying just as much as I did I think, possibly more if it's possible.

35:00 I've got his book, his biography, and I'm staggered at you know what actually is the story there. And he was a very nice bloke and unfortunately he's passed on too. Most of my close associates have gone, that's the problem of myself, left without many of them around.

35:30 **The downside of being healthy?**

I guess so, but I got my little great grandchildren now, it makes a big difference.

Did you receive the DFC while the war was still going on, or did you receive it after the war?

Oh, the war was still going on. I didn't have it presented until after I had finished with the 100 Squadron.

36:00 But when I left 100 Squadron I was posted to Commanding officer of the Brisbane Fighter Sector, but I wanted to go back up north on operations with the Liberators [bombers], I wanted to get into the war itself. And the air force didn't feel that way. They said "No, you've done your turn;

36:30 you've got to put your foot under the table." And I said, "No, I want to fly." I was asked if I wanted to fly with ANA and that's when I left the air force and joined civil [aviation].

Did you have to be in the air force for a certain amount of years? When you join up, do they say you have to be there for 7 years or 5 years?

37:00 One of the reasons I did this was because we were on a short service commission and I was told, given to understand, that they were going to demobilise everybody, the short service commission fellows as well as the others that joined up. And I thought well, if I was going to be demobilised and go and find a job in civil, I might as well find it now while I could. And

37:30 that was basically why I left but I find that I'm the only one that did that. Others that stayed weren't demobbed at all. They went through. And I could have. I met up with Val Hancock in a Toorak tram after I joined ANA and he saw me in uniform and he said, "What the hell are you doing in that? And I said I joined ANA" and he said, "What for?"

38:00 I just have a feeling now as I think back on it, he went back into postings and I feel that he had things organised in his mind that he wanted for me. He had me posted to do an administrative course later on and now I've got files back I see what they had planned and so on. But as to whether

38:30 it would have happened I wouldn't have known. Well I had a child and was married and I just felt I had to go for security. So that was basically why I left the air force and it was the worst thing I did, because I'd loved to have stayed in.

So you made the choice to leave because

Family

You were providing for family?

Mmmm.

Was your wife concerned that

39:00 **you were still flying?**

Well, when I married, I told her my first love is flying. I've also told my second wife the same thing. She throws it up at me quite often and I say that's the way it was. But oh no, she was with me all the way, she was a darling, she really was.

39:30 **Well it's interesting that your son went into engineering and stayed on the ground?**

I tried to get him into flying and he did a certain amount of flying but then I said, "Before we go too far into it now, let's get you to do a full medical," and I found out that his eyesight was a problem, and he wouldn't pass the medical. So he said he wanted to do engineering.

So he did have a love for flying like you?

Yes,

40:00 yes.

We'll stop there John before the tape.

40:04 **End of tape**

Tape 7

00:31 **John you were going to tell us about discovering and meeting up with Takahashi again, the fellow that shot you down?**

Well, did we do the tape where we did the episode there and I got into Aitape on the one engine and so forth?

Yes

We got that.

Yes.

01:00 But much later, say we go right through now to about 1965. I was in New Guinea, flying in New Guinea and a friend of mine was the head of the jail in Wewak.

01:30 He had an area under his house, a unit or a flat, and Japanese generals came from Japan out to do a war graves commission job, trying to get skulls, bones and things and take them back to Japan. And this jail fellow, McFarlane was his name, pointed out to the generals the actual

02:00 position where this gun nest, or anti-aircraft guns was. Taso Takahashi it was, said, "Oh yeah, mmm, mmm, mmm, a bit doubtful and dubious." Anyway about two or three months later, he got a letter back from them saying, "It's true, Captain Kessey, it is true, it is true." So

02:30 the district commissioner [local government official] met up with these people too and they invited him to Japan. He went over on holidays once and the generals took him along to meet Taso who took him home and he had a beer with him, a whisky He said he gave him a bottle of Black Label Whisky and

03:00 then as a result of this I said, "Heavens, what's his address?" and I thought I'd better write to this bloke. So I did and ultimately got a response back. I later realised that the letters were written by his son who spoke English and had just married and gone to Los Angeles for his

03:30 honeymoon. But we corresponded for a few years and then I wrote another letter and said, "Neither of us are getting any younger. I think it's about time we met up." I think it was about 1976 that I went across to

04:00 Tokyo and then got a bus from Osaka to Kyoto. I went to the Britannia Hotel and walked up to the

04:30 reception desk. I looked at the lass behind the counter and I saw on her dress the name Takahashi. I said to her, "I'm possibly looking for one of your relatives. Here's his card." She said Takahashi in Japan is like Smith

05:00 in Australia. So she rang the number anyway and in due course he came down to the hotel and I saw him wandering up and down. I had an Australian squatter's hat I always wear and he came along with a letter of mine and waved it in front of me. And I said, "Yes."

05:30 And he said, "Oh, so, he come." And he couldn't speak English, of course, and I didn't know Japanese. So I just followed him and we went off. He thought he'd make a holy mess of me because he took me to various Zen

06:00 churches whatever. I showed him a card belonging to a passenger flying in New Guinea, who was a Zen Buddhist monk in charge of a particular area. And he said, "Oh, friend, friend, friend." So we went and saw this fellow. Every time we went to one of these church places

06:30 we had green tea and so I was just up to here with green tea and they were really fabulous places we were going to. We went to this fellow and he was very very happy, and he spoke English; so we had a bit of a time there and some more green tea. And so finally we had lunch

07:00 at the Royal Hotel in Kyoto and his son was there. He had another one of his Kyoto fellows from New Guinea that had been in the service with him up there. And he produced a map which is a silk map as though it had just come off the press, beautiful, mint condition and

07:30 it was one that he had during the war. It was of the Wewak area and he had the whole thing in detail. Now I mentioned before about the 1880 maps that we had. Well all the Japanese maps of that area were accurate as we saw later on. And also their knowledge of this New Guinea country

08:00 was spot on and he produced this and said, "You come, you come?" and wanted to know how I came down on the gun. I told him I came down, got the hill and then came down like the bat out of billy-o and so on. Later on

08:30 I said to him "Savvy pisin?" and we continued our conversation then in pidgin English. I went to his place for the night. His wife

09:00 put me what they call the tea room. And he said, "No, no, no, I had to go." I thought, "Oh Christ they're throwing me out already." But they took me next door to a two storey brick building that they had built. He had taken over from his father as president of a kimono factory in Kyoto

09:30 and they built this building for parades for their mannequins for their kimonos. And so we sat down to dinner and we started off with he put a bottle of Black Label whisky in front of me again. I had one whiskey and he said, "Oh more, more."

10:00 And I said, "No, no, one." And he said, "Mr Whiskey he go home, more, more." I thought, "You didn't get me last time, you're not going to get me this time." So I left it at that and ultimately I had to go to my bedroom -

10:30 and finally in came a mattress, in came a chair, in came a lamp and that was my bedroom. And so the

mattress was on the floor, it had some blankets and things on it. That was it but I slept with one eye open I think that night.

Why was that?

I wasn't going to let him get me that night either. I wasn't

11:00 all that settled. He was being pleasant, but so was I. The next morning I looked around for the bathroom and there was only a bit of a wash basin so I used that to the best advantage and then I left him and went off. I joined another captain, actually from the Japan Airlines, who had been flying

11:30 on contract with ANA or Ansett in New Guinea with one of their aircraft. I think it was a YS11, they called it. I stayed the night with him then in Osaka and then I went back to New Guinea. But

12:00 when he realised I knew pidgin English, that was a big difference.

Can you tell me about picking up pidgin English, as a you know as a pilot in the RAAF. How much contact did you have with the natives?

I didn't learn that much in the air force but he did because he was army and he was with the natives. I wasn't with the natives. I

12:30 picked up English because I went up flying in New Guinea well after the war and I was dealing with the natives. And I had a houseboy and he spoke pidgin also. And also the cargo boys loading the aircraft - you had to talk pidgin with them and you just had to learn pidgin. So no that was quite simple.

Did you

13:00 **experience much I guess hatred of the Japanese in the services when you were in New Guinea?**

Oh yes.

I've heard and read a lot, but from your experience - ?

If the Japanese had caught my crew, if they'd jumped out at Muschu Island, they would have

13:30 cut the sinews behind their legs so that they couldn't walk, bayoneted them and then left them on an anthill nest, and that was it. They would have left them to die there with the ants.

14:00 Some (Japanese soldiers) picked up on the fringe of the camp, they were coming around to do snooping and sniping, had cooked fingers and they had slices of the leg of Australian and American soldiers and they just mutilated bodies and this is what they had.

14:30 We had, in general, a big hatred towards them. It was rather amusing one night though we were watching an American film at the American part of the camp and then suddenly we became aware of the fact there was a Japanese up the tree. He was enjoying the picture too; he got short shift.

15:00 **What happened to him?**

I don't know. The Americans took him, I didn't ask.

How did you find the Americans in general to deal with, you said before they were renown as poor navigators but?

Oh they were quite good but I'd never like to be under their command, I think I'd prefer an

15:30 Australian command.

Why was that?

Well I trust the Australian Command. The Americans, they mean well but I think our fellows have got more of a sense of better army control with discipline, ability and so forth.

16:00 They've got the armament, they've got the power, they've got the might. We don't have that; we have to use our initiative and that gives us a bigger edge I think. This is why in this last campaign, that's still going on in Iraq, all our hundred odd soldiers went over there and every one of them came back and they were in

16:30 dangerous areas but they looked after themselves. The Americans are getting killed one after the other.

And half the time it's by their own men?

Well that's right, friendly fire. Well you know the, if you look at that Beaufort there you'll notice that the rondel [identifying badge] on the wing is blue and white. At the

17:00 beginning of the war it was blue, white and red. I suppose Rabaul was the worst illustration. We would go in and do a bombing mission over Rabaul and then be coming out and the Liberators would be going in to have a go, to finish

- 17:30 it off or something. And we'd go and waggle our wings as we were going past to say, "Well, she's all yours man," and as we'd do that they'd brrrrrrrr! [gunfire] and what was happening. They saw the red in the middle of our cockade [badge] and they immediately took it for a Japanese. So we took the red out, and that's why you've got a blue and white. But
- 18:00 the Americans are good fellows as long as they've got the armament and the might. But I enjoyed being with them and I enjoy their company, but they've got a long way to go to get up to the British and Australian standard. Although they've got the power and the personnel, I think we still have the edge.
- 18:30 **John I'm just wanting to know if you ever experienced or saw any fellows who suffered LMF [lack of moral fibre] during your time in the islands - ?**
- I've had, I think one, one member who
- 19:00 we actually agreed was not happy up there and not there for the job, not able to do it, and he did come back. But the majority of the fellows there, every other fellow was really there for the job.
- How would you know he, that fellow, was being affected or wasn't performing. What would he do?**
- Well he'd be going out on a job and always come back with engine trouble, one thing, never get to the job. Another was general attitude.
- 20:00 And sometimes if it's left, the feeling can generate to the other members and you just have to watch for it, that's all. And just by conversation you pick up fellows feelings and so on. But that's
- 20:30 about the best way.
- So it's more of a subtle scrutiny I guess?**
- Well yes and also the Padre can help you there. He's got a close association with the people and if they've got a problem they come along and tell him. Then it's up to the padre, if he thinks its needed, to contact the CO and say, "Charlie's not really going to be up to it and
- 21:00 good idea to sort of post him somewhere." So that's the best way to do it.
- Did you find that many of the aircrew or even ground crew, or yourself, were superstitious?**
- A superstitious lot?**
- No.
- I've heard tales of crew having to**
- 21:30 **urinate on a certain wheel, or walk around a plane a particular way, before they'd go out on an operation?**
- Never heard of it.
- Really?**
- No.
- Oh, o.k.**
- Didn't do it on my wheel, anyway!
- You'd hope not.**
- No.
- Can you tell us a bit about being a wing commander and just the leadership that's involved in commanding such a large**
- 22:00 **crew?**
- Oh, it's just a matter of maintaining morale and I'm not too sure whether the other squadrons did this, but I always had a squadron parade once a month and I think some of them thought I was a bit of an odd
- 22:30 wig because on a battlefield you're going to have a parade. But I feel that having a squadron parade you smarten everything up and you get things organised properly and you all come on parade and you have things orderly. You're all one group and you feel as though
- 23:00 you're a unit instead of just continuously doing your jobs in your own little sector. Here you're all together and so on. I just felt that that was a good policy and I've got photos in there of the parades. I don't recall anyone objecting to it but I know it wasn't appreciated all the time.

- 23:30 But from a morale point of view it was good and kept everyone on their toes. For instance if some of them wanted to go without shaving and so forth, well that was a no- no. Everything had to be spic and span for the parade and had to be inspected and so on. If you keep things up
- 24:00 to a reasonable mark they'll stay there too, mostly. They'll come down and then up again. But if you don't have that, then the standard would just drop and drop and drop and drop. My thinking is that you have your method. My method was to have a squadron parade once a month and that was it.
- 24:30 **What would be the worst of that job, as opposed to being a pilot?**
- Well it was just the administration really and I wasn't noted for my administration. A fellow from the squadron actually wrote a book called
- 25:00 something - grew wings - Beauforts Grew Wings or something and he criticized me as being an excellent pilot and leader but lacking in administration. But
- 25:30 I felt t I had a very good staff there and my job was out on the field and so that was what I concentrated on. But if you have a CO that never goes out and never flies and never puts his neck out, well you don't get the regard from the squadron. But if you go out and join in with them, and the risks and the
- 26:00 possibilities of meeting up with everything, you're really one of them and they're one with you and you get their respect. But if you just want to sit in a desk and play with paper, you lose the respect and I just worked on that. Maybe I was right, maybe I was wrong I don't know but we were the number one bomber squadron.
- What was it about 100 Squadron that you think made them such a good squadron?**
- 27:00 Well we had such a history. They were first in the do [action] at Milne Bay and actually the history of 100 Squadron comes from our motto and emblem - the skull and crossbones. The motto is in Malayan, but in English it says: 'Do Not Disturb The Hornets' Nest', and that is the existing motto and emblem of 100 Squadron RAF in England. Now they came out in Singapore during the war period there and they were shot
- 28:00 out of the sky with very antiquated aircraft. The Japanese just slaughtered them. The remnants came to Australia and we faced up with the Beauforts coming online and so the RAAF formed a squadron with the nucleus of these RAF 100 Squadron and called it 100 Squadron
- 28:30 RAAF. We then considered that we were continuing the history of the RAF 100 Squadron and so we kept their emblem and motto and unfortunately we didn't register it with the folk in London to be ours. Therefore we don't have an emblem,
- 29:00 but we still use that because that's what we have. But you'll never be able to get it from any of the shops or places that sell memorabilia because it's not recognised and we formed 100 Squadron. The first job was up to Milne Bay and they did a very good job
- 29:30 and then came back and reformed and they went up to New Guinea again. They'd been the number one Bomber Squadron, Beaufort Squadron, all along and they've had extremely good blokes in it. It's just got the reputation and we love to have the association with the
- 30:00 100 Squadron RAF. But 10 or 15 years ago I read the RAF Aircrew Association Book (and I belong to the Aircrew Association) that the 100 Squadron RAF were holding a reunion, and I thought, "Heavens above,
- 30:30 100 Squadron is still going over there." So I wrote to the secretary, a fellow name White, and I told him of our situation - we considered that we'd carried it on and we didn't know that they had reformed. I got a letter back saying that they had reformed and they were very active, they flew Lancasters after that and even now they're
- 31:00 operating on. We went over to London when I went for the Freedom of the City of London and I just missed out on meeting up with the Squadron at York. They'd just gone the day before to Germany on a mission. We've kept up a relationship there but generally speaking I just feel that it's got
- 31:30 a history and a background to it that we feel is important. I wouldn't belittle the others but I just feel that ours is something.

How did the British feel about - ?

They were fascinated, they didn't know we existed.

Right.

We didn't know they existed, and we didn't know they existed so

That's wonderful.

they were quite interested in that.

- 32:00 **During your campaigns in action, what does the motto of 'Do Not Disturb The Hornets' Nest' mean for you?**
- Well it meant don't cause us any trouble man, or you'll know it. And no, it was good. Yes, we're very very proud of that even though officially
- 32:30 we don't have it; but we do and I've shown you the thing we have in the office there.
- I think it's even better, more enigmatic.**
- Yes, yes, yes.
- You talked about meeting up with Takahashi years later. I'm curious what**
- 33:00 **inspired you to seek him out and make that trip given that you actually didn't trust him late at night?**
- No, I wouldn't trust any Japanese. I'm honest there, I don't trust them. But my feeling towards the general Japanese is that I treat them as anyone, anyone else but
- 33:30 I don't hold them responsible for what happened. But I hold their government responsible for not informing them of what happened because their younger generation know nothing at all of the war. Joan was telling me last night there was a film there on T.V. about Japan
- 34:00 and they consider themselves as being the victims and they just didn't know anything about Honolulu. Let's forget that sort of thing. They didn't know anything, or didn't want to know anything, about what the Japanese had done elsewhere and the atrocities and all the rest of it. But we -
- 34:30 or the Americans - dropped the bomb and we killed an awful lot of Japanese but we saved an awful lot also by doing it; not just Japanese but Americans and everyone else. Because the Japanese Army just would not see light and face facts and give in. And it would have gone on and on and on and on. And it staggers me but the general Japanese I
- 35:00 quite get along with, and I quite like I suppose, but I just have the feeling I would never trust a Japanese.
- Did you ever, hear or see any Australians getting their own back for what had been done to local soldiers in terms of - ?**
- No, no.
- 35:30 **(BREAK)**
- 36:00 **The work that the Australian forces were doing in the islands and at that late stage in the war. I've read accounts that because of what Macarthur had done, and moved up to the Philippines, there was feeling that what was happening in the islands was a bit unnecessary and a bit of a mopping up campaign. Was that something that was present**
- 36:30 **where you were?**
- Well we felt that we were doing a job that had to be done. If we didn't do it, if nobody did it, then the Japanese would just grow and grow again and you'd find that they'd be a sore festering behind the troops that had gone right through.
- 37:00 This trouble could become quite a big problem and it just had to be done. That's the basis on which I did it, and I think the majority did. We were grossly disappointed that the Australians weren't permitted to proceed into that particular war and they were held back behind a certain field and a certain area. That
- 37:30 the Americans just wanted the fame and glory of being the ones to go through and do the rest after we'd helped them. They more or less said, "Well OK brother, thanks so much. We'll go on and do the rest now," and that's the way they do things. They take the help they can give them and then they go and take the glory. But
- 38:00 as for New Guinea campaign, Australians thinking about that get a bit hot under the collar - and it is hard to take in a way in that we should also have been allowed to have gone on. If we were doing this and still doing and going on with them
- 38:30 that would have been different. But we were stopped and we were told to just clean up the dirty backwater and the Americans would go on and do the rest. The Beauforts, in the South West Pacific area, dropped the biggest tonnage of bombs on the Japanese than any type of
- 39:00 aircraft in the South West Pacific - and that's both Americans and Australians.

Wow

So with all their big aircraft we actually did more concentration and heavier bombing than any of the other aircraft types in the operation. So I think we earned our spurs.

The Australians had a very good reputation.

Mmmm.

39:30 **O.k. we'll pause there John.**

39:32 **End of tape**

Tape 8

00:31 **John we were going to talk about this wonderful Christmas card, that somebody in your crew actually designed it, is that right?**

That right. My navigator, Allan Lorimer.

Can you tell us what happened?

Yes, it was Christmas 1944 and he designed this Christmas card and

01:00 we had as many of the aircrew that were available to sign on the back of it and the wording was, "Have a Merry Christmas, Happy New Year and a quick return home. We would also like to take this opportunity of saying how much we appreciate working

01:30 with our own Australian troops and particularly with this the 6th Division. You may reassure that we are looking forward to assisting you further in every way we can, good luck and good hunting. Christmas 44." And then I had as many of the crews sign on the back of it there. And it was

02:00 dropped to the 6th Divvy front line with some goodies, Christmas cheer for them. It was saved by the lieutenant who was in charge of the troops at that point and later I was able to get a hold of it and had a copy made and I have this here, it's really quite a memory.

What were some of the treats that you dropped

02:30 **for these men?**

Oh well I don't recall correctly because I wasn't there when they put them all together. But I think they might have put some beer in there too, and hoped that it was packed away and then some cakes and things like that. Would be the main things.

Not bully beef?

No. Bully beef - they'd had enough of that.

And what about you, did you spend Christmas in New

03:00 **Guinea 1944?**

Well it's an air force tradition at Christmas time, on an air force base the officers always served the Christmas dinner to the troops. So at Christmas time all the officers were in the mess serving the troops.

03:30 **Like a soup kitchen?**

Yes and it was well received that way. Yes.

So what happened towards the end of your time in New Guinea for the 100 Squadron?

Well I don't know that anything in particular, we just kept going with this, with the bombing

04:00 program and that was it and then I was just posted out and the new Commanding Officer, Hughie Conaghan, who was on my cadet course with me, was posted as Commanding officer after me and I was posted down to the Brisbane fighter sector in Brisbane. The position I didn't really think was a very good one for me, I wanted to go back onto operations with Liberators

04:30 or something more active up near the front line. That wasn't to be. I was told to put my feet under a desk. But as the war was coming to an end, I was given to understand that we would be demobbed with the rest of the troops. I had an offer to join the airlines, so at that stage

05:00 I felt - having a family, wife and son - I better look after security so that's why I left the air force and joined civil.

Had the war been declared over when they decided to put you in the Brisbane fighters?

No.

No, so the war was still carrying on -

It still was going on for the next few months, yes.

So no wonder

05:30 **you wanted to be back on the front line.**

Yes, oh yes. I didn't see any reason why I couldn't go back, but the air force did.

Maybe they were afraid that they'd lose you if you stayed there any longer.

Well I don't know, but I'd dearly loved to have gone back on operations there, but it wasn't to be so I had to look to the future.

06:00 **How did they put it to you that your time was up and it's time to move on?**

Well, it was just a bald statement that everybody was going to face demobilisation. I mean by that, all the people coming back from Europe, and there were quite a lot coming back from Europe at that time, and also because they'd had their

06:30 victory there, and we were coming back, it was just obvious that we were going to be facing a problem. But as so happened later on, none of my particular course was demobbed and I could easily have stayed there, but it was a risk

07:00 that I wasn't willing to take, that's all.

Were your crew sent back as well John?

Yes, yes.

And were they just as annoyed as you?

Well in a way yes, yes. But the crew was broken up then and that was that. Anyway that was the finish of the war.

And where were you when the war was declared over?

Melbourne.

07:30 **How was that?**

Well it was quite a relief to have the whole thing finished, but you could see that it was coming anyway. How it finally finished was quite good because you could then get on with the rest of your life.

Well your wife, no doubt would have been happy to have you home I'm sure?

Yes, well it was good

08:00 to be back and have a family life again, it was quite good.

Can you tell us, what was life like for the Brisbane Fighters?

The Brisbane Fighter Section?

Fighter Section?

I don't know, I didn't take the appointment up. So it wasn't for me, I wanted to keep flying.

I'm just curious, what is the Brisbane Fighter Section?

08:30 I assume it was just that they would have access to fighters in case there was an invasion of sorts, which was highly improbable at that particular time. But still it had to be kept open. I suppose you never knows what happens in war and the tide can turn and you can be left on the table.

09:00 It's something you have to keep til the very finish.

So tell us what happened then at the end of the war?

Well I joined ANA and I got my command on a DC5, which very few people know about

09:30 A DC5 is a Douglas Aircraft, they built 12 of them and then the word came through that due to the war, they had to cease making the DC5 and they converted that into

10:00 a bomber. You may have heard of a Boston Bomber and that was the development of the DC5. So instead of the DC5 they boosted it up and converted it into a bomber and it did a very very good job with the Boston, it had a very good reputation. In fact Wing Commander Learmonth, when he was in the Middle East and

10:30 before he came to us at 14 Squadron, was on Boston's in the Middle East, earned a DFC there on those.

When you talk about, in years prior, that a lot of aircraft were lost in training. How did the government work that out, did they say, 'So many planes

11:00 **we'll put aside - in case they crash in training'?**

Well they have to allow a certain percentage of aircraft that are lost in training, you can never tell what that number would be but you have to be prepared for it. You try and prevent it but nevertheless it will happen, particularly in a time

11:30 of war like that. And you have to just keep pouring the aircraft out and hope that you keep ahead of the depletion and keep building the stocks. And this happened in England with the Spitfires; they kept building more Spitfires than were being shot down which was why they were able to really build them up and keep ahead of the

12:00 Germans and really astounded the German because they didn't expect to see many Spitfires there and ultimately they had so many Spitfires there they just won the war.

How did you settle or didn't settle back into Civvy Street after

12:30 **being so busy and in action for quite a while?**

Well I found civil flying was quite interesting with ANA. On the DC5 we were doing trips around Victoria and down to Tasmania and Sydney and so on. But after a year of that the

13:00 Air force friends of mine who were associated in the formation of TAA [Trans Australia Airlines] had asked me if I'd come and help them form the airline as I had so much experience with airlines since the war. So I went across and, of about 7 or so people recruited, I was the only one that had had airline experience and

13:30 so I was responsible for training the ex-airforce fellows onto civil airlines operations. We used to go out on DC3s from Melbourne up to Canberra and then into Sydney and back. We'd be taking Mr Coles, A.W. Coles who's the chairman, to Canberra on negotiations quite frequently and that would be part of

14:00 our training. After about 3 months of that I was appointed as senior route captain, the first senior route captain for TAA and at the time of course we were operating from Laverton Airport because the airfield at Essendon, which was the main airfield for Melbourne, was just a quagmire and there were no runways there. They hadn't been thought of. And

14:30 Laverton had a concrete runway and so both ANA and TAA were operating out of Laverton. We were based there and on one particular occasion I was testing one of the pilots checking him for a position as a training Captain

15:00 and this particular fellow had been over in Geraldton when I was instructing over there. He'd been over there as a pilot, so I knew him, Tex Richards. I was taking off with this fellow and in the co-pilot's seat where an instructor sits. So he was doing the

15:30 takeoff from the right-hand seat which is an unusual seat for a pilot because you like being in the left, you get more use to it. When we were taking off we got to just 5 feet off the ground and suddenly the port engine, the port airscrew, just sheared off its boss and it just went madly ahead

16:00 of us at the same level, just five feet off the ground. We were getting up speed to do our climb and we felt this wrench. I had my feet and hands feathering the controls just in case anything happened, not that I expected it but it was always safe to do that in training. And I instantly

16:30 took over and applied right rudder, I don't know why. But that swung the nose to the right which is the only reason I'm here today. Normally when you lose your port propeller like that, the starter motor pulls you, turns the aircraft. Into that other side

17:00 the propeller comes and chops the cockpit up, and that's the way it mostly happened. Well, I think I was about the third one to survive that type of accident. This propeller kept going ahead of us and we were trying to get speed up so we could climb and then as we were doing this the propeller started to slow

17:30 down and we were speeding up and I wondered what the hell to do now. I was so low that I couldn't do any ordinary turn because the ground was too low. And I thought I'd do a skid turn and just as I was about to do that the propeller did a peel, it went straight up

18:00 in the air and then got to the top and came down and it landed on another DC3 and chopped the wing off. It so happened that this other DC3 belonged to the Royal Air Force, to an air commodore from the RAF, who was out on a trip to Australia, and we'd taken his wing off.

18:30 I just continued climbing then with this one engine and we got up to height and then did the circuit and came in and landed. With the speed which we had we did our landing run and continued over to the base, to the office. One of the fellows thought that I had a jet engine in the

- 19:00 port side. But that was just a little incident that happens, very unique, initial training there. But to start the airline off, after we'd been doing training for 3 months, we thought we'd get going. Wing Commander Hepburn, who gave me instruction when I was doing my conversion on the Beaufort Bomber, he
- 19:30 instructed me on that and so I instructed him on this. I thought he'd be an ideal fellow to do the first service for TAA, so I appointed him onto that and he did the first run – Melbourne, Sydney, Melbourne – and opened the airline. And then on October 1st, a few months later, I did the first flight to Brisbane from Melbourne,
- 20:00 through Sydney. We went up from Melbourne to Sydney on the 29th or 30th of September; and on October 1st we left Sydney and came up here (Brisbane) to get here about 10-30 in the morning. If we'd been doing from Melbourne it's three hours and a quarter to get to Sydney; and then three hours and a quarter to get up here; which is 6 and
- 20:30 a half hours. Half past three in the morning you'd be leaving Melbourne, which wouldn't have been very pleasant for the senior executives, so that's why we did Sydney and then we finished up here with that service, and that was on October 1st, 1946. And that started the TAA going. That was quite a good trip, we enjoyed that.

It would have been a wonderful experience to be

- 21:00 **part of the first major airline in Australia?**

Well it was, yes.

Did any of the other air force men do civil aviation like you?

Oh, a number did yes, a number did yes. Well as I mentioned there's John Ryland, group captain, during the air force, he was the operations manager for TAA when we started up, and John Chapman was one of the senior executives also he

- 21:30 was another group captain. Both of those gentlemen have passed on now. And Doyle was another, he's gone too. There were so many of them now, they've all passed on. In fact I find it hard to find people around that are still with me.
- 22:00 When I was doing that one run, I was going out from Sydney on a DC3. The weather was foul and we took off and straight into it and then when we were getting up around Coffs Harbour I just couldn't believe my accuracy, just sitting on a course and not having to work and steering it in the turbulence.
- 22:30 I doubted it, so I thought I'll put an error in, so I put on left rudder and I looked at the instrument, the gyro, and it still stayed on the right, the same heading. It was the same heading when I went around and then I put on right rudder, so it's still the same heading. In other words the gyro was not working. What had happened was it had so many pummels and bashing
- 23:00 with the turbulence that the bearings had ceased. We were at night time and in heavy cloud and rain and stuff. And so I asked the first officer to get me a bearing on a radio station back in Newcastle. He got the bearing.
- 23:30 We wanted to go this way straight ahead, but this bearing put us out here and that put us out over the ocean. I said to get us a bearing up around Lismore or Brisbane. So he got the bearing and it came in and put us about 30 or 40 miles out to sea off Coffs Harbour, which is the worst area for
- 24:00 thunder storm activity in that region. So I thought, the radio compass needles were waving around, we had to take a mean from them because of the electrical disturbance of the thunderstorm activity. It's not as accurate as they have these days. I altered course then to try and come back and intercept the track I should have, continuously
- 24:30 getting bearings from the various stations. And so I felt that I was back on track. In the meantime, Brisbane were calling up wanting our position. I radioed through to them that we were going around thunderstorms and we finished up back, landing in Brisbane about half an hour late. But,
- 25:00 you know, it was quite a night.

It's funny to hear the other side of the story. You're a passenger and the plane's late you say, "Oh what's the captain doing?"

Yes

But he's dodging thunderstorms.

Yes, it was quite interesting.

Can you tell us the story of the Indian that got into the nose of the plane?

- 25:30 Well after I was with TAA they were opening up the Pacific run which was owned by the government and had been operated by ANA under contract to them. They now wanted

26:00 their own airline which was called the British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines.

26:30 We were just starting off the airline, owned by originally England, New Zealand, Canada and Australia; but Canada pulled out and started off their own airline, Canadian Pacific airline and New Zealand pulled out,

27:00 so it was only Australia and Britain. And then Australia finally bought them out and it was just Australia. But it was British Commonwealth Pacific Airlines, BCPA. We started off with the DC4's that we had operating from TAA and it's under the same management as TAA and Australian Airlines Commission. And

27:30 we then went out on the run to Fiji and after a stop there we'd go to Canton Island and arrived about 4-30 in the morning. We'd leave at 5-30 and from there to Honolulu. Then we'd change crews and another crew would go on from Honolulu to San Francisco and then to Vancouver and that was in DC4's

28:00 initially and then later we got the DC6. The DC6 was a very very superior aircraft because it was pressurised and we could fly at 25,000 feet which was its limit then. And get over a lot of the storms and trouble that we had. The aircraft had a nose wheel

28:30 then the fuselage went around the side and it had two tunnels where a person could sit comfortably there, completely enclosed on either side of the nose wheel, which was in another cover. We would pull up at Fiji for 4 or 5 hours for a rest while the aircraft got maintenance by the engineers

29:00 and quite often the Indian lads would come around and talk to the engineers and muck about. And on one occasion I was flying a DC6 up to Honolulu and as we were doing the engine run up before take off I found that number one engine didn't really come up to the mark completely.

29:30 I asked the Flight Engineer, "What do you reckon we go back and get this checked?" and he said "No, that will be OK, but, instead of going up to 25,000 (feet) we'll sit at 19,000 and we'll get good power there," so that's what we did. And we then went on, refuelled at Canton Island and then went on to Honolulu. And when we got there, at half past one that afternoon,

30:00 I went to bed and was having a sleep when the phone rang. It was the Immigration Department from the American office and they said they wanted me down there straight away. After I'd had a shower and organised myself, I was confronted as I went into their office. I was asked to locate my friend who was possibly among a lot of people in a glass window. I said I had no idea who would be there, and I was told, "There's an Indian friend of yours out there." But what it all amounts to was that there

31:00 had been an Indian lad who was picked up on the airport and they said how did you get here? And he said, "I came on a Pan American flight from India." They checked on the Captain and grilled him and finally agreed that it wasn't him and then he said, "I came on a ship." They went with him to pick out a wharf and they said.

31:30 "That's interesting because that's a coastguard wharf and there hasn't been a boat there for two months." And so they finally settled it down to the fact that he came on my aircraft from Fiji and had come in the nose section, near the nose wheel.

32:00 He waited until everybody left the aircraft at Honolulu and then climbed down out of the nose and because he didn't know his way around the Honolulu airport, security didn't take long to

32:30 pick him up. And that's how he got picked up and he told them that he'd given me pearls and diamonds and things, various things to let him come to Honolulu. And then they asked me where were the pearls and diamonds and why would you bring a person here against the immigration? And I was really on the mat. Anyway that was finally proved that I had no idea of any

33:00 of this and we checked with the aircraft when it was in Vancouver. They had a look down that tunnel alongside the nose wheel and there were scraps of his sandwiches and biscuits there, confirming that he had come in that section of the nose wheel. And so he was then sent back to Fiji and the police in Fiji found that he had left a pushbike at the end

33:30 of the runway where he'd ridden up to wait until we got there and did our run up and that's when he got on. But that was quite an interesting period.

Were you paranoid from that moment on everytime you flew that someone was going to stow away?

Oh no, He was lucky, we were sitting at that height because had we got up to 25,000 he wouldn't have been alive, lack of oxygen

34:00 and he was just so lucky that we had this problem. They found it was a birds nest, that a bird had started to build a nest in the air intake and they took it out at Honolulu. But that was that. But the DC6 was a lovely aeroplane, they're talking about sleepers being a modern invention here but

34:30 we had them in DC6. The single bunks came down from the ceiling and the lower bunks made up into

double bunks and the curtains came down like a Pullman car from the top and they came down and they isolated each particular section and people got into their pyjamas and went to bed. The single bunks enabled you to segregate the sexes and so everyone was happy. Even when we landed at Canton Island

- 35:00 they still slept in their bed. There's no tying them down like we do these days and buckled up. And they got breakfast in bed and then they got up about 7 or 8 o'clock and got dressed and at half past one we arrived in Honolulu and that was that.

How did you cope with the time change in your travel, constantly?

Oh that was no worry.

- 35:30 Those particular aircraft, those flying in those times, it's not as devastating to a person as it is with a jet. See it took us 12 hours to do that leg from Honolulu to San Francisco; they go from Sydney to Los Angeles now in 13, 14 hours.
- 36:00 Well it took us a good six or seven hours to Fiji and another 6 hours to Canton Island and then another 6 hours or so to Honolulu plus the stop times and so forth. And then 12 hours there and then another 3 hours or so to Vancouver. But the time difference didn't really
- 36:30 amount to that much in those days as it does now.

I didn't ask you before about your religious beliefs, did you have faith that everything would be o.k. or did that all not come into play?

I had faith and confidence, faith in everything but

- 37:00 confidence in the maintenance and then in my ability to handle the situation if any did arise. Because the training that you get in flying is really extensive and exhausting and you get regular checks and you're really kept on your toes all the time. And you've got problems thrown at you
- 37:30 during your checks, such as a fire in this engine, a fire in that engine and lack of this or so forth, an oil problem or something like that or a high cylinder temperature, what would you do and how would you handle it? And all of these things you do these every so often, checks. And now these days of course it's totally different. They have simulators and they can
- 38:00 actually do these things to the engines and you then have to do the correct things; but of course with the modern aircraft particularly the airbus type aircraft, they're even more simple because the aircraft itself is designed so that it corrects problems and then tells you what it's done. It's fantastic, I just can't believe it but
- 38:30 this is the way a modern aircraft is handled now. But you're still checked on these things and if you've got a problem you've got to be able to, in the dark, hit the right things and make sure that you're doing the right thing and know the correct procedure to handle it. So that you're really quite confident with anything that would come up. The only thing would be if you lose a wing or something, but
- 39:00 if you do, well you just say amen.

If you could fly any aeroplane now, if I could just give you an aeroplane what would you like to fly?

A 747.

So you didn't get to fly a jet?

No, no. I was too old. They had a limit when they'd let you go onto the jets. I left flying later on

- 39:30 and it was bad luck. But I loved the Pacific run. We opened the service from Honolulu to Auckland through Canton Island, Fiji. In fact I did the first run as my training endorsement.
- 40:00 It's interesting that to do an endorsement on a run now, say the Pacific run, you've got to do it on the simulator and you've got to do several, maybe about 6 runs or something like that, before you can be endorsed. For my run, I sat in the cockpit in the third seat, watched the take off from Sydney, watched the landing at
- 40:30 Fiji, watched the takeoff there, watched the landing at Canton, watched the takeoff, watched the landing at Honolulu and then we did the same thing down to Auckland, the same thing back to Honolulu, I didn't touch the thing at all, I was just watching and they said, "Now you're endorsed. Now you can take the next service home." So that was the way that I learnt my endorsements.
- 41:00 End of tape

00:30 **O.k. John can you tell us, share with us what it was like to return to New Guinea after the war and flying around that territory?**

The weather was a big problem. But there was a big development in the country and I was

01:00 flying back on the old DC3's, Bristols Freighters and Fokker Friendships, just carrying passengers or freight. But on one occasion I was flying a load on a DC3 and left Madang and I was going to Mendi in the Highlands. Mendi's 5,000 feet above sea level and

01:30 we were after Hagen. After we passed Mount Hagen we encountered a lot of cloud and to get above it we had to get to 14,000 feet which you don't. You're not allowed above 10,000 legally, but still this was New Guinea. And we were sitting on 10,000 feet and there's a hill, a mountain right alongside us which is 14,000 feet high, and that was in

02:00 the cloud. I was doing a bit of navigation now, merely from mental navigation from what I had done before in the clear and I flew down from Hagen towards Mount Ialibu, which is eleven and a half thousand feet high, and estimated my time there and then turned on another track that took me around the other side of

02:30 Mount Gillawe which is 14,000 feet. Then I estimated the time I would be over Mendi. I looked around and I thought, "Well now, what will I do if I lose a donk [engine]? I'm sitting here, I haven't got any chance of getting down at the moment, it's all completely covered. I thought well now

03:00 there's Taree, there's Wapenamanda, there's Wabag, but they were quite some distance away. I doubt if I could have done it on the one engine. And just at that time, as I was turning around, you wouldn't believe it - but my starboard motor just conked out and threw a lot of oil around.

03:30 I was stuck 14,000 feet up, with nowhere to go. And a full load of heavy stuff in the back. So I was just going around looking and suddenly I saw a hole and I thought, "That's for me," so I dived. I said to the first officer,

04:00 Frank Koller was his name and he was from Hungary and we called him Goulash, to call up a 'Mayday' [distress call] and also to feather the airscrew. As he tried to feather [stop] the airscrew

04:30 I picked up the microphone and I gave "Mayday" three times. It's the one and only time in my life I've ever used that and then I realised this hole was here and I dived for it. I said to Frank, "If we're where I think we are, I'll come out of this at about 100 feet above the trees.

05:00 You should see, two minutes after we come out, a lake on your right." And so we came down, and as we came down it closed in behind us and it was about a 150 [foot] ceiling underneath from the trees. We were on the side of this mountain, Gilawe, 14,000 and a half feet. And so I headed

05:30 towards what I hoped was Mendi and two minutes later Frank sang out, " Skipper, there's the lake." So we were just where I hoped we would be. Which was a bit of luck. I was losing a lot of my speed that I'd gained during the dive and I was coming to a ridge, the whole thing I was aiming for because it went

06:00 down into the valley, into the Mendi Valley. Just as we were coming to the ridge, I started to get the shake of the shiver of the stall, but we made the ridge. We dropped down and then we got towards the airstrip and then I dropped the gear and at the right

06:30 time dropped the flaps a bit and we landed at Mendi. We got out and had a look at the engine and it was completely covered in oil.

07:00 It was one heck of a mess. I thought we'd go and book into the hotel and stay the night and see what happens after that. And suddenly another aircraft flew in and

07:30 he said he'd came in through another gap that had just opened. He had passenger load on and had to keep going. I said, if he did, so did I.

08:00 So I said, " Look if you make the trip and we go into any cloud or come near the clouds, that's it we'll come back." and he said "That's fair enough." So knowing that he wouldn't go far before he got in the cloud, I thought it wouldn't be long before we'd be back. I sat in the back, quite happy about things until I looked out and I saw cloud over the wings. I went up the front

08:30 and tried to be as nonchalant as I could, with these mountains all around me and with the poor passengers down the back. And then I had to give him a time limit to sit on this heading and then to turn on another heading to avoid this

09:00 eleven and a half thousand foot mountain. And then climb up and we came out on top. Finally we got on top at 14,000 again and I said, "Well turn down here now," and he said, "No, I think we go this way to Hagen and I said, "No, give us a break, just go this way. That's the way to Hagen." We had a bit of a debate, but anyway he came my way and after a short period the cloud started

09:30 to peter out and there was Hagen.

Did this bring back, you know your flying at New Guinea during the war, did it bring back those times?

I never had anything like that. I was always underneath it.

So it was actually easier.

Mmmm?

It was actually easier?

Oh yes, yes, yes. Well I'd been flying in this sort of weather for quite a while up til then but I never had a

10:00 engine out but always expecting it but when it happens, it happens you're on the spot and you've got to do something. So that was that.

That's incredible.

No it worked out all right. But

Did any of the flights that you took over New Guinea bring back your time during the war?

10:30 Yes a lot of it did. We did a lot of work around the Madang area and the Wewak area and so forth and Aitape.

11:00 And it was good sort of seeing it, Rabaul was another thing that was good to see and the volcano's there, that's interesting. You take off over the volcano. I had another engine out with a Bristol Freighter. We'd been up delivering fuel and just bringing empty drums out of

11:30 Banz and I had 100, 44 gallon drums stacked in this aircraft, empty fuel drums. Now you know how explosive that can be, potentially, an empty fuel drum is very explosive.

Because of the residue on the inside?

Well just the fumes. We were coming through

12:00 the Gap, the Jimmy[River] Gap and suddenly I had a fire in my starboard engine. I had another captain as my first officer and he turned around and saw this and just about had a kitten [severe fright]. He said, "My God, fire!" It was really getting going so I pressed the fire button on the starboard engine and

12:30 it was delightful just to see it sort of filter out. Then I had to continue on with the one engine back into Madang and this was quite a good operation. It was on descent so we didn't have any real problem and it worked out all right. But it was quite an interesting little experience. But with the Bristol Freighter

13:00 there's another interesting trip. That was to take a jeep to the district patrol officer at Tari which is really in the far west, it's in the Highlands, near West Papuan or as it is now, Irian Jaya border. These fellows

13:30 were really bushwhackers [primitive villagers] from way back. A lot of them had never seen a car. The only machine they'd seen apart from a bike was an aeroplane, and I landed the Bristol there with this car inside. I bought a ramp along and I said to the patrol officer [district official], "Do you want me to drive it out, or will you?" and he said "I will." So he drove it out and had the tultul and the luluai,

14:00 they were the two senior fellows in the tribe, come over and hop in the back. He waved cheerio and drove off down the strip and then went up onto the road. As soon as he left the strip, these fellows in the back piled out, jumped out of it while it was going. He pulled up and came back and said in pidgin English "What's wrong?"

14:30 They replied, "This fellow him he buggar up true. He go, he go, he go, he go, he not go long up, him he go, he go, he go, oh he buggar up true." In other words, everything that goes along the runway should take off. They'd only seen a plane, never seen a car and they weren't going to sit in that. So that's the education of the Tari.

15:00 **That's wonderful.**

That was the some of the fun we had there.

You've probably got more of a passion for flight than most people. What is it about flying - ?

Well you're in a different world; you're in a world of your own. You're

15:30 up there and it's your world. That's what you want to do, enjoy it because it's another life. It's something that you must do to enjoy. Flying itself is a freedom, it's just

16:00 you can go within limits you can do whatever you want with the aircraft. When you've got control of the aircraft and you're in general flying it's quite mundane doing the regular route flying and so on. But you never know when you're going to be called upon to do something special, such as an incident and

you've got to be prepared for that. And you have to accept it.

16:30 **And is that something you carried through your war years in particular?**

Yes, I just loved it, it was good. But apart from flying in New Guinea I joined Rotary [Club] and other organizations. I'm president of Rotary in Goroka and I was President of the RSL [Returned and Services League].

17:00 I was Senior Vice President or Vice President of the RSL for Papua New Guinea. I was being promoted to, voted in as President, but I was moving base at that time from Madang to Port Moresby and I couldn't guarantee that I could do it so I handed over and was Vice President. I was also President of the Airforce Association there and

17:30 a member of the Lodge [Freemasons] and I had a lot of social activity. With the Rotary, I set up the first Rotary Convention for Papua New Guinea and I had help from a fellow by the name of Lex Fraser in Ingham [Queensland]. He

18:00 gave me all the guidance about how to do it and what was necessary and so on. We were able to do the arranging of it and we flew in a Fokker Friendship load from Australia of Rotarians for this conference. And that went very well and then

18:30 we went to a conference in Moresby. Lex put me in command of this as chairman of the convention and it was a difficult one. In Wagga Wagga was the world vice president for Rotary. When he was asked who

19:00 we - New Guinea - would be districted to [partnered with], he said they're nearest to Darwin so join them up. Well that was stupid because we couldn't; we had no flight connection with Darwin, we couldn't get there and we didn't know anything about this. So I wrote to Rotary [headquarters in] Illinois and said what I thought about it. I kept writing to them and

19:30 finally they sent out another senior vice president who happened to be a retired airline pilot. I arranged my flights to coincide with his visits to the various Rotary Clubs and they were all told what they had to say. So when he went back we got word from them that we were now districted with Brisbane, because we had a connection there. I was

20:00 made District Governor's Special Representative in New Guinea and we had quite a good time there and a good life. But I took part in all the things that were going on there.

As someone who flew during World War II, with everything that you did, what did it mean for you to be involved in the RSL in New Guinea and

20:30 **to be involved in the squadron associations?**

Well, the idea of it was whatever means we could we took to try and bolster the building of Papua New Guinea. Now there was one flight I did from Moresby and it was a fairly interesting one.

21:00 I was doing this Moresby flight to Wewak calling in at Lae and Madang and the hostie [flight steward] came along and said "Sorry Captain, but there's one passenger over, there's one too many," and I said, "Oh well, stiff cheddar. Tell him unfortunately to take the next flight." She said, "That's a bit unfortunate because it's Michael Somare, and he's just been promoted to Prime Minister."

21:30 I said, "Michael was a friend of mine, I've met him many times and he still is the Prime Minister up there at the moment." And I got out and went along to see Michael and I said "Have you got a problem Michael?" He said, "Yes John it looks like you haven't got a seat." And I said, "Look I've often wondered if I can get help going across from here to Lae, through that Gap area.

22:00 You should know it pretty well." He said, "I know." I said, "Good, would you like to come up and sit up in the cockpit with us and have a bit of a chat as we go through there?" So I got him up in the cockpit and we chuffed off then and everything was great but when I got on the radio to Lae, I said "For God's sake, have a bloody seat ready for Michael because he's sitting here in the cockpit and he wants a seat." And so when we got to

22:30 Lae, there was no problem Michael had a seat from then on.

Well done.

I went along to New Guinea many years later, with a travel agency group that we'd been taken by KLM [Royal Dutch Airline] up to Singapore. They took us up in KLM and were sending us back with Air New Guinea through Moresby back to Brisbane.

23:00 In Moresby the fellows there took us, and another friend of mine from the old New Guinea days, to one of the hotels to have a look at the development. Some business people were on the lawn talking away and suddenly one of them came over to my group and said "Hey John!" and this was Michael. He asked what I was doing back there. When I

23:30 explained to the other fellows in the tour, in the travel agency group, who he was, they were a bit staggered.

John we're going actually have to finish in a few minutes, I'm afraid.

That's fine.

If a grandson or somebody close to you came up to you and wanted

24:00 **to get your advice because they were thinking of joining the air force and because there was another war looming, what sort of advice would you give them?**

Well frankly it would be his decision but if he wants to do flying and wants to go into the war and he's interested in flying I'd say "Go for it." But

24:30 it would be his decision. I wouldn't try to influence him one way or the other. I wouldn't like to think he'd be in the mud with the poor old foot sloggers and I don't think I'd like him to be in a tin can in the water, and I think aviation is far better. But it's a terrific life and

25:00 it offers big advantages and I'd say you couldn't do better. But it depends on the person, whether you want to go or you don't. But if you want to go, or you have to go, then I think my choice would be the air. In fact I'd just love to go to the present one but

25:30 I wasn't able. In fact I'd have loved to have gone to the Korean one but I was flying in civil and I just had to stay with it. But no, I think that would be my answer.

You still might get up in that Beaufighter yet?

Oh, I'd go in the Beaufort Bomber, not the Beaufighter.

Yes, Beaufort Bomber absolutely.

Mmmm.

O.k. John we'll

26:00 **actually finish there for the day, thank you very much.**

26:03 **End of tape**