

# Australians at War Film Archive

## Clarence Spurgeon (Spud) - Transcript of interview

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<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/937>

### Tape 1

00:42 **Can you start with a summary of your life?**

01:00 Well, I'm the only Australian in my family, my Dad was in the Royal Navy and was transferred to the Australian navy back in 1901, I think it was when the Royal [Australian] Navy was first envisaged. He was a communications specialist and remained so throughout his life, he retired from the navy in about 1936.

01:30 I think it was from the Australian navy. In the mean time, I had two older brothers who joined the navy and both became captains in the RAN [Royal Australian Navy]. I have a nephew who became a commander in the RAN. So, perhaps, it's relevant, perhaps, the fact that I joined the air force. We'll go into that subsequently. As a kid I went to school in Melbourne at Carey, which is a grammar school, and I

02:00 stayed there for the whole of my schooling. Other than a preparatory period in a state school, it was a kindergarten-type thing. I enjoyed my time at school, I had a whale of a time and I participated in just about every activity that the school required of me. My academic achievements were hardly starry though, but I think they were achievements that served me well later on.

02:30 I did an honours degree at school, which in those days was sort of a preliminary entry to university, which was my idea, I desperately wanted to be an engineer. Unfortunately my pass was not quite good enough to get to university, so I started in parallel with an acceptance into the public service which was part of your matriculation [final year of high school] exam anyway. Everybody

03:00 applied to go into public service and it meant that you'd go down the employment chain until you got to public servant. And that's precisely where I got, and my first job after school, oh, I enjoyed school by the way, 12 years was a long time to go to school, but I participated as much as I could in. I should incidentally mention on the way that the lady out in the kitchen I've known since she was seven, so we lived as neighbours and I was very gratified to find after I got home from the war

03:30 she was still there, and still available, which kind of surprised me after all the stories I'd heard about Americans.

#### **When did you join up?**

I started work in the public service, you did a public service entrance exam as part of your matric [matriculation]. I took on a job there which put me in a position of a shipping clerk,

04:00 which was really quite fantastic because the old air force flight sergeant I worked for taught me how to play snooker at the mission in Melbourne and I learned all the bad language I ever learnt in my life from him. But he was responsible in that little group at the time, he was responsible for bringing out all the airplanes that were sent from England, [Avro] Ansons particularly, that came out on the decks of ships and whatnot. And there very careful and manipulation on trucks that were taking them down to

04:30 Laverton [the Royal Australian Air Force base south-west of Melbourne]. So this began the initial equipment of the air force trained throughout the war practically. That reinforced an interest I had in aircraft anyway, I made model airplanes since I was a kid, not very successfully, my knowledge of aerodynamics was abysmal. The excitement was there and I think that

05:00 stimulated the interest. Plus the fact that two or three people I knew of had gone to Point Cook [another RAAF base near Laverton; home to the RAAF Academy for training future officers and pilots] as cadets, so having initially thought of going into the navy as a cadet when I was 13, I waited because I wanted to do it and school, and also the thought of going into the navy where my brothers had been through the same experience, they deterred me a little bit. The air force on the other hand was an entirely different sort of

05:30 attraction. I found out a bit about the old air force college as it [was] called in those days as Point Cook

and I must say that the entry was selective, I think in my year there were 144 applicants and in, in Melbourne alone. And out of that I think there were 16 of us in Melbourne that were primarily selected for that.

- 06:00 The process was not complicated it was simple. I was accepted back in April of 1939 and not called up in June as I expected because of the deferment, the rumblings of war were on the books then, quite obviously and, in fact, I was packing my bags to go to Point Cook on the evening 2nd of September 1939 when
- 06:30 his worship's voice over the radio said, "It is my melancholy duty to inform you," and I hadn't counted on that at all, but, okay it provided another sort of stimulus anyway. So off we went to Point Cook on the morning of the 3rd of September and clattered over the rail in the back of the old Bedford truck at 9 o'clock in the morning.
- 07:00 I was accepted into the RAAF College as a normal cadet on entry, had been for years we were knocked about by the senior course, we were told to wear bloody dinner jacket at night and things like that. And our table manners became regulated, didn't dare ask for the potatoes, you had to ask for the something or other, or whatever the jar was. Stupid rules that cadets
- 07:30 put on each other, nothing different from boarding school really. In the same way the physical treatment was inclined to be I thought childish, but OK it had a basic theory of obedience I think more than anything. I was fortunate in that some of the people who were in my senior course I knew for the rest of my life, some of them were senior cadets
- 08:00 when I was there and we got to respect each other and I got to respect them, much like going to boarding school anyway, but it was a different atmosphere from what I subsequently believe that the air force academy tried to reproduce after the war, much more homely much more friendly. A little bit like boarding school, but good fun, great fun.
- 08:30 However, we only lasted at Point Cook for about, I think, we there for about five or six weeks and the pressures of the time had arranged for some direct-entry cadets to come in on top of us. People who had already had flying experience and so on and were scheduled to be directed into the air force in our place, so we had to be found somewhere else to go and learn how to fly. This course was split up between
- 09:00 aero clubs [civilian flying clubs] all over Australia, I went to Essendon and I went to the ANA [Australian National Airways] School of Aeronautics, as it was called, where my flying instructor was an old air force pilot who'd been very badly burnt in a flying accident. The fact that he'd had that flying accident and survived turned him into the one of the best instructors that you could possibly imagine. I had a great affection for Lou and he taught me one hell of a lot
- 09:30 so there were 12 of us at the ANA school, another dozen at the Royal Victorian Aero Club, and we lived in boarding houses and, do you know Melbourne at all? Moonee Ponds where the girl with the gladioli comes from [Dame Edna Everage, a character played by actor comedian Barry Humphries], and I'm sure the house that we lived in was the one she lived in, it was an old retreat for old ladies and they looked after us like mothers. We had a great time at Essendon, we were pretty well free and easy,
- 10:00 there was no administrative restrictions, there was air force sergeant there to make sure we behaved ourselves but, apart from that, it was great learning to fly there because it was much more relaxed and less formalised. After we had finished at Essendon, I think it was the middle of January the following year, I went back to 21 Squadron at Laverton with about 14 of the other guys and we formed the first
- 10:30 sub-course that went into the citizen air force squadron, there were others at Richmond [RAAF base], there were some at, at various other training establishments around Australia, the old flying school at Mascot [site of Sydney airport] took on about 10 of them. So the course when it was finally accumulated graduated in two segments, one from Richmond and one from Laverton, where we graduated.
- 11:00 I think it was the 23rd of March or something like that. During that period we had the privilege of flying [Hawker] Demon airplanes, which was the front-line fighter plane that the air force had and a beautiful machine to learn to fly. Okay, we graduated, I think it was the 23rd of March, and I moved up the road to 2 Squadron, which was an Anson squadron
- 11:30 committed to the patrolling of Bass Strait when, I saw the Queen Elizabeth in full cry one day, going like a ruddy motor boat, and we used to fly right around to Adelaide, through Mount Gambier and then bring the other ships on the way back. So Richmond did the other half leg up to Sydney. Who looked after them between Adelaide and Perth, I have no idea.
- 12:00 I imagine they looked after themselves, but it was a nominal exercise in which I learnt never to fly an Anson again, it was cold and miserable and wet, the damn thing leaked like a sieve. Okay, after I graduated I went to 2 Squadron, as a said, we initially had Ansons and we had the first [Lockheed] Hudsons arrived in, at Laverton from, some went to Richmond, some went
- 12:30 to Laverton. And we were about to start converting to Hudsons when I got posted to 8 Squadron, which was formed here in Canberra, and I arrived here in Canberra, I think, on the morning of the 14th or the 15th of May. A friend of mine and myself we drove a beaten-up Alvis [car] from Melbourne to Canberra

with all our junk in the back, and

- 13:00 to be greeted by the usual variety of cadet camp that the poor unfortunate cadets at [Royal Military College] Duntroon still have and four inches of snow on the ground. It was kind of bloody cold sleeping in tents. The food was good-Duntroon standard and, fortunately, the beef around here is pretty good so we had tonnes of steak and we lived,
- 13:30 as a I said, for about, we were here for about, I think, it was almost two months. In that period the aircraft that had previously belonged to 8 Squadron, as the one out there was know, had been the four DC-3s belonging to the airline, they were progressively taken back to Essendon and one up to Sydney, and we slowly fitted out with Hudsons.
- 14:00 All brand new airplanes out of the depot at Laverton or Richmond. The first pilots that we got because of the nature of the training, they had done that at Richmond or Laverton and my first skipper was a bloke called Peter Parker [later Group Captain, awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross], who's father worked with my father in the navy, so I had a firm introduction to the Hudson myself. He was a brilliant instructor pilot,
- 14:30 I flew second pilot with him for 12 months. Slowly but surely the squadrons got together. It became very uncomfortable at Fairbairn [the former RAAF base located at Canberra airport [at the time called RAAF Station Canberra, named Fairbairn in 1962], I might add, because the massing of about 148 blokes, I think it was, put a real tax on that poor old Wiles [steam] cooker over there, and the two Duntroon cooks that looked after us.
- 15:00 It was good fun because Canberra was a great place in those days, it was freezing cold in the winter and we used to go to the movies on the weekend and you'd conveniently forget to leave the theatre after the lights went out because it was warm. And then we'd go home in the morning. But our CO [Commanding Officer] was Paddy Heffernan [then Squadron Leader, later Group Captain], who was a gentlemen and a great, he was an ex-Duntroon man so he was a great disciplinarian
- 15:30 and everybody was very fond of old Paddy. And very experienced pilot, I might add too, so we were lucky with the three flight commanders we had, all experienced and the rest of us were a mixed bag from Point Cook or elsewhere and varying flying experience. Initially, I went as second pilot to a bloke called Peter Parker,
- 16:00 who, as I said, who was the son of my Dad's best friend, and Peter I always got on very well with him he taught me a hell of a lot about airplanes and Hudsons, particularly. A Hudson had some peculiarities in aerodynamics that were different from what we had been used to you, had to just be a little more watchful, it was a beautiful airplane to fly, it was very comfortable,
- 16:30 it wasn't cold it was nice and warm and it performed very reliably.

**We'll come back and talk about the Hudson in some detail, but when did you embark overseas?**

We left Canberra here on the, I'm not positive about the dates, but I think it was about the second week in July and it must have been about that time it might have even

- 17:00 been the third week, I'm nearly sure we arrived in Singapore on the 3rd of August having gone from Canberra to Alice Springs over-nighted. I had to learn how to refuel a bloody Hudson with a wobble pump and I was there for three hours doing it and, anyway, the result was I missed the ball that the people in Alice Springs put on for us.
- 17:30 That was supposed to be terribly secret but when we drove down the street there was an enormous sign: 'Welcome to our heroes going to Malaysia'. Which it was amazing how news travels across the middle. We stayed in Darwin for two days while we checked the aircraft out because we had to fly to Surabaya [on Indonesian island of Java]. From there we had to fly to Surabaya in civilian clothes because the Dutch had not yet committed
- 18:00 and so in Surabaya we were looked after very, very well by the Dutch community. I should mention perhaps that 1 Squadron had gone ahead by about two weeks, they had re-equipped at Laverton and a lot of my friends, of course from my course, had gone into that squadron as well. I think there were 12 of us in Singapore off that course. We arrived in Singapore, I think,
- 18:30 on the, anyway, the first week in August. I well remembered because I got bloody German measles [rubella] and I was put into a Malaysian [Malayan] secluded hospital, which was an experience that everybody ought to have. The old matron did very, very well trying to look after me, but I was only saved by my visitors who arrived on the second day with a case of Foster's Lager [beer], which
- 19:00 kept me going for the rest of the week while I was there and, as I say, I was chucked out of hospital I was pretty well wrung out. German Measles was not an easily curable disease like it is now. And we moved into a base called Sembawang, which is on Singapore Island which was adjacent to the naval base in the north part of the island, and it was a
- 19:30 well-built airfield for Malaysian standards anyway. It was grass, it was deep Kikuyu-type grass so the wheels hung onto, and it was reasonably level, which was unusual for a Malaysian airfield. The only problem we had initially was it was adjacent to the naval base and in those days

- 20:00 you weren't allowed to fly afternoon because the admiral had to have his kip in the arvo, however, we quickly explained to him that Australians didn't like being told to do what they couldn't do and he graciously relented. I should mention at the same time that we went up there there was an input of trained aircrew for other squadrons that were on Singapore Island at the time.
- 20:30 They had some airplanes, I don't know how good you are on airplanes, but they had some biplane torpedo bombers that were called [Vickers] Vildebeests and all the navigators and gunners were put into those aircraft to release people for the RAF [Royal Air Force] were initially trained in Australia and went through the remainder of the time there. A lot of the pilots eventually were trained Australians,
- 21:00 I think, the population of Sembawang in those early days, I should mention Sembawang was built as a naval air station and was remarkable modern for Singapore, all the buildings were concrete. We had one very good hangar which was something the others didn't have, we had quite good stores and we had a NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute],
- 21:30 which is something not many people had, and we had, of course, the RAF scale of rations, which was not nearly as good as, I think, we had two, I wouldn't dare call them riots or rebellions, but the troops jacked up about three times on the dreadful bloody food, god. Kippers for lunch on Sunday, that sort of crap,
- 22:00 and eventually by persuasion, who happened to be a bloke... Okay, we were very limited in flying out, as I explained to you the spare situation with those airplanes, we got the airplanes alright, but the spares backing
- 22:30 was a box full of bits, you were lucky if you got an assortment in the drawer. Comparatively quickly our own grocers got on the job and we managed to arrange, not private supply, but we, privately we arranged for supply spares, but all the time while I was in Malaysia we were always short of spark plugs and that damn thing had 14 plugs on each engine and
- 23:00 we had 28 in fact, two on each cylinder, so I can remember as a junior pilot as we went up-country sitting down for two hours a couple of times a week cleaning spark plugs, and they were fine filament spark plugs you had to be terribly gentle with them. But things like that, fuel was not a problem we seemed to have plenty of fuel
- 23:30 there were great tanks full over on the other side of the island. Spare parts were a problem, yes, we used to ship them between airplanes to keep enough serviceable. But we had no reduction in flying hours after we arrived there, as a second pilot I was put into the first program of conversion training and
- 24:00 four of us went off in the first lot, the other squadron was also training alongside us. So Sembawang, for the early part, was a sort of a conversion-type training. The only operational missions we had there we found to our horror, for instance when we got to Singapore, that everybody went to bed at midday because it was too bloody hot to fly, well I've never heard so much crap in all my life, but obvious thing to do was to get up there where it was cool
- 24:30 there were two or three special trips flown. The new air officer commander we had was picked up in Burma and brought back to Singapore by one of our aircraft, other people who come out were wearing low-set hats and things who came out secretly were picked up by our people, it's very hard to keep a secret from Australians.
- 25:00 And, alright, what else did we do? Because we had a reduction, we suffered a reduction in our flying hours, we had tons of spare time so we played footy we played cricket, we beat the shit out the Singapore cricket club, nobody could beat us at Rugby, we tried to teach them how to play Australian Rules, it was a pleasurable place to be.
- 25:30 Six of us joined the Chinese swimming club because they had the best pool in Singapore, which you weren't allowed to join Chinese clubs, you see, so we used to have to get into civvies to get into the bloody swimming club. It was also the only place where there were any worthwhile looking birds about, and it was nothing like improving your morale like a partially clad bird walking around, don't tell my wife I said that.
- 26:00 **Later than that you were moved to Kota Bharu [north-east coast of Peninsula Malaya], can you tell us what happened there?**
- Well, we stayed in Singapore, the two squadrons stayed there until, I think, we moved up there, we were the first to go to Kota Bharu, we moved up there in February, and in the meantime, as I mentioned to you, five extra
- 26:30 second pilots were converted, which was very sensible, in fact, it was unusual for an Australian junior to be popped up to captain status, we were never made captains until we finally got it, but I did my short nav [navigators] reconnaissance course while I was doing that conversion. Now that was something that in Australia you didn't do for two years, but we had two instructors
- 27:00 and we had the where with all and the bloody paper and pencils and whatnot, so we all sort NR's. To

answer your question, my memory tells me that on the 1st of March, 1941, we moved to Kota Bharu. The 1st or 2nd and I had not seen the place before. When I arrived there it was a paddock

- 27:30 and about four, what they call attap huts, the [traditional Malay] coconut-fibre huts, and one building which was supposedly a waiting room for an airport. We had, they tried to put us in tents and we refused so we were put in temporary accommodation and, particularly the airman [non-commissioned ranks], and the airmen were treated like bloody dirt
- 28:00 up there and, we'd got to know our blokes very, very well, as Australians do. And we used to play cricket and kick the arse of them at football and whatnot. But it was a really sort of planters city with rubber plantations all around it, it had the unique political status of a self-run sultanate,
- 28:30 the sultan had been sultan for 300 years and he'd bought it off the Thais, that northern part of Malaysia, and so it was pretty primitive. There was a good club there, we used to go and dance with the planters' wives on Friday nights and a couple of blokes, I think, even advanced their dancing beyond that, but it was a good place to go and get something decent to eat, the rations
- 29:00 were appalling bad, the RAF [Royal Air Force] rations the world over were a tragedy. I went back to Malaysia twice after and I spent the first three weeks from my time there getting the bloody rations right. They used to fly fish out from England for Christ sake, in kerosene tins, the beef they got from India and awful, oh, I used to say, for Christ sake the freezers here are full of Australian beef.
- 29:30 I was going to explain, I went back later on as 1 Squadron in the [Malayan] Emergency [fight against Communism destabilising British Malaya; 1948-60], the bloody food was still bad, I had what the poms [English] call, not a rebellions, but a, when the troops rebel against their officers...

### **Mutiny?**

Yeah, a real mutiny, and poms locked all our blokes up

- 30:00 and I said, "For Christ sake all they did was protest at the food," anyway, to get right back to the beginning. It was no different to when we first went there, however, the public works department fellow there was very cooperative and he had those bamboo strapped huts up in four days, which we moved into, with pinched beds off the hospital and whatnot and we started setting ourselves up. The,
- 30:30 we, fortunately, had our own three cooks so we went to the, whatever they call, the supply place where they have frozen beef and whatnot, paid exorbitant prices for it, but we were able to feed the troops in a way which was very comfortable. Kota Bharu settled down to be a very comfortable, relaxed,
- 31:00 almost a holiday place, because we were still terribly limited in flying house. And the troops we used to roster the troops half-off in the afternoon, so that they could get a bit of rest, they were free to go to the beach in afternoon, it was only down the river about two miles. We all had boats, canoes and, some of them built very elaborate boats
- 31:30 to take advantage of the beautiful surf beach, and, yeah, I got through, enjoyed being in Kota Bharu, you could play tennis and golf course after a fashion, but I didn't play golf, as I say, you could pursue the planters wives who came down on the weekend, and dance with them and feed them and whatnot, but it was quite a pleasant sort of place to be.
- 32:00 Quite rapidly we got the Oz [Australian] touch into it, we had more buildings made, they set up proper workshops and things like that. We even had a Tiger Moth [biplane] that we had scammed out of, we found it at the depot at Singapore and pinched it, in fact, from the RAF, so that all the second pilots had a airplane to fly and unfortunately they built a boong-type [native Malay building that served as a] hangar,
- 32:30 too, but it, in, and the first decent blow we had the hangar collapsed and the poor old airplane was underneath it. But, yeah, it was good fun.

### **What operational flying was done at Kota Bharu?**

Very limited, I think a recollection, memory recollection says between 16 and 20 hours a month was all we could get out of a crew, however, because the tempo of what we called operational flying was

- 33:00 able to be brought down, all the second pilots of my squadron were converted to captain status, which was the best thing we ever did, because eventually, old Pete was the first bloke to be pulled out, I was the second of the second pilots up to captain, and quite quickly the composition of the squadron had its seniority and its
- 33:30 experience removed, from it. Okay so we got to work and started to, as I say, I did my 'Short Nav R' [Navy Regulations] course when I was up at Kota Bharu and that gave me captain status straight away. Our long, was one, two, three, four, five of us were upgraded at that time. The occasional trip to Singapore was always welcome because it meant you could get to the
- 34:00 swimming club again and restore your red corpuscles, but social life in Kota Bharu for the troops was pretty bad, we formed our own cricket club and there was some good cricketers amongst our blokes so we could play cricket and the locals were very receptive to that idea, contrary to what I think the RAF

would like to know. Like to know what we were doing,

34:30 we intermingled, which is something the poms don't do too well, or my experience tells me they don't.

### **What happened next?**

We were replaced in Kota Bharu by 1 Squadron that came up from Singapore and we just swapped over, and that happened in October . We already had

35:00 had some indications that, in retrospect you can realise that they were contributory to the Japanese reconnaissance effort, for instance, I can remember playing cricket and I could hear this damned airplane and, as far up as you could see, he was leaving, what we called 'flecks', small bits of vapour trail, and it was a twin-engine airplane and we put two airplanes airborne next Sunday

35:30 to try and get him, and they were 8000 feet underneath him, couldn't even climb to him. And when you read, if you've ever had time to read it, the book written by Colonel Fuji which is called The Singapore Story, he was bloody in that airplane and it was reconnoitring all the airfields on the west side of the mainland, and getting ours on the way in and Kuantan, further south, on the way back.

36:00 The other thing that is really incredible when you think about it, there were two Japanese-operated [underground] mines in Terengganu state [north-eastern state of Malaya], which was south of ours and at [the village of Padang] Endau, just south of the northern part of Johor [Bahru, southern Malay city], obviously the Japanese were there and they were completely accepted into the communities there. A lot of them had Malay families there,

36:30 so if we'd, I suppose that if anybody had thought about it you'd realise that the Japanese had been looking the place over for about two or three years. We had no opportunity to even expect that they would be working on using Thailand because we were forbidden from crossing the border in Thailand, even though occasionally coming back off trips, if it was raining hard

37:00 you occasionally overshot the coast, but it was all done very formally and we used to ring up and say, "We are terribly sorry we encroached," but all our operational training was against the possibility of that Japanese fleet coming, and it was going 12 months before the war started. As much as we could afford the flying hours to fly four-and-a-half hour missions,

37:30 but the same reconnaissance pattern pertained through those 12 months. 1 Squadron replaces us, as I said, in September, October and, of course, was there for the start of the war. We got back to Singapore and we hadn't been there long and they decided to move 8 Squadron up to Kuantan, which is half-way up to Singapore on the east coast [of Malaya]. Mainly to

38:00 exercise any reconnaissance pattern, which eventuated when the [HMS] Prince of Wales and the [HMS] Repulse came. And, of course, the very day we were running reconnaissance was the day they got clobbered.

### **What happened there?**

I went to, I didn't get to Kuantan until two day before the war started because my airplane was in overhaul at Sembawang and

38:30 I was getting very friendly again with my girlfriend, who worked in the naval base, but I went up to Kuantan and almost the next evening we were briefed to do the first trip against the Japs [Japanese]. And we knew they were coming because on the 6th of December 1 Squadron had found them, the whole fleet

39:00 and then they disappeared because the damn monsoon started almost the same day. The Japanese had done a very careful study of weather, I might add as well. And we were not called for the war until the evening of the 7th of December and we were told to bomb up and get ready to go up and bomb Japanese ships because they had seen the ones that were off the Thai coast. I should mention

39:30 that the Japanese had a much more friendly arrangement with the Thais because they had built up the airfield just over the border to the point where it carried [the Japanese front-line fighters the Mitsubishi] Zeros and any other sort of Japanese airplane that they needed. Had enough fuel stocked there to run them. And, of course, on the first morning they were available to support the landing so we were called up to Kuantan in the early part of the 8th of December

40:00 and when we got there the 1 Squadron were already into it and the Japanese were already landing on the beach, right opposite the airfield, which had been heavily defended and prepared for the possibility of beach invasion by an Indian army brigade that was there. But the Japs

40:30 had obviously done their homework very, very carefully, they'd probably been doing for 18 months, two years. In fact, I'm nearly certain that the fellow who was the barber at Kota Bharu turned up as a Japanese lieutenant-colonel when I was a prisoner of war. He knew bloody well who I was and so I'm sure that they had a very good intelligence set-up going at Kota Bharu the whole time, probably even knew the numbers of the blooming airplanes and the people. So on the first morning 8 Squadron joined 1 Squadron in this attack on what was three ships and a bunch of support of barges, landing barges, that were putting the troops ashore and we did the usual hosing operation. I tried to bomb a ship and

blew myself up so that I had to force land at Kota Bharu, one engine nearly fell out of the airplane and I chucked it on the ground there and spent to day waiting to go home. We left Kota Bharu the night of that first day. The Japs were already inside the fence.

## Tape 2

### 00:31 **The war had begun in earnest, what happened next?**

As I said, I pranged my airplane on the airfield and it was really rooted, it had no, it was very fortunate we were able to stay on the airfield and, furthermore, that I got it off the airfield, that I got it off the strip, but she was shot to bits and

01:00 my own fault because of the combination of target, the target I selected and the fusing I used on the bottom and, okay, I copped it. But after waiting nearly all day, 1 Squadron kept operating as long as they could, they lost the airplanes nearly as quickly as we had to the point where they had to leave seven wrecks behind on the airfield and we finally left

01:30 at about 6 o'clock that evening. We withdrew first and then the Indian troops came back into town of Kota Bharu that evening after the Japanese was well and truly established, probably by soon after midday, and even though we had sunk one of their ships and about four of their ancillary craft, we'd put a hole in a cruiser too, which

02:00 was an interesting story there. The second pilot in an airplane that was flown by a guy in my course, he tried to ram a ship, a cruiser [a medium-size warship], and the aircraft was blown to bits before they got there. Though, the second pilot survived and he's still alive, the first pilot was a bloke off my course, as I say, who was never

02:30 found again, or no bits of him either. But all together on that first day there were two crews 1 Squadron lost, we were lucky we didn't lose any ourselves, but okay 1 Squadron lost half their aircraft, they only had four airplanes left when the day finished. We finished up with, three days later, we lost four on the ground ourselves at Kuantan,

03:00 but where had we got?

### **The couple of months of flying against the Japanese invasion?**

Yeah, we all went back to Sembawang, to Singapore, and eventually Kuantan had to be abandoned because the Japanese had bombed it on the 9th of December, no, the 10th of December in the morning and

03:30 the airfield was completely air defenceless, it had no defences until, it didn't even have pits to put the airplanes in, there were no prepared pits, it was just a strip and a few huts. There's some sordid stories about what went on at that time, there was two days when the CO was trying, the CO was an RAF bloke, trying to make up his mind whether we ought to get out or not.

04:00 Obviously, he was being pulled from both sides and our blokes, we were saying, "For Christ sake let's get the bloody airplanes out before we left," and that's exactly what happened on the evening of the 9th, I think it was. They decided to get the aircraft out and the troops were taken out by train, went across to a place called Durian Tanta to get across the main line.

04:30 So, effectively, the airfield was, we used it a couple of times to stage airplanes through, but in the week afterwards it was barely used and the RAF, in fact, got out of it soon after we did. It became untenable that was the point. I might add that the Japanese had occupied the airfield within a matter of two days anyway, they were using it as a,

05:00 they had fuel there, of course, but they had pre-placed in the bush around it and in the mine works just further south to where they were, there was tons of fuel there. Anyway the pattern of operations thereafter, I think, largely, at the navy's insistence, because they had the Prince of Wales and Repulse there still there, just for a couple of days anyway, and the pattern

05:30 of reconnaissance had been set up to find the Japanese fleet, which we knew was substantial, about 22 ships, of various sorts. And to keep trace of where they were we did reconnaissance which was centred on that north-eastern quadrant and also to act as so-called 'protective screen' for the Prince of Wales and Repulse. And the moment that they'd rather,

06:00 well, in retrospect, that rather silly admiral decided to go to sea when he did with the Japanese sitting at the end of dockyard where he was with a radio to tell them when they moved out and a ship planted in the middle of straight outside to tell them when the ships' past going north, it was inevitable that the Japs were going to clobber them. And that's precisely what they did with

06:30 their two carriers they had. Or one was not a carrier, one was a seaplane tender, but the other was a light plane carrier, but that's precisely what they did and, of course, the navy kept on saying that "These

ships [are] invincible," and, unfortunately, the Japs hadn't heard that. They knew better, and they were sunk as history tells us [both ships were sunk off the coast of Kuantan with the loss of 840 men on 10 December, 1941].

- 07:00 Yeah, so that piece of the water off Kuantan became quite important as far as the departure of the navy from the war's concerned. It also meant that our air reconnaissance effort was centred on that understanding of reconnaissance to the north and east, we were trying to find where those ships had gone and
- 07:30 as it turned out the Japanese obviously had much more intelligence than we gave them respect for and they had anticipated, they knew what airplanes we had, they knew what range the airplanes had and so they just kept the fleet out of range, pretty sensible way of doing it. There was only one sighting of a naval ship in that period up until the Japanese
- 08:00 made the second landing on the east coast, just near Endau [120km south of Kuantan], north of Mersing. That was the mission that we had, was to try and find those ships and, of course, the search pattern was directed on a radius sort of about 80 degrees off a point off Endau.
- 08:30 We had the right area, but we didn't have the range. And, again, they knew that. So we had two search patterns we used to run with, there was one that would run up parallel the coast up through, I can't think of the name of island now, anyway, 120 k [kilometres] further north, and came back on almost the same track, and we had another one that operated in a fan off Kuantan, which was
- 09:00 abandoned after the ships were sunk. It was pointless, so the next thing, obviously, the Japanese had it all extremely well planned, as I said to you, before they had a copper mine at Endau which had been occupied by the Japanese for months before the war and, in fact, half the blooming staff of the Japanese army was there by thing started finished. So we used to
- 09:30 do reconnaissance on a lighter head pattern first, that was the morning one and there was a afternoon one that looked out toward the [island group of Kupulauan] Anambas and Borneo. Subsequently, when we did find the fleet eventually, it came down opposite the, I don't know how your geography is, opposite the Anambas and there were ships in the Anambas islands, anyway, which we used to go an photograph.
- 10:00 I'm not sure what we said we were doing but we knew the ships were there. And I think it was probably because the navy was still the, directing the anti-naval battle. One becomes cynical about it afterwards when you realise perhaps it was, it didn't really achieve much, but in the circumstances I suppose it was about the only thing that could be done.
- 10:30 Okay so we had two runs, one we called the 'milk run' [routine flight on a set route], which was done first thing in the morning about 6:30 [am], up for an hour and a half and back again, and the other one was the fan reconnaissance. We, I think we had two airplanes that happened to run into the sinking of the Repulse and the Prince of Wales, they were there when it bloody-well happened
- 11:00 and I can remember one of my friends come back and said, "For Christ sake, there is two ships arse-up in the sea," and the fellow had been rescuing all around it and they said, "You silly bastard that's the Prince of Wales and Repulse." I can remember when he said it. A mixture of shock and ludicrous, I suppose, it was so ludicrous,
- 11:30 they'd have gone right into the mouth of it. Okay, in retrospect you can talk like that so, okay, you say. When I [was] shot down I was on the milk run one morning and I was the second charlie [aircraft patrol in pairs; the 'second charlie' is the follower], I was riding second to another bloke, and we were intercepted by fighters that were, we were on our way home having, in fact, been up to Natuna Island.
- 12:00 And we were on our way home and the first word I got was a scream from the back, it was way up me arse shooting, and the next my starboard engine disappeared, or it didn't disappear but it was on fire. He made one poor pass and, regrettably, my gunner and my wireless operator were both killed, rounds came through over my shoulder,
- 12:30 my second pilot was down there in the hut [area aft of the cockpit] and, as I said, the airplane was on fire. I had no alternative but to put it on the water. Incidentally, my number one [the lead aircraft] had taken off into the cloud, he'd, I yelled to him, "For Christ sake get out of it," and he managed to get back.
- 13:00 Briefly, what happened was the airplane was on fire and it was getting bloody hot, the second pilot, as I said, was down there, I don't, retrospectively, I don't know he might have been hit too, I don't know, but there's no point in trying to go out the back where the dingy was so I said, I yelled out to him, "Throw your dingy out and come with me,"
- 13:30 and we went out the side window, I got him, I had to drag him out. I'm not sure, but he may have also been wounded, I don't know, I got him in the water and he, fortunately, had his Mae West [slang term for the emergency inflatable lifejacket worn by aircrew] over his back, so I was able to do that up. Mine, I had already done up to get out the hole [window from the cockpit], you didn't
- 14:00 get out the side window if you had it blown up, you just didn't get out, so I had to drag him out without

his Mae West and put it on when we got him in the water and it was then I realised that he wasn't all that good, he'd been hit somewhere else. I never found out what it was because he quite quickly, I don't know whether he fainted or what, fortunately, I got his

- 14:30 Mae West blown up so he was waterborne but not very well. I never knew what the circumstances were or what because he was unable to tell me. I was okay, I had my Mae West on and I had kicked my shoes off. So the sea was flat, there was just a little bit of a ripple in it, I don't know what our position was, I never tried to,
- 15:00 position where the aircraft was when we went into the water, but we were in the sea for all that day and all that night. He, regrettably, I think succumbed about midnight or after midnight but hung on as best he could, but he was a goner. The first sign I had of
- 15:30 being anywhere near land of any sort was when the sun came up, the horizon lit up and I could see the outline of a small island, a place called Pulau Seraman [?], I'll show you on a map afterwards if you like. And by that stage he had succumbed, he drowned,
- 16:00 so I had little choice but to release him, he was in his Mae West tied onto me and I had to release him because the tide there runs right across the face of that little string of islands, I had to swim like buggery and I finally made it on the shore, or onto a rocky reef, at about six in the morning, just after daylight.
- 16:30 In doing so my feet, by then were completely sponge, I cut my feet to pieces on the coral, so I wasn't all exactly the most mobile that I could be, I had no shoes I had no socks even, so, and a flying suit that was all. Anyway, I got on to that island, a little place, I got onto the north side and,
- 17:00 coincidentally, or almost coincidentally, my skipper, my lead man had come back to look for me and he got jumped by the same fighters and he was shot down. And he managed to get his boat out and his crew into it and, by coincidence that only the good lord knows about, he landed on the island next-door to me, I didn't know about it until after the war, I didn't even know
- 17:30 he'd got out, I didn't even know he turned back, and he came back looking for me, I suppose. Anyway, I wasn't in real good shape by the time I got up on that beach, I tell you, and it wasn't a beach it was a cliff like that, so I had to climb up this cliff onto the top of island, I wanted to had a look and see where the hell I was. I had a pretty good idea where it
- 18:00 was located, but, I think, on that first day, the first thing I looked for was water, and there wasn't any. and I passed out about lunchtime, I think. I just went to sleep, woke up about 2 o'clock in the morning, I suppose, and I was woken up by little animals that were running around,
- 18:30 who were interested in me and by morning I had made up my mind I had to try and find some water and, fortunately, it started to rain so I was able to make a water bottle out of my Mae West as we had been trained to do. Use the balloon for water and you had a thing that you could suck water through it. And made shoes out of the rest of the
- 19:00 flying jacket. Cause my feet were cut to bloody bits by the bloody coral. Anyway, that day I sat around I remember and I heard that same morning, I heard the same milk run going up and down, the two Hudsons going up and back, and I thought to myself, "Well you're a bit bloody luckier than we were." Little did I realise that the
- 19:30 other pilot in the other Hudson got ashore on the island next to me, he had his dingy and all his crew with him, of course.

#### **What was on this island you were on?**

Pretty-near buggery all. It was a scruffy little, scruffy island and it was coral, basically coral and walkable with short grass and one corner was

- 20:00 swamp palms, I forgotten what you call them.

#### **Mangrove?**

Hmmm, soft of mangrove swamp. And that was on the north side, south side rather, and I decided I was on a top of a hill, you could see the coast over there, and it was about, I was

- 20:30 looking at a place called [Kampung] Mawar, which is just south of Endau. I recognised the cape just north of it, so I knew where I was. And I decided that, it didn't appear, there was a little bay down below me, I'll show you some photos later on I took when I went back in Malaya the second time. But there was nothing down there, there was a couple of fisherman's huts but they were only transitional accommodation, so I decided to walk around the other side
- 21:00 where I'm sure on the leese side [side opposite the prevailing wind] there would be some village of some sort. And it took me all day to get down there and by that afternoon, fortunately, there was tons of water so I could carry this bag of water around with me. A few coconuts on the ground, I ate them up. And the village was completely disserted when I got to it and then I noticed that across a sort of shallow,

- 21:30 another small island. And that was the island onto which the other crew had go onto it, further south. By that time I was pretty-near bugged. Incidentally, I found an old collapsible boat off the Repulse on the beach there and I thought, "Thank Christ for this, I've got a boat." But do you think
- 22:00 I could put the thing together? And, of course, it was rotten anyway, it had been on the Repulse since the first war [World War I], it just collapsed when I opened it up. By that time the Malay had spotted me, I was fiddling around in the little village, which was obviously where he lived and he, they had obviously cleared out when they heard the airplanes going up and down off the coast and they had gone around to a larger village on the second island,
- 22:30 a place called Pulau Sebit [?]. And, eventually, I persuaded this stupid bloody Malay that I wasn't a terrible Japanese, my Malay wasn't all that good, but I knew how to call him a stupid prick. But, eventually, he came over late in the evening and took me around to a sort of a village and there was three Chinese
- 23:00 charcoal burners that made their living out of producing charcoal. Chinese stoves, I suppose. And one of them who spoke, no, he was dumb, Malay dumb, and he was Chinese dumb too, I found out subsequently. The other two spoke a little bit of Malay, I could get across, they translated, and I should mention that I mentioned, the
- 23:30 other crew, had got across onto that island. And the afternoon I was standing on the beach looking how the hell I was going to get over there, a boat sailed out, and the crew was on that boat, I missed them by, they didn't know I was still alive, of course. So they got back to Singapore and I didn't. Anyway, I was taken around, and by that time my feet had started to suppurate [pus or fester], so I was bugged. I couldn't walk anyway,
- 24:00 so the Chinese looked after me very well, set me up. And I had enough Malay to explain to them that I had to get back to the mainland. I knew enough of the geography to say, "Well, could we go to Mersing or could we go to Endau," or somewhere like that. And they had obviously...I should mention
- 24:30 that in the meantime, the night before I trekked off, the Japanese had landed on the coast, a bloody ship went out past my island, I could have reached out and touched them, there were two merchant ships that used to land all their stuff and about 10 or 15 other ships that were involved in their escort.
- 25:00 They arrived, landed their people and then pissed off [went] again.

**That was before you arrived on the island?**

No, that happened the night I, or the second night after I was there.

**What did you know of that at the time?**

Nothing. We suspected that this had been the fleet that we'd been looking for, in fact, we suspected they'd try and land at Endau because the Japanese presence there

- 25:30 and also because the [2/]18th Brigade of the Australian battalion were down at Mersing anyway. Okay, but the time I stumbled through my Malay chap with the Chinese they had told me that the other boat had gone with the other people and they would have to wait until that boat came back,
- 26:00 as it happened they didn't come back, the Japanese had shot it up, the four blokes that were in it got out, got off back to Singapore. But the boat didn't survive and neither did the Chinese that were driving it. So I said, "Well what are we going to do? What have you got in the way of boats here, that can get me across to the mainland?" They had a small prau [canoe-like boat], a little sailing prau about 16 foot, I suppose. And this old fellow put me in the boat the following morning and took me over to
- 26:30 the mainland and I started to walk to Singapore with my feet tied up in old socks and things that they had given me. And I got as far as Mersing, and I had avoided two Japanese patrols on the way down and when I got to Mersing there was only one way to cross the river and that was you got to swim it. And, of course, the noise I made swimming across the river must have alerted them and I was
- 27:00 just walking across the road, when two Nips [slang for Japanese people] on push bikes came up alongside me. And, I think they thought I was some wayward boong [derogatory for local or native] trying to cross the road. Until I turned around and, of course, they realised who I was. So I was taken back to Endau. There's another story that starts there.

**Perhaps you can tell us the different places that you were taken as a prisoner of war?**

- 27:30 Well, we've jumped in history, okay, from, I was taken to the Japanese headquarters at Endau and, to my eternal gratitude, the fellow that looked after me was an English-speaking graduate of Columbia University [prestigious New York university] who had been, very nice bloke, and I can't even remember his name, for Japanese he was
- 28:00 very American and he'd been falsely told that his father was dying and he ought to get back to Japan, and as soon as he did they grabbed him and wanted him as an interpreter and as a student of that part of Asia history and also geography. Very nice bloke, very nice, but had grown up in Los Angeles [USA]. Anyway, I was very fortunate that I fell into his hands rather than

- 28:30 anybody else, he took me to the doctor, they fixed me up, fixed up my feet, got me a pair of shoes and a shirt, I think, a pair of old shorts, I had too. When I got there I was taken to a little hut and over in the corner,
- 29:00 yeah, I can never remember this fellow's name, but he was a pleasurable individual and we once, we broke down the initial sort of huff huff [awkward meeting] barriers, he was, I won't say kindly, but he was better disposed to me than others and, as I say, he took me straight to the doctor, who was also very nice, helpful individual who had been co-opted into the Japanese army,
- 29:30 spoke not much English, but enough. And they bandaged me up and whatnot and I [was] chucked back into the hut with an old, I can't remember the old bloke's name, he only died about a week ago in Melbourne. He was a gunner in a Vildebeest that had been shot down when the landing took place, a Vildebeest or what was the other bloody airplane they had? Anyway, we sat
- 30:00 around here, well, they gave me a decent feed, which was very nice of them, too. Nice refreshing meal. They were not unpleasant, he sort of, I think he held the rest of the mob off a bit, the Japanese guards were stuffy, bloody stupid bone-headed Japanese coolly people anyway. And they were grandisimo, as far as Europeans were concerned they had never seen one before,
- 30:30 so if we got into their clutches you weren't treated exactly well. But I was only there, the two of us, were only there for two days, and I was told by the Sig [signaller] that we were going to be taken across to headquarters. And I didn't know where that was until we got on the road and we were taken, put on the back of a truck
- 31:00 on the top of a load of crap, and taken down to Mersing and taken across to Kelang and that's where the headquarters of the Japanese, of the guards was. And after about two days we were locked up, a stinking bloody garage, it was as hot as buggery too. But, fortunately the people who took us over stayed with us for a while so we were fed.
- 31:30 Ukini was the bloke's name. Ukini had made sure they understood we were to be, and of course when the guards left to go back we fell into the hands of the guard division, which is a rather different selection of Japanese, and they were the origins of the real bastards, they could be. So food was not exactly plentiful and the second night,
- 32:00 third night we were there, second night we were there, got there about midday and, yeah, second night, I was taken up to the Kelang school, which was on the top of the hill, and that was on the Japanese headquarters for the landing in Singapore, the guards division. And General Mishigawa was the first bloke I was introduced to there,
- 32:30 and Mishigawa was a typical 'Bushido yump' [disdainful/mocking reference about a devotee of the feudal code of the Japanese samurai] we called them, over impressed with his own dignity and importance and completely determined to make sure I had no status at all. He said he had some questions to ask me. And I said, "Well, I'll do the best I can. I should point out to you that I
- 33:00 haven't been in Australia for 18 months, if you were asking me." They had mentioned the questions, he had some questions about Australia or Australians. And the first question he asked me, "Where Batchelor was?" The airfield up the Northern Territory [100km south of Darwin]. Now I'd never heard of bloody Batchelor, it hadn't even been, a sod [a clump of surface soil held together by the roots of grass] hadn't even been turned when we went through so I don't know anything about Batchelor at all.
- 33:30 And after I picked myself up off the floor [laconic reference to the fact he had been knocked down], I went and sat back in the chair and said, "I still don't know where Batchelor is", so the questioning went along the same sort of lines, and I said, "Look, I've told you I haven't been in Australia for 18 months." And, finally, he accepted it, so at that moment we were virtually hauled to the lions as far as creature
- 34:00 comforts were concerned. And, eventually, they brought a lot of Indian Army captives there too, that had been, poor old Indians just folded up like cards, packs of cards, and they were all coolies [unskilled labourer], Indian coolies anyway. And the only people I met while I was still at Kelang were the two brigadiers of the Indian Army brigades.
- 34:30 Typically, stuffy Indian Army people. And I must say I looked like a bloody tramp, I had an old pair of, I don't know whose trousers they were, some blokes, given me a pair of pants and not sand shoes but sort of scuff shoes, I hadn't had a shave for a week and, of course,
- 35:00 above all, I was Australian and in the air force, and they didn't have any great regard for air force people anyway. However, ultimately those two brigadiers became almost human beings, I met up with them later. Yeah, we were there for two or three days and then we were all taken up to Kuala Lumpur [capital of Malaya; shortened to KL] and chucked into the Pudu gaol.
- 35:30 I paid an old collegians visit to Pudu gaol the last time I was in KL. It's still the same, still got my rude comment on the wall at the back of the toilet block.

#### **What was that rude comment?**

It's spelled F-U-C-K-U, ha ha. It wasn't a pleasant time in Kuala Lumpur that was a,

- 36:00 I've been back there, as I said, I went back more for, for old times sake rather than anything else, so I could say when I got back home that I'd been there. People, I went back to Malaysia twice because, it's sort of off the record really, but we were determined to put a monument at Kota Bharu to the two crews that were lost there, they were very good friends of mine. And I went back twice on the
- 36:30 mission to do that, and as far as I know it's still there, but I don't think it enjoys any great status in Kota Bharu, because they're impregnated completely by the Japanese now, especially the northern Malaysians. However, I got a couple of good friends, the sultan I have to say is a handshaking friend [acquainted but not close friends], his wife, on the other hand,
- 37:00 who was an Oxford University graduate and a very, very lovely person, they were very good to us. And there is an old lawyer there who does the court law for the Kelantan government [central northern state of Malaysia], he, I think he's a half-Indian Burmese fellow, whose a very good constitutional lawyer. It's a nice place Kelantan, it's a good place to go for a holiday, actually.
- 37:30 Except its now over-populated with the bloody Japanese, and they are tin mining frantically in southern Thailand now, so yeah, I haven't bothered to go back since. Anyway, that's how to get to KL in great discomfort that's all.
- 38:00 **How long were you there for?**
- I got there in, 14th of, 11th of February, and Singapore fell on the 15th. I left there, I think, on the 16th of October.
- 38:30 I think, I'm not sure of that date, either September or October.
- What was the next place you were...?**
- Well, what we did was the Japanese used to sort of throw papers in the air and say, "How many people are technicians?." And, of course, you could see all the Aussies, their minds working frantically to find out what sort of technicians they were,
- 39:00 and I had 12 Aussies, had three electricians and a couple of instrument fitters, all army blokes, there was one other I mentioned, a gunner that was shot down in, he was in KL as well. Only two air force people there, and I became identified because of my air force status, presumably, as some sort of
- 39:30 technical whiz, so I was put in charge of this group of technicians, mostly electricians or instrument fitters or motor mechanics. The Japanese, for a while in KL I worked in the old Ford agent's yard, we were ostensibly maintaining Japanese trucks and what we did was to take all the spark plugs out and bury them.
- 40:00 Find the trucks very hard to start and, technically, it was an excuse to get away from Kuala Lumpur. I wanted to get to Singapore to find out if there was any of our people there, but at least I could talk to as human beings instead of grunts [derogatory for infantry soldiers] or soldiers, we used to call them grunts, but
- 40:30 to my disappointment when I got to Singapore there was only one other air force fellow there. Australian air force and he was in town anyway, so I only stayed in Changi [Prison] for a very short time. But the idea was to take this bunch of technicians to Japan. Now when you say Japan, to the Japanese that could mean anywhere in South-East Asia in those days, and that's the excuse that was used, of course, every time you went to the Thai railway you went to Japan,
- 41:00 or if you went to Hong Kong you went to Japan, so it was no sort of airline-ticket destination, it was a really, a misnomer for shifting you to somewhere else. So I took this group of technicians down to Changi and with them went all the
- 41:30 very sick people, we took all of them as well, because we knew there was a hospital in Changi, and we persuaded the Japs that we ought to take them. Anyway, about 28 of us went down to Singapore and we waited around there for, I'm just trying to think, the beginning of October until the first week in December, and then they said, "Righto, the technical party is now going to Japan," and we were put on...

## Tape 3

- 00:31 **Can you start again on that summary of where you were?**
- I went from Changi and got on a ship, which was a fascinating story on its own because the first ship they offered I didn't regard as very good travelling accommodation, so I pissed off and joined another group
- 01:00 and finished up on the general's party on a much better ship. Followed closely by 17 Australians, of course.

### **Can you take us through very briefly through?**

From Changi it became, I was only there for three weeks and I was stuck in with a bunch of people who were obviously destined for the same part of the world that I was. The Japanese plan

- 01:30 was to segregate all the officers they could in one place and it was, Formosa [former name of Taiwan] was the place decided. Except that in those days they referred to it all as Japan, and you were off to Japan you were going to Japan and I thought, "Oh Jesus, going for Japan for December we'll be miserable." So, as I say, the nudging and shuffling that went on to make sure you got on a ship
- 02:00 that was going not, who wants to go to Borneo [large island east of Malaya], look what happened to them. I had no intention of going anywhere, or down to Sumatra [large island south of Malaya], for Christ sake who'd want to go there, so the idea was you dodged about and you lied and cheated and double crossed and whatnot to get to where you wanted to go. And as soon as they said,
- 02:30 I can remember this, I was standing on 16 wharf in Singapore harbour by the go down and were standing there and there were three ships, a tiny little pissant [little] out about half a mile off the beach, and they said the technical party is going on that ship. And I said to myself and about 14 others around, "Not bloody likely, I'm not going on that friggin' thing."
- 03:00 So what you do is get lost for a while, you see, and come back eventually and there were 14 of us left, mixed poms, Australians, and that's all we had. The other half are out there on the pissy little ship waving frantically and I thought, "There is nothing I can do for you," because I'd found out in the meantime that the ship standing just there, which was a lot bigger and a lot more comfortable, strangely enough called the
- 03:30 England Waru was taking the generals to Japan, and I thought, "Aha! You'd be a fool if you didn't try and get on the same ship that was going to Japan as the generals were on," and that's exactly what happened. We, I'd said to the other Oz [Australians] that were with me, six of them, and about four or five poms [English], and an American. That we had an American, I don't know where he came from but
- 04:00 we saw these, the generals all went up into the gangway into the bowels of the ship, and I thought, "Okay, that's alright, we'll just hook on the back there." That's precisely what happened, we all went through the washing department downstairs where they gave everybody a bath, washed all their clothes, and into a hold. And I got in there and I'd never seen any of these people before and they hadn't seen me either, but circumstantially it
- 04:30 was quite wonderful, because if you've got any bloody brains you go where the generals are going, even though it wasn't quite as good as it turned out to be. But the first bloke I slept next to, as I remember rightly, it was an Indian Army major general and I can't think of his name now, but next to him was the major general who'd been at Kota Bharu, whom I knew quite well, and his
- 05:00 name's...I can't remember names. So the question of playing the field that the best possible outcome became the game that POWs [prisoners of war] faced. Even, you lied like buggery, it didn't matter, and Australians are very good at that, so we got, and the first thing we had was the first real bath I'd ever had since I'd been a prisoner of war, we all went through the Japanese
- 05:30 system of purification, if you like. All our clothes were washed, you had to put them on wet, but that was alright. And I finished up sitting next to a major general, as I said, down in the hole. To his surprise.

### **Just so we can finish the summary?**

From there the ship went to Cape St Jacques in southern Vietnam

- 06:00 and then up to Formosa. We got off the ship at a place called Takao [modern day Kaohsiung], which is in the south of Formosa Island, is adjacent to the biggest airfield, other than the American one, I had ever seen, Japanese main transporting of airplanes to the south, to the Philippines or the Malaysia or do. I don't know how many airplanes went through that place every day,
- 06:30 but we were in the circuit pattern of that airfield, the camp that I was put in, a place called Heito [also known as 'Camp 3'], and Heito turned out to be a strict sand grabbing working camp, and I was one of nine or 10 officers that were left there to look after. The generals went through Heito on three occasions on their way into Formosa and when they were
- 07:00 on their way out on the way to Japan they came to Heito again, because it was adjacent to the airfield and the aircraft that took them to Japan were long-range four-engine aircraft that could go right through. Anyway, so, this camp became my home for two years, almost two years, and I saw people go through that place in droves. The majority
- 07:30 of officers of every nationality and of every rank above colonel, lieutenant colonel, came to Formosa at some time or other, and went through one of about four camps in Formosa. There was one very large camp that I eventually finished up, a place called Shirakowa [also known as 'Camp 4'; near Chia, central Taiwan] up in the mountains, very lovely place, almost holiday, climate,
- 08:00 dreadful accommodation, dreadful food, but accommodation was good. And all the generals were

eventually taken there, every officer of every, Dutch, American, British and Australian, seniority above lieutenant colonel went [to] that camp, the whole bloody lot of them were in one seething mass. I'm glad I wasn't there myself

08:30 even though that camp had the best outside Australia university going that you could possibly imagine, they had the cream of academia there as far as learning things was concerned. So I stayed in a working camp in the south because I was young, and believe it or not, I became a cook, and for two years

09:00 I was a cook. My immediate companion was a sergeant Chinese from the Philippines with whom I had a, dear old fellow died last year, I still communicate with his family, they live in Canada and the girls write to me every Christmas in the most endearing terms. Chan [the Chinese sergeant] and I got on very well, he was a hard-nosed bloody Chinese truck driver, but a wonderful, wonderful fellow.

09:30 And the rest of the camp had, we had 24 Australians of who six were officers, but stayed pretty permanently in the camp. British there were as high as lieutenant colonel, down to about lieutenant level, and there was 21 of them who didn't change either,

10:00 well, some of them changed because a couple of them went nuts and had to be shipped out and things like that. Americans, there were four with Tantom's party, one was an American mining engineer from the Philippines who was ostensibly a captain in the US Army, he'd never been in the army in his life, but it was a good

10:30 disguise for his position at the time, he was a mining controlling engineer.

### **Which camp were you in when the war ended?**

I went from there, as I said, to Shirakawa, which is in the middle of Formosa. We were there for four months and then it was decided, because the [Allies] was getting into the Philippines and getting closer to Formosa. In fact, three weeks before I left the camp in the south we were bombed by Americans trying to bomb the airfield and

11:00 they were letting their bombs go three miles shorter than the bloody target, so we copped it, we had 21 people killed in the camp then. I wasn't there at the time, but I went up to this officer collecting camp in the island and we were there for, from the 3rd of December in 1944 until

11:30 22nd of October, and I went from there to the northern part, which is Keelung in northern Formosa, where all the officers were left were collected except for a few that were left behind in the small camp to do administration and medical. We were all taken up and put on a ship, coincidentally and extraordinarily

12:00 called the Melbourne Maru, and the Melbourne Maru did its stuff very well the first night we were out on a sand bank and bugged the bottom of the boats so we had to [go] back and get into another one, Winchester Maru [Asaka Maru], which is identical. We went from there to Japan to Moji [near Fukuoka, Kyushu island], in the south, I spent three, two and a half months, in a mining camp in the south, in southern Japan in Kyushu,

12:30 where we were treated comparatively well because we were all crook. And from there we were taken, every officer in Japan, in greater Japan at the time, above the rank of captain was taken and virtually put on a ship to Korea, and by train we were taken up into Manchuria [former name of China] up to Mukden [near Shenyang, 1000km north-east of Beijing]. The generals had all been

13:00 previously flown in to the northern part, another camp to the north of us, so practically all the officers were in Manchuria and that's where we were released, the Russians. That's a cook's tour. That trip through Korea was magnificent, it was in the spring, Korea in the spring is beautiful, bloody, all the fruit trees are out in bloom and

13:30 all the boongs come out in their fancy clothes on the weekends and that, it was really lovely, it [was] the only time I'd ridden in a Japanese train with the window open. In fact, you could see it all. The accommodation facilities in Manchuria were comparatively better than what we had had before because in camp in Mukden, where I was, there were 800 and some odd by the time we'd finished, of officers.

14:00 **Let's go back to the start.**

14:30 Where are we now, in Mukden, aren't we?

### **Yeah, you've been released by the Russians.**

In the most incongruous Hollywood way, because the Yanks [Americans] found us first, they flew in. I was out walking with Air [Vice-]Marshall [Paul] Maltby [RAF], who was the senior officer

15:00 in Singapore [actually AVM Sir Paul Maltby was assistant air officer commanding Far East Command] when I was there, I'd never met him and he singled me out to go walking with him in the yard. And I was standing there and I said, "Excuse me Air Marshall, but that is a [Boeing B-24] Liberator over there." You, we heard this airplane flying by, there was an airfield just, oh, a few miles away, I said, "That's a Liberator, and, furthermore, 19 parachutes have just fallen out of the back of it." And he said, "Oh don't be so bloody stupid."

- 15:30 Stupid colonial Australian!" and I said, "God damn it sir, I'm telling you." And an hour and a half later they brought the entire crew of this Liberator into the camp and they were the relief party, because they knew where the...the generals in the meantime had been brought down from Manchuria, so we were all together and the Americans, of course, knew where we were. The Russians in the meantime had started
- 16:00 over to Manchuria and were coming south and they arrived in at the camp gates a day and a half after the Americans had landed there, so the old Russians had made pretty good territory at the time. The most extraordinary experience was to have the joy and pleasure of mixing with Russians, every single one of whom were drunk to the eyeballs, I've never seen
- 16:30 such a pissed-up lot in all my life. And we were as free, virtually as free as birds in town in Mukden. We met up [with] the French consul and his rather beautiful blonde daughter, and with 1300 hungry-looking Americans after her. I went to the post office and I got a whole set of Manchurian stamps, which I've still got somewhere,
- 17:00 just like walking around town, we went to the brewery and filled up two trucks with beer and took them back to the camp.

**We'll go back to the early days.**

**17:30 What sort of person was your dad?**

He was a convinced Baptist, of course, with a name like Spurgeon, and I went to Sunday school every Sunday until I was about 14. And I went to church every Sunday too, because I got into the habit of going. The school I went to was a Baptist school so there was no sort of sensation of

- 18:00 dictatorial treatment, but it was pretty strict, nobody in my household, as far as I knew, until me brothers came home ever drank any grog, for instance in the house, we were all very, very purist Baptists. My Dad had been orphaned when he was seven year old and he had been brought up in what is now quite a famous orphanage

- 18:30 in England run by an ancestor of his called Charles Hadden Spurgeon, my Dad was called Charles Henry Spurgeon. So [he] was C. H. Spurgeon, which is traditional family run on. Yeah, I didn't live a strict existence because I was the youngest in the family, I had brothers who understood that I didn't need to straight-laced [puritan] or

- 19:00 completely non-sectarian, if you like, and I learnt that at school anyway.

**What sort of person was your mum?**

She was a very, her father had been a store keeper in the naval dockyards in Portsmouth [England], and that's where my Dad met up with my mother, when they used to go [to] the same Baptist church in Gosport, not far from Southampton.

- 19:30 And my Dad met up with her when she was only 17, that's the same way I met that one out there [meaning his wife], but eventually they got married and Dad had a sheltered career in the navy because he was a specialist cipher man [a specialist in code writing and deciphering] and that was one of the reasons he was offered to the Australian navy,

- 20:00 because he was the only one who could read the cipher, I think that was the reason, anyway, and he was made an offer, of course, he couldn't refuse in comparison to the life he lived in England, even though they lived in a suburb of London, he worked in the admirals office at the Admiralty [headquarters of the Royal Navy] and was obviously a highly respected non-commissioned writer.

- 20:30 He did his fleet time in the Mediterranean, the same as everybody else did, but he was a very honourable and straight-as-a-rod fellow [followed the rules], my old man. He didn't teach me much that I didn't learn myself, but he was that sort of a fellow, and having a large family, and my mother was a quite soul

- 21:00 from a fairly simple background, I think. I didn't know her nearly as well as I knew my old man, cause I got an idea, I was sort of an afterthought, I was the youngest in the family, by a long way.

**How much younger?**

Ten years, you know, woops. I think,

- 21:30 I had a sister ahead of me about four or five years, unfortunately, she died, as a baby, but my other brothers and sisters were well on, my eldest brother was 22 years older than I was.

**Was he involved in the First World War?**

He was in both, he was in the first war as a cadet midshipman [Royal Navy most junior officer rank]. My other brother didn't join until, well, he wasn't old enough to go to the first war but he was

- 22:00 in England in 1921 and doing his anti-submarine training and he went back to the RN [Royal Navy] the moment the war started in England, he went back to the Royal Navy as a destroyer captain.

**Did they make it through the Second World War?**

Yeah, oh yeah.

22:30 The elder brother finished up a CBE [Commander of the Order of the British Empire] in the navy and my younger brother was a DSO [Distinguished Service Order] in the navy. He sank a ship with his little destroyer and also was in the Norwegian evacuation of Norway. So he had two years in the Royal Navy before, in the early days of the Second World War.

**23:00 When you were growing up what did you know of the Australian Anzac tradition?**

Oh, I can remember the first Anzac Day march I went to when I was about seven, I suppose, and I wondered what the hell they were all doing. Gradually, I suppose, the Anzac tradition is imbibed by school kids as it's explained to them, but it never worked in the way a lot of people think it should have.

23:30 I'm a member of the RSL [Returned and Services League] now, but I don't ever go anywhere near, they haven't got enough air force people in there, and neither am I a member of the Air Force Association, because they are nearly as stuffy, and they are full of bomber command anyway.

**24:00 Growing up did you feel you were Australian or English?**

Who me? It never occurred to me really, my brothers and I always thought we were Australian, except that when I started reading birth dates and things like that I suddenly realised they were all born, I was the only Australian in the whole family. But they certainly didn't have any trace of their time in England, they were all kids when they left

24:30 England anyway. Both my brothers went to Jervis Bay [Royal Australian Naval College officer training at HMAS Creswell] when they were 13, my third brother went to Dookie College [Melbourne] and became a farmer in Western Australia. I'd never ever seen him until about four or five years before he died, he just disappeared into the bush in Western Australia. My two sisters are, one

25:00 became, she was one of the first public servants to come to Canberra in 1937, as a typist, and my second sister was a pharmacist trained at Queen Victoria Hospital in Melbourne. And they were, my eldest sister was 10 years older than I was and the other one was about seven years older than I was, so, I,

25:30 the contact I had with my family were mainly my sisters.

**And your lost brother in Western Australia?**

I didn't see him until I flew up over there once when I was in the air force and I rang him up and said, "Get your arse down here, I'd like to shake your hand." I remember he went to Scotch College in Melbourne and I can remember him going off to school, but no contact of any other sort. I used to hear about him,

26:00 he went through the worst part of the Depression on a decrepit property in, out in mid-Western Australia somewhere, which eventually he turned into a good wheat-producing farm, to the extent he could retire when he was 53, so...

**How old was he when you finally met him?**

Ah, 60, might have been even a bit older, but he had been

26:30 back once to Melbourne and with his family because my brother wanted to see the kids, so he was there for about three or four days and then he had to go back to the farm anyway.

**We'll move on to joining up.**

**27:00 Where did the point come for you going into an air force position rather than a naval position?**

I suppose it was there all the time, I don't know. I always had a fascination with airplanes and, of course, at that time the navy didn't have any. They had a couple of Supermarines [Seagull V], amphibians [flying boats] that they used to fly [via catapult] off the cruiser, but that wasn't flying, that was dicing with death. And

27:30 in those days, of course, the air force was rather frowned upon by the navy as being a junior bunch of larrikins anyway.

**What did your dad say to you when you told him you wanted to join the air force?**

He said, "You do what you want to do. If you want to join the air force you go and join the air force." And I had done an enquiry pro forma for the navy when I was 13 and I just didn't bother to launch it, I couldn't imagine being in the same occupation, see

28:00 the routine in the navy in those days was strictly boy scout's stuff. If you got a trip to England you were very, very fortunate and got a detachment to the Royal Navy, which is where about the only place they learnt anything.

**Looking back, if there was no war coming up,**

28:30 **do you think you would have gone on to a service career?**

I didn't know there was going to be a war, until Menzies [Robert, prime minister] told us. Well, I hadn't really appreciated what the significance of that was.

**What motivated you to join the air force?**

What motivated me? Oh, I think I had always had that subterranean feeling about airplanes, I think

29:00 and when you build airplanes and they fly you begin to wonder about whether you know anything about it or not. And I must say I built four of them that were brilliant, far exceeded my expectation. And also, controlling them convinced me that this is what I ought to be doing.

29:30 **Can you tell us about your first solo flight?**

Yeah, I can remember it well. Because I think I told you that my instructor was an old sergeant pilot and had, who'd been very badly burned in a prang [crash] he'd had in an old wooden loft [aircraft], and he was a man of singularly demonstrative language, which came at you in the form of

30:00 every invented curse you've ever heard, if you did anything or stupid, you heard about it.

**Can you give us an example?**

Oh, I suppose the hardest exercise to learn is a slow roll, especially when you are doing it against the rotation of, it's easy when you are doing it with the rotation when you are going that way, but against the rotation you've got to go very, very careful, and

30:30 I can remember his remarks after my first couple of attempts were too explicit to bear repetition, and...

**Can you give us an example of the language?**

"I thought I told you 14 bloody times not to ham [push] down on the left foot!" you know, that sort of thing. So you consciously take

31:00 your left foot off the rudder and the right and you just go along like that. But, yeah, he was, he had four pupils of that course, two of them failed and I was terrified I was going to be the third. And I said to him one night, after we had finished I was walking back with him and he didn't say much,

31:30 very rarely was he critical or, and I said to him, it would be dangerous of course if I even asked what my chances, and he said, "You silly bugger, you're still here aren't you?" You know that sort of response, but, yeah, he was a great teacher, very patient.

32:00 **This was pre-Empire air training scheme, how well organised was the Australian air force?**

Air force? Oh, good, excellent, cause one of the prize postings for young air force officers in those days was an instructor and the numbers that they needed each year, probably no more than four or five a year, it meant the competition was very close. Some people

32:30 didn't like being instructors, it was one very good way of guaranteeing your advancement.

**How well equipped was the Australian air force at that time?**

Well, I learnt in an aero club, of course, which is a different experience altogether, even though it was under air force control. Yeah, the, their

33:00 airplanes were, I was at the ANA school and the other one was the Royal Victorian Aero Club, all the airplanes were well looked after and, you could tell just by sitting in them, they were clean and they were, if they got dirty they were washed every night, so people looked after their equipment and that's inclined to reinforce your confidence a bit, it also teaches you a couple of basic lessons, you never leave an airplane dirty,

33:30 even if it's only the paint that looks good.

**Can you tell us about any mistakes you made during your training?**

I don't remember having any, I suppose the hardest thing was,

34:00 it's very easy to do a slow roll to the left, because the clock's turning to the right because it tends to, if you try to do one the other way, it's kind of more difficult, and I can remember the day I did a right-hand roll without any trouble and only because there was no noise from the front seat at all. I thought, "Well, the poor bastard's trying to get his breath," and he said,

34:30 "Hey, that wasn't half bad." So I realised that, yeah, and it felt good too, didn't fall out of the air or anything like that, and the old Tiger Moth [biplane], mine was Gypsy Moth it was an old wooden Moth and, to keep the nose up in an airplane with a third of the weight hanging out there on the front end [because of the engine], to keep the nose up and under control is pretty blooming hard, and you've got

to work

35:00 your feet and...but, yeah, I don't know whether I had any particular aptitude but, I think I tried to say before, I think I understood the aerodynamics a bit better than having built the damn things myself and having realised what happens, if the thing didn't do what you wanted it to do, it was rigged wrong.

35:30 Twisted or something like that.

**What were your ambitions in the air force?**

Me? I very seriously thought after I came over whether I was going to stay.

**But I was thinking more at that time did you want or fly multi-engines or...?**

It didn't worry me, I was a big airplane man, I'm sure I wasn't a knuckle head [fighter pilot]

36:00 I know, I had too many friends who were.

**Was that the slang term for fighter pilots?**

Yeah, that's what we used to say about fighter pilots. I had good friends that were fighter pilots off my course and some of them, I suppose, 50 per cent of those

36:30 blokes were killed anyway. But three or four of them I remember as being exceptional pilots.

**What's the difference in personality between a multi engine pilot...?**

Oh, they were more gung ho [enthusiastic], I suppose, they were a bit... They always did silly things without even worrying about it, and sometimes the dangerous things were that way, but I don't think there is any difference. Temperamentally, I suppose,

37:00 there was some difference. I remember one bloke, who was a bloke called Congo Kinnimont, I don't know whether his name rings a bell. He was a...what do you call a bloke that works on a cattle station? [jackeroo] I remember he arrived at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne with a rolled towel under his arm,

37:30 with his boots on and dirty old pair of khaki pants and the warrant officer, when he saw him, he said, "The first thing you're going to do when you get to Point Cook is get out of those clothes and get a bath." And Congo was always the gung ho sort of fighter pilot type individual, he was a very good pilot, though,

38:00 very, very good, but I don't remember many others of our...oh, yes, there were, there was another bloke up in Queensland who was pretty good, too, and he only died last year and I can't remember his name, but he'd been a fighter pilot all through the war and survived it. I wish I could remember his name. He distinguished himself

38:30 in the early days in Vietnam by being captured by the Viet Cong, I remember, and it took the entire, the efforts of the entire Australian government to get him released, forgotten what his name was.

## Tape 4

00:30 **You converted to the Hudsons after the Ansons, can you tell us about that?**

I didn't convert to an Anson really at all, I just flew it and was lucky enough to be posted to a squadron before I'd even had a chance to be a skipper in the Anson. I'm very glad I didn't, but I had enough hours as a second pilot in an Anson to realise that it wasn't a safe airplane to fly over water. As a matter of fact,

01:00 I was very glad to get out of it for that reason, because those old airplanes were clanked and they were absolutely clapped out [worn out], and you could hear them groaning when they were flying along. But, yeah, I don't suppose I ever had the choice really, I just happened to be available

01:30 at the time and coming from a reconnaissance squadron I'd done a navigation course so I was obviously destined for an airplane that required some sort of navigation qualification, and I did what they called a short NR course when I was in Singapore and that put me in a position where I could be a skipper of a reconnaissance airplane.

**What did you enjoy most about flying?**

02:00 All of it. There was no particular, I think the nice thing about it was it was a gentleman's way of performing a military function if you like, for instance, although I looked after my own particular airplane like a mother goose, I had the same crewmen, in fact, my electrician's now up here in Canberra, I don't know where the hell he is, he is supposed to ring me up. But

02:30 he was my electrical fitter for every airplane I ever had, because we got on well together and we didn't argue the bloody toss. He was a good tradesman and Mick's followed me around all over the place, but, unfortunately, the poor old bugger's gone blind and somebody's got to guide him around, but he'll come over here one day and

03:00 we'll talk about the same things we've talked about for 45 years. The same people and the same stories to go over, but yeah, I think was the, I liked the bigger airplanes anyway because there is not substitute for having two engines. If you've only got one it's a bit embarrassing, but if you got two and one stops it doesn't matter.

03:30 **Can you tell us about the Hudson?**

A good airplane, a beautiful airplane. It was a, it was comfortable which was the most important thing, you could walk around in it and let it fly itself and go for walk and things like that. It was a confidence building airplane, it had two engines for a start,

04:00 it was, mostly it was comfortable. It wasn't noisy like some of them were. The old [Avro] Lincoln was a noisy airplane, but it was a good one, it was a good airplane, and the same way that the [English Electric] Canberra became a good airplane.

**Can you take us through a pre-flight on a Hudson?**

I didn't do any pre-flights on a Hudson.

04:30 I used to walk around and put my hand on the prop, but they did that and that was the way it worked. I had the same ground crew the whole time I was flying and so you knew damn well it was as good as anything you were ever going to. But I used to walk around the airplane, I suppose I used to look at things like trim tabs on the rear end, I used to look

05:00 at the positions of the flaps, when they were retracted if they weren't even. Tyres, kick a tyre, if it feels alright, if it's the right response to your toe, I didn't do any real, I used to go crook if the windows weren't clean and particularly on the inside. That's why I'm so meticulous with the car, I do the same thing with the car.

05:30 But pre-flight was, you depended on the guys to do that. You did that yourself, but yeah, and the same, nowadays, of course, the pilot in an airplane that the air force flies now he just gets in and flies, and the technicians make sure that everything's, he'll tell them if

06:00 it doesn't work, probably in singular language, too. But there's no such thing as the old walk around the airplane, kick the tyres and waggle the surfaces and things like that.

**Can you walk us through Hudson, can you describe it?**

I'd find it difficult to remember, I think, it was a very comfortable airplane,

06:30 it was soundproof or nearly soundproof, the only thing that weren't fitted were the side panels, the noise resilient panels where no, it was just skin on the inside. It, ours was one of the few Hudsons that had a carpeted floor, and the troops used to pride themselves on keeping it clean, too,

07:00 we had a vacuum cleaner in that airplane, which was stolen somewhere. But the piece of carpet, as a matter of fact, came from St Andrew's Cathedral in Singapore. When they changed the carpet there, we managed to get a bit of that, but it had a bed in it, it had a layout, pull down stretcher, nobody ever used it as a bed, normally it was a place where if a crewman came with us,

07:30 he just z'uzz'd' off there, or you stacked your gear on it, too, because you had to tie everything down in a Hudson like you did every other airplane. It had, it was completely weather conscious, you could adjust the heat and cold so that the temperature was perfect and that was throughout the airplane. What else?

08:00 It did a lot of its things automatically, preset conditions, there was no question of fuel control or anything like that, you adjusted that on very-carefully instrumented fashion so you always operated the same B settings and the same mixture settings. And they were all visible, no, it was a very comfortable airplane.

**What was the crew on a Hudson?**

08:30 Four. Pilot, second pilot, or navigator, and gunner and wireless operator. Wireless operator sat behind, there is a big panel here that went right across here with a door in it, radio operator was out there. And the gunner, of course, was out the back end.

**What sort of armament could she carry?**

It could carry 4000

09:00 pounds of bombs, comfortably. Could probably carry six [6000], but it would be hard work. I don't know how much ammunition they would carry, but I think it was about 250 rounds of turret ammunition down

the back. We always carried a few spare bricks [ammunition in cases of a similar size to house bricks] in the floor in the back, on the stowage, so

09:30 very rarely would you have a chance to fire more than 100 rounds anyway. Very rarely.

**What were the self defence guns on the Hudson?**

Two rear-firing turret guns and two forward 6-inch guns and two forward side-operated by the wireless operator and by the second pilot, two each side, or one each side, I'm sorry. And that was through the hole

10:00 cut in the window, they had a preset insert in the window so that the gun wouldn't point at the wing for instance, or go anywhere further aft than the first rudder. Theoretically that was the way it was supposed to be, very rarely did I ever have the time to operate side guns

10:30 in any case most of the attacks came from behind us. So, defensively, the rear turret was the defence you had.

**What was it like to fly the Hudson?**

Like a ladybird, beautiful, it was just, well it was an airliner, it was very well, it handled beautifully, it was a very positive sort of airplane and it had tons of power, which was different from an

11:00 Anson, it had plenty of reserve power, it was good on fuel, that was the nature of the engine, they were big engines. You had about four-and-a-half hours' range in it, I suppose, five [hours] if you squeezed it. The books used to say it had seven hours, but I think that must have been in the minds of the advertiser.

**11:30 When you were posted at Singapore, what did you know about the rise of militarism in Japan and what was happening over there?**

Well, the Americans weren't anywhere near the war then, that was almost 18 months before the war started that we went to Singapore, and, as I said before,

12:00 Singapore was, you'd have to describe the service conditions there as idyllic. They didn't do any bloody work at all, and the equipment that the RAF had there was abysmally bad, some of them came out of the first war. There had some [Bristol] Blenheims there that were so old, I went for a ride in a Blenheim, I got out of the thing after about three-quarters of an hour and said,

12:30 "I'm never going to do that again," they were decrepit and old and they had not been serviced properly. And as I say, everybody went to sleep at one o'clock [in the afternoon], even the airmen went to sleep at one, after lunch, how the hell you can keep an air force squadron going when you only work three hours' a day, I'm bugged if I know. Because it was accepted that [even] mad dogs and Englishmen don't go out in the midday sun.

**13:00 What did you know of Japan?**

Nothing, I knew geographically what it looked like, roughly. I had no idea it was geographically expansive as it was, I didn't realise that the Japanese, if I'd thought about it I would have I suppose, I didn't know they were in Mukden, in Manchuria, I didn't realise

13:30 I knew that the grand China War, as they called it, incorporated the invasion of Manchuria, but I thought they all got out as, because the climate's so bloody awful, but I had no idea of Japanese history at all. I knew that the Japanese had been allies of ours in the first war in the naval sense, but nobody ever saw a

14:00 Japanese navy ship, as far as I know. My brother had done one tour in Hong Kong as a naval officer and he had gone to Japan on holiday, his honeymoon, as a matter of fact, he went to Japan and I think it's quite possible that he worked in a part of the navy department in Hong Kong that worried about the Japanese, I don't know, maybe they were concerned about them in those days.

14:30 But he certainly never spoke to me about it, not until after I got back anyway. And then, see my elder brother died during the second war, anyway, as a result of a bit of bungled surgery, as a matter of fact, but he never asked me about Japan. So I think my own folks were probably

15:00 a bit timid about asking me about Japan and I didn't mind that I very rarely talked about Japan, anyway, I only lived in Japan proper for two months, and that was in a bloody coal mine.

**How were you keeping track of the war in Europe at that time?**

Pretty well.

15:30 The radio broadcasts were good, I must say the BBC [British Broadcasting Service] was always, we always listened to BBC news in the mess I remember that, because at that time it was the end of the first battle of Britain, and the initial rumbles of the second and, of course, the sort of gung ho-esque [meaning that fighter pilots were enshrined in the public consciousness as 'heroes' or 'legends'] was

16:00 well established as far as fighter pilots were concerned. We knew a lot of the blokes that were in fighter

command in those days from having met them before, but I didn't know many RAF people myself. When I say we, the air force knew a lot of those blokes, because they had gone mostly through Point Cook. I think out of the Point Cook officers that were in

16:30 fighter command, Point Cook training officers, 70 per cent were killed in the early stages of the war.

**What were you told of the strategic role of the RAAF in Singapore at that time?**

I don't think we were told anything. The job we were given was maritime reconnaissance, which is much the same I suppose as coastal command was given

17:00 in England, and they had Supermarine flying boats and things like that to do that with. But I don't suppose our role, because, completely and absolutely apparent to us until the 8th of December 1941 [the day the Japanese attacked] and, I think, we were, I used to wonder sometimes what we were doing there.

17:30 We used to do those fan patrols out of Kota Bharu right up to the Cambodian coast and I don't know what we were bloody-well looking for because we never saw anything. And it was only on the 7th of December, when they saw the hole bleeding Japanese army, navy coming down from... Another thing I didn't know until I went back to Vietnam was that the Japanese were in Cam Ranh Bay [Vietnam] well before we ever talked about it, in fact, the airfield 2 Squadron operated from in

18:00 Phan Rang [Vietnam] was a Japanese airfield and right on the end of the southern take-off runners at Phan Rang was an old ancient, oh, what was the mob from South America that settled there? In south Vietnam, in the 14th century, they were there. And history is a mix, and their dress is a mixture of all those

18:30 different contributory populations they had. There were people who were arriving in that part of Vietnam in the 14th century that came from South America, and it's not generally well known.

**You didn't get up there at that time when you were in Singapore, did you?**

No, you weren't allowed to go anywhere near French, it was French then, of course.

**What sort of airplane was the Hudson in that operational role?**

19:00 What for maritime defence, do you mean? Well, the only one we had was the Hudson and the Anson, and the Anson was pretty well known to be on the end of the string as far as efficiency was concerned [meaning it wasn't efficient]. I suppose the Ansons did a very good job while they could, but there were really,

19:30 as reconnaissance airplanes they were designed for operating around the UK [United Kingdom] and the English Channel, but as far as we're concerned, I think, they squeezed the last possible use as a maritime reconnaissance airplanes out of the Ansons in those days.

**What about the Hudson?**

I think it was a pretty suitable sort of replacement for the Anson. It was much more comfortable anyway.

20:00 **Your particular Hudson, how did you personalise it apart from the carpet? Did it have a name, for instance?**

It had a motto on the front of it called 'Nux Vomicae' [meaning] 'nothing makes us sick' and that came from my brother who had it on one of his ships. Yeah, mottoes, I don't think we worried much about those. I'm trying to think, some people had,

20:30 I remember one fellow had a picture of, not Marilyn Monroe [voluptuous female Hollywood actor], what was the name of the infamous female of those days that had blonde hair? What the hell was, uh? I'm taxing my memory beyond its capability, I'm sorry.

**What about any particular rituals in your crew before you went out on missions?**

21:00 "G'day, Mick. How are you, Harry?" I don't think, I think we did a briefing of sorts, we knew what the mission was before we went, unfortunately, they became a bit stereotyped, when you knew you were on sector three or five or seven or whatever it was. And they were all produced

21:30 in pre-plan form, so all we needed was the chart and put the four plotting points on it and join them up, and all the navigation was airborne navigation, anyway, you didn't do any, we didn't do any astral navigation or sun spotting or anything like that. It was done on calculated wind, remarkably accurate as a matter of fact, near the equator for eight months of the year it is pretty

22:00 stable anyway. The only, in the two extremes, in the monsoon it became unpredictable a bit, but weather conditions were always good up there except for the two months of the year when they weren't, as long as you were home by four o'clock it was alright. But I don't think there were any sort of short cuts

22:30 of, off the end of the finger things with navigation in those days. You found a wind and you steered a

heading off of the wind, that's all, and if you could measure your speed, which was pretty hard over water, unless you went to an awful lot of trouble, so it was done by not guess work so much as best, well, you could plan it that's all. If you happen to be lucky enough to have a

23:00 island or something that you could use as a reference which was more positive when anchored to the bottom, there was no real way of checking, we had no radars, we had no, we had a directional beacon on the airplane, which by dint of our own radio people's ingenuity they'd built us a beacon at Kota Bharu for instance, and it was powered by

23:30 a small motorbike engine, a lawn-mower engine, in fact, the generator was powered for that. But gee the number of times we used it was remarkable, they could give us a bearing to steer to get us back to, back home and on a number of occasions that worked very, very, to our benefit very much. But we had no radar, none of the aircraft were equipped

24:00 with radar of any sort and so you were dependent on ingenuity more than anything else.

**How did you put your crew together?**

I didn't, it happened. Well, it was the crew I inherited from Peter Parker, when he left. And fortunately the same crewmen stayed with me, there was only four. There was

24:30 an engine fitter an electrical fitter, an airframe fitter, and what was the other one? A mucker of some sort, he was a, all the other bits [instrument fitter]. But the maintenance schedule for the airplane was pretty simple. It was only an airliner after all and nothing seriously ever went wrong with it unless some silly bugger shot a gun at you or something like that.

25:00 But the airplane was maintained as an airliner.

**Did you have any particular protection from fire in the plane? Like armour-plating or...?**

No, we never had any on the airplane at all, no. The worst part about it was neither did anyone else, there was no armour-plating, none at all. And it was pretty thin aluminium skin anyway.

25:30 **You mentioned Peter Parker, who taught you a lot, can you tell us about any survival lessons he taught you?**

Well, I don't think he taught me any survival lessons, you learn survival lessons by experience more than anything else, you

26:00 read, I don't, anybody had had the, well, we lost two airplanes that just disappeared when we were at Kota Bharu, for instance. One, I think what happened was that he, he's dead now so it doesn't matter, I suppose, but he was a bit gung ho, anyway, and, I think, he put the airplane into a position where it was

26:30 aerodynamically impossible for it to stay in the air, and he went into the sea, they were all killed. That was one of the accidents we had, there were other minor accidents that were usually pilot error from, the Hudson wasn't a critical airplane to handle but by comparison with an Anson it was. It was much more highly ring-loaded and it had

27:00 different NPR systems [Nozzle Pressure Ratios], the flaps were Fowler flaps [used on most modern passenger aircraft], which extended the area of the wing and also changed the angle of incidence of the wing, which was a great old idea for a short airfield, but I don't think that, I...lot of people thought there was a 'bogey' about the Hudson [meaning it had a design fault that caused the aircraft to fall out of the sky], I don't really think there was, except that two or three of our crews were lost because the airplane

27:30 lost its ability to fly. In other words, it lost an engine or it was shot up so badly that it, I remember that one went in behind the mess, as a result of war damage, after the war started, and nobody really knows, but it certainly had lost its ability to stay in the air. And as soon as he

28:00 tried to do a turn it just, he...

**When you are training on the Hudson, do you do stalls?**

Stalling you do, yeah, but what was the point, the airplane was aerodynamically designed to stall, when it was very, very slow, so from the point of view of short landing and things like that it was brilliant. It had tons of grab on what little air it had, but it could do, in the same way it could

28:30 present you with a flying disaster quite easily, if you weren't sensitive, if you like, to the outcome of your foolish actions were. I think most people were, the only people I know that were killed in Hudson were usually due to structural damage to the frame or the flying controls in some way or another.

29:00 Sometimes, if it was a single engine situation, it would be very critical.

**How well did it fly on a single engine?**

Well, it just didn't have enough power to do what it, could do on two, that was the situation you found yourself in. I didn't have any things like that myself, I suppose I did, I had lost one engine that morning on the 8th of December, but it didn't occur to me that there was anything likely to inhibit me

29:30 from flying on the other one, even though it made it a bit more awkward. And now that I think about it the bloody airplane was full of holes so it couldn't have had much fuel left, in other words we were pretty bloody lucky, but, yeah, I can't remember instances, we had a couple of accidents, I suppose, that were

30:00 could [have] been accredited to or credited to pilot error, but most cases I think they were war damaged more than anything else. And once you did that, the airplane was fairly sensitive to war damage. I can't think of anything...it didn't land very well if it only had one tyre,

30:30 that was another thing, it used to do the most extraordinary things, but most times you could put it on the ground slow enough, if it would only turn quite sharply with a flat tyre. I saw two or three accidents where that was, well, they weren't accidents because they didn't turn into accidents, but incidents where tyres had gone [on] one wheel, and all you do is hold it off until the last possible moment

31:00 before you put it down, and nine times out of 10 it just did that.

**Did you ever have to do that?**

No, I never had to do that. No, well, I don't remember having to do that. The only thing I can remember in the one that I had was obviously the left hand tyre had gone, it had blown,

31:30 because it was dragging very hard to the left before I stopped it. And it stopped because I think it went into a ditch, not a ditch but a drain.

**Where was that incident?**

At Kota Bharu, that's the only one I had.

**Can you take us through that particular flight?**

Um,

32:00 well, I think I was one of 12 airplanes and I was number three in one flight, we used to fly four in a flight, and as soon as we got up anywhere near the Nips we just broke up and went our own way, chased each other around. But, as I said, in my case, I dropped a bomb and I must have been something

32:30 either in the target blew up and hit up or I was too close to the bomb when it went off because I got a piece through the front corner of the airplane, and it's sufficient to affect the control of the airplane, largely, but we were lucky enough to be able to get it [the aircraft] on the ground. Apart from the

33:00 difficulty having got it on the ground, obviously I had lost the left tyre, and it started dragging left until I pulled it up in a ditch on the left-hand side. But I was very fortunate I didn't have any great speed when it hit the ground, it was very light on for fuel and things like that, all the fuel had boiled out, it had pissed out the holes, but now we

33:30 were lucky.

**Any particular crash procedures you take before a landing like that?**

Well, they all strapped in, that was the only thing we did, and, of course, the next quickest thing is to get the hell out of it and that's precisely what happened, they all got out before I was, and running if I remember rightly. They thought it was going to blow up on us but, fortunately, most of the fuel had gone.

**What was the situation for the pilot? Is it every man for themselves? Or are you last out?**

34:00 I was last man out, yes, I can remember I even stop[ped] to even pick up my cipher bag with all the signals books in it, I picked that up, and the parachute, I picked that up on my way out the door, but that was only because parachutes were in short supply and if you saved one, well, okay, it was yours.

34:30 If you left it in the airplane, see that airplane was going to burn anyway, and, no, okay, I was out the door and as far away from it as I could be.

**The plane did burn?**

The Japanese destroyed the remnants of it after they occupied the place.

**What is the procedure**

35:00 **for evacuating or parachuting out of the Hudson?**

Out the door is the quickest way, you don't get out the window, there is no way you can. Windows are big enough to get out, as I said, when we pranged on the water we both got out the side window, by pulling glass back you could fit right through the hole and [as] long as your Mae West wasn't blown up, we got out that window quite comfortable, otherwise

35:30 it's the door, which is out the back. Sometimes that is not convenient or you can't get the bloody thing

open because of damage or something like that, but, procedurally, that's what you, I never really thought that much about it, I know what I'd do and I made for the door as quickly as I could. Because the airplane had a notorious reputation for, if there is any fuel left, it will go, it will blow.

36:00 So and they burnt very well, Hudson, it's the sort of material, metal that was fiery, if you like.

**Is that the thing you fear most?**

Yeah, I think so, I think so, well, obviously during, I suppose the thing you dread more is any sort of survival in water, and that was

36:30 what happened the second time, I can remember the deceleration being somewhat steep, if you like, it was almost instant as soon as the thing stopped aquaplaning, then it went, it stopped very quickly so you had to be very quick to get out. That's why I was a bit surprised

37:00 that we both got out, because, as I said, the other two had already departed the world [been killed] anyway.

## Tape 5

00:36 **Can you tell us what Singapore was like before the Japanese invasion?**

Completely relaxed, I would say, it was the sort of pinnacle of the British Raj,

01:00 I guess was displayed there and, yeah, it, the highest proportion of the population were poms who I think were on some sort of allowance to say away from England. Or, alternatively, high proportion of the rubber planters, for instance, managers, were Australians. But most of them were up-country,

01:30 up in, the rubber grew better than it did around Singapore. Singapore was a trading centre. And I can remember we had to wait literally weeks before we were even allowed to put a foot in the cricket club. Raffles Hotel [an icon of 'Britishness' in Singapore] would not accept Australians in their dreadful-bloody-looking overalls or uniforms we used to wear.

02:00 And apart from the fact that we could be barely understood by the staff in the hotels, because we didn't talk like the rubbers [owners/managers], and then we started beating the shit out of [annihilating] them playing football and I know we won a rugby championship in the first three months we were there, and they couldn't get over it, how can you run around at midday in that [heat], you should have to wait until four o'clock to play football,

02:30 bullshit.

**What places were popular for you to go to in Singapore?**

The swimming club was the most popular because our wages, by everybody else's standards, were abysmal, they were a, a thorough disgrace, we were on the same allowances as if we had been on, even up country, we had to beg for an extra meal allowance so we could survive, and I think

03:00 it was three [shillings] and six [sixpence] a week was the meal allowance. Well, okay, you could buy one decent feed for three [shillings] and sixpence, 35 cents, or whatever it was.

**Can you describe that swimming club?**

Pay was £3 10 [shillings] a week in Australia and, I think, we went up by a magnificent sum of 20 per cent or something like that when we went to Singapore, so that even if we could afford to go and have a meal at

03:30 the Raffles Hotel, we didn't want to go there, anyway, because we were regarded almost [as] outcasts. And the attitude persisted, I regret to say this, but the attitude persisted even after I was back in Singapore after 1954, it was bad. Australians were regarded as, all the decent fights downtown were Australians

04:00 asserting themselves that's all, or belting up some bloody shopkeeper who had screwed them. And screwing the customers is the name of the game in Singapore, but, yeah, we could, we went to places where we wanted to go to, where we felt comfortable, and, eventually, we were reluctantly accepted in the cricket club as non-weekend guests.

04:30 You didn't go there on the weekend because that was a member's prerogative.

**Were there any special drinking places that Australians frequented more than others?**

We had our own at the Sembawang, we had our own beer, in fact, Australian beer was being drunk there more than any other sort, English beer was pretty pricey, and pricey I mean

05:00 it was sort of threepence halfpenny a glass, instead of tuppence halfpenny a glass, that sort of thing,

but, yeah, there was some reluctance on the part of the Singapore locals to accept that we colonials had imposed on them. And, I don't know, I've never understood why they had to feel that way.

05:30 Who the bloody hell did they think they were anyway. But they were the survivors of what, I suppose, had been established in India as the British Raj and if you lived in the tropics you had to live like that, that's all.

**What was morale like at those times that you weren't really on active service?**

We played a hell of a lot of sport, even if we had to

06:00 play amongst ourselves. The only club that we still had to be invited to play was golf, and I didn't play golf in those days, when I went back the second time I played golf, as often as almost I wanted to. A lot of the boys, a lot of the airmen, went to the races, and did bloody well, too, cause a lot of the pimps were Aussies, anyway, and most of the Chinese horse owners there, and

06:30 they were all Chinese horse owners, took the Australians to heart, and they were the only ones because they knew they used to really spend their money on horses, but, as I say, it was terribly difficult to break into the sort of social stream.

**What frustration...**

For airmen it was almost impossible.

07:00 **What frustrations were there at this period of inaction?**

We were pretty happy, the, you know, the troops got, we made a point that, they stopped sending the mail by ship and he used to come up by flying boat with Qantas and little things like that so the blokes had a reasonable flow of mail, those that who seemed bothered to write to their families,

07:30 anyway. I think a lot of our troops were quite glad to be away from their families when we were up there, in the situation where they were, they weren't paid much any better, and they used to get into trouble by going to the dance palaces they had in Singapore, because they were supposed to be out of bounds to Europeans, and they couldn't afford to go to a

08:00 pub in town so we used to turn a blind eye to it. Yeah, it was a, on the other hand I know three blokes who married daughters of Singaporean families. In one case, admittedly the girl's mother was Australian and he virtually lived at their house at weekends, he used to go an, I think, he was

08:30 courting, is what they call it up there? I don't think it is any different from what it is anywhere else, this bloke had his eye on the girl and no doubt about that, unfortunately, not only was he killed but so was she on the way out, she was trying to get out of Singapore and was killed when one of the ships was sunk, so double tragedy, sort of neutralised itself. I don't ever remember feeling miserable.

09:00 I don't think I ever felt home sick, we had a lot of fun, we had a hell of a lot of fun.

**In retrospect is was said that the forces weren't prepared for a Japanese invasion, how prepared did you feel?**

I felt pretty bloody good actually, and the thing was in RAF terms,

09:30 we not only met all our mission requirements but we exceeded them. And I know we had the reputation eventually of being the only ones who put their hands up if anything needed to be done, for the simple reason that, despite the reinforcement of the RAF and there were some reinforcements that the RAF brought into Singapore, that they could afford. Most of the squadrons

10:00 in the RAF were then manned by Australians anyway, which I suppose was a question of convenience more than anything else. As I say, I flew around in one of their Blenheims once and I said to the bloke when I got out, "I don't know how the hell you can stand the bloody squeaking and groaning of your airplanes, it's going to fall apart one day." But that was the airplanes they had, the RAF were notorious like that

10:30 and the same, I can tell a couple of stories sort of almost to illustrate the point. When I went back the second time the air officer commanding, as he was called in Kuala Lumpur [capital of Malaya], was a bloke called Digger Kyle, who was an Australian in the RAF, and an air marshal, and one hell of a fine bloke. And he was called Digger Kyle

11:00 in the RAF and when it came time for him to go back to England and be the last resident senior Australian in the air force I said to him, "You're going to have a farewell parade, aren't you?" And he said, "I dare say I am." And I said, "Well, I want it to be here and I want it to be done by the Australian squadron." And, of the, course, the RAF do drill, you know, what we call

11:30 the drill, like the bloody guards do [at Buckingham Palace], and they brought with them this peanut of a bloody warrant officer who was supposed to run the parade for them and I knew bloody well as soon as he turned up on the parade it was going to be fucked up, and really stuffed up. So all our blokes were lined up on the parade ground, and they did look bloody smart because we had

- 12:00 worked on them a bit. And I remember the first command in an RAF formal parade is, "This is not a regulatory order," the warrant officer says, and then he says, "Roman Catholics that, fall out the Roman Catholics and Jews", and I thought, "Oh, bullshit, I know what's going to happen," half my blokes will, suddenly turned Catholic, and that's precisely
- 12:30 what happened, so half of my mob marched off the parade ground while we had church you see, so the next one [order] was, "Mohicans and Indians, about turn," and I thought "Oh, no, it's not going to happen," about 20 of them about-turned. Well, I thought old Digger Kyle was going to fall off the bloody dais, he said to me after, he said, "I know there are many fellows in the RAF who'd love to have a farewell party like that."
- 13:00 But those are the sort of funny people, RAF people, as soon as they go to the Far East or somewhere like India, they turn into something entirely different to, and I got a lots of lots of friends in the RAF who are not like that and I know, but as soon as they get in the bloody tropics, it must be the sun goes to their bloody heads.

13:30 And I told you about no flying.

**What sort of reputation did you have amongst the men?**

Sort of reputation? Oh, some of them didn't like me at all. Especially after they have had their arses kicked or something like that.

- 14:00 I understand from my reliable sources that I enjoyed an acceptable reputation in that regard. Australian airmen, I found, the only thing they resent is dishonesty of any sort and if you can't talk to a bloke square in the eye, then you are not worth pissing on, and they're very, very, sometimes
- 14:30 they are demanding, airmen, airmen are. I don't know about bloody soldiers, but when I was in Vietnam I was, found the same thing amongst the soldiers, but they can be very scathing of some of their senior NCOs or officers. But with no evil intent. I don't think there had ever been an intent to assassinate an Australian or get rid of him by other means, but, no, I think,
- 15:00 I always seem to get on well with them, anyway, there is always a couple that you find you are treading on all the time, but I never really had that experience.

**Can you tell us about how quickly things changed in December '41 when you heard the first news of a Japanese invasion?**

How quickly they changed? I suppose for Singapore it was pretty quick

- 15:30 in terms of, see the, to announce the start of the war we had a Japanese air raid. At midnight on the 8th of December and it cleaned up the centre of Singapore pretty well, not a large area but it certainly knocked out Raffles Square, which is the sort of central shopping area of Singapore city itself. And that came as
- 16:00 a bit of a sudden awakening and then, we used to listen to the Japanese radio [station] and they had a broadcast each and every afternoon and we were told that we weren't going to be bombed, we weren't going to bomb Australians, no, until later on it was. I think the first raid we had was the 17th of December, because they found out that there were British and Dutch squadrons on the same base [as the Australian squadrons] and they made
- 16:30 the point, we got bombed pretty heavily in that raid. Later again, I think it was the 25th, I wasn't there, but on the 25th they got a clobbering, too.

**Where were you when the Japanese raided on the 8th of December?**

We were at Sembawang, no, we weren't, I was in Kuantan, that's right, I had just gone from

- 17:00 Singapore up to Kuantan. Yeah, that came as a bit of a, because nobody, I don't think that anybody in their wildest dreams had expected that to be, the Japanese would announce the war had started, and we used to listen to the Japanese radio, as a matter of fact, and they used to forecast when they were going to bomb in Singapore, whether it was to let the locals know
- 17:30 or just to remind them that they kept their promises or not, I don't know. But, again, I mention Colonel Sugi's book before, he was the chief of staff to Umaster and he wrote this book when he was a banned Japanese citizen living in the Philippines. And he made the same point, he said that Umaster had in his mind the whole time that is was fair
- 18:00 to tell people when they were going to be bombed and, even more importantly, they were [told] when they, were told [when] they were going to be. Their bombing was bloody good, too, very, very good.

**How quickly did the air force respond, you mentioned you were in action two days later yourself?**

We were in action the next morning, after they started landing at Kota Bharu.

- 18:30 We were there at 8 o'clock in the morning and they'd started, 1 Squadron was bombing ships by 1 o'clock in the morning on the 8th of December. I don't know whether anybody had ever made the point to you, but the first shots fired at Kota Bharu were eight minutes and 32 seconds ahead of Pearl Harbor, and that's a remarkable bit of timing if you think about it. There is arguments about
- 19:00 whether those calculations are right, but on the basis of all the scientific evidence that is available, that was the timing. And, in fact, they were really about five minutes late bombing Pearl Harbor because of the weather, but it would have been, I suppose, it was a bloody credit to them that could even figure that out.

**Can you take us through that first mission then,**

- 19:30 **you sustained some damage on that occasion?**

Well, there were 12 airplanes in 8 Squadron and they were at Kuantan, which is south of Kota Bharu, about an hour-and-a-half flight from Kota Bharu, and we were told to go and bomb these ships at, about, I think we were told, no, we were told to bomb up and be ready

- 20:00 to respond to another signal and we got the signal at about half-past four in the morning saying they are trying to land troops at Kota Bharu and get your arses up there and bomb whatever you can see. So we have left as soon as there was enough light, I suppose it would have been half-past six in the morning, I suppose. And we took 12 airplanes with us
- 20:30 and we flailed around when to got to Kota Bharu, we'd been told on the way up exactly where the landing was taking place, it wasn't opposite the beach we expected it to be it was in the next adjunct, Kusamata Bay I think it was called, but, yeah, and when we got there the place was a milling mass of,
- 21:00 the Japanese were using motorised landing-craft to bring their troops ashore, from ships that were offshore. I don't remember seeing any ships off-shore because I was too busy chasing these bloody motorboats around and then, as I say, I suppose I had made about four circuits, five circuits, and I saw what I thought was a ship in a cloud and I threw some bombs at it and it back, fired on me,
- 21:30 so my participation in that operation was comparatively short, conventionally.

**Can you describe what happened?**

Well, the bombs we had on, I cant' remember precisely what the fusing was, but I think the fusing of a bomb is one in the tail and one in the nose. And you can vary them and you can select which fusing you want,

- 22:00 know we had from my memory, we had instantaneous fuses in the rear-end of the bombs and delayed fuses in the nose, and I got an idea that the second pilot in selecting fusing, I can't blame him because I don't know, but I have an idea that he might have flicked the wrong switch, the net result was that the bombs went of instantaneously rather than delayed and delayed.
- 22:30 I would have been well cleared of any blast or any debris effect, but I copped it through the floor and, in fact, through the bottom of the airplane. To the extent that the fuel to the port engine was very markedly diminished to the point where the engine wasn't performing at all. And, I think, there might have been engine damage on that side anyway. And the
- 23:00 airfield, Kota Bharu airfield, there was only one, oh, two, three miles away, and I raced over there and flung it on the ground straight away. What I was more concerned about was it would catch fire and it was pretty quick in a Hudson if you get fire. As it happened the airplane went on pretty well actually, went on the ground, except at the moment it did I realised that the port tyre
- 23:30 had blown out, so we did a nice little, ah, ballet dance off the edge, fortunately, off the edge dips into the gully on the side.

**Can we go back, can you describe the scene of the Japanese landing?**

Well, I've forgotten the name of the water entry that they used into the beach,

- 24:00 it began with a K, a funny Malay name. Anyway, the Japanese had obviously had reconnoitred the area well enough to be able to brief their boats that they follow a circular pattern coming in on one side and going out on the other, and they were ferrying, probably when we got there, there would have been
- 24:30 24 to 30 of these high-speed motorboats with about 20 men in them, some of them had a fixed anti-aircraft gun, a 0.5 [calibre] gun, others had just simply the troops that were in the boat or under the thwarts and were firing rifles at us. I suppose I made one pass first and
- 25:00 then I went around and, I think, I made a second one at which, I think, I might have been hit in the port side from fire from the ground or from the boats, and the next time around I decided to try and drop this bomb. So I had to make a circuit and climb up so I was 450 feet and then drop the bomb, and I don't think I could have been at 450 feet otherwise
- 25:30 it wouldn't have hit me, I must have been lower than that but, as I say, by then the weather had packed up out to sea, heavy cloud. Very good for them because they could hide behind it, but I suppose the

whole operation was over 20, 25 minutes. I was on the ground again within 10 minutes of that happening, so

26:00 my short entry into the war was a pretty short one.

**How did the squadron's morale respond to this?**

I think we were all pretty hyped up about it, but the response subsequently...because, one, two, three, four of our airplanes suffered damage from ground or sea fire.

26:30 One gunner was injured, shot in the chest, fortunately, he survived. Another bloke was shot in the foot. I think there were others that had minor injuries, skin injuries and things like that, from the Japs firing back at us, but most of them, because I wasn't there, I didn't see what happened after I left the scene of the crime myself,

27:00 the majority of them were called back to Singapore on the basis that the bombs were more valuable than throwing them at people who were ashore anyway. I don't know, I don't know what the hole story is. Most of the blokes that were there, unfortunately, aren't here now to tell the story [meaning they have since died].

**How much did this vision of the Japanese troops landing surprise you,**

27:30 **in terms of what you had been told about the Japanese?**

I didn't think it would be what appeared to be as efficiently organised and operated as it was. There was no doubt about it they had, and there is also, there's no doubt that they had a lot of practice in their exercises in little wars they had up in China, they undoubtedly refined their

28:00 landing procedure from ships, to the point where it was ahead of anybody. The other thing, of course, that I suppose was surprising was that they had undoubtedly practiced these manoeuvres on their way down toward Malaysia. They had also researched tides and whatnot in that area so they knew what the tide was going to be at any particular time

28:30 they did it every, very thoroughly.

**What information had you been supplied about the Japanese soldier and what to expect?**

None, none. Not really anything, as I said in the crew room we had this old Manila folder, I can still see it with about eight sheets of paper in, which was prepared by the RAF headquarters and reported to show what the Japanese air capability was. And, really,

29:00 it was comic cuts, it was really ridiculous, I don't think anybody in their, even when we read it, I don't think anybody believed it. By their [RAF] sort of operational briefings were pitiful, pitiful.

**How frightening was it to see this well organised operation being unleashed?**

I don't know about frightening,

29:30 surprised, yeah, I had, and none of our intelligence briefings had any idea that this sort of capability. One tended to dismiss, I suppose, any Asiatic as being sub [human], if you like, but there was no question that these guys, not only were they good at what they were doing

30:00 but they were experienced with what they were doing, they knew damn well what they wanted to do and they wanted that airfield without any bugger blowing it up. Now either they also integrated into their planning with the fact that the weather was going to have, and they must have studied that over years, almost, you could almost forecast the time in the tropics when the monsoon was going to come,

30:30 the north-east monsoon, and that's precisely what they had done.

**What discussion was there at this point about the plane that you had seen earlier?**

About the what?

**You had seen a high flying Japanese reconnaissance plane, did that come up at the time?**

I'm trying to remember, but I can remember on the Sunday following that sighting that we had, when we were at the

31:00 cricket club, the Sunday following I'm nearly sure we sent an airplane up in anticipation of that. We figured out, or whoever did the figuring, that he obviously comes on a Sunday when there is no risk of, cause everybody goes to sleep in the tropics on a Sunday, and they had made careful study of what the local activity was like, and

31:30 nobody works on the weekend in Malaysia anywhere, so it was not only shrewd but it was cleverly shrewd that they, that airplane used to come at about that time. And I'm sure that having got all his photographic data that he wanted anyway, there was no need for him to come back many times a day,

32:00 perhaps he only came twice in the whole exercise, if the weather was, see in, that was in about October,

so we are not into the north-east monsoon yet, it doesn't start until December, so the weather on the west side of the peninsula, east side of peninsula, would be clear but less likely to be on the west side. And, I think

32:30 that probably the only, he'd come back when he did, was he'd heard the weather on the west side was okay for photographing, as I say, in his own book he said he knew that the RAF were going to try and intercept him. He also had a pretty shrewd idea that they didn't have the capacity to do that, and we didn't.

**I want to take you forward,**

33:00 **later on you were flying on a 'milk run', can you take us through one of those?**

Well, that's what I explained was designed to find the Japanese fleet after it had dispersed from Kota Bharu, so it was in a segment that was oriented north-east out of Singapore.

**You described the strategic aim, I'm interested in what you saw?**

33:30 The reason that you did it at low-level was the risk of low cloud, that's all, and the moment that, the monsoonal movement of air on the coast decides what cloud there is going to be, and whether it is going to be low of medium-level cloud. So with a north-east monsoon, it doesn't produce or raise any moisture

34:00 until it hits the coastline and that's precisely what happened, that line of little islands I talked about was virtually the boundary of where the bloody cloud started to build up, so okay I was two or three miles short of the cloud bank, I'd have been right if I'd have got there. The other bloke who was with me was shot down because he came back looking for me

34:30 and he got clobbered by the same pair of fighters that were loitering in anticipation of him doing precisely that.

**How much warning did you get that there was another Japanese aircraft in the vicinity?**

What, behind us? Oh, none, the gunner just screamed out, "They're shooting at us!" And, as I say, I immediately went for the nearest cloud I could find but before I could get to it

35:00 he had hit me anyway. The other airplane got away by going into the cloud and staying there. He was also shot down, I think I made the point to you because he came back looking for me

**What radio contact did you have between airplanes?**

You don't have radio contact when you are on patrol, you don't open your mouth, so there was not

35:30 even a, I don't even remember procedural arrangement in the event that you are attacked, I don't think we had one. I don't remember.

**What did the airplane do at that moment?**

Which airplane?

**Your airplane?**

Well, it started to go out of control because I lost one engine,

36:00 well, almost lost one engine, eventually it went. Okay, it's harder to fly on one engine and particular if there is any other damage in any other part of the plane that I didn't know about. But there wasn't enough, I don't remember any of the details really, except it became very apparent when that engine was afire that I had to get out, and so I was very much

36:30 preoccupied with how I'd go about doing that, particularly, although the second pilot didn't do anything, I still almost suspect that he'd been wounded, okay I had a go at getting him out, and he didn't make it.

**That landing on water, you said, is one you particularly feared?**

Well, you tear the bottom out of the airplane, see the Hudson

37:00 was an airliner that was designed to have a bomb bay put in it in production, so you had two bomb bays that opened that way [outwards], all you had to have was one water leak in the leading edge of the thing so that when it hit the water the water would tear the leading edge of that door away until you had no bottom in airplane at all, well. you had a floor

37:30 but not a bottom in the airplane. Aerodynamically, it was impossible it, because, almost impossible, but I don't think I had much time to think about whether I was. I hadn't even dreamt of the possibility that I would be even shot at by an, anybody, I thought we were home and hosed

38:00 because I could see the line of cloud ahead of us, but we weren't.

**How badly damaged was the aircraft when it hit the water?**

Damaged to the extent it had an engine on fire, the starboard engine was on fire. What

- 38:30 aircraft damage we might have had in the way of bullet holes, I don't know because there was nobody to tell me anyway, but certainly in terms of handling, I dare say, also we'd started to lose hydraulic pressure, which meant that eventually the wheels would start to come down or the bomb doors would start to open, that would be the first indication, and I don't
- 39:00 remember either of those two events occurring otherwise we would have gone straight over on our backs. So it was a question of the decision I had to make was, "Do I put it on the water quickly and have the chance of it staying afloat or do I wait till it falls apart?" As I said, I had already lost the starboard engine
- 39:30 that had been set on fire, so I knew I didn't have much time to do, I didn't know, but is suspected if you like, I figured out that I didn't have much time and that's pretty much precisely what happened, but the Hudson was not a good fire airplane, put it that way.
- 40:00 **How much is, does your thinking guide you and how much is adrenaline?**
- I didn't have time to think. All I was concerned about, and it was over, it suppose, it was over in a matter of 10 or 15 minutes at the very most, because I don't remember how many passes he had at us but it must have been two or three, so okay that's a span of perhaps 20 minutes.
- 40:30 I don't think it was as long as that.

## Tape 6

- 00:30 **In that plane, you are strapped in, and after she came to a stop in the water...?**
- It's very quick, to get out like that, but the, as I said to you, the critical thing, he had to climb over me first for me to push him through the window and then I had to get out after him, because he
- 01:00 was, I think he was shocked up, frankly, he wasn't very responsive, so I had to get out and put a bit of, blow in his Mae West before I fixed up myself. And I can remember, distinctly, I said, "Have you got any bloody shoes on?" because it's terribly hard to kick and float at the time with shoes on, and I can't even remember what his answer was
- 01:30 and then the next question was, of course, we were tremendously fortunate there was no swell. It was just a very light swell, nearly all day.
- How did you know the fate of your gunner and your wireless operator before you ditched?**
- Oh, I did, I did, the second pilot had checked them and, yeah, the gunner, I think he told me that the gunner was,
- 02:00 I know the wireless operator was lying here with his head through, they doorway on my right-hand side so, he was as dead as a maggot, an the gunner had only got two lots of rounds away, and then we were dead quiet so I knew then that, if he wasn't dead he was pretty sick anyway. But the wireless operator confirmed that he was killed, shot through the head.
- On the first pass did you get any instruction from your gunner for evasive action?**
- I don't remember hearing
- 02:30 any so either, I can't lay blame anywhere you see, because I don't know whether he was unable to communicate with me or, whether it was just simply a failure of the equipment, he might have even been injured in the first pass. But I have to be frank, I don't know.
- What did you see of the aircraft attacking you?**
- 03:00 Nothing. Have no rear-vision mirror, so I had to, the first thing I remember were the shots coming through the right-hand side, up here on the roof.
- What do you feel or hear at those moments?**
- Oh, a hell of a clatter, but probably not more than 10 or a dozen shots, but they make a hell of a lot of noise, because they rip through in a sequence and, yeah, it's quite a bang
- 03:30 and then whatever I could have done in the way of evasive action was pretty little, because I only had one engine anyway, I would have thought the whole business would have been over quite quickly.
- Do you recall a fire drill or the drill for engine out?**
- I don't think we practiced the drill, but we never had the idea,

- 04:00 for instance, the bottom of the bomb bay had been ripped out of the airplane, so it wasn't a floating airplane any more, it was floating, floating on the fuel tanks and what petrol or fuel was left in it. I don't even remember thinking about it, I remember thinking about it beforehand by wondering what would happen, they were not
- 04:30 self-sealing tanks, they were just in tanks and nobody had ever, nobody else had ever been shot at like that, on the other hand, on the first morning some 1 Squadron blokes had been shot at like that by fighters, and I don't remember any comment that they might have made. Maybe the guy shooting at them weren't as good shots. See
- 05:00 we were flying at the time the attack was made, I was flying straight and level, about, I suppose, 25, 30 feet off the water and the first yell I heard was from the back, and then nothing except a burst of shot coming through the airplane. And there was one more pass where the same thing happened, but it hit the starboard engine then and set it on fire so
- 05:30 the moment I saw the fire, you know, I realised what a fire bomb the Hudson was once the flames started. Particularly in an engine.

**Outside the aircraft how quickly did it go down, did you see it going down?**

What happened? Of course, the moment you hit the water it tore the whole guts out

- 06:00 of it, all the bomb doors were torn off and probably a good part of the underbelly of the airplane would be damaged, and I can remember the water being up to about the top of the wings on either side, it wasn't completely submerged so, whether there is a good way of putting it on the water, I don't know, but the airplane was stable when we got out of it,
- 06:30 but [it] sank very, very soon after we got out of it. Cause I remember I was trying to tie his [the co-pilot's] bloody Mae West around his waist and, of course, I don't know whether he was wounded in any other way, either. I don't know whether he was shocked or whether he was even bordering on semi-consciousness, I don't know, but he was aware enough
- 07:00 to be able to talk to me. Incidentally, any of these observations I presume are protected are they, I'd hate to think that his wife for instance would have access to this sort of conversation, I think she is happily married with three kids, well they've grown up by now. I'd hate any suggestion or thought that that was going to happen.
- 07:30 **I don't think these particular observations are.**

She would know my name, of course, but, even if...I wrote to her after it happened, I said, "Look, when...", and I explained to you, she came around to see me with the gentlemen who, she was only promised to my second pilot, there was no question of formal engagement, but she had come to see me as soon as I got home to

- 08:00 ask if I thought there was any chance of his, she thought he might have been a prisoner of war like I was, and hadn't been reported, and I tried to reassure her, I said, "Look, I can't be bloody certain that he won't turn up, but I can be pretty bloody certain, pretty bloody near certain that he didn't [survive]." So that's the last I've spoken to her, I've never, I said to her
- 08:30 if you'd like me to I'll keep in touch and she said, "No," that's sufficient for her.

**What's the last you saw of your plane?**

Mine, the tail went up and she sank right away, because the bottom was ripped out of it, you see, as I explained to you, the bomb doors are very flimsy and that's obviously what happened, those

- 09:00 doors were just ripped right out and we were floating on what was the buoyancy of the fuel tanks.

**You were left adrift in the ocean with no life raft, what thoughts are going through your mind at this time?**

I remembered something my Sunday school teacher had told me, if you are in trouble, pray. And I thought to myself, "I'll give it a go." No, I don't really

- 09:30 remember much at all. The first thing I would have said to myself was "Shit, what's happened? Or what do we do now?" And, as I say, at the risk of appearing flippant, I think that the only sort of instinct that I know about that is more alive than any other is preservation and, I think,
- 10:00 that was foremost in my mind, there was no question about that and, of course, the, I hadn't studied the, I was flying second Joe [second aircraft] in this exercise so I wasn't navigating and the only, I had guessed we were somewhere near the end of the mission because what we used to do when we finished a search we used to break up and
- 10:30 go back independently, but, when I talk to, I think to myself, what other possible consequences there could have been and I'm reluctantly drawn to the conclusion that it must have been right or some part of it must have been. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here, but as

11:00 far as he was concerned, I said to this girl, "Look, I am near as possibly certain that there is no bloody chance of him being a prisoner of war," I knew it wouldn't, it couldn't be possible, in the same way as I told the relatives of the other two blokes that there is no way in the world that either of them could have survived.

**As the reality of your situation**

11:30 **sunk in, what did you then consider your options were?**

I, well, I had, I suppose I had him to worry about a bit. The concern I had was that, fortunately, the sea was a shallow roll, that's all, so there was no problem of breaking waves or anything like that.

12:00 But I suppose I thought about how far away we were from wherever we though we were, because in reality there is always a difference between forecast location and actual. And then, I suppose, I was preoccupied with worrying about him and keeping his head out of the bloody water. I don't remember in terms of time

12:30 or actuality when I might have realised that he wasn't alive any more.

**What other concerns did you have for your safety at that time in the water?**

I think I spent most of the time saying "Shit" or words to that effect. But

13:00 I don't know, I don't even remember, I must have contemplated the predicament, I'm sure I did, but I think I was, as I said, I think I was a bit busy with him for a start and, secondly, we were so extraordinarily fortunate that there wasn't any more that just a low swell, if there had been any sort of broken water, we would have been in real trouble.

13:30 **What about sharks?**

Charts? I had no time to even grab anything from the airplane when I got out, I had no maps.

**But did you worry about shark attack?**

Sharks, I though you said charts, yeah, I did, as a matter of fact, particularly with the possibility that he might have been bleeding, which, of course, is a natural,

14:00 drew sharks instinctively to blood. I don't think, I don't know much about sharks to answer your question, but I certainly wasn't trouble[d] by them, or I can't remember being troubled. I think I can remember at night being chewed at by fish. I probably, I'd kicked my boots off and I still had my socks on

14:30 and I think I can remember being chewed at by something, probably a fish.

**What was the feeling as the sun went down and darkness came?**

Kind of lonely, yeah, I had no indication then, of course, whether I was close at all to real estate and

15:00 there's a tide that runs down there it's about four-and-a-half to five knots, anyway, so I knew that I'd be on a, probably sou'westerly because of the shape of the coastline, or I'd be drifting in a south-westerly direction and, in fact, I suppose it was almost due south.

**I know it's difficult to talk about, the moments of your friend?**

No, I am not going to say anything about that.

15:30 No, it was just unfortunate, I don't even remember how long it was, so I suppose in terms of relative time, it was, it was after dark, he could have lasted a couple, three hours I suppose, but you see we had been together nearly all day. We where shot down at probably 9:30 in the morning

16:00 and it was after dark, I remember that.

**Do you recall any conversation?**

No.

**After he had gone, what were you considering your options were.**

I don't know, I suppose I would have

16:30 had to have some feeling perhaps even of guilt or precisely as you said, I might have aid, what the hell else could I have done, or should I have done more, but I couldn't really, in relation to the predicament I had with myself, without knowing anything about where we were, the possibility of my survival, I suppose in animal terms one's thoughts

17:00 immediately turn to one's own survival. I think that [is] probably the easiest way to explain it, but I can remember even thinking about whether I ought to call on the almighty [God], and I thought, well, there's not a bloody lot he can do right now, well, I don't think there is, and I'm not an almighty caller,

anyway, but

- 17:30 the thought passed through my mind and maybe subtly it went upstairs, but the first thing I remember was, it must have been early in the morning, when whatever moon was left made itself known, I guess, and I can remember seeing the silhouette of this hilltop, which is probably no more than 150 feet
- 18:00 above sea level I suppose, I don't remember is, the dawn is very brief in the tropics and it's almost as if somebody had turned the light on and I realised that I was within swimming distance to the coast. It didn't look very habitable, it didn't look like it had a nice sandy beach
- 18:30 to land on, it was all jagged rock and, of course, all night the thought had been going through my head, I wonder if anybody going to have a snap at my leg. And I suppose that passed through my mind too, but when I, and then, when the final incident, I remember seeing a sort of
- 19:00 point of entry, if you like, or a, it was, I've forgotten what, surfers have a turn for a channel in a rock that goes between the sea and the shore which has been ground there by sand and tide forever, and it, least it had clear water in it. I overlooked the fact that, of course, that the bottom would probably be coral anyway, so I got in there
- 19:30 and the next thing the first wave chucked me up on the rocks and the ruddy coral tore my feet to pieces when I tried to stand up, well not tore them to pieces but cut them quite badly, and my feet were very, very soft. So it was simply a question of pulling myself up, I don't even remember how I did that, I remember I had a couple of cuts on my knees from trying to crawl over the...
- 20:00 **Did you have any water with you?**
- No, that was fortuitous too, the, I think what I must have done was pull myself up on a wash of a wave which pushed me up a little bit higher, and I must have passed out, I think, because I woke up with the hot sun on my face, I remember, and with a rather passionate sort
- 20:30 of thirst, but there was no fresh water around anywhere that I could see within cooe [close proximity; within the distance one's voice carries]. And my first instinct was to get up out of where the tide would be when it come back in again, and that's precisely what I did. Oh, it was a bank about 50, 60 feet, quite steep bank but with enough projections on it for me to get my feet.
- 21:00 Needless to say my feet were cut to pieces.
- It's an extraordinary story of survival?**
- Well, I often wonder how they didn't start bleeding as soon as I, but I concluded that I wrapped them up as quickly as I could, a had a shirt on so I took that off and made some wrap-around bandages for my feet, and there was no, as I recollect there was no
- 21:30 severe bleeding afterwards, they [the cuts] must have sealed up pretty quickly. But whether the long time submerged in the sea water might have had something to do with preserving the blood flow.
- I can imagine spending a night out on the ocean, was there a time when you just gave up hope?**
- 22:00 Oh, no, I don't think so, it wasn't a question of giving up hope, it was a question of how long it was going to be before I ran into something and, as I said, I, after about 3 o'clock I could see the silhouette of these hills on the horizon.
- You had really done your best to get everyone home, but you still felt a sense of guilt as the commander. Do you still feel that these days?**
- 22:30 When I talk about it, yeah, I suppose I do. No, it's not a feeling of guilt, it's a wonder as to whether I could have done anything differently, I've often wondered about that. But that's stupid because it's too bloody late and you are only going to worry yourself sick trying to figure out what you could have done. I had no,
- 23:00 I had no grounds to try and medically appreciate what his injury might have been or what his chances of survival might have been, he might have drowned himself, I don't know. But it's a terribly difficult question to answer, even if I asked it myself I wouldn't find it very easy to supply
- 23:30 a plausible answer, anyway, but you can rest assured I have asked myself the same question and I probably will now, having been reminded.
- I don't mean to...**
- Knowing him, and I knew him pretty well, and he'd be saying, "Oh, shut up you stupid bastard, don't worry about it," but on the other hand he could just as easily be doing something else,
- 24:00 I don't even know whether he's on cloud nine [heaven] or not, but that's something I suppose one day I'll find out, won't I, if the bastard comes looking for me. Yeah, it's easy perhaps to be, when you are in a strong position of having lived through an experience like that it's very

24:30 easy perhaps to be a bit flippant about it, it's a way of covering up what might be otherwise a nervous reaction to it, but, honestly, I'll probably start thinking about it again now, but I don't know, there was nothing that, honestly, there was nothing that I could, believe, and nothing that I could believe now that I could

25:00 have done to produce different results.

**Certainly, what you've told us this afternoon, you did your best.**

Well, it's very hard to keep on fabricating a story without making some sort of error, that's the point, and I'm not fabricating. I turned out pretty much, as far as my memory will serve me, it turned out pretty much that way and,

25:30 yeah...

**You were finally captured at Endau, can you tell us about the events leading up to that capture?**

Well, I'm trying to think how I can,

26:00 what do mean as far as meeting up the Chinese, is that what you mean?

**You did take us through that, let's move forward to the time of your captivity?**

Well, it got to the point where, eventually, I met up with this Chinese who patched up my feet and were very kind to me, and in my limited Malay I could exchange

26:30 thoughts with them to [the] point of saying that I had to get to Sungemoa ['Kampung Mawar?'], I knew both the features from the map, from reading the map. After a lot of hoo-ha and ha-ha [noisy fuss to communicate] between the two of them, it was agreed that I could be taken to Mawar. I think they were running short of rice or something like that and they had to go to the mainland to get it, because

27:00 as I think I explained to you, they were charcoal makers and it seemed an extraordinary thing that they would live on an island but, apparently, the type of wood they had there made very good charcoal. That's pretty, I suppose, if you got the, one of the Chinese brothers was a,

27:30 what do you call them? 'Mongol' [he suffered from Down's syndrome], Chinese 'mongol', with the same characteristic expression as a 'mongol' invalid that we have, and he was dumb to the point where he couldn't speak but he could understand quite clearly what I was saying. And the Malay boy who was there did all the talking, I understood a little

28:00 bit of Malay and, eventually, they agreed that they would take me across to Mawar and they would get some rice while they were there. And as soon as we got to Mawar the following morning, I suppose we left about half-past six in the morning and it was about a two hour trip across to the mainland, and as soon as I got ashore at Mawar, the old head man in the village came down, muttering away, yelling in Malay,

28:30 "Piss off! Get out of it. Shapung ['Jepun'], shapung." So the Japs were there, so I said to him, oh, I've forgotten his name, he told me his name, I can never remember. I said to old bloody 'Bully' [from the island], "Don't wait, go back," so he took off.

**What was the name of the Chinese friend?**

29:00 I think he was called 'Bully' or something like that, or Bully is a sort of a name, "Hey mate, Bully or Boody." Anyway, he [was] very smartly, took to what I said and pissed off himself, and the Japanese were in that village, I know damn-well they were, because subsequent conversations I've had with other people

29:30 who escaped from RAF planes in the same area and hid up, was that they couldn't come out of the trees they were hiding [in] or the caves wherever they were because the Japs were there. And the schoolmaster who was the bloke who spoke to me, my Malay was limited, but he made it very clear to me I had to piss off otherwise I'd bring down the wrath of the shapung on his head. So I took off, he gave me

30:00 a basket, a container of cooked rice in a handkerchief and off I went. And, as I said, I had no shoes, I had some wrappers around my feet, that's all, and I made it about 38 miles down the coast before they got me. But the other thing was it was a forestry area

30:30 and there was a track along the coast, so it took a hell of a lot longer than it would have had I been on the road, however, they said to me don't go anywhere near the road because the Japanese were patrolling it, so I didn't until I got to Mersing, and I had to cross the road there. And that's where I was caught.

**How long would it have taken you to get down the coast?**

31:00 A day and a half, I'd made about 34, 35, 36 miles down the coast. It was more than that, about 46 miles.

**Where did you sleep?**

Just on the beach.

**How are you going for water?**

Water was pretty easy because there was a lot of swamp streams that run into the sea and the water was pretty good, as long as you don't drink it green, that's all.

31:30 But, oh no, the water was pretty good, it rains every night anyway and you can lie with your, get it off the trees.

**What was your condition?**

It would be pretty, I was able to walk still, even with the bandages on my feet, but not fluently, I was not walking with any

32:00 fluid pace but I wasn't making much in the way, I suppose if I add it all up it was about 40 miles I did in, no, it wouldn't be 40 [miles] it would be 30, 32 miles, so in about, certainly it wasn't, I was probably making a mile an hour, something like that,

32:30 which wasn't bad, and particularly as the track followed the coastline very closely.

**What was keeping you going?**

I was a bit keen to get home to get back and, yeah, I don't, what I would have, all the time I was hoping to find

33:00 somebody to, I didn't have much Malay but I could talk a little bit, and I was hoping to find somebody who was going to be a little more helpful than the old schoolmaster had. He was murdered shortly after, as a matter of fact, poor old fellow, I found that out after. When I went back to Malaysia the second time I went up there to see if I could find any of those people and what had happened to the old burners on the island and,

33:30 but nobody seemed to know and, of course, the trouble was that that part of the country was still, when I went back the time of the Emergency was still prone to be populated by rebels and nasty Communist people, but it wasn't, I bet it wasn't they were too good. I didn't get to Endau, I tried to but I couldn't get there.

**You**

34:00 **obviously had some hope that things would be okay once you got to Singapore, but...?**

Oh, yeah, I think I knew that it would have to be quick because that was the, see we went out on that mission on the 24th or 25th of January and things were not real good then either, though Singapore was supposed to have hung on until the 15th of February.

**The British had lost the Prince of Wales**

34:30 **and the Repulse, you weren't on that flight but your colleague saw that happen. What do you recall of that?**

I think the reaction in the crew room, I remember quite clearly, what the hell did the silly bloody navy think they were doing, you know, what were they going to do, and I don't know what the admiral was thinking either, he probably said to himself, "Shit!

35:00 It's no good us being here, in the naval base, we are going to get clobbered by these bloody bombs if we are not careful and...", but as to why he went in the direction he went, the only conclusions the historians have concluded is that he was looking for the Japanese fleet to have a go at it, well, he's bloody mad, and the fact was that anchored in the strait outside the naval base was a ship with a Japanese

35:30 radio station on it, and they must have rung the bell as soon as the Prince of Wales headed up north. Must have rung their mates up and said, "You want to cop this, this must be the greatest Mickey Mouse [easy prize] of all time." So I can't criticise the admiral because he is dead.

**Do you recall the two Japanese on the bicycle apprehending you?**

36:00 Do I recall, yeah, they were a bit unpleasant, they presented me with a bayoneted rifle, which is not the most reassuring sentiment of friendship, and I just stood there until finally they yabbered at each other. And, fortunately, for me

36:30 the, I heard the noise of a car coming and there was a major in the car and, immediately, he took charge of the situation and I was strapped onto the outside of the car and carted up to Endau, standing on the running board. I had my hands inside, you know where the door post is, and they tied me on with a, seemed like a lump of pork,

37:00 but, yeah, that was about 15 kilometres, I suppose, and on my way back there was a couple of airplanes

wrecked on the road and they wanted me to give my commentary on, one was a Vildebeest and one was a [Fairey] Albacore, and they still had bombs hanging on them, and what did I know

37:30 about bombs, I said, "Bugger all, I'm not a bloody armourer." I believe two days later one of the bombs flew off and blew up, much to their surprise, I imagine. I was surprised they didn't ask me to take the damn thing off, very gratified they didn't, but one of the crew was still in the airplane, the poms that was driving it. I assumed that one day somebody

38:00 had pulled him out and buried him, I hope so.

**Did they take you off the car and take you to those airplanes?**

Yeah, did I, one of the, the major, not the lieutenant that was with him was an interpreter of a sort, he spoke a bit of English and they wanted to know, the airplane was armed with flares which we

38:30 used for illuminating the ships landing on the beach, or were destined to be used, and they said, "What sort of bombs are these?" and I said, "They are not bombs at all, they are flares", they accepted that explanation without any trouble. I wasn't asked to lift anything off, I told them that I wasn't a qualified armourer, I didn't know anything about bombs or flares and he accepted that.

39:00 In fact, as I say, that bloke was quite pleasant, he was gruff in his manner of address but I think that was an act he put on for the couple of soldiers he had with him, and from that point, as I say, it was only a short distance back to Endau.

## Tape 7

**00:29 The English-speaking officer you met in Endau?**

I was just going to say when I got back to Endau I was rather apprehensive, this guy was getting stropy, the bloke that had me in the car,

01:00 and I didn't understand any Japanese at all then, if I understood what I do now I would have known what he was saying. The impression I got was that I was for the high jump [liable for severe punishment or death], so when we got back to Endau I sort of stood around looking stupid until they made up their minds to put me inside one of the little cottages on the side of the road.

01:30 It was about half-past five in the afternoon and when I got inside I was buggered, I was absolutely buggered, I just flopped on the floor. And over in the other corner, was quite dark inside the room, I heard a movement over in the other side and I said, "Is there anybody there?" and this small voice from the other side of the room said, "Well, what the fuck are you doing here?"

02:00 It was a kiwi [New Zealander] gunner and wireless operator who had been shot down in the landing thing, he wasn't in the Albacore that I saw but he was in another Albacore, that they both parachuted out of. And remarkable in his case, his pilot was able to walk back to Singapore from that, well not walk back to Singapore but he got far

02:30 enough south to get back to Singapore, but left old 'thingo' [forgotten his name; the kiwi gunner] hanging in a tree with his parachute, not that he could do anything about that. Kelly was his name. Only died about two weeks ago, Kelly, she rang me up to say that he left a message for me before he died, he said, "Tell the bastard to belt up", which is typically Kelly. Anyway,

03:00 Kelly and I very quickly introduced each other and that, surprisingly, was as good a medicine as I could have had. Even though Kelly was not the most, he was a personable Irishman, they're not bad, he'd been, as I say, as fortunate as I was that he hadn't been knocked off by the...

**You said you expected to be executed?**

03:30 And it was at that time the rather nice English-speaking Japanese, comparatively nice I should say, because he quite obviously had to preserve an appearance of being anti, when in fact I'm sure that he was glad to have somebody who spoke English to talk to. And his position in the, as a sort of interpreter-cum-hanger-on was probably

04:00 as precarious as anyone. However, he was very, good enough to me to get me something to eat for a start and some water, to fill my water, I still had my water bottle. And he got me some water and I think both Kelly and I past out then, went to sleep, because the following morning I was again thumped on, there was a thump on the door, and I, Kelly opened the door and there was a couple of Japs there with a stretcher to take

04:30 me up to the doctor, which I thought was rather nice. And they pulled the crap out of my feet and wrapped them for me. A very nice, almost effeminate, medical orderly, who seemed very, very concerned, because he hissed through his teeth all the time, but the American Jap

05:00 or what I called him, the American Jap was very concerned about my well-being and whatnot and I found out, afterwards of course, that he'd been told that his life was under threat if I wasn't made well and taken back to see the general.

**What became of him do you know?**

I haven't the slightest idea, I had thought he was a, what do they call it, George? A tech, a university student in Georgia

05:30 Tech in California [Georgia Institute of Technology is in Atlanta, Georgia, USA]. As I told you he had been called home on the false pretence that his old man was dying and his old man wasn't dying at all, they just wanted somebody who spoke English, I suppose, and then he'd been dumped on this ship to come as an interpreter.

**You were interrogated by General Ushido?**

No.

06:00 I'm trying to remember the name of the guy, that was not in Endau that was after I was taken across to a place called Kelang, on the west coast of Malaysia, we were, Kelly and I, were chucked on the top of a truck of supplies for the, that came off the ships that had landed, and we were chucked on top of the truck and driven across, was about a four hour trip on the back of this bloody truck

06:30 and we were stuffed in an old garage in the back of the school, where we again passed out. I think we went to sleep, they gave us something to eat. And it wasn't the first night it was the second night, I think we passed out pretty well for the next couple of days

07:00 and I think it was two nights later, two nights after we got there, that I was woken up and prodded with a prong and told to walk up the road to school, there was a very big high school they had taken over as their headquarters, and I've forgotten the general's name now, Owito, Ozita, I think was his name, and he was the guard

07:30 division commander that was working up the landing on Singapore island, and he asked me questions I couldn't possible answer about Singapore island and so on.

**How rough did they get with you?**

Oh, I think I told you they asked me did I know where an airfield called Batchelor was in the Northern Territory? And I said, "I'd never heard of it." And, of course,

08:00 that's when you don't say, you don't abruptly respond to a Japanese general by saying, "Get stuffed, I don't know!" I got clobbered then.

**What was your word back to him?**

I just said, "I'm sorry, I don't know, I've never heard of it."

**And who hit you at that stage?**

I think he did himself with a bloody scabbard [holder for a knife or bayonet] he had, scabbard or some other instrument he had on the bench.

08:30 And he whacked me over the ear, and I don't remember what I said, I think I said, "Shit!" or something like that. I said, "General, I can't tell you, I don't know." And, of course, I was talking through an interpreter and the more the interpreter tried to convince the general I was telling the, same thing, the more the general got cranky, about, clobbering me.

09:00 I got a couple whacks over the ear, that's all. I said, "Can't you tell him that I don't know?" I hadn't been in Darwin for, I was in Darwin once over the last 28 years and, yeah, anyway, he calmed down after a while and he asked me a couple of other questions.

09:30 Did I know what ships would be in Darwin? and I said, "Would you please explain to the general that I have been to Australia once in the last 15 months and I don't know what ships are in Darwin." So that was, oh, there were a number of other questions to, did I know, you know, things about the Australian army, because the Japanese do not

10:00 discriminate between army people and air force people, anyway, because to them they are the same thing and, you know, it was tough, he was getting cranky because he thought I should have known all these things and the Japanese can become quite frustrated. I imagine the general had a matter of significant moment on his hands, but I still can't understand why he asked me

10:30 why did I know where Batchelor was.

**How did he see the way the Japanese army was organising itself at the time?**

The Japanese army? Oh, I don't really know, it was obviously an enormous success, though, whatever it was. And you see at that time the Japanese had just had a whole stream of very, very successful operations particularly against the 2/19th [Battalion] and the 2/30th

11:00 Battalion, 2/29th Battalion, too.

**You mentioned in the summary that you met some of your Japanese interrogators after the war?**

No, I met up with one bloke who said he knew of me, know how he did? I don't know. Now he was a bloke called, have to think of his name, it was a name like Matchoko

11:30 and 'Matsi' was an American Japanese who worked for what's called the Kempeitai, which is the Japanese military police or secret police. And George, his other name, was Misaka, Misaka is a

12:00 very Californian Japanese name. And George asked me several times questions that I thought I had heard before so maybe my record included reference to the fact that I had known where this that and other thing was. George, incidentally, was a Japanese who was as smarmy an

12:30 individual as I had ever met, he was very clever at his job and he could be just as passionately pleasant as he could be unpleasant, he was a traitorous bugger. I'm glad to say he is dead now.

**Where did you meet him?**

In Formosa, yeah, but I must have met [him] when I was in Malaysia,

13:00 probably at Pulau [Pinang], where, who mentioned to me subsequently that they knew of me from Malaysia, so I don't know how that could have happened. I was never interrogated when I was in the gaol in Kuala Lumpur so there was no question of it happening there, and I don't remember being interrogated

13:30 anywhere when I was in Singapore, so I don't know how, they must have had a file, I suppose, with all the information they could get off me.

**I want to move on to Kuala Lumpur. How did you arrive there?**

On the back of a truck. There was a truck. I think I said to you in the gaol in Kelang they gradually accumulated some,

14:00 I won't call them escapees, but people who had survived the 2/29th Battalion exercise at Parit Sulong and Mua and they [the 'escapees'] had gravitated back down country obviously trying to get back to Singapore and been picked up on the roads or tracks coming back. So in the truck going up to Kuala Lumpur there would have been

14:30 seven or eight Australian of the 2/19th or the 2/29th who were being taken back there as well.

**What did you know of where you were heading?**

When going to KL?

**Did you know you were going to KL?**

Going north and that's the only place, I didn't know that we were going to be incarcerated in the gaol, but it gradually became apparent, I think one of the guards mentioned

15:00 that he came from the gaol at Kuala Lumpur and you quickly draw a conclusion that stops you worrying about the question any more, say, okay, that's where we're going. As it turned out it was, it was exactly right and the conditions in the KL gaol had been all the, all the prisoners they had had been liberated by the Japanese so

15:30 presumably they all went back to their centres of crime wherever they were and only one wing of the gaol was held over for any casual prisoners that were picked, I think the first prisoners brought into KL where about the 2nd of February.

**What were your first impressions of the place?**

Oh, it's a, it's [a] gaol built on a British colonial design

16:00 and I can show you a picture if you like?

**Describe that picture to us in words?**

It's an open-ended 'X' with a connecting, that's the main building, and then in one corner of it there was a, at one corner of the gaol yard, there is an old women's prison, a hospital prison ward and up on the

16:30 headquarters end of the building was a kitchen and a sort of group of cells that are obviously held for people who were being interrogated, I guess. Because that's what was going on there when we were there, we were kept awake at night by the poor bastards screaming.

**What happened the morning you arrived? What time of day was it?**

17:00 It was about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, I think. A sensation of confusion on the Japanese part, they

weren't in any way organised to take any quantity of prisoners and, quite frankly, the inboard fear of what was going to happen to us because we had heard all sorts of stories like the Japanese never take prisoners

17:30 unless they can make use of them. You know, the sort of 'cheer-up stories' [an ironic reference] that you hear about situations like that, however, the first person I met going into the place was an Australian and I, he was, I can't remember his name now, and it doesn't matter, he was from the 2/19th Battalion. The senior Australian in the place was a bloke called Reg Newton,

18:00 who wrote a book after the war about KL prisoners and I'm trying to, I've got the name of the book on the tip of my tongue and I can't remember, but there had been other books written by other people who had been in survivor groups. For instance, progressively, as the population increased, as more people from the northern battlefields

18:30 had been caught [and] were brought into KL. We had Argylls and highlanders [2nd Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, British Army regiment], quite a number, about 150 of them, we had a lot of odd gunners from [an] artillery battalion because [the] artillery battalion always got left behind from the withdrawal anyway. And, as I say, quite a quantity of Australian[s] from the

19:00 Parit Sulong battle, which was 2/19th and the 2/30th Battalion, 2/19th, 2/29th and [2/30th], and a few Malay volunteers, not many. They were responsible for the great KL escapes. I don't know whether

19:30 you have heard that one. Numbers of other gunner units, the sort of people that were left behind because they had heavy machinery to drag along...

#### **Where were you taken?**

Some Indian Army troops were also caught and we had their officers in the camp with us because, by and large, they were poms or late-poms [upper crust poms] anyway.

20:00 **Where were you accommodated within the gaol?**

I'm just trying to remember, initially, I was treated as wounded because I was wrapped up, I had a bandage right round my leg. And, if I remember rightly, I had an old walking stick somewhere, so I was treated as a medical patient and at the time

20:30 the population of the, they had initially put all the captured people into what had been the female section of the prison, and they had got to the stage where it just wouldn't hold any more, so they opened up the hospital ward that I mentioned, to look after the people who were sick or, and by then they had half-a-dozen doctors they had picked up along the way so it, achieving

21:00 some sort of conditional organisation that was better prepared to looking after casualties, and I was put in with that lot. Even though my condition was by no means critical and pretty glad I was too, because the other poor bastards were all jammed eight to a cell and it was kind of uncomfortable.

21:30 And that was the first concession the Japanese made to the fact that they had rather more prisoners than they thought they were going to get. And by the time I left KL there would have been 400 prisoners in there.

#### **What was the situation in the hospital section you were put in?**

Pretty rough.

#### **Can you describe what it was like?**

Well being a

22:00 prison and [in] a native prison the facilities were not all, the bathrooms, in fact, were just pits with water in them and you used a bucket to throw water over yourself, the bed arrangements were non-existent, you slept either on the floor or on a pallet and, eventually, working parties were able to go out and get some beds, not many,

22:30 so that the hospital could be set up. Cause we had a hell of a lot of battle casualties with us. Some, the death-rate was pretty high when I got there first. But I worked in the hospital when I was a patient there, just helping out as best I could, and the critical shortage of things like bandages and so on was very, very bad,

23:00 for some time, however, eventually the Japanese relented to the point where we were allowed to buy stuff in town, I don't know how we got the money but I think the blokes had a few bob in their pockets and were able to buy some medications and antiseptic-type rather than anything else, but a lot of blokes died in that first few,

23:30 from war wounds.

#### **What were your jobs helping out in the hospital?**

Just helping, I was not a professional of any sort, but because I was in there, anywhere, I said, "I can

stagger round an help as best I can.” But I was only there for, because they needed the space for the blokes who were really sick, it really improved only slightly

24:00 in the whole time I was there, the quality of the medical attention, we had a pretty high death-rate in that first part of the time we were there.

**Who was providing that medical attention?**

Doctors that belonged to the military units mainly, they had managed, we'd found a couple of field ambulance trucks on the way, in

24:30 various parts of town and we managed to grab as much of the medications as we could, bandages and things like that. But they were in very short supply and it was terribly difficult to communicate with any of the locals to see if they had any, so we had to improvise and a lot of blokes lost shirts to make bandages.

**You mentioned the town, what sort of access did you have to the town?**

25:00 We didn't have any at all for a while, except that the rations used to come from somewhere in town, probably provided by a Chinese merchant of some sort, and the rations, I might add, were supposedly only two meals a day and they were only half-meals anyway. You got a cup full of rice and perhaps a bit of vegetable soup, but that was all.

25:30 And the sort of cleanliness of the cooking facilities was critical because we had already had dysentery [infection that can kill; caused by poor cleanliness] rife amongst us and as soon as you've got dysentery everybody's got it so in our attempts to try and reduce the effects of dysentery spread[ing] it was kind of hard so,

26:00 yeah, it, the other thing that made it kind of difficult was the Australian[s] were by no means the only ones there, there were all sorts of Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were there in quite large numbers, they had been brought down from up north, and then there was another gaol up at Taiping, which eventually had to be cleaned out and the

26:30 contents were brought down to us, so by about September, just before I left, there would have been about 3 or 400 prisoners in there, and accommodation was becoming very critical, we were three to a cell. One on the floor, one on the bench and one on the dining table or eating table, so we

27:00 were kind of packed in.

**Where were you moved after the hospital?**

Well, I went down to Singapore.

**Were you not in a cell in KL?**

Oh, yeah.

**Can you describe the cell you were packed into?**

They were a probably, they wouldn't be about as big as that hallway out there and they had one

27:30 large concrete slab on one side, which was the bed, and on the other side they had a place where you were supposed to have your mess tin and your tin for water. And if there was any water and, fortunately, there was plenty of water, the Japs had not damaged the water supply in any way in KL,

28:00 so we were lucky in that respect. But eventually they started to send out working parties and I used to take out a party, see I was a technician so I had some sort of priority in the selection of jobs that my group would do. Needless to say, the greater part of my group were Australian because

28:30 Australia had a remarkably large number of mechanics and we went out and worked in a facility that had been previously the Ford distributor's work site and we were able to repair some Japanese trucks in a way that it would have been very difficult for the Japanese after about 50 miles.

29:00 **What did you do to them?**

We used to hammer the bloody heads of the plugs together and put a handful of sand in the sump. I don't know if they ever found out who done it, but we used to get reports back, in fact, the facility was closed down because it wasn't producing the results that the Japanese had intended. I don't think anybody

29:30 ever concluded that we were fooling with the bloody vehicles.

**How did the guards treat you?**

If you kept out of their way they were alright. There wasn't enough of them, I think we only had about eight guards for the whole place and they were concentrated around the main gate. But there was a, initially there was a sergeant major that was the gaoler,

30:00 or the head man on the gaol, and he [was] eventually replaced, the senior [Allied] officer in the prison, in the gaol, was a brigadier, and he insisted that there was at least a commissioned officer from the Japanese there to be responsible for the people he had, and, eventually, if I remember rightly, he was, the lieutenant

30:30 was the guy who was sent to run the gaol, but by and large we ran it ourselves.

**What sort of organisation did the prisoners have amongst themselves?**

Oh, pretty good, immediately they gravitated into regimental or battalion groups so the Australians were all together and

31:00 I had, we had 2/19th, 2/29th and 2/30th were the three major battalions from that brigade, and then we had a brigade major from the, what was the general's name? The one that got the VC [Victoria Cross]? The battalion commander who became a general [Possibly: Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Edward Cumming, 12th Frontier Force Regiment, Indian Army, was awarded the VC at Kuantan; he later was promoted to brigadier general...or is he talking about the Australian Lieutenant Colonel Charles Anderson, CO of 2/19th Battalion, who was awarded the VC at Muar River for valour and leadership; he became a POW and was never promoted]. Anyway, the Australians organised

31:30 quickly, we had no trouble at all, there is a very well known book [The Grim Glory of the 2/19th Battalion AIF] written by an equally well known character called Reg Newton, who was the senior Australian there for quite a long time, he was the commander company headquarters from 2/19th. Reg was a pain in the arse, really, [he] was a typically Duntrooner-type military bloke.

32:00 And the Australians responded very well, even though it was not a morale-producing situation they were in. Old Reg [Newton] used to belt them over the ears if there was any bloody nonsense, and I mean that.

**Where did you fit in to these battalion organisations?**

I decided I'd become a member of the 2/19th battalion and

32:30 Kelly and I were there together, and we used to stand up and say that we didn't do duties like ordinary soldiers did because we were airmen, until we got our arses kicked in and told to go and stand in line like everybody else did, but I made some very fine friends amongst those blokes. And, unfortunately, there is not one survivor of the old KL officers group left,

33:00 and Kelly died at about three weeks ago. His wife rung up to say he'd left a message for me and I said, "Yeah, I know what it is", and she said, "Well, you won't ask me to repeat it will you?", "Get stuffed or belt up!" or something like that. Poor old Kelly, he was a good bloke accept he was a natural born gunner, not a

33:30 hell of a lot of brains, but a hell of a lot of guts. But, anyway, as I say, the Australian group got on better than most of them did, there was a lot of arguments amongst the British Army, between the groups, because they don't all talk the same language, the bloody Scottish couldn't talk to the middle county [from the English Midlands] people that we had

34:00 in the 18th Battalion, in the 18th Divisions was composed of all colonial battalions. Three of them were regulars, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, well you can't understand the bloody Scotsman, anyway, and some of them were middle county and they're worse. So there were occasionally, and being regular army of course, they had all done

34:30 there time in India and done there time in Hong Kong, things like that. But by and large the group at the gaol got on pretty well together.

**At what times were you able to mix amongst each other?**

After you had a meal you could, well the lights used to go out at 7 o'clock, because we were dependent upon electrical power in town and they, the electric generators had been

35:00 knocked around a bit before the poms pulled out, so we only had, the whole town only had about one and half generators of power so we were dependent on a pretty limited amount of light bulbs in the evening but, yeah, the organisation seemed to pick itself up quite quickly and after all the sort of initial scraps between battalion and

35:30 whose fault was it we were there and so on, and everybody blamed everybody else to the point where you eventually had to scream, "Why don't you fellows [stop] playing the bloody war again." By the time, as I said, I left after about three months, I think there were 400 and some

36:00 odd prisoners there, there might have even been a few more, but there were every sort of mishmash and mix-up of poms and Australians were about 90 or 95. I've got a prisoner list outside, that was sent to me not long ago by a fellow in England who was

36:30 researching the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and in view of the fact that I took nine ikes [mechanics] with me to Pan [Short for Japan?] when we went there, he wanted to know what I knew about them and how many of them died while we were in formation, so I was able to help in with that.

- But I had four by the time I went to Singapore, I had 14 jocks in this so-called technical
- 37:00 platoon that I had and probably the dregs of the bloody orphanages in Glasgow [Scotland], but great blokes terrific fellows.
- What was the worst thing about the gaol in KL?**
- The uncertainty of the food supply was probably...no, the first affected thing would have been the shortage of medical supplies,
- 37:30 we had plenty of doctors, we had about eight doctors there, all sorts, of course, and doctors when you put them in a bunch fight like hell anyway. the tragedy was the shortage of material to look after, some blokes limbs that had to be taken off, well that gets a bit critical, and having no
- 38:00 hospital in town to send them to we had to do the best they could. I think the, in the time I was there the deaths would have been, oh, 100, I suppose, mostly from battle wounds, but...
- How did you deal with uncertain and poor food supply?**
- Well, you just, I suppose we looked at the almighty every night and said, "Well, how about a helping hand,"
- 38:30 but you used to be able to pinch a lot, but if you pinched it you pinched it for yourself you didn't pinch it for the group. We had, the prison had a matter, of course, had a large vegetable garden as part of the work for the prisoners that had been there before. We tried to get that going but the more we did, it was outside the wall, of course,
- 39:00 the locals pinched it all anyway, so we gave that up. We used to send, we had two 'forage parties', we called them, that went out every day to get mainly green vegetables and they'd stagger back with a couple of bagfuls of stuff they had pinched off the Chinese, but shortages were
- 39:30 particularly critical in the post surgical drugs. A lot of those blokes, there were about 38 or 40 people who had lost limbs of one sort or another and they required some sort of special medication, well, miraculously it used to mysteriously arrive and I think that the
- 40:00 contacts we had were able to do that. Not in any lavish quantities but sufficient to do that.

## Tape 8

- 00:30 **When you left KL you were in Changi briefly?**
- I went to Changi, because I had never been there, of course, I didn't get that far and what I wanted to do was find out how many of our blokes had gone through Changi as prisoners of war, and there was only one, who was a guy who survived
- 01:00 a prang at Kota Bharu which killed a mate of mine who was the pilot, and this bloke was the second pilot. And he found himself in the water and was picked up by a Japanese ship. Eventually, he got to Changi and he was the only one of the whole of our outfit that was a prisoner of war.
- What happened during those two and a half, three weeks that...?**
- Oh, I just laid around the place waiting to,
- 01:30 I knew we were going on and what they were doing was organising, I think I explained to you, I had what was called a technical group, they were electricians and carpenters and various other tradesmen but, apparently, were being sent to Japan as they said to provide some sort of technical help to the Japanese. It didn't worry me whether we were providing technical help or what.
- 02:00 I don't know where they got the idea I had some sort of technical qualification, but I presume that all air force people in Japan have got technical qualifications. So and being the senior of the whole lot I was put in charge of this motley group of bloody lying criminals of the Australian lot that I had with me, and I explained to you that we eventually, they got round to the point where
- 02:30 we were being shipped up to Formosa. Did I cover that bit?
- Let's talk about the ship to Formosa, if nothing important happened in Changi?**
- Nothing important that I could see.
- Any particular memories that stuck with you from that three weeks?**
- Yeah, the nicest thing about going to Changi, was that Changi was divided into a national groups, Australians, poms, Indians and so on

03:00 and various other regimental groups, but the most important thing was you had to cross from one zone to the other in what they called a caravan, which was a trolley that was pushed along by blokes, and the only way you could get from the British lines to the Australian lines was on the trolley and you had to have the same number going back to push the trolley when it was loaded. So I went over to the Australian lines,

03:30 I didn't even have a pair of boots, no shoes, no footwear at all. So I went over there and the first bloke I ran into was Colonel [Wilfred Kent] Hughes, who used to be in the parliament [he served as Member for Kew in the Victorian Parliament from 1927 to 1949, and as Member for Chisholm in Federal Parliament from 1954 to 1970], and his father and my father are old mates. And old Bill said to me, "You're dead," and I said, "No, no, all I've come here is to get some decent clothes." And he rigged me out in full set of Oz clothes

04:00 so I remember him, and a pair of boots, which was the most important thing.

**Were they army issue clothes?**

Yeah, what they had done was gathered all the stores and taken them to, taken clothes off dead fellows, and made a clothing central store and it functioned the whole way through the time that they were in Changi.

**After that was is it easy still to identify yourself as an airman?**

Didn't matter,

04:30 I always stuck to my rank and I was always called lieutenant, it didn't matter, whether I was a flight lieutenant or not [the army equivalent to RAAF flight lieutenant rank is actually captain; the army rank of lieutenant is below captain], the army don't understand the air force ranks, anyway, in fact, they don't understand much at all really. They certainly didn't understand the air force ranking system, but...

**After that you were shipped up to Formosa, was it [on] the England Maru?**

05:00 [It] Was the England Maru.

**Can you tell us a bit about that ship?**

It was a comparatively new cargo ship about 12,000 tons, I suppose, and the general, I think I explained to you, there were two ships they were trying to get us onto, one was a little tiny pig of ship called the Tottori Maru and it was only about 1400 tons and they packed 300 blokes into that, I don't know how they did that,

05:30 but my idiots who were anxious, Australians are always anxious to be first in to something, they won't wait, they got onto that ship and then tried to get off. Come back, I'm saying to them, "Come back for Christ sake we've got some in here", and so, unfortunately, they went to Korea and didn't do very well. I think they had about four of them die out of that group there

06:00 because the climate's appalling in Korea anyway. The rest of them, I think there was 26 of us in the other group, it was a mixed bag of every nationality you could think of but terrific guys, they were tremendous blokes. I had three Argylls and you couldn't understand a bloody word they said, but they stuck to me like glue

06:30 I've never forgotten it, yes, good old Scotties [Scottish]. And there were a couple of Geordies [people from the Tyneside region of northern England] from Sunderland. Anyway, it was a mixed bag but a very close knit group and the rest of us managed to get on the ship with the generals and by some missed chance the generals' party consisted of about 163, I think it was.

07:00 Ranked from colonel up to general, and there's this scruffy bloody lot of mine in the middle of this group. However, we did very well, the blokes all helped with the older generals we had some of the crankiest old buggers you have ever met in your life and, of course, they all, the majority of them had served in the Indian Army, anyway, so the rules applied but

07:30 that was a comparatively comfortable journey except that two days out I came down with dysentery. So I spent the pleasurable remainder of the trip on the upper deck, on the flat deck of the ship, under a truck lying on an old mattress. Next to me was Sir Shenton Thomas the Governor of Singapore also with dysentery and we had the best treatment from the medical profession that I could possibly [have]

08:00 been lucky enough to get. In fact, the doctor, who became a particularly close friend of ours, we went and stayed with him twice in England after the war, and a lovely fellow, a very lovely bloke. And in that group were technical people, as I said, like I was. Mostly Royal Engineers or, in the army, engineers

08:30 who'd all been put into this segregated group. And I slept in comparative comfort on deck while they all sweated down underneath.

**What were the toilet facilities [like] onboard that ship?**

Pretty ordinary, there was a suspended galley deck off the side of the ship and you precariously grabbed hold of the rail and swung out with it and you crapped where you could, it was like a long

09:00 ladder, and when they'd finished they just wash it off by dunking it in the sea, and needless to say the onset of dysentery was reduced a bit by the use of simple sanitation method, but by the time we got to Formosa there was probably 20 per cent of people had dysentery. The food was appallingly bad

09:30 and badly prepared and badly served, so you couldn't help but distribute dysentery through the...

**What sort of thing were you given to eat?**

Oh, rice and stale sour vegetables mostly, no meat or anything like that. Okay, it was sustaining. Anyway, when we got to Formosa we were taken off the ship at Persan [Fengshan] which is in the south at a port

10:00 called Takao and not far from the biggest Japanese airfield in South-East Asia. I'd never seen an airfield complex like it was and, of course, it was on the ferry route all the way from Japan to the Philippines. Anyway, we were put off there and put on a train, those of us who were crook were stuck in the back of trucks and

10:30 taken out to the camp at a place called Heito, which was in the middle of a swamp. They had redirected a river out of the river bed, it was about two and a half miles wide, and they wanted, the reason for that was they wanted the sand out of the river bed, which was all good clean washed sand. And also it had grown very good sugar cane, subsequently we planted

11:00 cane out again. But and I stayed in that camp for two years. The group of people that went through initially, all the officers were put into that camp while they sorted out where they wanted to go. Anybody above the rank of colonel and anybody the Japanese didn't like, otherwise, no matter what his rank was, were all shipped off to an officers camp up north, the very senior generals

11:30 out of that group, anybody that was two star [major general rank (or equivalent for other services) and above] or above, were again segregated into a camp on the east coast of Formosa where they stayed momentarily while they built a special camp for two stars and above.

**While you were still with them, how did you see the Japanese treating the higher ranking officers?**

They [senior officers] didn't seem to, a lot of times they are inherently stupid, and

12:00 so are a lot of Americans, and if you could only persuade them to ride with the swell a bit, they didn't have any trouble at all, but when they started getting uppity, the Nips used to belt into the, frankly, not the generals so much they would be segregated or they'd lose privilege or something like that. But by and large I think about,

12:30 in the time I was in that camp, in the first six months, there must have been something like 380 officers went through it and ranks right up to lieutenant general [three star rank]. Eventually the very senior generals were put into a, we used to call it a vegetable garden, it was a very pleasant part of northern Formosa, they were segregated from the lower general ranks who were then moved down to a

13:00 place called Shirakawa, 'Shirakawa' means 'house of the happy valley' or 'home of the happy valley', and it was quite a pretty part of Formosa, quite a productive vegetable-wise, and they could grow their own vegetables and whatnot. Not that any of the generals had to go and do the digging, colonels and lower ranks did that.

**Did you get close to any of those high ranking people?**

13:30 Yeah, oh yeah.

**Who in particular did you...?**

Well, I knew most of them by surname, anyway, some of them I just couldn't stand, quite frankly, but the general, General Key [CO 11th Indian Army Division] was the fellow that was our brigadier at Kota Bharu, now he marched onto me as soon as he saw me. He said, "Didn't you get away you silly bastard, you should have,"

14:00 you know, but he was an Indian Army man of considerable military aplomb, he was a wonderful soldier. Others of them were fatted and stupid, standing on their dignity and being uncompromisingly difficult and, of course, they copped it, couldn't understand why they did mind you. And no matter what you hinted at

14:30 them in the way of changing their behavioural pattern it was all, in fact, even trying to make them take a bath was hard enough. But, anyway, poms don't bathe very often. But on the other hand, amongst that group I had some very, very close friends, who seemed to understand, but a lot of them were old colonial type Indian Army people who

15:00 were used to having the proper levels of subservience, if you like, from their juniors, and okay you just avoided them, well I did anyway.

**How was the dignity of these people in charge after the shambles ?**

I don't think it worried them, I don't think it worried me, because I didn't really know anything about,

they said, what they thought they'd done.

15:30 I spoke at length with two or three of the, Sir Shenton Thomas the Governor of Singapore, for instance, I spoke at length with him. He wrote a book, of course, in fact he wrote a book in blank verse [poetry written with lines that do not rhyme] on his experiences. It's a triumph if you have never read it, what's the name Miltonian blank verse [John Milton used blank verse to write his epic poems Paradise Lost (1667) and Paradise Regained (1671)], which is a fantastic achievement. But he did it for the mental exercise.

16:00 And some of the other generals, General Keith-Simmons who was a Scottish major general, fantastic bloke, wonderful fellow, never ever forgot a name, "What are you doing here, Spurgeon?" I met him three separate times, and or something like, "Oh, you again," but always approachable. On the other hand a lot of the Indian Army people weren't

16:30 approachable, it was quite amazing. After we had been delivered there we were taken, that was the place where every prisoner of war in that group was processed into the Japanese system, we had to sign non-escape documents and all the rest of it, which was...

**What did you have to sign?**

A non-escape document, so we wouldn't escape and, of

17:00 course, General Percer [No Percer in Formosa but there was a British Army Lieut General Percival] was the fellow who tried to insist that British officers were not allowed to sign a document, so he got flattened, just knocked to the ground, much to the disturbance of a lot of the people who were there, because that's the way the Japanese treated people who dared to stand up to them. And somebody was screaming out at the top of his voice, "Why don't you sign the fucking thing!"

17:30 And it doesn't matter a damn it was under oppression anyway. But...

**How else were you processed apart from signing escape documents?**

Oh, I must have had some sort of guardian angel cause I never, oh, I was gaoled about four times, I think, while I was a prisoner for various things. I was accused of thieving things, sugar, for instance,

18:00 we worked for a sugar company, so I couldn't understand why on earth I was penalised for pinching sugar, but it was more for the hospital than anything else that I wanted the sugar, but they eventually took the generals away from amongst the hoi polloi [masses] down where we were and we finished up in a camp of about,

18:30 oh, a varying population between about 260 and about 340 people.

**Can you describe the set up of that camp for us?**

What is was like? It was built, as I said, in a recovered river bank which made it automatically a hive for malaria, so everybody got malaria at least once a season and a lot of people died from malaria, in fact.

19:00 And it wasn't until we could persuade the Japanese to segregate the camp from all this ditch water that was lying around the place, get rid of the mosquito breeding areas, that we were able to cut down on the malaria, transferred malaria. We had no drugs, of course, which was equally bad, and the

19:30 incidence of dysentery was high. Dysentery was probably the most infectious of all the interior diseases anyway. So in the time that I was in the camp, the death list would have been, and I was there for two years, by dint of hard work it was kept down under the 200 level, so a lot of the people who, as I say, hadn't been brought up in the tropics

20:00 who'd come out in the later divisions, reinforcement divisions had to be taught to keep away from the mossies [mosquitos]. Even if we had mosquito nets it made little difference because every time you went for a piss [urinate], you got bitten on the arse [buttock] anyway.

**How did you personally survive during that period? What methods did you adopt?**

I kept busy, I

20:30 was one of the first officers to volunteer to work in the kitchen. I was aware that if there was any place where graft would go on it would be where the food was and sure enough that's what I found. We had the unfortunate situation when we got to the camp, and I don't think I am talking about anybody who is still alive, but there was a crew of a Dutch ship that had been arrested on the high seas

21:00 and moved into that camp. And Dutch people being as they are, and I hope you have no Dutch relatives, are very apt at looking after Dutch people. It's a natural characteristic of the race, and it took it a while to get the bastards out of the kitchen where they were racketeering as hard as they could go. So there was an American officer who was

21:30 a mining engineer and myself and we had two Chinese who had escaped for the Philippines and had been picked up. I mentioned Tanto, my very fine Chinese friend, he and I worked in the kitchen together for two years and, on and off for two years, Tan worked there the whole time, they didn't let the Chinese

go out of the camp area, and very fortunate to survive the whole way through, he had another little Chinese

22:00 by the name of Jimmy Waylong, and Jimmy was also from the Philippines as an escapee, they tried to sail a boat from the Philippines to the Chinese coast and, hadn't made it. So the mixed bag in the kitchen was one Australian, three Americans, two Chinese and about four poms. That varied and we used to run three

22:30 shift a day for kitchen. And food was average, I had to learn how to cook rice properly and in large quantities. We had 300 prisoners in that place. And then ensure a reasonably accurate equal distribution system, which was equally difficult. Was more rackets in food than you can ever possibly read of.

#### **What were**

23:00 **some of the rackets and graft that went on around the kitchen?**

Usually if somebody had something that somebody else wanted, cigarettes were always a problem even though some of the best, I won't say some of the best, some of the more reasonable cigarette tobaccos were produced in Formosa and we could buy them through our canteen if the administration looked favourable at the propositions we made.

23:30 And officers were paid varying amounts depending on rank and we had enough to spend in the canteen, it took a long time for us to pool the resources that we had to share it round the whole lot, but eventually we did.

#### **What sort of contact were you able to make with the outside world?**

24:00 I was allowed, in the whole time I was a prisoner, I was allowed to write 14 letters. At Formosa I wrote six, in Singapore I wrote two, no, one. In Japan I wrote two, and in Mukden I wrote about four. The only ones that got home were five from Formosa. They, and also the only letters I got

24:30 from home were five from Australia. They were very nice to have, of course, cause at least it showed that my mother knew I was in the situation I was in and not dead. That was the first time she had been told in anyway that I wasn't dead. You're in that horrible suspended state of being missing, which is,

25:00 might just as well be bloody-well dead. Yeah, the letter writing, the Americans were the worst off for mail, in my recollection. Even though later in the business when the Red Cross got things organised, shall we say on a community basis, rather than the Americans trying to organise their own, like they always do, and the avenue opened up

25:30 through South Africa, South Africa became the intermediary if you like in POW assistance and until the there were prisoner packages that were produced in England and again in America. But they were designed for prisoners in Germany, so the stuff they had in them was almost farcical, nobody wanted raspberry jam,

26:00 we wanted a decent opportunity to get some bread. We made bread we made very good bread, but it was rice flour and rice flour doesn't make good bread.

#### **What else did those care packages have in them?**

Most of them, the American Red Cross ones, were full of things that Americans liked. Like, you couldn't get a decent piece of cheese. I don't think I've ever wanted cheese as much as I wanted [it] when I,

26:30 in the van. I never thought I would be interested, but, it was good food, of course, and a combination of good flavour, but some of the American stuff was not worth it. Cocoa for Christ sake, who wants cocoa? And no salt, salt was almost impossible, we could use crude salt we could pinch out of the steel works and things like that. But it wasn't the salt we were used to,

27:00 it was too high in chloride, but simple things like that, pepper and salt were very, very acceptable, but the standard parcels from the American Red Cross had things like Spam [tinned luncheon meat], can of Spam, sometimes cocoa, sometimes coffee, very rarely tea,

27:30 sometimes milk powder, which didn't go down very well at all because it only made about a cup full anyway. And I don't think I missed milk as much as missed some of the other things, butter would have been, the Japanese also on occasions used to break into the parcels and pinch stuff out of them,

28:00 they'd be damaged in shipment was the story, and all the things that, cigarettes, there were always a few cigarettes in the packet but you could buy quite good cigarettes in Formosa, quite good tobacco in the canteen.

#### **What was it like to receive mail on the rare occasion you did?**

Like a bank holiday, because everybody was as sure they were going to

28:30 get a letter from home, and the looks on the faces who didn't get them was incredible. On the other hand people were very good with the letters they had that had news that was dispensable as general

news rather than anything else, and some of the people, some of the English people in particular got very clever at writing not coded letters, but

29:00 letters by inference that conveyed a message.

**What was your treatment from the guards like?**

Um, it was funny how your treatment was reflected by news that the Japanese got, particularly in the latter stages of the war when they were getting the arse

29:30 beaten off them. And, or particularly if the, we used to have what we called a wondering Kempeitai, that was the secret police, his name was George Mizaki, I knew George very well, he was an American-bred Japanese and George used to hang around sometimes at night and try to listen to conversation until we told him not to be so bloody stupid, and he

30:00 realised how stupid it was, too. But, he was neither a hindrance nor was he very helpful as well. Occasionally, he would give us items of news which we would not have otherwise heard, either by accident or with full intent. I'm trying to think of, what was the name of the big battle in the Pacific? We knew about that, I should mention that throughout the whole

30:30 time I was in that camp we had a radio show and once a months we had news, not much, but it was usually sifted news either from South Africa or the American side. The only trouble was we had to save up enough torch batteries out of the, what we could buy at the canteen, to make an A-class battery

31:00 and that thing was, the huts we lived in where made out of big bamboos, about like that, the radio set was in there, and very few people knew it was there, the dissemination of the material that was obtained by that radio source was very, very closely guarded and policed.

31:30 There were some people in the place that we would never have dreamt of telling what the news might have been, so it was very carefully guarded amongst the people who were privileged to what was going on.

**Who was in charge of that radio?**

The doctor, because he had a source for torch batteries, he had a torch for his hospital

32:00 work. And they used to save batteries up until they got an A battery about that long, which would be enough to charge the condenser valve and you could get, I think they used to listen to about... They had a schedule somebody had written to them in a letter had given them a schedule in code, and they had a schedule for BBC broadcasts

32:30 which came through India. That was helpful to a degree but it had to be very closely restricted to the audience that you could believe would protect it. It was never any, we knew when all the Middle East victories had been achieved, we knew that. And then

33:00 later on when the American releases were also picked up, and the American news on the BBC was included, Pacific was also, we were brought up-to-date on that then. But it was very, very sparse and very widely separated in time, it had to be done very, very carefully, of course, to get the radio loaded up to where we could listen

33:30 to the BBC.

**You mentioned you got into trouble in the camp, what incidents did you get in trouble for?**

Oh, there was one particular NCO that was also the commissariat [food supplies] NCO, a bloke called, oh, think of his name, I'll think of it in a minute, and he was a big bull-headed [obstinate]

34:00 Korean-Japanese cross and he used to take, he couldn't take chaff [joking], if you tried to chaff him, which was the way, of course, you got around Japs, anyway, chaff them or smart talk them. I used to ask him sometimes to get us some flour, "Was it possible to get some flour so we could make some bread?"

34:30 And, of course, wheat flour was impossible so we used to get rice flour, well you can't make bread with bloody rice flour, you can make a thing that looks like a bloody dead scone, and it's just about as tasteless, too. But he took a dislike to me personally and I did three gaol terms because of misdemeanours by other people that they couldn't identify so they

35:00 were put on me, two of us we were always targets for that sort of thing. I didn't mind, it's just that he took a dislike to me personally. He might have had a relative who was killed in New Guinea or something like that, and I was associated with it so, was misfortunate. But, fortunately, I found out later he was hanged, so my conscience is know clear, I would have had to have gone and

35:30 done it myself.

**What was your punishment?**

Gaol, cell, I did two periods of two months in cells, and they were very cramped, they were about the size of that corner there.

**How big was that cell?**

It would have been six by four feet, I suppose, oh, quite high ceilings but no outside

36:00 windows or anything like that. It was kind of oppressive and depressive.

**Were you in solitary confinement during those two months?**

At one time I did seven weeks, I think it was, two of us did seven weeks, not in the same cell but the other bloke was adjacent. He was the

36:30 camp tailor and he was a gentleman of Jewish extraction who'd been a refugee from Europe and gone to England, and immediately had been drafted as a tailor for the colonel of the regiment, so we had a tame tailor amongst us. As I said, I don't know many Jews but those I do know are kind of awkward particularly when they are

37:00 under restriction of any sort. He didn't react very sensibly to the Japanese determination to beat the daylight out of him, and he couldn't understand why it was always him, cause he was a bloody fool, that's why. And no matter what you told him, I shouldn't talk about him like this cause he is dead, anyway, but he was very stupid and he

37:30 tried to kowtow [to be servile] that might have resulted in privilege for himself, and that's stupid. Anyway he's...

**What sort of effect does seven weeks like that have on man?**

Oh,

38:00 I suppose, mostly the opportunity to inward look a bit, there's not much to, you didn't get much in the way of exercise, I was allowed to go, for instance, if I, there was no latrine arrangement, a can was provided, and in any case I didn't always get enough to eat to warrant a, he...

38:30 I think I did about four periods, I suppose, totally about, oh, 10 weeks, but mainly because of these ructions I used to get into with the cookhouse, that was the main problem that seemed to get up their nose, I suppose it embarrassed them the fact that they couldn't do any better than what they were doing, and in any

39:00 case it made no difference to the adequacy of their diets. And they lived, the Japanese always lived very, very well, but they were scaleless [black and white] they were completely about principle these people.

**Was there incidences of brutality?**

Yeah, not bone breaking or anything like that, but, yes.

39:30 There were occasions when people were people were beaten, usually for being disrespectful or what the Japanese regarded as being disrespectful. A failure to pay compliments, and it's a Japanese habit to pay compliments, at a rate far in excess of what we'd even contemplate, so if you either did it at the wrong time, or didn't do it at all, it could be

40:00 a source of, and, as I say, they took advantage of some people who apparently they had set up as people they just didn't like. And they segregated those people much more than they did others. As I said, the whole time I was there I did, oh, I suppose, four periods in detention of varying,

40:30 quite, you know, you can't reason with the Japanese, if he's made up his mind he won't believe you anyway, you can't try and rationalised what might have happened, and also, of course, the risk of prejudice in someone else is always there, so, yeah, okay, I did my time.

## **Tape 9**

00:31 **What did you learn?**

The reason I did it was a way I could get outside the camp, we had a farm outside and, I said, it was a[n] alluvial, sandy loam [dirt] good growing for spuds, particularly, and I said, "Why don't we grow potatoes?" So we grew three acres of potatoes and the bastard sold the whole lot in the market in town.

01:00 **We missed the start, what did you learn?**

I got into situations where I became unacceptable if I was in the kitchen, something I did or said would give them an excuse to arsehole me out. And there is always somebody waiting who wanted to go and work in the kitchen anyway. So there were several

01:30 occasions where, I ended up in the office staff on one occasion and that was the most crashing awful boring inside job, and I loved working outside in the fresh air.

**What did you particular learn when you were doing planting of the potatoes?**

I learnt how to drive a Japanese one-share plough with a buffalo, her name was Molly. Regrettably, sad to say, that Molly met an untimely end, she finished as being very, very enjoyable soup.

02:00 But driving a buffalo is a very tricky business when you've got the plough in your own hand and one string to steer the 'moose', and she was an obstinate old bastard.

02:30 **How were you communicating with your guards?**

In grunts mostly, we had no interchange of, you see most of the guards in Formosa were Formosan conscripts, if you like, and the average Formosan is not possessed of a great deal of normal human intelligence anyway,

03:00 they are short-legged monkeys really. So the guards were sort of nominal, it was, where the hell would you escape to if you got out anyway. And I can remember we had a jockey with us, a bloke called, I can't remember his name now...

03:30 and the Japanese commander was a lieutenant by the name of Tumaki and it was his life-long dream that he wanted to learn to ride a horse. So I said you get a horse and make sure it's got the right gear, it's got to have a saddle and stirrups and bridle and reins and I'll get a fellow to teach you how to ride it. And, of course, again

04:00 it was a terrible mistake, I should have never volunteered because the first time he got on a horse, he had to be helped onto the horse and, unfortunately, the two prisoners that were helping were a little strenuous and he went straight over the bloody horse and landed on his ear on the other side. Okay, we eventually taught him how to ride this horse and until his general found out that he had this capability and they posted him,

04:30 posted him to some obscure military establishment elsewhere. But things like that, we used to just train a cow to pull the blooming plough and a week or two later the Japanese had decided it had to be killed for some meat. And the prisoners got very, very little of the meat from the killed cow, but we had to buy it

05:00 we had to buy them from our canteen fund. So there you are.

**How did the economy work?**

Incredible, isn't it? The 'economy' inside the camp itself was based on cigarettes really, tobacco and cigarettes and those that didn't smoke did pretty well because it was usually by barter

05:30 there was rarely any currency ever that changed hands. Theoretically, we had bank accounts, but we never had really any access to them and we had a canteen for a while where you buy by docket, they made very good tomato sauce in Formosa and, of course, for the purposes of eating rice, anything that provided a flavour other than bland rice...

06:00 **In the gaol, when you were in solitary confinement was there any graffiti on the walls?**

It would depend on the guard, see the camp guard was mounted by an infantry in town, it wasn't done by the prison staff, not always, anyway, so the conscripts that you got from the regiment in town could be anything from

06:30 lunatic to, you know, they could be army rejects right down to farm boys.

**What was written on the walls of the prison?**

What at...

**Did you write anything on the walls?**

No, I don't think there'd have been any necessity for it anyway. I think you are thinking about things that were written on the gaols in Singapore

07:00 **Do you remember any of those?**

I was never in one, I don't ever remember our gaols being disfigured in that way.

**Were there code words that you used?**

Writing in my diary I did, yeah.

**Can you tell us about those?**

They weren't really code words at all, but they were designed to confuse, rather than code words, but...

**Can you recall any specifically?**

07:30 I can't really. I've got a diary somewhere that I could have dug out. but most of the things that I wrote in

my diary were daily occurrence, events, names of people who posted, and things like that. I didn't have any reason to write anything else really. I recorded the dates I got mail for instance, which wasn't

08:00 very often, but or, very rarely did I lax off onto realms of improbable thought. There was no opportunity for that.

**How important are rumours in the life of a POW?**

They weren't bad. Some of them were extraordinarily clever but in the main most of them

08:30 were found to be turkeys by the time they arrived where they were going. But a lot of people, the only letters, initially, we were allowed to write were a pro forma type thing, you know, I am well, I am sick, I am in hospital, or never any mention of whether you were well-fed or if you had been sick, you could put, I've had malaria

09:00 or I've had something else, dysentery. You could write one sentence, said, "Please remember me to so and so," and the Japanese always used to obliterate the name that you wrote in the name. If you wrote it hard enough with a pencil it would show on the other side anyway. I can't remember what the salutation was but it was extraordinarily naively Japanese-English.

09:30 They could get prepositions and consonants, so, till they were, some of them were hilarious, the opportunity I only ever had an opportunity to write three, what I call, full-page letters and none of them got through.

**How much Japanese did you speak?**

10:00 Not much. Enough to make myself understood, mostly to say "Yes" or "No" or "Maybe," but I knew all the names of the foodstuffs we had through the commissaries, like vegetables and things like that.

**Can you tell us any executions that took place of prisoners?**

No.

10:30 I don't think I know of any, I may have heard by hearsay of some but I wouldn't consider that being reliable enough.

**What about church services?**

We had a padre with us. I wish I could have found it, but he was immensely clever as a sketcher of caricatures and he published a book after he got home, and I've got a copy of it somewhere or I've lent it to somebody to look at.

11:00 I'd hoped to be able to show it to you but, yeah. He had a professional knack as a caricaturist and they are really remarkable. There is even one of me there, which showed a rather gaunt-looking figure with a short haircut, but some of the one's he did

11:30 of my friend Canto, who is featured in the book, and that is a remarkable living picture.

**Were there any people who couldn't cope with captivity?**

I suppose, I think it killed a lot of people because they couldn't cope. Or people became so ill they gave up anyway.

**Can you talk about that?**

I can't bring any to mind.

12:00 I remember dysentery was the greatest killer we had, anyway, and, of course, it's an immensely easily transferable disease if you're not careful. But I think I had seen people just give up when they had dysentery, particularly, there were two camps in Formosa that were particularly notorious. One was a

12:30 copper mine and people there, I know, suicided because they just couldn't stand it any longer.

**You knew that at the time?**

No, I was never there, fortunately, there is a remarkable book...

**You went on to Japan to a coal mine?**

Yeah, I went to a camp with a coal mine.

**Can you tell us briefly about that camp?**

13:00 I didn't work in the mine at all, but we were put down a shaft when we, see we were there when the B-29s [Boeing Superfortress] started bombing Yokohama [central Japan] and further north and they used to come right over where we were and, eventually, of course, they bombed Nagasaki [southern Japan], which is only 600 miles south of that, not in the time I was there, but Nagasaki was cleaned up just before the end of the war,

13:30 as was Iwashita which was further north.

**What happened at that camp with a coal mine?**

It was a sort of fill-in period in the, the determination came in about October of 1944 to move all the officers from Formosa other than what was sufficient to run the camp, all the superfluous officers were moved to Japan.

14:00 **Would you say that officers got a better deal?**

No, I don't think so.

**Is there any particular incident that stands out from the coal mine?**

Except how wet and cold it was, but I didn't did any coal. We were just hidden down there during the air raids.

**What could you see?**

Oh, you could see what they left behind in the way of [vapour] trails, far too high,

14:30 and they were on their way to Yokohama or Tokyo.

**What was your knowledge of what was happening in the war at that time?**

Didn't I tell you we had a radio set in Formosa?

**Yes, but once you were in Japan?**

There was always a radio set somewhere and we always had, it depended on who you

15:00 had as a mate as to whether you heard anything. I think also, we had an English-language newspaper, which contained absolutely no information at all other than what the Japanese wanted to tell us, but there were contacts, shall we say, by radio with real news,

15:30 and particularly when we got to Manchuria it was commonplace for news items to be passed around.

**Can you tell us about that trip to Manchuria?**

You see we were taken from Formosa to, and this is late in '44, now when was it? December, January '45, we were

16:00 taken to Japan and then I was only in that Moti camp [?] for five weeks, five or six weeks. All officers below the rank of captain were congregated down at Fukuoka in the south and we were put on a packet-ship [mail or small-parcel transport] across to

16:30 Korea and taken up by train up through Korea to Mukden.

**What did you know of where you were going?**

Well, we knew pretty well where we going.

**Did you know where you were going?**

As soon as we got on the packet-steamer we did, and believe it or not it was the last trip it made, it was sunk on the way home back to Japan. So we were extremely fortunate. And I have an inner feeling they knew we were in the damn thing, otherwise they would have sunk it on the way over.

17:00 But there were 168 junior officers on that packet-steamer and, I think, it went at 21 knots the whole way across the Japan sea [Sea of Japan].

**Wasn't hanging around?**

That train trip through Korea was the most beautiful train trip I've ever had. It was in the spring in Korea and there's no more beautiful place than Korea

17:30 in the spring. Silly, isn't it! And the finest railway lines I have ever seen anywhere in the world, cause they were all Manchurian scale, five-foot three gauge, enormous locomotives that pulled us up those mountains. Yeah, it was a very pleasant journey.

**How were you looked after on that trip?**

Very well, cause the whole train was full of officers and we had exactly the same meals

18:00 as the troops would have had if they'd, the Japanese troops would have had, little wooden boxes with meals in it.

**Can you tell [us] about the camp in Manchuria?**

The one that we eventually went to was in Mukden, or just outside Mukden, and it had been especially built as a prisoner of war camp, it was built on the German prison camp line, it contained, I think, when

I was there,

18:30 upwards of 1100 prisoners in it. It got reduced quite quickly when they sent off some of the unenlisted men, but eventually we had, the generals were brought down from northern Manchuria to the same camp as we were and we were all released from that camp. So the generals were flown home through China and India.

19:00 **How long were you in that camp before you were liberated?**

I was going to say five and a half months, something like that. We left, I left there in July, the, July or August, August.

**What were conditions like compared to Formosa?**

19:30 The accommodation was better, it was in brick buildings and, of course, that part of Manchuria is freezing in the winter, fortunately, we didn't have a winter, but we got there at the tail end of the winter and I tell you it was pretty-bloody cold, too, but I think that the standard of accommodation was better.

20:00 I think it was built on decks like sleeping decks in a troop ship, and the mattresses were fresh straw mattresses rather than, and you could draw fresh straw.

**How were you coping?**

Oh, I did alright. I think I had malaria about four times, that's all. I got malaria in Formosa

20:30 and it was recurring, of course, we had very little in the way of drugs until the latter end, towards the end of our stay. We were bombed by B-29s from Saipan [island in the western Pacific] that brought up supplies for us.

**Can you tell us about that particular air raid?**

Yeah, I was out walking, we had a quadrangle outside,

21:00 inside the wall but outside the barrack block, which was an exercise quadrangle and I was walking strangely with Air Vice-Marshall Maltby, he had never met me, he said he didn't know there was another Australian air force man in the camp and I said to him, "Well, I've only been here for two and a half months," and, of course, he had been in another camp further north, as a general, and he questioned me on what

21:30 I had done, and where I had been and whatnot. And while we were talking, I said to him, "If you'll excuse me, sir, I'd like to point out to you that that's a Liberator over there and it is dropping parachutes on the airfield." And you could just see it over the top of the wall as it made its first pass. If I remember rightly, there were five white parachutes and seven or eight mixed-colour ones, and the second run there was another

22:00 six white parachutes with an equal number of colour ones. And that evening they brought in this American major in who'd been flown in from Saipan complete with his radio set and two doctors, he had a Korean and Chinese with him, linguists. Two radio operators and set of radio equipment and that was our first

22:30 indication that we were going to be released, it was about a month to get out?

**Prior to that you were bombed by the B-29s?**

I think literally bombed is a misnomer because they were trying to drop supplies and the trouble was that contrary to how most people did it, they did by free fall, it was a thing like a platform put in the bomb bay

23:00 which was released complete so you had to duck inside while this bloody thing flailed out and the bags of supplies were just tossed to the four winds. I remember the hospital disappeared under [a] cloud of cocoa, it was a bag of about 40 kilos [kilograms] of cocoa hit the roof of the hospital and blew up like a bomb. So that stuff all had to be recovered. It was interesting we,

23:30 the first night we had the doors of the camp open was when the Russians arrived, a Russian tank drove straight through the front gate and we looked outside there was a lagoon outside the gaol full of kids diving for Mars Bars. A whole spray of Mars Bars had gone into this lake, you know a Mars Bar, a chocolate about this big [12 centimetres long]. There were hundreds and hundreds of them all over this lagoon,

24:00 needless to say we didn't see any of them.

**You mentioned there was actually an air raid that hit the camp and prisoners were killed?**

Yeah, that was in the previous December.

**Can you tell us about that?**

I wasn't there when it happened, there were five, I think, killed, if I remember rightly, and several

injured by an airplane that was misguided

24:30 or the weather was bad or something like that, and it actually hit the retaining wall around one side of the camp and there were several people sheltering under that wall. I think there were five killed in that raid, the only time they ever bombed.

**Prior to your liberation was there any concern for your safety, perhaps retaliation from prison guards?**

25:00 I don't think there was any suggestion that, I don't think it had come to anybody's mind, there were no rules written as to what you did if such and such a situation arose because you could probably imagine 20 different sets of circumstances and you can't write rules for all of them. Particularly when POWs were involved because they didn't like being told what to do much. That was my experience

25:30 anyway. No bastard tells us, especially if he is an American.

**What was it like that trip home?**

Fantastic, because we talked about it and what would happen and the general, as soon as the, this American arrived with his group of linguists and whatnot,

26:00 very quickly set up radio communication, with Saipan anyway. And things like medical supplies, which we were short on, were very quickly delivered to us. And the question of evacuation was raised quickly because of, rather fear of reactionary reaction of the locals or Japanese to the Russian invasion. There was no doubt the Russians had

26:30 made up their minds they were going to get there first before anybody else, and that was the quickest run to the river up north of us, down to Mukden anyway. And Mukden then was the sort of civic centre of government in Manchuria then. So, naturally, we were concerned about how we were going to get away and what sort of arrangements could be made

27:00 quickly, and very efficiently and very quickly, five ships were organised from Okinawa [southern Japanese islands] from amongst the personal transport ships, they had a hospital ship, two LCAs [Landing Craft Assault, amphibious landing craft] which are the infantry landing ships, we had a fleet of navy vessels to clear the mines out of the channel from Dairen [300km south on the peninsula], and

27:30 what else did we have? There was one hospital ship, two LCAs and five destroyers, I think was the complement, and we had, we organised two trains driven by our own people to go from Mukden down to Dairen and I can remember that very, very

28:00 clearly because the, there was an apprehension that the Russians might have interfered but apparently they got the word that they were not to and we had an unmolested trip from Mukden down to Dairen, it took us a while because the trains had stopped 'officially' operating, and we had

28:30 three engine drivers of our own, driving the locomotives, and, of course, from locals who reckoned they knew how to operate the radio, railway equipment.

**How did you get back to Australia after that?**

Well, we came out, I came out by hospital ship to Okinawa, it took us four days because we had a typhoon in the middle of it, and

29:00 we were put into a reserves camp, which was just a bunch of tents on the end of the runway. And I met up with an old sergeant who had a tame [?] twin engine airplane and I had seven Australians with me and I said, "What about 6 o'clock in the morning, would that be too early for you?" and he said, "No, sir, general." I gave him a bottle of whisky and we were on our way to

29:30 Philippines the next morning.

**Who flew the plane?**

The old warrant [warrant officer] did. Was an old beaten up [Douglas] C-42 and I wouldn't have flown in it if I'd have known what it was. But we were in Manila ahead of the others by days.

**What word did you have of your family?**

I had none until I got to Manila [Philippines].

**And is that when you found out about your brothers and your dad?**

What had happened to what?

30:00 **Your brother?**

Yes, my brother [Captain Arthur Henry Spurgeon, OBE, RAN], it's the first, I had had news that he had died after hospital treatment [on 16 December 1942 in Sydney], he had a gall bladder that went bad on him and he died in hospital so I knew about that.

**When did you find out about that?**

I had one letter from home just happened to mention that he had died in hospital.

30:30 I think Mum had written four or five times, and she put important news in each letter each time, to make sure that I got it. The first letter I got in Manila was from that girl down the hall.

**That must have been a nice letter to get. What was it like landing back in Australia?**

That was good because an old squadron mate of mine had a Liberator squadron in Darwin

31:00 and mysteriously an Australian Liberator arrived at Manila airport and I had 15 RAAF blokes with me that we'd got together and I knew they were coming, because the draft conducting officer we had in the camp was an air force bloke, anyway, so he fixed it with his radio, we knew it was coming, we knew what time we had to

31:30 be there at Clark Field [near Angeles City] so we were there at 5 o'clock in the morning and we were wheels-up [after take-off the first action is to retract the wheels] and away by 6 o'clock in the morning.

**What sort of reception did you get?**

In Darwin?

**From your family?**

It took us two or three weeks to get from Darwin to Sydney in a [Convair PBY] Catalina ['flying boat'], of all things, and every time we stopped anywhere everybody had to treat us as medical evacuees so it took

32:00 a bit longer than I had hoped. I think I got home, I certainly got to Sydney after five or seven days after I left Manila, I got to Sydney and we'd been equipped in Brisbane with uniforms and things and I got home on the, let's see, went home by train and got into Melbourne about 6 or 7 o'clock in the morning, we were at Melbourne Cricket Ground and I was out

32:30 of the place by 4 o'clock in the afternoon, me sister was waiting for me in the car park.

**What did you say to her when you first saw her?**

Well, she said to me, "Well, I thought I'd bring my son because he is the latest addition to the Spurgeon family," and I didn't particular mind who it was, as long as they had a car and could drive me home, so I was home

33:00 by 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

**What was it like sleeping in your own bed?**

Yeah, it was pretty good.

**How had you changed?**

Oh, I don't remember being changed, I was a lot lighter in weight than when I'd been away, I was about a stone [6.3 kilograms] lighter, I was pretty

33:30 skinny-looking but I don't remember having any residual illness, I had a couple of fits of malaria, that's all, but the medication fixed that so, yeah, I was alright. I went straight on, I think I had about five weeks leave before they put me in a medical rehabilitation centre at Warburton [75km east of Melbourne].

**Why did**

34:00 **you have to go to a medical rehabilitation centre?**

Because all POWs had to. It was rule of the exercise.

**Many POWs didn't cope well with freedom?**

Yeah, I think I, I think a lot of blokes found that circumstances were different when they got home from what they had expected. Let alone what they had been told.

**How was it with you?**

34:30 Oh no, things were exactly as I thought they'd be, I had no, you see I had had a letter from my friend in here, which sort of excited my curiosity a bit because I thought she'd be married to some American or something and, but I'd known her for too long anyway, she wouldn't be game to do that, I've known her since she was about nine, I think, so it was almost a forgone conclusion

35:00 what the result would be, and very grateful I was. She's four years younger than I and I was only 21 when I went away so, she was pretty young the, but she's a woman of singular purpose and determinant mind.

**You went on to have a very long career in the air force,**

35:30 **you stayed on when many people were leaving, why?**

I went through the rehab process at the Melbourne Cricket Ground and one of the first questions I was asked was, "Why are you in this queue, you ought to be in the discharge queue," and I said, "No, I'm a bloody permanent air force officer."

**Why did you stay on?**

Well, because I suppose I didn't know any different.

36:00 I had never any intention of doing anything else, in some ways it was kind of difficult to see a few of my acquaintances who were still around who had had the advantage of promotion while the war was on, and that perhaps it didn't worry me at all really, I've caught most of them.

**Looking back on your war experience,**

36:30 **how do you feel about it now?**

Well, I suppose it was certainly a unique experience, I think I learnt a lot of lessons that I might not have learnt from any other exposure to, I learnt a hell of a lot about ordinary people and the way that they, other human beings behave under some conditions of difficulty,

37:00 and in rather unexpected ways in which they handle them.

**Do you have any regrets?**

I don't think so, I suppose I could have, well, I could have been dead, couldn't I, maybe three or four times. Of my immediate acquaintances in my flying course, I think, probably

37:30 15 were killed during the war. Some of them were killed in Malaysia, fellows that were on my course, but it sort of never entered my, that anything like that was going to happen to me, and even while I was thinking about it in the 'can' [Prisoner of War camp], I had no desire for any other form of employment.

**What do you think about war?**

38:00 Well, it was an unpleasant experience, if you like, because the outcome certainly wasn't what I expected it to be. On the other hand, I'm still alive.

**Can the war be a pleasant experience?**

Well, I don't know whether it was, I suppose I took it because it was the thing I was trained to do.

**We are getting near the end the interview,**

38:30 **how do you feel about the Second World War and what it had achieved?**

Well, I had no control over what had occurred, did I. The fact that I decided that, I decided a long while before the war finished that I was going to stay in the air force, because, frankly, I didn't have any other qualifications and it was something I enjoyed

39:00 so it was both pleasurable to me and, okay, exciting to me to be able to stay on with a lot of people that I had known. I think off my course there were at least 20 who stayed on after the war, out of the, I think we had 26 killed off my course and about 28 survived it.

39:30 **Having been a military officer, what is your opinion about war generally?**

I suppose it's one of those things, my opinion about it would be that quite often I wonder why it is that some people seem to have a different attitude to why we have them, I could quote a certain person [President George W Bush]

40:00 in the United States right now, I suppose, why the hell did we ever go to bloody Iraq [on 23 March 2003 a so-called 'coalition of the willing' led by the United States and including the United Kingdom and Australia, invaded Iraq under the pretext of disarming Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein of weapons of mass destruction]? I'm fucked if I know! You notice, I hope you have noticed how very, very quickly we cease to be involved and I hope that that's the pattern for things in the future. Look what's happening to the poor old prime minister [Tony Blair] of GB [Great Britain] now.

**This archive will be here in 50 or 100 years time,**

40:30 **have you got any message for [the] future?**

I don't think so, I think that if I had my time over again I'd certainly make arrangements to change some of the circumstances. On the other hand, if I had done that I might be dead. So from the point of view from a bloke who made up his mind in early life to go into the [military] services and, particularly, to go into war, I couldn't have had any better outcome, I think I done good. And I don't think I did myself any harm either. I think the experience will always be there and it's incredible how frequently I seem to draw on it, without trying to remind me of some of the unpleasantness. Of my ilk in Formosa,

now I'm the only [one] left out of my group but that's probably because I was the youngest in it anyway. I don't know what the percentage in, I belong to the...

**NB. This transcript is of an interview filmed for the television series, Australians at War in 1999-2000. It was incorporated into the Archive in 2008.**

## Tape 10

- 16:26 I went to Malaysia because
- 16:30 we'd had ....-
- The Australian Squadron was set up in 1950
- 17:00 and I was the fourth or fifth CO [commanding officer] of the squadron, we did a twelve months tour. It was a solo tour as we called it, without families and the airmen were the same, they did eighteen months and the officers and air crew did twelve. So I went there in April of 1950, '56 I beg your pardon, '55 I beg your pardon. I went there first in, at the end of March, 28th March
- 17:30 in 1955 and I finished my time there in March of 1956 but in the meantime I was CO of a squadron of a hundred and forty-four people who I came to know intimately. But the job we had, we were given of course was to, that of a heavy bomber squadron, admittedly only a total of six aeroplanes operational but each of those
- 18:00 aircraft were capable of delivering quite a clout, particularly if they all did it at the same time and in the same place and that was the mission ... the missions we were given were controlled from Kuala Lumpur which, where the group headquarters was. And I dare say the way it happened was that the army rang up and said we want something bombed and group headquarters went away and planned a mission, sent it to us and we went and tried to do what they thought they
- 18:30 wanted us to do. This exercise could become frustrating sometimes because one began to wonder why one was doing things and I made this point very clear to my IOC who happened to be Digger Kyle, an air marshal in the RAF [Royal Air Force] who was an Australian born and I said, "How the hell can we do any sort of a job at all if we don't know why the hell we're doing it?" and hence we got a little more rapport in the exchanges
- 19:00 of information particularly and more importantly to those people who are doing it. It's very frustrating if you're throwing bombs around and you get no idea back as to what, what results you've got and from that moment I think the situation improved a little tiny bit. The difficulty was that the units that were requesting targets to be bombed were not one unit that we could
- 19:30 talk to or get used to but they were all over Malaya: We bombed anywhere from way north in Pahang down to just over the water in Johor. And so the only unit that I ever contacted we ran into because we played cricket against them and two of the officers, three of the officers were Australians and it was a Gurkha battalion, the 2nd, Princess Mary's Own Battalion of Gurkhas and
- 20:00 we used to go up there for dinner sometimes at night and when they were allowed to, they'd come down and play cricket or tennis with us. So we developed a rapport but only with that one unit. I didn't speak to any CO of any other army unit that I was supposed to be supporting and very rarely did we get any report back as to whether a mission had been entirely successful or to their satisfaction or whatever.
- 20:30 It remained until the end of my tour like that. It was very difficult to find out how good your results were because if your blokes are throwing bombs at the ground they want to know what the hell they've hit or if they've killed anybody, even if it's an elephant and we did kill one elephant and they told us we had done so. How many thousands of monkeys we killed also by bombing trees I don't know but yeah, it was sometimes frustrating.
- 21:00 I suppose the most responsive exercise that I can recall was one we did about three weeks after I arrived there and we still had five RAF Lincolns with us at Tengah and we put twelve aeroplanes over a target at once and blew the side of a hill away. And I think we successfully disposed of whatever the target was but again in detail we were never given that
- 21:30 opportunity finding out whether we did. Very frustrating, particularly as I say for young aircrew who are doing what they reckon is their best and then they don't know what's happening. If that's criticism of the exercises we did, I have to say that a target was taken on just before I came home and it was so secret that my bombing leader and myself were the only people who were told about it, and it was bombing
- 22:00 what we ultimately found out was a suspected campsite just in Johor, about thirty miles away from the airfield. The planning was done in a shed underneath a water tank because it was the only secret place on the whole base where nobody was listening to this, well we hoped they weren't, and unfortunately I was, the delay in putting the mission on meant that I was sent home before it was actually

22:30 flown. It was flown three days after I left by the new commanding officer and we killed nineteen CTs [Communist terrorists] in that raid including what they called the Prince of Johor who was Go Bang Tuan[?], who was the deputy to Chin Peng [CT leader] and he was killed in that mission. That's the only really satisfactory result of a mission that I can recall. In terms of spraying the countryside with bombs and twenty

23:00 millimetre ammunition we must have shot off shiploads of ordnance without really hearing whether it had been successful or not. Of course the other thing too was we didn't get a chance to meet any of the people that we were working with. We talked to them on a radio but you didn't really meet them and I think that that's a disappointment and maybe it was difficult because of the tenseness of the situation

23:30 at the time. It was disappointing.

**Can you talk about how effective the bombing raids were?**

I tried to make clear that we never really knew. I dare say those people who were on the ground or anywhere near it and subsequently followed it up would have found out whether it was

24:00 successful or not. We even tried different sorts of fusing on the bombs to see whether we could, for instance we tried a proximity fuse exercise which meant that the fuse itself looks at whatever it's aimed at and says, 'Hey, I'm at three hundred feet - bang!' and that was designed to destroy foliage overgrowth and also to destroy anything underneath

24:30 it. So the bombs were set off at different proximities to the jungle coverage and as I say we found out we cleaned up a lot of very good trees and trees look different when they've got no leaves on them, but whether we achieved anything for the army and their purpose in what they were trying to do I don't remember ever hearing.

25:00 Each Lincoln was capable of carrying fourteen thousand pounds of these bombs. Sometimes they were a thousand pounders and other times they were five hundred pounders so the load was half but normally we flew a full load of fourteen thousand pounds of bombs on each aeroplane. The aeroplanes could go singly or could go as a group of three or go with six which was our maximum; it's the number of aeroplanes

25:30 we had, six operational aeroplanes. So, in terms of ordnance we had plenty of ordnance there and we had the means of delivering it. In addition to that each aeroplane had a twenty millimetre gun turret with two guns in it and if you had got close enough to see anybody you could have sprayed them off the face of the earth. We were asked on occasions to strafe a strip of territory, which we did. We used to run up and down this thing

26:00 firing at the tops of trees. We didn't know whether we'd hit anything, we were never told. Well we were told once when we killed an elephant and lord knows how many monkeys we'd knock off doing that but again the targets were identified for us in terms of geography but not in terms of results. Disappointing in the extreme.

**Just talk about Australia's role in this, how**

26:30 **it fitted in ....**

In those days there were no Australian troops on the ground, we had no Australians there in those years. The only people on the ground were in the main, I mentioned a Ghurka battalion. There were other British Army units that were in various places. In KL [Kuala Lumpur] there were two battalions there I think and further north there were other groups of troops deployed. But unless we asked specifically who was there, the

27:00 only people we knew on the ground were the people who flew the marker aeroplanes, little Cessnas that used to drive round. He'd fire a smoke rocket at where he wanted the bombs to land and then clear the hell off out of it. One of my members was Malcolm. Several times I flew with Malcolm. I never ever had the pleasure of shaking his hand but according to what Malcolm told me on the radio we'd done exactly what he wanted us to do. So with Australians,

27:30 as far as I know, the only Australians I met there other than our own people and other than people living in Singapore and there were many of those of course but in civilian employment, the only two Australians in the military I met were two officers out of the Ghurka battalion. They very rarely were in a position where we were operating or where they'd asked us to operate because the Ghurkas had a rather different way of doing their business. They were rather more

28:00 stealth fighters than they were loud hailer fighters and as I say we never really knew who we were bombing for or why. It's extraordinary isn't it?

**Just tell me about how you summed it up**

28:30 **and that is, that you were there hanging around waiting for the big one ....**

Well I had a pretty good idea of what it was like from talking to people who'd been there and had come back and mind you the situation changed from time to time. The Emergency either became intense for a

moment when something was on or alternatively it levelled out at a comparatively quiet sort of incidental type of

- 29:00 targeting, for aeroplanes anyway. In those last few months, probably the last four months it was really depressing because there was no air work really for us to do until this one last operation. I think they invented things for us to do so that we wouldn't feel as though as weren't fully occupied but that last operation did my
- 29:30 morale more good than anything even though I wasn't in it. I'd planned the damn thing and I knew exactly how it had to be, and boy we got sixteen of them. Admittedly half of them were girls, don't take any notice of that because they were the friends of the management I'm sure. There were of course female fighters with the CTs as we called them, communist terrorists, but I think
- 30:00 these ladies were spending the weekend in comparative seclusion, postulating.
- Just tell me, did you think that all it was was just something to do, waiting for the bigger war to happen.**
- I think that it perhaps covered the purpose that we were originally sent there for and in the earlier days of the conflict the results were
- 30:30 much more positive than they were when I was there and remembering that there had been negotiations going on for the twelve months before I got to Malaysia in an endeavour to come to some sort of conference type solution to the problem that we had. There could have been other people in the higher places if you like who were closer to what the situation was but it certainly was not disclosed to us in any direct fashion.
- 31:00 That the situation was improving, we gained the impression it was improving because there was a couple a periods where we just didn't have any missions at all. We all became very good swimmers and tennis players but I don't mean that cynically but literally there were no targets given to us. On one occasion for reasons that perhaps nowadays it doesn't matter, I suppose but there were
- 31:30 Australian people in other places in the Far East, and they were air force people, okay I went to visit them. It doesn't matter where they were but I wanted to see that they had plenty of Australian beer, that they had Simpson's meat pies and things like that. So it gave me an opportunity to go to two or three other places in times when things were quiet. Maybe it sounds to you as though
- 32:00 the activity was so restricted that it wasn't time consuming but it was. There were tons of things we could do that occupied ... most of the crews I had for instance had not worked up before they came from Australia and we took an opportunity of converting our second pilots and things like that to fly the aeroplanes. But training missions were very few and far between.
- 32:30 We couldn't go very far out of the country. If we wanted to go to the Cameron Highlands it was a bit dangerous for us to go there because it happened to be that the Communist terrorists were active in that area. But other than that I don't think any of our people went to any sort of holiday resort. They used to take leave in Singapore or I think that's where they were, they didn't tell me they were going anywhere else.

## Tape 11

- 00:41 When I was posted to Vietnam I was in a senior officer's position. I was the deputy commander in Vietnam which meant that there always an army commander in Saigon and a deputy commander also living, resident in Saigon and I was the deputy commander
- 01:00 which was always an airman, and our troops if you like were down in, further down in the Delta. I had a detachment of Caribou aircraft which is like a little Dakota and some Iroquois which were under my long distance command. They worked through a command system down at Vung Tau. So that my contact with them was, I didn't purposely go out of my way to contact them but I was casually
- 01:30 interested in what they were doing. In fact I was very interested in what they were doing or what the army was trying to make them do. Again we were faced with the situation that the majority of our air crew and particularly in helicopters were quite young and comparatively inexperienced. There were experienced people amongst them of course there were, but a lot of those kids were pretty green off the vine. The fact that they did so magnificently I think stands to their credit
- 02:00 more than anything else. So that my perspective was from longer range than perhaps if I had been working in the unit myself. To relieve the monotony of life in Saigon I used to go down to Vung Tau and fly with them. I learnt how to fly a helicopter when I was in Vietnam, not very well as Frank Riley will tell you, he was my instructor. But enough to familiarise
- 02:30 myself at least with what, the sort of things they were doing, the sort of terrain they were flying over,

the sort of missions they were given and so on, some of which were pretty testing. I don't think we had arguments with the army, not voluble ones anyway but there were discussions about some of the missions that we were given and how we thought it might be better if you did it this way when they wanted to do it that way and

03:00 nine times out of ten the commonality of purpose achieved the aim anyway. We eventually got to agree with each other but unfortunately of course also in a situation like that we had accidents. We had aeroplanes that were lost accidentally and we had crews that were lost accidentally but that's part of the business anyway and

03:30 a discussion as to whether aeroplanes were being employed, which way or the other is something that you always resolve after it's happened anyway, even if it's only so it doesn't happen again.

**So just give me your thoughts on 'Vietnamisation'.**

Vietnamisation to me was a subtle process of getting the Vietnamese to believe that they could handle the situation that they found themselves in

04:00 at that time. Unfortunately I was the second last appointee to Australian staff in Vietnam by which time things were starting to be made evident that Vietnamisation as we understood it initially, I don't think was going to work out. It was a different sort of Vietnamisation initiated by North Vietnam rather than South Vietnam and I don't know whether that

04:30 says what you want me to say. By the time I came home the situation had already started to deteriorate quite markedly in Vietnam itself and there was evidence of course that came to us through various sources that indicated that things were not all strawberries and cream anymore. The South Vietnamese Army was being relentlessly pushed back

05:00 and relentlessly I suppose, becoming disillusioned with what they thought they were trying to do, but I think beyond that it would be dangerous for me to postulate any more. It's turned out in history now the way I guess the North Vietnamese intended it to turn out anyway. By the time I left we were already negotiating and planning to get out ourselves even though it was not public

05:30 knowledge and as it happened in a matter of eighteen months after I left, we were no longer in Vietnam anyway other than a few of the people that were deployed with Vietnamese units. So my, if you like, my swan song was the fact that it was in Vietnam.

**Tell me**

06:00 **about the American pullout and the effect it had on Australia generally.**

We realised I think that the Americans had already started to pull out when I was there. They had taken out a lot of administrative units. The fighting units were being compressed rather more than they had been previously but I, the only knowledge I had I suppose

06:30 was in the situation reports that revealed that there were changes in the deployments that they were making. I'm sure that our own army people were well aware of what those changes meant to them and also at that time too politically, there was concern in Australia here I think as to indications that there were some

07:00 run down if you like in American enthusiasm for what they'd been doing. But I think as much as I've said there, it should be an indicator enough that things were going on outside my immediate ken that ultimately led to the fact that the Americans withdrew and that happened within twelve months of my coming back here to Australia. The indications were there in

07:30 subtle ways if you like that there was something like this was going to happen. It happened rather more acceleratedly I think and politically it happened quite quickly.

07:46 Memorabilia

10:50 End of tape

**INTERVIEW ENDS**