Australians at War Film Archive

Keith Meggs (Meggsie) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:34 **Can we start with where you were born?**

I was born in Melbourne here. My mother and father lived in East Preston. I was born in North Fitzroy in my grandmother's place and we moved out to Preston at about that time as far as I can

01:00 recall but Mum and Dad lived there until the Depression, then we moved back with my grandparents. We stayed until almost when the war broke out, we moved back out to the house in Preston where I, from there went to Northcote High School and my interest in aviation had started when I was about 5 or 6 and I can recall the winning aircraft

01:30 in the 1934 Centenary Air Race form England flying over as they arrived in Melbourne. And this is my first memory of my aircraft and nothing stopped from there on, it was aircraft from there on. When I was at Northcote High School, as the war had started then, in 1939, I joined the Air Training Corps and in fact the Australian Air League before that,

02:00 before I moved out to Preston and from there the Air Training Corps when I was old enough at 16, with a view to getting into the air force as soon as possible. Of course, 18 was the joining period for air crew which I had to have, I didn't want anything else except to be a pilot. So I stayed in that until – I was actually kicked out of the Air Training Corp for not handing my rifle

02:30 back having reached the age of 18 and not doing as I was told to hand my rifle back. And I finally got a letter from them saying "Hand it back or else" because in those days, as 16, 17 year olds, we used to carry .303 rifles about on the trams and what they do nowadays with terrorist activities I don't know but we were, as youths, carrying rifles around with

03:00 us. So I think I might have got a dishonourable discharge from the Air Training Corps for not handing my rifle back.

Why didn't you hand it back?

Oh you had to hand it back plus various items of your uniform which were loaned to you rather than given to you and when you turned 18 it was compulsory retirement from the ATC [Air Training Corps] and not having done so my mates and

03:30 I were on to a good thing we used to spend our weekends going to aerodromes and hitching rides interstate. We go to Brisbane, Adelaide, Sydney on a regular basis with Americans or Dutch or Australians or English aircraft that were touring about. So we wanted to stay in the Air Training Corps as long as possible so for that reason we didn't bother to take note and hand our material in.

04:00 Finally we were forced to and had to wait then to join the air force which took another couple of years.

So was that so that you could keep wearing the uniform and kind of pretend to be in the Air Training Corps and get these lifts?

Yes, yes, we were on to another thing too, during winter, we went into the second-hand disposal stores in Melbourne

04:30 of which there were quite a few and you could buy a disused great coats, air force great coats, for say five shillings, and you had one of those and put it over your ATC uniform, which had Air Training Corps on there, nobody knew you were Air Training Corps so you were just another Air Force bloke hitching a lift. Of course you had your badge on your cap but hopefully nobody would look at that. So

05:00 we managed to get quite a lot of flying in, in a lot of aircraft.

I mean we'll go into the air training corps days in great detail but can I take you back to the earlier days and your father, your father was a newspaper man?

No, that was my grandfather.

Oh, your grandfather, The Argus?

Yes, he was a compositor with The Argus, yes. So every day when we were living there in North Fitzroy with my grandparents he would come home with every paper there was

05:30 because they had a deal through interchange, we'd get The Sun and The Argus and The Age and we also got The Herald and, well, The Star in those days, printed by The Argus. So everything referring to aircraft in those papers I used to cut out and keep in big scrapbooks. And I kept those until I was in the air force.

06:00 **So, yeah, your grandfather was in newspapers. That's a lot of newspapers to have every day?**

They all used to come into the house and I kept everything about aviation from the time I was about 5 or 6 I was doing that. I remember those scrapbooks which my mother made, big scrapbooks I kept until I was in the air force. But they were under the bed in big boxes and cases and she kept writing to me "Can I throw this stuff out?" "No, no, no,

06:30 no". And finally, I said "Yes, O.K." Now I regret it because I know what was in those newspaper accounts of those days which I'd like now. But at school I used to do drawings for people, on request, of aeroplanes, even in the 3rd and 4th grade, and people knew me as somebody mad about aeroplanes which never changed.

07:00 **What sort of things would be in the newspapers?**

Oh, accounts of that 1934 Air Race of England to Australia, the first aircraft that I can remember seeing was a Scott & Black De Havilland Comet, the winning aircraft. It flew over Flemington race course as the finishing point of the race and then headed out and did a circle of the northern suburbs and landed at

07:30 Laverton so that is in my memory. But also the account of Kingsford Smith's [aviator] loss and there's a picture of him over there, in fact there are 2, 3 and his aeroplane. He was my hero in those days and while people nowadays say you must remember where you were when President Kennedy was shot or Martin Luther King [was shot], I haven't got a clue but I

08:00 do know exactly what happened the day that Kingsford Smith was lost. I can recall in detail how I found out.

Tell me?

Well my father used to come home from work at about 5 o clock and he used to come home with the afternoon Star which was the Argus paper and the morning, no, he didn't get the morning one, my grandfather had that. He handed me the paper as he came round the corner as I ran up to meet him. And there on the front was "Kingsford Smith

08:30 Missing". He was trying to break a record in flying out from England to Australia in the aircraft which is pictured there. He was flying over the Bay of Bengal and he just disappeared, they never found him. Months later they found the wheel from his aircraft in the sea. He'd taken off with influenza from England, he was warned not to fly but he did because of the government activity he was very short of

09:00 money and they owed him quite a lot so he thought in breaking the record he'd get some money coming in. So he did it and the theory is that he probably fell asleep presumably in the morning, 2, 3 o'clock in the morning over the Bay of Bengal he might have just fallen asleep and just let the plane go. He hit the top of an island, hit the trees. So that was a

09:30 blow to me and of course there was great hope that he would be found in a couple of days but he never was, hasn't been to this day, apart from that wreckage.

How old were you?

November 1935, I was just coming up to 8, I was 7.

So what was it about Kingsford Smith that you loved so much?

Because he was a great Australian

10:00 hero much like an unwashed singer nowadays, a rock and roll singer, who you call heroes on radio and television, they're not heroes, they're just people, idols you might call them, they're not heroes. Heroes do something heroic, Kingsford Smith had done quit a lot of heroic things in his time. He was the first to fly the Pacific in both directions, he broke records

10:30 between England and Australia. He was the first across the Atlantic, sorry not the first across the Atlantic but he was the first to fly completely around the world, in different flights, but he was the first to go right round the world. He broke records in Australia, he broke a record around Australia so he was the hero of the day and he features very highly in aviation history.

11:00 So, someone you'd look up to and hope to emulate some day.

Did you ever see him, personally?

No, I didn't, unfortunately.

That must have really, kind of sparked and fed your interest in aviation?

Yes, it did, yes. So those scrapbooks with that sort of material in them –

11:30 I've now recovered a lot of the material of course from other sources but I certainly would like to have what was in those scrapbooks as well as I'm sure there are things in it, I know there are things in it that I haven't got otherwise. But there were quite a lot of them and Mum tossed them all out, probably burnt them.

So tell me about your family, you were living with your grandparents?

12:00 The whole family was there, yes, Mum and Dad. Dad had been in the army in World War I, in France, he was gassed finally and in hospital in England before he came back here. I was the first child eventually of nine although one died at nine months with pneumonia, the others have all survived, they're all around still. So being the eldest

12:30 I suppose I might have been spoiled I don't know. The younger ones say I was. I wasn't made to eat vegetables for instance where they were forced to. I probably got kid treatment. I was the first to go to work, naturally, and we all get on well together still.

So how did your father support that many people?

Well, he was a painter by

13:00 trade, a house painter. I don't know if he did anything on the side, I don't think so. He used to go to work at 7 in the morning and come home at 5. I know he used to go round to the bookies [book makers], round behind the pub, of a Saturday so whether he made anything I don't know because I wasn't into that sort of thing but I think we probably got a bit of help from my grandfather who I think had a reasonable sort of

13:30 job with The Argus. He only had my mother and another brother and her brother I should say. But they were a big family too they ended up with nine children as well. And my mother's brother was a tram conductor and my grandfather used to tell me, I can remember him saying "Don't get mixed up with aeroplanes, there's no future in them. Get a good solid job like your uncle, join the

14:00 Tramway Board, become a tram conductor". If I had I'd have been out of work years ago, wouldn't I. In fact I stayed flying much longer than he did on trams. He retired many years ago anyway. So when we moved out to Preston I think there were only about four of us when we moved back out to

14:30 Preston, it might have been five, but then the rest came along. And when war broke out Dad joined the Volunteer Defence Corps and I can recall riding my bike down to Point Cook where he was on guard duty, around Point Cook area and seeing him there, but I think it must have been when the Japanese came into the war, he transferred into the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] again. He was pretty old at that stage, I

15:00 suppose he must have been late '30s. Maybe I could work it out if I stopped but eventually he got sent up to Darwin so he was up in Darwin when the wharfies went on strike and the army were unloading ships. The Japanese were bombing the place but the wharfies were on strike, so what's changed, what's changed? This rally the other day on Anzac

15:30 Day, not Anzac Day, what they call Remembrance Day, CFMEU [Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union], a rally, same attitude. Anyway, Dad was then put in charge of movements of Japanese prisoners down to Cowra by train and I can recall him coming on leave a couple of times from Cowra having brought some Japanese prisoners

16:00 down and guarding them by train. When the war ended he was out again of course, went back to painting. And I then applied when the first call up for air crew happened, it was the Royal Australian Navy looking for pilots for their new fleet air arm, or naval aviation it was initially known as.

16:30 I got through the medical but in their medical they sat you up against a wall with your legs out and measured your leg length. I was ¾ inch too short so I didn't get into the navy for which I'm now thankful. I later on trained, the air force called up about six months later so I'd missed the first call up but I got into the second. And we were trained in parallel with the

17:00 navy pilot trainees and the ones that were on our course I think there are only about two left. One got killed on the course, one was killed in England while he was training, naval training over there, and two or three got killed off carriers. So the air force was a safer

17:30 organisation I think. Anyway, to get back to the early years, as soon as I left school at the end of my intermediate year I wanted to get into the aircraft industry. So I went down and applied to work at the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation at Fisherman's Bend and I got in straight away and they were making the Boomerang fighter at that

18:00 stage, the Boomerang was a locally designed fighter aircraft and it was just magic to go into that factory and see all the new secret fighters that we were building in that factory. So I spent 5 ½ years there working right through until I joined the air force but I spent the last 3 years as a member of what they call the flight crew.

18:30 That was in the flight hangar preparing aircraft for test flight, rectifying any mistakes, any errors, getting them ready for the air force to test them and to pick them up and to fly them away for sending off to squadrons. So that last 3 years was just heaven, if the factory was heaven, this was heaven on

19:00 heaven, absolute magic for a young guy. And also I'd done something I've always been proud of – at 19, we were building Mustangs at that stage. We would get the Mustang down from the factory and they'd be prepared for test flight. We had our own test pilot who'd do all the testing until the aircraft was

19:30 perfect but then the air force would send a test pilot to verify it then he would take it away. In my last over two years that I was down there I was approved to do all the engine, all the engine testing on Mustangs and I was quite proud of the fact that as a junior worker I was so allowed to do. So from there I went into the

20:00 air force, did my training at Point Cook, 18 months of that, and then I was posted to 3 Squadron which was up at Canberra and what they had was Mustangs. So after only Mustangs for the last 2 years, working on them for over 3 years, there I was flying them which was magic again. It was good.

What did your family think through all those years of your childhood think about your

20:30 **passion for planes?**

Oh, I don't think there was any, nothing, excepting, I wouldn't say encouragement, but probably just acceptance. I never heard anyone saying "Don't do it, don't do it, it's dangerous". I think it was too far ingrained in me for them to think anything else.

What about your brothers and sisters, were any of them interested?

Well,

21:00 two brothers joined the air force in national service. One brother won a scholarship in the national service trainee organisation to get flying training. He did some flying training but finally they found he had some medical problems which ruled him out so he didn't get any further. The other one was just in the ground staff.

21:30 The next brother to me joined the navy, he didn't stay in that very long, that was after the war of course but none of them got involved in aviation otherwise, no.

Did you used to play games, some sort of games when you were a kid to do with flying?

Not really, no, there was nothing you could

22:00 do in those days. I most certainly made model aeroplanes. One of the things I can recall there was a military on the platform at school at Miller Street where I went when I was at my grandfather's, holding my hand out for three cuts for flying model aeroplanes on instead of going Wednesday afternoon to cricket and the

22:30 compulsory – I'm starting to lose my voice. Better wait a little bit – getting three cuts and not being at sports afternoon, I was there flying a model aeroplane instead of going on the sports of an afternoon. So model aeroplanes were a major

23:00 thing, an occupation, so I kept that up until I joined the ATC I guess.

So tell me, what sort of model aeroplanes did you make?

Oh, in those days there weren't anything like there are nowadays. Just you'd buy a kit in a box and they were powered by rubber, rubber bands, big long length of rubber, you had to

23:30 wind the propeller. It was nothing like you'd see nowadays. There was no engines in those days although engines were available if you had enough money to buy them. Ordinary people like us couldn't afford them but mainly just made with balsa and tissue and rubber to drive them. You could make

24:00 solid models out of blocks of balsa, that was all, there was nothing, no plastic kits like you get nowadays. That was all.

Were they particular types of planes, were they models of actual planes?

Yes, you could get the kits. Again, they weren't as

24:30 detailed as you can get nowadays. They were nothing like you can buy nowadays.

But what sort of planes were they?

Well, Hawker Demons, Bristol Bulldogs, Spitfires perhaps, Hurricanes, very little unless you could buy things that you could

25:00 buy in America. There was a lot of material you could see in magazines in those days but there wasn't a great amount of material you could buy here.

So did you have a lot of these planes, did you have a squadron?

No not really, no. One thing that I can recall,

25:30 I came across a magazine just recently because I've got old magazines, 1932, and I came across a picture of an aircraft which I had in those days. It was called the Meteor. It was an aircraft that was designed by a local company called Central – an aircraft

26:00 design called, by a company down on the, it was called the Meteor anyway and I came across the plans for it in a magazine which I took out just recently. And having found that in 1932 it came to mind that one Christmas when I was probably about

26:30 9, 8 or 9, I can recall going into my mother's grandfather wardrobe, mother, father, Melbourne's – I'm losing my – at Christmas time I went into my mother and father's

27:00 wardrobe and I opened that and there was model of this Central Model Aircraft Company in Melbourne and lo and behold it was that same model called the Meteor which was there for me for Christmas and of course I got into trouble for going into my mother's wardrobe to find this model which was for me for Christmas.

27:30 That was a thing that I remember I flew and got into trouble for not being – no, I'm finding I'm getting out of, a bit out of – give me a little while there.

Do you want to stop?

Yeah. At my grandmother's place, my grandmother and my grandfather looked after us, Mum and Dad of course. My father had a pushbike which was allowed to ride it and at a weekend I was able to ride my bike over to Essendon Aerodrome which from North Fitzroy was a fair way and I was

28:00 only allowed to ride around the local area to my friend's place. But I was allowed to drive to Essendon Aerodrome with a mate and I managed to drive to Essendon Aerodrome to see the aircraft and somehow I was able to get back home

28:30 again and oh the – it's still, I just can't think.

Tape 2

00:31 **Keith did you tell us before about the first time you ever went up in a plane?**

Yes, that was from Essendon Airport when I was, in 1937, the aircraft was a De Havilland 50A, the registration was VHUFE and the pilot was a fellow called Howard Morris who later met in Sydney when I was – oh, in 1950 something, just before he was killed in a

01:00 car crash but he was still flying then. And his son later became somebody in the aviation industry through aeronautical engineering with Qantas and then with the marketing of the Nomad which was built down at Fisherman's Bend. He was the marketing manager for it but he died 3 or 4 years ago, he just used to live over in Beaumaris.

What do you remember of that because obviously as a kid you know you'd long to be up

01:30 **there, what was it like that first experience?**

Oh I can remember I was sitting in the back of the DH [De Havilland] 50A cabin which had a seat which you could turn around and look through a little hole and see the pilot. And I can recall taking off from Essendon and turning around from the north, heading down over the station pier, Princes Pier, where I looked out and having seen the city turning around the

02:00 piers before turning back and going to Essendon. It was just breathtaking you might say. And the next time I flew was in, oh no, I flew in a Glider down at Geelong in about '40, '41, with Percy Pratt at Belmont. The next time was when I was in the ATC, two or three years later.

Who was Percy Pratt?

He was a fellow that formed

02:30 an aviation business at Belmont Common at Geelong. They had a couple of hangars, they set up a flying school, with his brother Charlie Pratt, who'd been a World War I pilot and they built gliders down there, a gliding school and a flying school and built a couple of aircraft. So I went down there with the Air

League on a weekend camp. And I remember staying in the hangar,

03:00 sleeping on some sort of stretcher in their hangar. I must have been 11 or 12 at that time.

Did you talk about the Air League before?

Australian Air League?

Yeah.

Didn't I mention that I'd joined that when I was 9 or 10. I was in there for a couple of years.

03:30 We used to meet in the Northcote Football Club rooms in Westgarth Street, Northcote, and we learned all sorts of things like how planes were made and so forth. Very rudimentary stuff at that age of course but it was educational anyway.

Do you remember much of the Second World War, what was going on abroad?

Oh yes. Quite a bit.

What sort of impact did that have at home and for you personally?

04:00 Oh well of course we had to build trenches in the back yard, air raid shelters because regardless of what you read in books nowadays there was fear of Japanese invasion. And there's a book that came out by Dr Andrew Ross which I've got part of where he said in the last few years, the Japanese weren't, they were afraid to

04:30 invade Australia because Australia was so well prepared. That was absolute nonsense because Australia wasn't prepared, we were scared of the Japanese invading. Even though I was only a teenager I know what the situation was publicly and we weren't prepared. We didn't have any aircraft, the guns, the ammunition, the tanks, anything. In fact, when my father was in the VDC [Volunteer Defence Corps] at one stage they were

05:00 training with virtually broom sticks through lack of guns in their training days. The same at Fisherman's Bend where I worked with the CAC [Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation], we had the VDC also looking after the aerodrome in the aircraft factory, for a time there they were being armed with mock-up guns. In fact in my research for the book that I'm writing or have written there's a lot of material about the

05:30 VDC down there in those early days where they did not have material to defend the place. And I've got material about their acquisition of material from the government and how they were allotted two or three machine guns between a whole company until more became available. So if the Japanese had made it through the Coral Sea we could well have been invaded in late '42, early '43.

06:00 So disregard what you read nowadays.

And so you said you had to dig trenches in the backyard, is that right? Who would do that at your place?

Oh, Dad was away so it was the family. Of course during heavy rain they all got full of water but I guess if the Japanese had arrived with an aircraft carrier off the south coast we would have been into the trenches into the water anyway. But

06:30 virtually every house in the area dug a trench for their back yard. Some of them were more involved than others by putting up timber structures and a proper roof but the one that we had was just a trench with some sort of timber structure over the back and probably a bit of corrugated iron, I can't remember exactly.

And what about at school, I mean what sort of role, what

07:00 **significance did the war have in terms of what was happening at school?**

Well I went to Northcote High School and on Moonee Park which was the adjacent sports ground we had a unit of the army with search lights, there was no anti-aircraft gun there but they were a part of the Melbourne anti-aircraft organisation. So apart from seeing that at night which we did sometimes the school

07:30 itself, I can't remember whether we had any trenches dug there, I don't think we did. But we were indoctrinated in the war of course but there's nothing definite about trenches.

Tell us about the indoctrination I mean what were you being told by teachers of what was happening and what was likely to be happening?

I don't think there was anything definite in that respect. I know one teacher left to go into the

08:00 air force but I don't think there was any discussion about the war itself, I can't recall it.

So what age did you actually leave school and go to work at Fisherman's Bend?

I left at the end of '44 so I would have been 16, nearly 16. And I had school holidays over Christmas,

obviously it was mandatory to have your holidays first before you went for work. So I went down and applied

08:30 for CAC and got accepted straight away. I started there at the end of January, beginning of July ’43.

Do you want a drink?

Just my voice going, I think It’ll be O.K.

So sorry beginning of ’43 you started at CAC? All right, is there anything else

09:00 **in terms of school life? It sounds like you were quite passionate about flying, about aviation, were there any other interests outside of that in those school years?**

I was in the Air Training Corps when I was there, I think ’43, no, that came a little bit after I think. I can’t recall whether I started at Air Training Corps when I was still at school, I think I might have in some time in late ’43. But the

09:30 Air Training Corp the meetings were held up at Preston Technical School which was nearer home because by then we’d moved up to East Preston from my grandmother’s place.

But your father was till up north?

He was away, I think he was up in Darwin at that stage, yes.

Did you hear much form your father, was he corresponding much?

I think he wrote on a regular basis to Mum. In fact I’ve got some of the letters that he wrote, I’ve got

10:00 photocopies of, the family have got – it’s distributed around so I’ve got some of the letters he wrote from Darwin, yes. We didn’t see much of him probably two or three times over a couple of years I think.

And how do you think your mother coped with sort of the extra load at home?

As far as I know O.K. She wasn’t working of course she was home looking after eight children and as far as I know she coped O.K.

10:30 There were no hassles like there seem to be nowadays with working women.

And can you tell us the sorts of things this is still in that schooling period, the stuff that you’d get up to, was it all aimed at flying or were there other sort of pastimes?

Oh, yes, there were other pastimes. I took up bike racing, I joined the local bike racing club so I did that for a couple of years until

11:00 air force, until I joined the air force and then of course the usual TA things with the local girls, the local carry on, the local pictures, the local dances which is much more inviting to what I hear nowadays of club life. All they seem to do is go out and have drugs and beating each other up and noisy music. We had good music in those days.

What was that music?

Oh all the swing and jazz of the early ‘40s.

11:30 Bing Crosby singing and Artie Shaw and Duke Ellington, that sort of stuff, good swinging music which you could sing and whistle to. Chattanooga Choo Choo, Begin the Beguine, the words of which I can still sing if I had any voice.

Who are your favourite performers from that period?

Oh there are so many of them I can’t recall. I still play records of that era

12:00 and there were so many that I liked, they were numbers that were played on the Saturday night dances, of course, and local bands, Jack Davidson, Jack Davidson – Jack was well known in those days, you probably haven’t heard of some of them. But every town hall in those days had a dance on a Saturday night and they were packed with people dancing in pairs, not with each other, not with

12:30 males dancing with males and females with females which I abhor so, yeah, it was good fun in those days. We all rode bikes, we didn’t have cars. My family never had a car until well after my mother and father were left alone with the family moving out. And my first car was after I came back from Korea with the air force. I bought one then but we didn’t have cars to go to dances.

13:00 So you walked down to the dance at the local town hall, you walked home.

Can you describe one of those dances for us, what the mood and the atmosphere was like how many people were there, that sort of thing?

Well I used to go mostly to Preston Town Hall with my mates, two or three locals, and you could walk there. It was not far enough away not to walk but you could also get there by bus if you felt like it. And the place was open from, oh probably half past

13:30 seven but you could have two or three hundred people in there. But the Preston Town Hall – but unbeknownst to me at the time the Preston Town Hall was also the headquarters of the Volunteer Air Observer Corps which was called the VAOC during the war and they were charged with keeping track of all aircraft flying all over Australia. And they had air posts everywhere, in Bendigo for instance up on the

14:00 top of the tower in the Rose something Garden. The tower is still there it used to be, a goldie, what do you call it, a gold mine type tower, and my ex-wife used to be there as a teenager. And any aircraft that went over anywhere in Australia was followed by that VAOC volunteer people and was reported to headquarters in Victoria which used to be in the Preston Town Hall. And

14:30 even though we used to meet in the ATC just up the road from there we never heard about that VAOC headquarters which I'm sorry about now.

That was supposed to be a bit hush hush or something?

Yes, but I thought we should have been indoctrinated as the ATC because if you ever come across the VAOC they kept track as I said of any aircraft flying

15:00 anywhere so if somebody flew from Sydney to Melbourne and got lost some country town would say "Oh, an aircraft's circling looking to find out where he is", and the Preston organisation would say "All right, we know what he is, he's 20 miles away from where he should be and he's just landed". Anyway, to get back to the dance, there probably be about two or three hundred people there and good music from the

15:30 stage. A proper orchestra, not just a bass and a drum and a, what do you call it, but a proper, probably ten or twelve piece orchestra playing good swing music of the day. Excellent to dance to but occasionally they'd play a number – we used to have a fellow with the orchestra at Preston, he was like Gene Cooper,

16:00 ever heard of Gene Cooper? He was a drummer par excellence and when he started on a solo everyone would stop dancing and come up to the front and listen to him. Not quite as noisy as it is nowadays but it was good drumming.

He was a Melbourne drummer, do you remember his name?

Not off hand. I was thinking of it a few weeks ago it came to mind but at the moment it doesn't.

16:30 **But at that time – so how old are you at this stage when you start going to the dances?**

Oh probably 15, 16.

And there would have been, I mean the Americans were in town at that stage, was there much of an American presence at those dances?

Not out here, no, not at Preston. I can't recall seeing any of them out there but I was mixing with them to a certain degree at Fisherman's Bend because there

17:00 were some there because American aircraft were being assembled there. As they came off the ship at Port Melbourne they were towed round up Salmon Street into Fisherman's Bend and assembled, when I say assembled, they were basically in one piece except the wings might have been taken off and the tail plane or the propellers, they were covered in something like gaffer tape and spray-painted or

17:30 sprayed material to keep the moisture out, the sea spray from the ships so it had to be uncovered, all the material taken off with steam cleaners and assembled and got ready to fly, test flown and then flown up north. So there were Americans there at that stage, yes. And one of the things, before I worked in the flight hangar the Americans had an assembly hangar alongside that and at

18:00 lunchtime I used to sneak down there to see the American aircraft pretty close up. And of course they had Commonwealth guards to stop you getting into the American hangar but I found a way round the outside of the fence and sneaking in, I crept into the American hangar and I was sitting in Lockheed Lightenings and Republic Thunderbolts and Douglas Havocs until somebody caught me and I said "Damn" but that went on for months. That's how I got to know aircraft – in fact there's a Lockheed in there

18:30 behind you that's one of the type that was assembled there and they've been my favourite aeroplane ever since. I wanted to fly one but I never got round to it.

Well it sounds like from a very early age by hook or by crook you were going to be flying?

Yeah, no other ambition at all.

So the ATC was that concurrent with your working life there at CAC?

Yes, yes,

19:00 that was we used to go to a meeting there it was once a week normally and also weekend parades we'd

go to and do drill and they had an aircraft there as well an old Hawker Demon for learning something about the structure of aircraft and there were exams on aircraft recognition so that if Japanese aircraft came over you could say “That’s the Japanese Betty, the Mitsubishi bomber”. And we got down to

19:30 doing one hundredth of a second flash on a screen of an aircraft you could pick what it was. We also did Morse code, learned morse code, as I say aircraft recognition, maths, navigation, all the subjects you would have learned in the air force because it was a means of including all the learning you do in the air force for air crew or ground staff training. You get yourself to the

20:00 stage where you go in at 18 or 17 ½ even and pass all the exams tout suite. So those meetings with the Air Training Corps were going on in parallel.

It sounds you would have had a bit of a head start on, were they all sort of young guys your age?

Yeah, yeah, from 16 up to 18 in the ATC.

20:30 **Were they all sort of equally intense?**

Mad?

Yeah, basically.

No, not all. In fact up there there’s a log book that I kept while I was in the Air Training Corps and this mate, well a couple of mates that I told you before, we went interstate as much as possible on weekends. I kept a log book which is still up there of the flying that I did in the Air Training Corps. And about 3 or 4 of us used to do that the

21:00 others weren’t so madly keen that I came across that I knew about but I ended up with 70 flying hours in American, Dutch, English and Australian aircraft.

So what planes were you flying on then and was this, did there come a point when you were flying solo?

Oh, no, just as passengers. In Oxfords, Ansons, Dakotas,

21:30 Mitchells, Catalinas, Sunderland, B29, the super fortress, the Privateer, oh, they’re all up there anyway, there’s about 20 of them listed. We flew in anything we could get a hand on, Beaufighter, Ventura, yeah, all sorts of things.

And what would you need to be doing even if you were a

22:00 **passenger were there tasks up there?**

Oh, sometimes if you flew in an Anson the pilot would always give you the right hand seat in the cockpit because you had to wind down the cage by hand to save him doing it, whoever was in the right hand seat. It was a long arduous job, it didn’t have a hydraulic reattaching system, it was just manual. You had to wind, they say about 126 times but I can’t remember how many. And also put it down when you were coming in to

22:30 land.

What about navigation, I mean you were learning that, did you have to apply any of that?

No, we didn’t really and if we did an interstate trip that would be up to the normal air crew and we were just along for the ride.

And did you, was there ever any air sickness that you had to combat or anything like that?

Never, no. I was well keyed up about it.

23:00 **So what was your opinion of the instructors and how do you think they responded to you, what was their take on your enthusiasm?**

In the Air Training Corps?

Yes.

Oh, I suppose they thought I was par for the course, was going to make it into the air force subject to medicals and everything else. I can still recall the instructors we had and I’d like to get in touch with them but I think there’s probably that not many left now and they would have been maybe 10,

23:30 15 years older than me. But we had a very enthusiastic crowd with the ATC even though a lot of them weren’t as keen on the flying side apparently. Maybe a lot of them just wanted to get in to ground staff, to be engine fitters or whatever but there’s one, oh no, he wasn’t in it, a mate of mine I was recently staying with in

24:00 Adelaide, he wasn’t in the ATC but we have a common friend in Melbourne still who had no ambition I don’t think to get into air crew. It was a very enthusiastic lot all together.

Did you feel that, were you sort of champing at the bit [eager] to get out there, I mean, the war was still on did you feel there was a chance that you'd actually be able to get out there?

Oh, I thought so, yes. The dropping of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima

24:30 ended it of course very suddenly much earlier than expected and Nagasaki of course a couple of days later. But if it hadn't have been for that it might have gone on for another year and it would have meant driving the Japanese out of the Philippines and up into Japan itself and the invasion of Japan which would have been the death of hundreds of thousands which I think was fairly met with those atomic bombs. So we were thinking the war would go for at least another year

25:00 at the end of mid '45, '44 until August, we were looking at another year of it.

So how old were you when the bombs were dropped?

In August 1945 I would have been 17, 17 ½.

And how old did you need to be to be able to enlist with the air force?

18. But at that stage they'd stopped

25:30 recruiting air crew because they had so many and as the war was declining and the invasion of Japan coming up we had enough air crew to meet requirements so all the air crew trainees they had at that stage were out picking grapes or whatever else was required in mundane everyday tasks to meet food commitments. So there was no scope for more trainees so I had to

26:00 wait until 1948 to get into the air force.

Still talking about the Second World War, how avidly were you following events?

Oh I wouldn't say very closely just sort of that we knew basically what was going on but I wasn't politically engaged or avidly engaged with following the war. I knew basically what had happened in

26:30 Singapore and New Guinea or the Middle East.

Can you name that plane?

I can Jimmy that would probably be a Piper Seminole, a twin-engine trainer, yes.

Normally if we were filming we'd stop there and wait for it to go over.

Well that's why I get hang ups nowadays because there aren't enough aeroplanes flying over. Melbourne as you know is just across there and once there used to be an aeroplane

27:00 every five or ten minutes, now you're lucky if you hear one an hour that's the way aviation's being treated now through CASA [Civil Aviation Safety Administration].

Very briefly, what do you mean by that?

It's the organisation that replaced DCA [Department of Civil Aviation], CASA is, what do they call it, the Civil Aviation Safety

27:30 Administration, yeah. They've ruined it and also the fact that the aerodrome's been privatised over there and a factory's been built in one corner of it. One runway's been cut in half, the beginning of the end.

So can you tell us, you spoke earlier about the work that you were doing at the factory there. You said at the

28:00 **end you were very proud because you were responsible for particular?**

In the flight crew, starting up –

At CAC, yes.

I was in the flight crew for about nearly 3 years. I'd been trying to transfer there from the main factory ever since I got there and I finally managed it just after the war ended. So that was in September '45 and I was there until August '48,

28:30 end of July '48 when I left to go to the air force so for the last probably 18 months, 2 years there I was approved to run the start-up Mustangs, the first engine run right through to the time they were given their final test flight and flown off. And I became the armourer there too after the war when the people as soon as they could got out to go back to the car industry, garages or whatever, I became the

29:00 sole armourer to arm the guns for gun testing and to unload them after test firing down the Torquay range so I was quite proud of the way I got up in the flight crew as to a junior worker.

So you were testing the engines on the ground making sure everything was, can you tell us a little bit about the, and don't be scared of confusing us with detail, can you just go through

the

29:30 **processes that you were involved with?**

All right. When Mustangs were first towed down there from the factory they had to be prepared for the first engine run and the first engine run involved checking the tappets on the top of the engine, of course. You know what tappets are? They were the push rods on each cylinder. So you had to check that. You had to check carburettor settings and they were given an initial run, just a short

30:00 run to make sure there were no oil leaks or cooling leaks after of course you checked the oil level and the cooling level. And cooling of course in a liquid cooled engine is the same as the radiator in a car, it has to be full. So after the first run which is only a short run with all the cowls off and the spinner off the propeller everything was gone over to make sure there were no leaks. The oil was drained because it was just an initial run

30:30 and refilled with special oil, you made sure there was no bits of metal in the filters as well from the initial run again. And it's run again you set things like metaphoric pressure, maximum rpm [revolutions per minute], oil pressure, vacuum pressure and the vacuum pump which powered the instruments, most of the instruments. All sorts of things like that were checked. Then the cowls were put on and it was given another run up to on the ground 61 inches of

31:00 manifold pressure and you couldn't run a Mustang up to above 40 inches and that's opening the throttle – with 40 inches or more the tail would lift and it's likely to hit the propeller on the ground. So for any runs above that they had to be tied down with about eight hundredweight of concrete blocks from a big bar through the back of the fuselage. Then you could run it up to 61 inches, in setting of that 61 inches sometimes the

31:30 throttle might be such, you might go to 63 or 64 inches. In fact, 67 was an emergency setting the pilot could go to so you did have to go to that to make sure it was going to 67. But the settings were done so that the throttle was adjusted so in normal flying and for take off 61 inches was the maximum you were allowed. So that setting was done and then you'd go through the gate and make sure you had

32:00 67 for emergencies. But there was wire put across that, copper wire, so if it went through that gate the ground staff, the engineers would have known that and the engine would have to be inspected very carefully to make sure it hadn't burst anything.

I understood that totally. No that's really good, that's why it's really important for the archive to get because there aren't that many people who can probably talk through that process.

32:30 **There's probably more there I'm sure. Go for it?**

You also had to set the vacuum as I said before, that was the vacuum pump, and the pump supplied suction like a vacuum cleaner to various instruments in the cockpit, the artificial horizon, the directional giro, the two things if you were flying in cloud for instance they were very important otherwise you wouldn't stay up straight. You might end up like

33:00 that and falling out of cloud so that was important to have that vacuum at the right suction. The hydraulic pressure was set, the hydraulic pressure for setting flaps up and down and the undercarriage up and down, that pressure was also set. Fuel pump pressure, that was set, all those things were part of setting up the engine insulation before the cowls were put on for final run up. And we had inspectors, a

33:30 company inspector, Commonwealth Aircraft Inspector, who checked all the work that I and the others had done. About four or five people were approved to do that running and after he had done it the AID inspectors, the AID was Aeronautical Inspection Directorate, which was an organisation which had started in the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] but as the war progressed it became so big it became a separate organisation. And after the war it

34:00 became the Directorate of Quality Assurance. I'm not sure what they call it now whether but it's the same thing and they had to run it and check it on behalf of the air force. And after they approved it, the test pilot from the CAC, Jimmy Schofield, who is still living in Adelaide but he suffered a stroke, he would fly it and it might take 2 or 3 flights to get everything right because in the air things were slightly different to what they might have been on the ground. Where we

34:30 set the propeller to be rpm to be 3,000 rpm, well, he was doing 300 knots it might have shown 3,075 so we'd wind it back a little bit with the propeller governor. Then he'd come back and those things would be checked. He might fly it again and then it would be prepared for the gunnery trials so the guns would have to be cleaned, not cleaned, they were cleaned because they had, what do you call it, grease

35:00 in them, so they'd be cleaned out, 50 rounds put in each gun, in each gun bay. Then he'd take it up and fly down to the Torquay range although here sometimes they didn't go that far they just went somewhere over the Bay, fire all the guns, make sure they all worked, make sure of the sight. The sight had to be set as well, as the armourer at the time, that was a job that I also was doing. The aircraft was hoisted up into a level

35:30 position, laterally and longitudinally and it was set at a thousand inches, well the gun sight was set at

1000 inches back from a big screen that was set up the other side of the hangar. The aircraft had to be perfectly level, laterally that way, and longitudinally and the gun sight up there, of which there's one there, that's it there, that's the gun

36:00 sight, it hasn't got the right glass in it but that's it – that had to be set at 1000 inches from that big screen, then all the guns had to be aligned individually on the part on the screen. Plus the camera gun in the port starboard leading edge, everything had to converge at say 300 yards and 1000 inches, everything was pointing in the right direction. So that was done before the gun

36:30 test and when the guns were loaded he went and fired them and came back and they were – anything left was taken out. One gun might have stopped firing so that had to be rectified and he might have had to do another test. But after that they were cleaned, taped up so they were clear of any dust getting in and it was ready to go to the air force at one more test, well, after the air force test pilot.

So you said it

37:00 **was Mustangs at the end, this is what you're talking about now, it's specifically the Mustang?**

Yeah, that's the Mustang there.

So where were they, I mean where did they, you said they got sent off to the Air Force but to which bases and do you know where the Mustangs seeing action at that point?

No, none of our Australian Mustangs went to war they were being prepared for it when the atomic bomb was dropped. But initially they went to 2 AD [Aircraft Depot] or 1 AD I should say at

37:30 Laverton which was the reception centre for American or Australian or British aircraft coming into the air force. They were prepared there and then sent to squadrons. From there they went to 2 OTU [Officer Training Unit] at Mildura for training people in Mustangs and also up to Queensland a couple of squadrons formed up there, 84 Squadron, which was equipped with Mustangs. Usually they had American Mustangs and

38:00 American Mustangs were sent up to Borneo and their pilots were being converted on to them up there as well from Kittyhawks. And actually when the war was finished, when BCOF was formed, the British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, the people from Borneo and Labuan were asked for volunteers to fly Mustangs up to Japan to occupy Japan. Well they went up there and they took American-built Mustangs and our

38:30 Australian Mustangs were never used in that war. They never went to Japan either though, again you get books and magazines which say Australian-built Mustangs were used in the occupation of Japan, not so, all American Mustangs except at the end of the Mustang phase of the Korean War, four Mustangs were sent up there because they were being shot down at such a rate we were running out of

39:00 American Mustangs. So four got up there and I happened to fly one of them back from Korea to Japan when we returned to Japan to get Meteors. That particular Mustang or that number I was the last one to fly and I was shot down in it. Nobody else ever flew it after that.

Did you have something to do with the building of that one, did that come from Fisherman's Bend?

No, that's an American one.

39:30 We also had Wirraways at CAC at that time. Wirraways had been built up until 1942 but there was another order for 150 given in 1943 by the Air Force so we had those in the flight hangar as well. But they were just being used as trainers at that stage so they were a secondary thing to Mustangs.

40:00 Mustangs were wanted as urgent equipment for the air force. We had, actually at that stage we had orders for Mustangs for 1,390 to be built at Fisherman's Bend but it ended up only 200 but that's something very few people are aware of, 1,390 orders for if the war had kept going. We were going to be building them at about 1 or 2 a day.

40:30 **How long were the days there at Fisherman's Bend?**

There were two shifts at that stage but it probably would have ended up being three if the war had continued. In fact it was three in some parts of the factory but in the aircraft, the main part of the factory it was only two.

How long was your day, how long would you be on the floor?

Oh we started at 7.14 and we finished at 4.18. We had half an hour for lunch –

41:00 work that out - nine hours and half an hour for lunch.

Tape 3

00:35 **How do you think the Mustangs that you guys built compared to the Americans?**

Far better. The workmanship in the Australian Mustang was superior to the American because most of them were built after the war, we'd only started supplying the air force in late '45 with our own and as the war ended

01:00 they were built on a much slower basis and the standard of workmanship was much higher. And that was quite apparent when we flew American Mustangs, they were built under the war pressure with the idea that they probably weren't going to last long anyway and the workmanship wasn't of such a high standard.

Were you receiving reports on the Mustangs that came out of Fisherman's Bend when they were sent to Laverton and Point Cook?

01:30 Laverton, No. 1 Aircraft Depot, yes.

Were you getting reports from pilots?

No, once they'd passed into their hands we didn't get much back unless there was found in service and there were quite a few things. At one stage they came back to have the elevators changed from fabric covering to metal covering because in high speed dives the fabric was floating even though it was stretched tight and (UNCLEAR) and

02:00 painted at 500 miles an hour in a dive it was floating onto the air flow. So all Mustangs were then changed to aluminium alloy skins in the elevators, so that was one modification. There was another one to fit rocket rails underneath, those rails you can see there, six of them, they were a modification that was put on afterwards so the Mustangs came back for fitment in the

02:30 factory. Plus bomb racks, the inboard ones, they were bomb racks and they were actually fitted but some Mustangs were fitted with tin rocket rails instead of bomb racks, that was a modification done. There were a number of others fitting that reflector gun sight instead of the original American sight that was fitted – things like that they came back for.

Earlier you talked about the camera gun, what was that?

03:00 That was a thing about that big built by a company called Bell & Howe in America, it was fitted into the wing route of the plain. See where the wheel folds up

I can, the camera can't. Do you want to get it down?

I can't. In the leading edge, the camera gun was there, that was aimed at the same place where the guns were meant to converge so when you pressed the firing

03:30 button, the trigger, the camera gun would operate at the same time as the guns, it would take a record of what you were firing and that could be looked at when you got back to see whether you hit anything or missed by a hundred yards or whatever so your assessment of what you were shotting at was available on film.

So was that solely for training?

No, that was in operation. Later on that was replaced by a gun sight camera which was put on top of the gun

04:00 sight, we used those in Korea actually instead of the camera gun, that was actually part of the gun sight. That was called the GSAP, Gun Sight Aiming Point Camera.

Yes, because we heard about that before but didn't really have it explained as well as that.

Who was that from?

I can't remember to be honest but it was someone who was flying,

04:30 **I think it was in training, they went off to fly Lancasters or something in pilot training.**

They wouldn't have had Gun Sight Aiming Point Cameras then, they had the camera there.

So you got to know the planes quite intimately, did you ever get a chance to get up in the Mustang?

Not at that stage, no, they were all single seaters except one that was converted in the air force for testing of acoustics

05:00 and for various other tests that were done. They took the fuselage tank out which was behind the pilot and fitted a seat just for someone to go up as a passenger from the Aircraft Performance Unit just to measure the acoustics and a few other things about pilot surroundings. That's another thing I did while I was at CAC, apart from creeping down to the flight hangar, the Yankee

05:30 hangar we called it, where the Lightnings and Thunderbolts and Havocs and Liberators and so forth were, I used to go the other way to what was then the Department of Aircraft Production, DAP, they

were building Beauforts and Beaufighters and then Lincolns and again there were Commonwealth Police patrolling that – a big fence between the CAC and the DAP. But if you were smart you could get round them so I used to go down there at lunchtime or any other

06:00 time there was nothing to do and look at the Beauforts and Beaufighters being built, they weren't built there they were assembled, because the Railway Workshops in South Australia at Islington and Newport here, near you, and Glenora in Sydney, they were making the major components of Beauforts and Beaufighters and they were then railed down either to Fisherman's Bend or

06:30 to Mascot Airport in Sydney for final assembly of Beauforts and Beaufighters so the final assembly here and the test flying. I also tried to get a flight in a Beaufighter. I got to know the test pilot down there, Harold Shelton, he only died six months ago down here, he was 92, still flying gliders, dual – but anyway – I missed out but I

07:00 went down there to see what was doing down there so I got quite familiar with that place as well

How did you manage to sneak in, what was your little plan?

The canteen at the DAP was at the end of the fence outside towards the tarmac. If you played your cards right, the guard was looking that way or walking down that way, you could get round the corner and through the canteen and into the main factory. I got that down to a fine art. I also saw there Lincolns were being built towards the end of the

07:30 war. The four-engine Lincoln bombers, again the parts shipped in from the railway factories, and I also saw the first components for a thing called the Avro Tudor which is a four-engine airliner. The air force ordered twelve of them as transport aircraft and the first parts came into that factory right at the end of the war and after that the contract was cancelled

08:00 and none were ever built but I did see parts of it being built. They were building parts of the fuselage in the experimental shed as well so I'm one of the few people I think that knows first hand that Tudors were being built.

So do you think if you'd managed to sneak into one of the Mustangs like get it ready and hop into the cockpit there you'd be able to?

I wouldn't be able to fly it, no. I'd started

08:30 gliding – I'd joined a gliding club at the end of the war too so I'd started learning to glide, I could handle a glider in the air but a Mustang would have been a bit too complicated I think. Actually a Mustang had a trait that once you put power on the thing would tend to swing because of the taut from the propeller and you had to be aware of that but you weren't aware of it at 17 or 18, you hadn't been indoctrinated.

Tell us about your

09:00 **gliding, those first experiences of being up there and you being in control?**

Well, the gliding started off down at Governor Road, Mordialloc, just a couple of miles away really. Beforehand in '45 I'd joined the club and the first job was to get the equipment ready for Christmas '45 which was going to be our first camp. And the factory where the

09:30 equipment was, was on the Nepean Highway up in Brighton and we were making a winch to tow the gliders up, we were preparing a primary glider which was in one piece but it had to be repaired, there was some work to be done on it. So I used to ride my push-bike down from East Preston, down to Brighton if I wanted to get to work on that. I used to ride a push-bike to Fisherman's Bend every day as well. And we worked on

10:00 that and the first camp was down at Governor Road, well it wasn't a camp, it was weekend flying and we were given initial training, it was just to hold the wings level in a wind as tyros so you learned what the controls were for. When the wind was blowing the wind would react to the controls and from that you did slides towed by the winch

10:30 with a great long cable. You'd slide probably a couple of hundred yards learning to keep it straight and level. That was a built up process of course and eventually you did your first off the ground at 2 or 3 feet and 20, 30 yards. As you became adept at keeping it level and straight you'd go up higher and higher, further and further until finally you were released

11:00 of course from the cable, it was just towed up from the nose, and when you were considered adept at keeping it straight you were given an S turn, right down the paddock, and if you managed to handle that all right, a few of those, you were able to do a circuit. And finally you were launched up to 1,000 feet and a complete circuit right around. But the aircraft then, the primary gliders, they were very inefficient aerodynamically

11:30 so there wasn't much hope of staying up, once you launched the thing it was virtually all the way down to a landing. So not until you got onto sail planes later did you have much hope of staying up beyond launching point.

Do you remember what it was like the first time you were released and you were on your own

up there?

Not really, I suppose just the excitement of doing. I can't recall it

12:00 particularly, just a sense of achievement "Whacko, I'm finally on my way".

So I think we've sort of covered, I mean tell me if I'm wrong, but that period with CAC and then you started to learn how to glide and then Air Training Corps, we've spoken about what you were learning there - navigation and plane recognition etc. Tell us

12:30 **about the end of that period leading up to your involvement with Korea?**

Well, I joined the Air Force on the 2nd August 1948, that was the second call up for air crew. As I said I'd missed the first because of being involved with the navy and not applying for the first one. So I got into the second and we went to Point Cook for training on the 2nd of August, six months of training enlarging on what we'd done in the Air Training

13:00 Corps. I think I did fairly well on the theory side of things there and then flying training started on Tiger Moths for six months and we did six months on Tiger Moths. Then we went on to Wirraways which I was quite familiar with of course working on them. After that we did 20 odd hours of Oxfords which are twin-engined aircraft just to get some

13:30 indoctrination into twin engine flying. Then there's the wings part of it where we were all given awards and the Chief of Air Staff came down to give us our wings, to pin them on, and then we were due a week's leave I think it was and we were posted away to the squadrons and I was posted to 3 Squadron at Canberra which had

14:00 Mustangs. So it was a great thing finally to get on the – I can recall I took off on my first Mustang flight on Runway 1or 2 at Canberra, facing into the north east and I can recall sitting in then you'd open the throttle and just thinking of those cylinders and the pistons going up and down in those twelve cylinders and think "Oh you beauty, here we go".

14:30 So I flew there for about six months and the Korean War had broken out at the end of June and four pilots from 3 Squadron were immediately up to Korea. They'd been there six months ahead of I was - in fact a couple of them were old

15:00 (I'm going a bit peculiar again) World War II so they got posted up because – then the Korean War was meant to finish by Christmas of course - and they were sent straight away to reinforce 77 Squadron which was then based at Iwakuni in Japan as part of BCOF and so I remember then I was posted in August up to

15:30 Williamtown to finish pilot fighter training Mustangs. The squadron at Canberra was a tactically (I'm starting to go) –

It's all right. I think because we're also rushing a lot too, I don't know if that makes any difference – maybe I'll just talk for a minute and we'll see how it goes. Are you feeling all right though – do you want to stop?

See how I go.

16:00 Just my voice is getting of my – my brain is getting ahead and if I talk too long something goes out of kilter.

Maybe. Also we did jump ahead quite a lot there so we'll maybe just slow down. Like the training period I'm really interested – that is quite important for us to get a sense of that training period once you'd joined the air force. So that period, you know, you join up and, you know, your doing your first hours up there, if you can tell us what

16:30 **planes you were flying on those very early stages of your training with the air force at Point Cook?**

Well, Tiger Moth first of course, you know what Tiger Moths look like do you, are you au fait?

17:00 With the Tiger Moth we had about 60 hours flying in that, 50 to 60 hours. That was a bi-plane which was a fairly elementary aircraft which had been used with the air force since 1939 actually and they were still in use until about 1959, '58, and sixty hours of training in that, basic training. And from

17:30 there once you learned the basic situation with aeroplane flying you went to the Wirraway to get formation flying, instrument flying, low-level flying, all sorts of things that were more operationally mounted. You did about 150-60 hours of that and you also did

18:00 night flying, navigation flying round the country and after finishing that you went on to the Airspeed Oxford which was a twin-engined aircraft and it was just a basic thing to get used to twin-engine flying which wasn't kept up for very long – only the first couple of courses that flew in those days got twin-engine flying.

18:30 So from there we were given our wings and then posted to the squadrons. Some squadrons went on to

Mustangs, some went on to Dakotas, twin-engine transports, some went on to, oh, what else, nothing much else in those days. Soon after we got aircraft which needed twin-engine flying like

19:00 Neptunes and Dakotas was basically what we got apart from Mustangs and once you got into the squadron of course you were trained on the particular aircraft which the squadron had. In those days there wasn't any particular training organisation, which they later had. So the pilots that were later posted to a particular

19:30 aircraft when to an operational training unit like they had in World War II to be trained on the aircraft that went to the squadron. But in the period we went across we were trained within the squadron rather than separately at an organisation. So from there you were trained in the operational use of the aircraft, in low level flying for Mustangs and low level co-operation, they were fitted with cameras, photographic

20:00 work with cameras, so we got that as well in the squadron I was with.

The aerial photography?

Yes, very low level stuff for army co-operation so that the army could then get coverage for any attack on the ground to enemy areas where the armies are operating. So when the Korean War broke out of course we got posted away from that into the

20:30 fighter side of Mustang use.

Can you describe to me how you did the aerial photograph, you know, where the camera was and how it was operated?

The Mustang, in those days, had two cameras, 24 cameras, mounted, pointing at the starboard side. One vertical one and one at an angle. And they were fitted in the Mustangs at CAC when the requirement was made to have those

21:00 aircraft and we were posted to a squadron. So if the army wanted a particular co-operation to be picked up, if the army was on the ground, the enemy was on the ground fighting towards the front line, the Mustang could then go at low level, follow the area where the army was, the enemy army,

21:30 camera photographs were taken, brought back, and they were looked at very closely. They said "Right, they're up in the hills on that area there so we've got to get somewhere there to go and fight them". So the army was dependent on what we picked up.

So how did you operate the cameras from within the plane?

From inside? The aircraft was fitted with an operational automatic system whereby you could press the

22:00 trigger on the control column when you went over the aircraft or over the area pressing the camera it would have just picked up what you wanted. So it could have been just an area of one basic army lot or a whole mile or so. So whatever the army wanted we went out to do it.

So you were trained in that and you did that as well when you were in Korea?

No.

22:30 We didn't do that in Korea, no it was all air to ground work in those days. No, it was never used in Korea. Those aircrafts with cameras weren't used up there.

So just going back to your training, there were 4 different planes that you learned to fly?

Yeah, Tiger Moths.

And they must, as you said, they had different functions, yeah. Can you give me an idea of say the difference between the Tiger Moth and?

The Tiger Moth is a very

23:00 elementary thing. It's like being taught to drive a car – you might have got into a Morris Minor with a teacher to teach you to drive a car and you just went round the corner and you learned how to turn left and how to turn right, that was about it but then you went from there to a Holden Commodore and you learned how to drive at speed, how to skid left and right, how to do high speed runs from

23:30 somebody chasing you. It was just a way of getting up to more positive teaching.

So the physical differences in the planes, I mean, is it about wing span, is it about, you know, the positioning of?

Well the Tiger moth is just a basic small aeroplane. It was an open cockpit with an instructor in the front cockpit and you were sitting in the front. So he taught you basically what the controls were

24:00 for. You learned that if you turned the stick that way the aircraft would bend over and bend that way. If you turn it that way it goes that way, if you pulled back on your stick you'd go up. Just basic how to fly

but with the Wirraway you learned the more detailed things like doing aerobatics doing high speed turns, diving, pulling up, missing things that were coming after you,

24:30 formations, navigation, all the detailed ways of flying which didn't go – you did a basic navigation exercise in Tiger Moths but that was just from Point Cook down to Lake Colac and down to oh somewhere down that way and just to give you a basic idea with an instructor. But in the Wirraway you did a couple of trips with instructors to teach you something more about

25:00 cross-country flying, navigation and you did them by yourself, solo exercises. The final one was from Point Cook up to Wagga and then across to, where was it, Wagga, then across to I think it was Mildura and then back to Point Cook – so a fairly reasonable, a whole day's cross-country.

And which planes did you like of those planes that you trained in, which did you like?

25:30 The Tiger Moth, sorry, no, Tiger Moth to get on to really powered flying but the Wirraway was the most positive one to get on to. You're really getting towards actual operational flying on the Wirraway. The Airspeed Oxford was just something which was just twin engine training that's

26:00 all. And later on they got rid of that, they didn't give the later people that sort of training. It was something left over from World War II and with 20 hours of it, it was just a bonus you might say.

So the Wirraway was a more sophisticated plane?

Yes, it was, yes. And having worked on Wirraways it was a bonus for me as well having worked on them for a couple of

26:30 years also.

So, I'm trying to imagine like the feel of flying it – is that an important consideration, how it feels, how it deals with wind and – can you give me some idea of what it feels like to fly a Wirraway, what are the specific things about it?

Well when you first got onto it, the Wirraway was quite a big aircraft of course. The Tiger Moth was that big when you got onto the Wirraway it was that big and it looked quite big to get into it to

27:00 fly. Of course your first flight with it was with an instructor and you were then in the front seat and the instructor was in the back so you were actually a pilot of something almost operational and it was quite a positive, very pleasant feeling to get onto the Wirraway. And with 150 hours of it – it took you, it might have been 6 months flying on it, so you went through all the

27:30 operational sides of flying, what you would have done later on in the Mustang or if you were posted onto Dakotas, twin-engine transports, you didn't get to the same stage as you would have on Mustangs doing aerobatics and close formation flying, that sort of thing but the Wirraway was a good step towards flying operational aircraft. The same sort of performances, the same sort of activities but not the same

28:00 formation and not the same performance. The Wirraway wasn't as good as the Mustangs but you could do the same things much more slowly. So that was the thing.

What was it like flying in formation, the first time you did it was that difficult?

I think we did some basic flying in Tiger Moths, formation, with an instructor, never singly. And it was

28:30 only a small imposition of formation flying. With the Wirraways we got to learn good tight formation flying even solo, without instructors, because that was part of the indoctrination into operational flying. In fact in operational flying in Korea you didn't get to fly tight formation because if you were fighting against enemy aircraft you could not fly tight

29:00 formation because in that way you'd be flying close up to whoever your leader was and you couldn't watch him and the guy coming behind you either so you flew like that, a couple of hundred yards apart. So often again you read in books nowadays of people flying in tight formation and looking out for the enemy coming behind you, it never happened. You'd be shot down. So people who write nowadays haven't really got the score.

29:30 **So why don't we move on now to Korea or to that point where you were given your instructions. When did your training finish?**

Well, within 3 Squadron at Canberra, a formation in the aerobatics and so forth was just something we picked up, we weren't really indoctrinated into it because it wasn't a fighting aerobatic company

30:00 so when I went up to Williamtown from Canberra in August, we were indoctrinated into aerial combat sort of flying. Fighting against aircraft, doing aerobatics to miss or to get away from aircraft who were attacking you and we did air to air firing on Lincolns which were four engine bombers from Amberley in Queensland. They'd come down

30:30 occasionally and fly backwards and forwards for us while we did attacks on them and learned how to attack bombers in case we met bombers in Korea.

Tell me about that, that's fascinating, how did you actually attack without attacking, how did you fake it?

Just with camera guns, if the Lincoln for instance from Brisbane was flying backwards and forwards, we'd do an attack on it and he would

31:00 turn away and the guy in the back turret, because they had a turret behind and a turret on top and a turret in the front with guns on board and they would tell the captain when we were coming and they would turn away and we were supposed to chase them round. Now once you got up fairly close to anything that was turning away from you, you had to really pull it tight to keep up with it to fire your guns and rather than the bombers which weren't easy to get away from, if you were

31:30 attacking another aircraft which we did as well with Mustang versus Mustang, he could turn like that as you were turning in and you couldn't pull yourself round fast enough to aim at him because there was a limit to how far you could tighten the turn without blacking out so it was a matter of indoctrinating yourself into attacking.

What do you mean blacking out?

Well if you've got an aircraft pulling very

32:00 tight and you turn like that, all the blood rushes from your head, from your brain, and down and you lose consciousness maybe just for a few seconds until you straighten up again. But the guy behind trying to pull up in this one here has got to pull tighter so he gets into the position where he's pulling too tight, and this one might be doing the same to try to escape – so if you get say four or five times the force of gravity all the

32:30 blood rushes down from the brain and you black out and you've got no blood in your head and you weigh about four times the weight of your body. If you weigh 10 stone and you pull 4G [four times the force of gravity] the force on your body is four times 40G, ten times the weight and you in fact weigh that much for just a few seconds.

So is that something that you've ever experienced.

Oh yeah, yeah, that was common.

33:00 In fact on Wirraways we used to try that and try and black ourselves out – in fact if we'd only known we might have broken up the aircraft by pulling too many G for the aircraft but as trainees when we were up flying without an instructor we'd try and black ourselves out but none of us ever had any trouble with it but later on we might well have broken up the aircraft.

So you black out, you're unconscious, what's happening to the

33:30 **aircraft?**

Oh you'd still pull it around. It would only happen for a few seconds perhaps while you were pulling too tight and if you sort of finally released the pressure on the control column the aircraft would then go back through 4-5-2 and you'd come out of it again. But it would be a few seconds of indoctrination. By that time the guy behind might have suffered

34:00 and he might have gone like that and by he time you turned around he couldn't catch you. So maybe then you came back around and got on him.

So this is what you did at Williamtown, this was the final stage of your training was it?

Yes, fighter training. We also did some high altitude flying, we got up to 35,000 feet in the Mustang at that stage. In fact that was the stage where you had to wear oxygen masks of course

34:30 but you couldn't go very much above that because you'd suffer from lack of pressure from the atmosphere. In fact 42,000 was the absolute limit you'd fly at anyway otherwise you'd just black out from that of course, from lack of pressure on the body – even though you had oxygen, you were breathing through your oxygen mask, your body couldn't cope with the lack of

35:00 pressure to feed oxygen into your whole system, pressure on the blood system. So we just went up to 35,000 feet to see what it was like, so there you go, all sorts of indoctrination. Later on in Meteors in Korea we went up to 42,000 but they were pressurised, Mustangs weren't pressurised in the cockpit, Meteors were.

35:30 They were still limited to 42,000 in case the pressurisation broke down and if you were above 42,000 which was the nominal figure and the pressurisation broke down you could be up there not realising that the body was going to suffer in fact it might also cause death. So 42,000 was the limit and if you did break down you had to lose height straight away, like

36:00 down.

Like, straight down?

Yep.

Low level flying as well, did you do that at Williamtown?

Oh yes, not too much because air-to-air was the major thing but low flying was basically at Canberra for the army work. We didn't do much of that at Williamtown, air-to-air was the major thing to learn before you went to Korea

36:30 because we were expecting then to meet North Korean aircraft which really didn't eventuate by the time we got up there.

37:00 **Just with the low flying, that's a particular way of flying isn't it and potentially really dangerous.**

Yes, it is.

Tell me how you do that and what are the special skills?

Well, it's to miss trees and to miss fences. Normally in an air force squadron you're not supposed to fly under 200 feet but I can remember in training in Wirraways with an instructor in the back we were

37:30 trained to lift over fences. You had to learn really what it was like because if you were in combat there was no restriction. If you were chasing someone to shoot them down or if they were chasing you, you wanted to get down as low as you can to dodge over trees or over hills. So low level flying in war time was as low as you could get but it was good fun, good fun.

38:00 **Well, tell me about how they trained you, was it a gradual sort of thing, you went and started at one level and you went?**

Oh, probably, I can't recall a progressive way of doing it. I think it depended on the instructor, some instructors, ex World War II people – most of our instructors hadn't been to war they'd been through the training organisations in World War II but they'd never been posted to squadrons – they'd

38:30 missed out because of the end of the war and they then went to the flying training school to do instructor's courses. They were posted to us and of course they were keen to get into what they'd missed out on so any low level flying they enjoyed and teach us as well. But I'm not quite sure in the actual flying training the air force might have said don't do anything under 200 feet or whatever. But it was a

39:00 progressive thing that we did and of course we then went doing it solo and we couldn't be caught, we were too far away, no one could see us.

What terrain, what area were you doing the low level?

Oh, we'd go out anywhere in the peninsula down from Portsea, anywhere around from Point Cook down the Geelong peninsula or somewhere, anywhere around, we were given an allotted area to

39:30 fly, somewhere north of Geelong out towards Ballarat.

Are pilots still trained down there?

At Point Cook, no that was 1992, Point Cook was closed down as an air force training organisation. Now they go to civilian organisations which do the initial training under contract and then they go to

40:00 Pearce in Western Australia for training on prop jet aircraft – it's all gone to hell in a basket as you might say, the air force isn't like it used to be, it's all ruined.

I think you mentioned that before, didn't you?

Tape 4

00:34 The first cross country that we did solo, long distance cross country up to Wagga, I think it was across to Mildura and then back to Point Cook, we landed at two places. On the way up, up at Kimble one of the navy trainees had an engine failure and he tried to land on Kilmore race course but instead of doing the right thing he put the undercarriage down to early and

01:00 he's turning into land, he stalled and went down and killed himself so it was a bit of a low level, mind blowing thing to us. We didn't know until we got to Wagga that he had done that but it was a bit of a blow. But apart from that we didn't lose anybody else on the course.

Did you have any mishaps or near, any serious experiences?

01:30 Not really. One of the guys on Tiger Moths tipped his aircraft over, in landing, upside down, he was a guy who was later killed in Korea through hitting two Meteors together.

He sounded like he should never have got in a plane?

No, well, he actually hit a Royal Air Force fellow who was out there instructing us on conversion to Wirraways but we were in

02:00 operations activity at that time and coming back from an operation, coming in – we used to fly in what we call rear formation, like that, but for coming in to land and the guy out here would move and get back there so that they're all, 1,2,3,4 and fly into the aerodrome, dive down to the runway, and the leader would pull up like that and the other guy would go

02:30 1,2,3 and pull up, you know, 3 seconds apart. But in changing over from there to there he hit the other guy, the Royal Air Force fellow, and they both went down, that was it. So we had four Royal Air Force guys there with us then and that guy got killed along with our guy as well. Incidentally I've got my log book up there for Korea if you want to look at it.

03:00 I can reach it, don't take it down. Have you found the Korean part?

Yeah, I did, yeah. An awful lot of flights, several in one day and I noticed a citation here that said that you were awarded the Citation Air

03:30 **Medal for dive bombing?**

That was an American thing, the air medal. I think you got that automatically just for flying a few times. In fact the Americans used to get one every ten flights I think, every mission they flew, they'd get some guys with four or five air medals. We only got one.

04:00 **Will we move on to going to Korea? So tell me about that?**

O.K. Well we went up there from Sydney by Qantas DC4, operations up there to Iwakuni which was the home base of 77 Squadron when the war broke out and they were operating originally from that base, flying across to Korea and then flying back at night

04:30 after refuelling and rearming in Korea. As the war progressed we got bases over there and by the time I got over there they were at Pusan which was down in the South Eastern corner of Korea. And at that stage the North Koreans had come down almost to that corner, driven everybody out of Korea. By the time I got there they were starting to get driven back and we were

05:00 based at Pusan. The only time we went back to Iwakuni then was when an aircraft had a major repair job to be done or an overhaul work, you'd fly one back, maybe stay overnight, and take another one back to Pusan and leave the other one there for a couple of weeks while they worked on it?

So tell me when exactly you went to Iwakuni?

Iwakuni. I got there I think about the

05:30 15th of December 1950. I was there for a week sort of getting indoctrinated and then I flew over to Korea, no, my first trip out of Pusan in a Mustang was on the 22nd of December. I'd flown across I think in a Dakota because we had Dakotas operating taking troops backwards and forwards, the air force and the army.

06:00 And on my first day one of my other mates on the course, Don Ellis, he was killed also, he was shot down, so that was my introduction to Korea.

In that week, was it a week that you spent in Pusan before you went, what were you doing during that week?

Let me think – I can't remember exactly.

06:30 **Were you flying?**

I think we did some flying, yes, in Mustangs but there wasn't any training going on at that stage. I don't know what I was really doing – I think I might have got there the 15th, 16th, 17th, it was a few days before I got to Korea. I think the first trip was across in a Dakota and I think I picked up a Mustang there and brought it back for maintenance and then flew back to Korea, to Pusan, and I

07:00 think I might have got on the next trip on the next day which was just a familiarisation trip to have a look at the area so we could recognise where Pusan was from the air and to look around and see what the country looked like. And then the next day was out on an operational trip and Don Ellis was killed on that first day I think it was, so on the 22nd I did my first operational trip.

What I haven't asked you about is the

07:30 **crew, the crews on the Mustangs, did you have a crew?**

Only one, single seater, a single-seater fighter so you're on your own.

So you're always on your own?

Yes. You could go out with either two or four aircraft, sometimes twelve if there's a big mission, three lots of four would go out to attack something. But mostly it was just four or two. You'd go out to attack

08:00 a route where the North Korean trucks, tanks, railway trains were coming down with troops and supplies and you'd be out looking for them trying to strike them or bomb them or find tanks that were hiding – what they would do during the day is drive into a village and just drive through somebody's side wall into the hut but you could

08:30 follow the tracks and if you thought somebody was in there you'd just bomb or strike it or rocket it to try and destroy tanks in there.

Did you, were you given intelligence about what to look out for and what movements were going on?

Yes, there was a briefing every day, every morning before you went out and you were also briefed at night about how the war was progressing whether the bomb line which was where the enemy were

09:00 beyond, whether that was moving forward or you were being driven back so that you didn't bomb your own troops. There was a signal that was given, they had a signal on the ground to show that they were there and it wasn't the enemy. But basically for ground attack work we'd go beyond the bomb line up into enemy territory. In fact some of them were way up, a couple of hundred miles north of the bomb line up into a place

09:30 called Wonsan on the north east coast, we went up there and bombed a power house or shipping or something. I've forgotten exactly now but that was way up – it was winter then and for a guy that had been brought up in Melbourne basically in summertime and winter where it might have got down to 30 degrees in the morning, Fahrenheit, and then during the day it might have got to 20,

10:00 sorry, I'm talking centigrade there, it might have got to 40 degrees during the day and we thought that was cold to get up there into Northern Korea in those days it was just like the end of the earth to us. You were over the snow covered ice covered country, nothing else to see. It was fairly bare so it was a bit of a shock for people down south or any part of Australia.

So talking about flying up

10:30 **north and it being freezing cold and stuff in the mountains. What were you looking out for up there?**

Well that trip particularly we were looking out for – I think we were sent up to bomb a big power station in Wonsan but on the way back if you had anything left you'd be looking out for any trucks on the road, convoys of supply trucks, but over that side of Korea I don't think there was much at that time, any railway

11:00 lines, anything at all, bringing supplies or troops down south.

So what were the conditions like inside the plane if it was (UNCLEAR)

O.K. You had warm air coming through the system from the engine bay. If you went down of course you'd never find your way back because it was a long way to walk and Australian people in North Korea stood out like the proverbial

11:30 so I don't think you could have walked home. But we didn't lose anybody up there at that stage in fact the only people that we lost in Mustangs were a few people who got shot down, didn't make it home. As I said the first day I was there one of our people did and then in late February another guy from my course, in the next bed to me in the bunks we were

12:00 in, he got shot down. He hit a ditch and turned over and drowned. Lo and behold, just a few weeks later I did the same thing but luckily I didn't hit a ditch I didn't turn over so I got picked up by a jeep and then – I don't know if you watched MASH [Television series based on the Korean War] on TV, do you watch that? Well I watch it particularly because I got taken to a MASH [Mobile Army Surgical Hospital] unit but I didn't see, what's her name, Hawkeye

12:30 and the bird. But I just got looked at there and I got picked up by a helicopter and taken back to an aerodrome and flown home.

O.K. It would be good to hear that story in detail but you've gone from all this training and now you're in Japan and then in Korea, so what was your first operation, what did you have to do?

If I can remember that's probably up

13:00 looking for a road that there might have been trucks or even, what do you call it, carts driven by horses or cattle. We knew that they were coming down with rifles and ammunition but anything that we saw that we thought was feeding to the North Koreans before they got driven across the 38th parallel. So we were looking for those with rockets.

13:30 We had six rockets and two 500 pound bombs under the wings of the Mustang plus 1880 rounds of .5 ammunition so whatever target came up you'd use what was appropriate. If you saw tanks you'd fire rockets at them, try to dismantle them you might say. If you saw a train you might drop bombs on it

14:00 or a tunnel with a train in it. Anything at all, trucks coming down the highway. Eventually it got to the stage where the highways moving down to the south were all given recognition, in fact, the maps are over there I can give you a look at them if you want, showing which ones you were allotted. And two aircraft, we'd go up along say a

14:30 hundred miles of those looking for any movements, if there was nothing there you could bomb a bridge or a railway line to discourage anything coming down.

What about people, what about civilians?

Didn't see much of those but of course if you saw where a tank had driven into a village you couldn't very well say that there was nobody in the village but in general I think they all got out if they knew that North Koreans were dismantling their

15:00 village by driving trucks and things into them, people would get out. In fact, people coming down to Pusan, there were hundreds and thousands of them coming down as the North Koreans moved down there initially. And Pusan was just a, what do you call it, people living in very dire straits because there was no accommodation because they'd all moved down. So probably we

15:30 didn't come across too many up there with people still living. But I think they moved back after we moved back over the bomb line and started to drive them back up, we got people moving back up north again. Whether their villages remained I don't know, probably not, a lot of them were destroyed.

The bomb line, can you explain what the bomb line is?

That was depending on where the ground forces were,

16:00 where they were driving the North Korean ground forces away from the bomb line, nominally the 38th parallel was the place where the North Koreans invaded South Korea so they drove down past that and as the bomb line changed we'd have army people, for instance, or air reconnaissance people giving word about where the North Koreans had got to. That would be fed into General

16:30 Macarthur's headquarters in Japan, in Tokyo, by radio and so forth and they'd draw day by day whether you could move forward 10 miles or whether you were driven back five miles so that the bomb line was then picked out and given in the briefing that anything beyond that was enemy, so don't bomb or attack anything south of that, you might get our own troops. So the bomb line was flexible, moving every

17:00 day but basically at that stage moving north and finally got it across the 38th parallel. Before we got up there to the 38th parallel we'd almost, well we had finished virtually with Mustangs, and gone back to Japan. That was when I was shot down in the last fortnight of our Mustang operations and on the same day there was another guy shot

17:30 down, he landed on a sand bank with his wheels up. I landed on an old aerodrome with my wheels up so the two of us were picked up by jeep and helicopter on that occasion. Then a few days later another guy who was on the course with me, he was shot down when the two of us were up there too. So I was able to circle him while he was being fired at on the ground and we got some other aircraft to come along, American and Australian

18:00 aircraft, to circle him. He bailed out actually with his parachute, just making it a few hundred feet above the ground. And I told the people in Orange about him, he lives up in Sydney, Ces Sly. He rang me and said "Oh, No, I don't think I want it" And I said "Do it, Ces". Anyway whether he's agreed to do it I don't know but he was flying up until recently too. But he was picked up

18:30 finally by two helicopters, the first one got hit and badly damaged and had to withdraw so they sent another one and picked him up and he was sent home, well not sent home, sent to hospital for a while.

What were the circumstances of you being shot?

Well, we were doing very low level strafing of something on the ground and that was part of the course of course to find anything you could, trucks or transports or trains or tanks. We were down

19:00 looking for something and going along the highway well the road, it wasn't a highway really. And we were between mountains in the valley and they had guns and I remember hearing "bang" and I knew, I thought, exactly where I was hit, knowing the Mustang from way back. I was hit just up there in the oil cooler which is in that thing down the bottom. I could hear that and sure enough shortly after the oil pressure started going

19:30 down on the cockpit instrument and with that, as the oil went down, of course, the engine seized. So I was getting all ready to bail out and I was heading back then, the guy that was with me who was leading me so no, there's a disused airfield up ahead, it was Kimpo, so I elected to land on that wheels up and I did. When I landed there was an American Marine Corsair there, which is an American fighter

20:00 that had also landed wheels up there, there was nobody there at the time. So we were both there and I got out and there were a couple of characters coming across with rifles from the other side of the aircraft. And I didn't know who they were, it was in no man's land, and in fact Seoul which was the capital of South Korea had only been taken the day before and Kimpo was about ten miles north west so I didn't know whether they were

20:30 North Koreans or South Koreans. They turned out to be South Koreans and then a jeep turned up and I was picked up and taken to MASH.

What about the landing? When you say wheels up you mean it was like a belly landing?

Belly landing, yes, because the aerodrome, you didn't know how rough it was.

So how rough was it?

Oh, I think I landed on a fairly smooth place. I can't remember but you never knew whether there might have been a bomb

21:00 crater you might have hit and turned over perhaps. So from that point of view – and that Mustang was never found again, some months later the engineering officer from the squadron went up to try and recover it and it was gone. So maybe some South Korean got it and turned it into pots and pans.

But was it a really dangerous landing for you, were you worried about it?

No, no. I had done a belly landing when I was at Point Cook actually on

21:30 Wirraways. Again, a fuel system failure, we'd been out dive bombing on the range at Werribee and somewhere coming back to Point Cook the engine failed so I elected to land in a paddock wheels up, so it wasn't knew. But that aircraft was flying again within about 3 or 4 days. It was trucked back to Point Cook and repaired and flown again.

It must be a particular technique though

22:00 **like landing wheels up?**

Oh, you just land smooth, skid along. It lands, well, depending on how you handle it of course, smoothly. It pulls up very smartly because there's no wheels. I don't know how long it was at, maybe a couple of hundred yards - I was back that day actually and flying again the next day.

So was that the

22:30 **most threatening experience you ever had?**

Oh, I got hit in the fuel tank before that, I remember coming home with fuel streaming out of the starboard tank of a Mustang. But it was on the way home that I first found it, it must have been pretty late and plenty of fuel left anyway so I had to change tanks then.

So you made it home.

Yeah, yeah.

You said before that you knew where you'd been

23:00 **hit. How did you know?**

Just the noise, the ping. It was a .5 bullet it was, a .5 machine gun and I felt it was right behind me, underneath, and the oil cooler was down there, in at the intake in the front of that thing there and I went "Oh, oil cooler" it just sounds like that. And I'd never heard one hit before but just knowing the Mustang I thought that's where that is and sure enough the oil

23:30 pressure started going down so it wouldn't have lasted much longer before the engine seized.

Were you involved in any dog fights, any aerial combat?

Not in Mustangs, in Meteors. There were a few which weren't very, what would you say, positive dog fights because they didn't stop and mix it with the Migs [Mikoyan-Gurevich, Soviet aircraft manufacturer] they just dived through us from high altitude, firing as they went, and then keep on going across the border. They didn't stop

24:00 and mix. If they had we'd have got a lot more of them. But they could dive so much faster than us in Meteors.

So you were in the Meteors?

Yes, we went back to Japan on the 7th April '51 then we converted to the Meteors which had just started arriving by sea from England. And we stayed there until July or late august and we flew back to

24:30 Kimpo, which by then was an operational air field, it had been rejuvenated and we operated from there then from Meteors.

And how different were the Meteors from the Mustangs?

Oh totally different. They were jet aircraft of course, so piston engine and we were flying up to 40 odd thousand feet initially where the Migs were and they were much faster. They had a

25:00 420 millimetre cannon which were good for shooting down aircraft and ground targets. So we went up there and initially we were above the North American Sabres which the Americans had. They were just starting to get numbers of them in Korea and the idea that we were top cover with the Meteors down below us. But it turned out – sorry, the Sabres below us. The Meteors couldn't really

25:30 mix it at high altitude with the Migs so we eventually came down with the Sabres up top. Then again we got attacked by Migs diving first at high speed and following and you jut couldn't catch them.

So what are the Migs like, how do they compare to the Meteors?

They were much higher performance as far as speed was concerned. They weren't as good as the Meteors at mixing in a

26:00 dog fight. So if they'd stopped and dog fought with us we would have shot down a few of them I reckon.

And why was that?

Because we were more manoeuvrable. We could turn faster than them and we could get on their tail if they were – if they kept turning we could pull round and get in behind them in a smaller circle. If they'd started to fight with us we'd have got them but they didn't.

So their tactics were to use fast dive bombs?

Yeah, just diving and

26:30 firing. But they were training – we reckon they had Russian and Chinese pilots as the leaders, introducing Chinese pilots and North Korean pilots into Migs, teaching them what to do in tactics. So for the first few weeks when you saw them they'd be flying up above us backwards and forwards and then occasionally there'd be two or four of them dive

27:00 down.

Can you just go back over that again, do you mind?

With the Migs, they were basically being taught, indoctrination, the pilots of Migs were at a low level of training like we might have been at Point Cook in Wirraways or at Williamtown in Meteors learning the basics of air to air fighting, which it was, air to air combat, with those aircraft up at high

27:30 level from 35, 40,000 feet. So they were being taught by somebody, probably from Russia, who'd been World War II combat pilots and they were teaching them what the tactics were. So finally after perhaps a week of training backwards and forwards showing what was required either two or four would be broken away and led down by an instructor, down through

28:00 us and firing as they came down within range. But they'd keep on going and we didn't have a hope in hell as they say of diving and following them. And we were at that stage up near the Yalu River, the Yalu River was the boundary between North Korea and Manchuria where they were based. And General Macarthur wanted us to go across into Manchuria and attack their bases. We could actually see their aerodromes in Manchuria but we weren't

28:30 allowed to cross. President Truman said "No, we can't do that, we can't go across". So we were kept across that side. They could dive across, get across the border and they could perhaps climb up again and come back and fire on us but that's the way it went. Finally, eventually three or four weeks you might get eight or twelve of them diving down and attacking or firing at us but not stopping to

29:00 mix it. In fact on one occasion I was the spare, every mission had a spare aircraft go up because if there were say 8 or 12 aircraft go up to patrol up there, to protect the aircraft underneath doing ground bombing, fighter bombing, or big bombers bombing something, we'd be patrolling above. But the spare was always sent out so that if one aircraft in the 12 had a radio failure

29:30 or an ammunition or a gun failure he'd turn back and the spare would take his place. So I was the spare on this occasion and I went up as far as Pyongyang, which was the capital of North Korea, and I heard the guys up there – I think I might have been doing aerobatics or something, just flying around, before I went back home again and I heard up there they were involved in a bit of a dog fight with Migs coming down on them and the leader, he said

30:00 "Oh, there's one of them heading south" so I never thought any more of it because they were 50 or 100 miles north of us. So I turned round then heading back to home and as I was coming back, underneath, a few miles over, there was an aircraft heading north – and I thought it was a Sabre because Sabres were involved at the same time as we were and they were based on the same aerodrome as us. And I thought it was a Sabre spare. When I looked at it as it went

30:30 and past down there and I thought “Gee, that’s not a Sabre” so I turned into him and tried to dive on him but I couldn’t catch him, it was a Mig. Obviously a trainee pilot who’d been driven away from the dog fight or the attack and he was down south and if I’d been a little bit smarter I might have got a Mig. I’ve always regretted that.

So what were your tactics when they would come through diving on you, firing?

You’d turn into them and as they came

31:00 down, if you attacked from an aircraft like that you always turned into them so that you’d make them pull tighter and tighter so it got to the stage where he couldn’t pull any tighter without breaking G force, getting into 4G or 6G or whatever it was and he just couldn’t cope with turning faster. So we could turn faster than him, he was going faster than us anyway, so the force on his aircraft was such that he’d lose you.

31:30 I remember seeing a Mig coming this way to the left, firing at me, you could see the cannon firing, he had a 23 millimetre cannon on the starboard side and a 23 millimetre cannon on the port side and I can recall the flash of the gun. The 23 millimetre was fairly slow firing so you could see flash, flash, flash. That was an attack that he made.

What about collision, I mean it seems like you

32:00 **could have a collision or anything?**

You didn’t really because you fought in pairs then. When you broke up you were in flights of four and if you were attacked you might break into two pairs. The wing man was always with his leader he was meant to follow the leader and watch out to protect him from anything coming from behind. So you

32:30 flew like that or crossed over like that. But the leader, it was up to him to watch out for any opposing traffic so by the time you were in a dog fight, if there was a dog fight, you’d be miles separated and later on the leader would say “right, let’s form up on the coast” at whatever place it was, you’d all go home. Or else you’d go home in

33:00 pairs if you were separated enough. So it was on one of those occasions when those two Meteors collided coming back from a mission which I wasn’t on. So it was all very exciting, all very interesting for a young lad. We used to test the guns when we went out, as soon as we took off, climbed out over the bomb line you’d fire the guns just for a couple of seconds to make sure they worked, as you were climbing up to

33:30 35,000 feet because you had to be sure your guns worked.

So when did you do that, as you were setting out?

As you were climbing out. We’d take off in formation, groups of two in pairs, about six or seven seconds apart. Then you’d join up or gather in fours, a lot of four, another lot of four behind, another four, as you climbed out across the bomb line you’d just check your guns and make sure they worked.

34:00 **So were you carrying a lot of ammunition?**

Full, as much as you could. I think with the 20 mil I think we carried 200 rounds each four 20 millimetre cannon.

And you said before that you also used napalm?

That was on the Mustangs, yes.

So what did you use that for?

Oh, burning anything that we came across. If we came across a tank or a truck or a convoy or a train in a

34:30 tunnel or a village with the tank inside the , maybe a couple of tanks inside a village.

How does it work, napalm?

Napalm is a jellied petrol, a combination, you’d use drop tanks, the same as the tanks we carried long range fuel in – if we were doing a long trip instead of bombs we’d carry long range fuel tanks so the napalm was put in that. And as it hit the ground it would ignite

35:00 a, what would you call it, ignite a, what do you call it?

A fuse?

A fuse, yeah, and the tank would explode of course on impact and he fuse would just set the jellied petrol on fire. It burned fairly heavily, nowadays I think it’s not to be used except by people that don’t believe in the United Nations.

35:30 **So why is that?**

It’s a terrible weapon actually, if it hits people if they are civilians for instance rather than a force of troops which you don’t hold as much hope for, I don’t suppose if they are troops fighting your blokes, but if they’re civilians it’s pretty deadly, people can get very badly burned rather than just killed outright. It spreads

36:00 all over, hundreds of years, it spreads for, the impact.

So how did you approach or what were your orders in regards to civilians with the work that you were doing?

We didn’t really see them, we didn’t know. In the early days civilians were coming down south to Pusan in whatever they could carry, anything on bikes or

36:30 carts or on their backs. Up there you used to see them carrying things on their back like peasants, great big loads of timber, firewood and so forth, so they were used to that. But amongst them there were also North Koreans coming down, infiltrating. In probably the days before I got there, they were coming down in amongst the civilians so you couldn’t do much about it. I don’t know exactly what they were being indoctrinated in

37:00 before I got there about hitting those sort of people but by the time I got there you didn’t see much pedestrians, civilians.

They were refugees, those people?

Yes, I didn’t really, I wasn’t involved in attacking them. The only time I think I attacked people was troops, a whole bunch of North Korean troops in

37:30 jackets, they had quilted jackets, they were out in a paddock coming down, quite a number of them, so I attacked them and I think they were the only time that I saw individuals to be attacked. I suppose I strafed them I think with the guns and whoever else was with me. So that’s war.

So you kept in your log books you kept

38:00 **records of what you fired on, what you destroyed did you?**

Not really, no I didn’t. I should have done because now it’s all disappeared.

But what were you required - you were sent out on an operation and instructed to follow a particular highway.

You’d be debriefed when you came back. Intelligence officers would debrief you and you’d give a complete description of where you went, what you found, how many you found and

38:30 everything. So that went into the material that went back to headquarters in Tokyo every day. And they’d say “Right, we’ve driven them back to there. We’ll move the bomb line up and our ground troops with tanks and trucks and so forth can move forward by tomorrow” or overnight or whatever and so it went like that. So I didn’t keep enough information there now to make any record of, just an overall picture.

39:00 **I wanted to ask you about the officers and your COs [Commanding Officers] how – but I know we’re close to the end of the tape.**

Tape 5

00:31 When the war broke out the CO of 77 Squadron was Wing Commander Lou Spence who had been a fighter pilot in the Middle East in World War II but he was the second pilot killed during a ground attack job in September ’50. And the guy sent up to replace him was Dick Creswell who’s still living up in Canberra. In fact he might be

01:00 down on the 4th for this lunch. But he was the CO when I got there. He’d been a fighter pilot in New Guinea during the war on Kittyhawks. So he was there right through my period on Mustangs, he was there until we withdrew and went back to get Meteors but there were also 4 or 5 other officers, flight lieutenants. And then we had the four people

01:30 from England, the Royal Air Force came out to convert us onto the Meteors. They weren’t supposed to fly with us but they did. They got as much flying as they could on Mustangs and they did a heck of a lot of flying. So they got more than they were supposed to but enjoyed it of course as fighter pilots form England. And when we converted over to Meteors over in

02:00 Japan some time in that period Dick Creswell had organised, no, before we moved back to Japan for the Meteors, he and a fellow called Des Murphy who was a flight lieutenant, they managed to get a conversion onto Shooting Stars which were American jet fighters, as a part of the indoctrination into jet flying. So they had, I think they did 10 missions each from a base in

02:30 Japan and that was part of the indoctrination for them to pass onto us about jet operations. And later on after Dick Creswell did his tour on Meteors because he'd done all the Mustang work he was almost ready to be sent home but he got a conversion onto Sabres and did some Sabres with an American squadron as well. Because before we got Meteors it was hoped that we would get

03:00 Sabres instead but the Americans didn't have enough Sabres for themselves at that stage so we were ruled out, we didn't get any. So we put up with Meteors which were second best you might say, from England. They weren't in the same class as Sabres for dog fighting at high altitude. So Creswell came home and the guy that replaced him was Gordon Steege, he'd been a

03:30 Middle East fighter pilot in World War II as well, with the RAAF and he was there for not very long, a few months, but he was more mixed up with the administrative side, didn't do a whole lot of operational flying and I think that ruled against him somehow. He wasn't apparently keen on operational flying it seems so he got posted home and replaced by somebody else. At that stage, he selected to go to

04:00 America for which I'm truly thankful. There was a good will tour organised for somebody from every fighting force in Korea on our side, about 40 people, Turks and Indians and South Africans and Greeks and Australians and New Zealanders, Poms, everybody, and all the Americans of course, marines, air force, navy. So we went across to

04:30 Washington, on the 24th October 1951, United Nations Day, so we took part in a great ceremony in Washington on the steps of, what do you call it, the White House. And then we were sent round America in two halves, one round the north another half round the back or the bottom to indoctrinate people into buying war bonds, donating blood, joining up,

05:00 fighting in the services. We even went to high schools and gave lectures there. But there was a big social round as well, I even had breakfast with Eleanor Roosevelt and met, what's her name, the singer, female singer – millionaires, we stayed in the Waldorf Astoria so it was quite a thing for a young boy from Preston. But then after we'd finished that I think it was for about 19 or 20 days we were given a week's leave in

05:30 San Francisco. Then were told we were going across to France to go to the United Nations building in Paris to meet the United Nations. And so we did that, then we were given more leave and the army fellow, the Australian Army fellow and myself went to London and had about a couple of weeks leave over there. And I think that if we hadn't gone back and said "Here we are" we'd still be there.

06:00 I think we were lost. Anyway, I got sick of England, I flew, hitched a ride back to America and then back to Korea and tried to stay on for another tour but I'd already been posted to Malta so I had to go back home and get ready to go to Malta. But later on I heard from various air force people, pilots in Korea, that I should never had been selected to go to America on a good will tour because I didn't smoke and I didn't drink, I wasn't a typical Australian

06:30 pilot. But I did get on to Rum and Coke over there, that was the start of the decline.

In the States?

Yeah, so it's claret every night now.

So what was expected of you on that good will tour? What were you expected to do?

Oh, just to promote all those things like joining up with the forces, buying war bonds, donating blood, anything at all that was needed to keep the war going in Korea

07:00 or to beat the North Koreans.

And why do you think it was you that was selected from the Australians?

Because I'd just finished a tour, 100 missions was a tour, in fact I'd done 104 plus two in American aircraft as passenger, I'd snuck a couple of trips with them. So being ready to be sent home and not having blotted my copybook I suppose I got selected to go on that tour.

07:30 It was quite a good social occasion actually. Very good high class hotels and food and what.

Had you, you'd already received the citations at that point, the DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal]?

No, I don't think I got that until later on. I think that arrived after I was back in Australia. I had the Air Medal but I think the citation, yeah, the citation came before I went to Malta – I think when I was on

08:00 leave before posting back up. I had a couple of weeks leave here in Melbourne before I went back to Williamtown went into post to convert onto Vampires and then go to Malta. We sailed to Malta from Sydney on the Asturias, it was a migrant ship going back empty.

So we talked about the Air Medal and the Distinguished Flying Medal. You got the Air Medal first,

08:30 **what was that and who?**

That's an American thing which is given on the basis of the number of missions you've done. I've got an idea it was ten so they gave us that once you'd done ten missions. Later on they gave extra ones for people in 77 Squadron who'd done maybe 20 or 30, I don't know, but it was after I'd left and there were only a few who got that. But the Americans I think got the every ten missions anyway. So the DFM was awarded

09:00 after I got home. That had to be approved by the Queen or her mob up there in England.

Now the DFM, was that given for a specific incident?

No, I think for being early for every mission I think, never being late. I don't know. I just suppose never missing out on a mission, doing what was required.

Do you remember what was said in the citation?

Oh, it's in the log book there somewhere.

09:30 The medals are inside too. Here's the air medal one. Presidential unit citation which 77

10:00 Squadron got and there's the DFM so there and there.

Is it possible for you to read out what it said there?

Well the American one is " Dear Sir, I desire to advise you that his Majesty the King has been pleased to arrive of the acceptance of the United States Air Medal which was awarded to your son Sergeant Keith Raymond Meggs by the President of the United States of America for outstanding services rendered by your son

10:30 in operations over Korea. This approval was announced in the Commonwealth of Australia Gazette Number 43 on the 22nd of June 195. On behalf of the Minister for Air and the Members of the Air Board I desire to extend to you congratulations on this recognition of your son's splendid service. Yours faithfully, M.C.Ensloe, Secretary of the Department for Air".

11:00 So that's that one. Unit citation, I don't need to read that out do I?

I'm interested in the DFM though if you could read that out, I'd appreciate that?

This is from the RAAF Chief of Air Staff. "Dear Flight Sergeant, I refer to the award to you of the

11:30 Distinguished Flying Medal which Her Majesty the Queen has been pleased to approve in recognition of your gallant service while engaged in operations in Korea. This award was announced in the London Gazette of the 1st of April 1952. On behalf of myself and the other members of the air board I desire to extend to you our heartiest congratulations on this recognition of your distinguished service. I am enclosing a short length of the ribbon

12:00 of this award and send with it my best wishes for the future. Yours sincerely, Murdoch, Chief of Air Staff". So there we are.

Is there not another one over there, the DFM which sort of described your service as well?

12:30 I don't know, no, that's the unit citation. I think that was the only one in there about the DFM. That's the air medal. Oh, yes, that one.

Yes, what's that one?

That's the Governor General, Commonwealth of Australia, Honours and Awards. Awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. "Flight Sergeant Keith Raymond Meggs, 833283,

13:00 citation, Flight Sergeant Meggs KR has flown a total of 100 operational missions in Mustang and Meteor Aircraft in support of the United Nations Forces in Korea. This non-commissioned officer's aggressiveness and absolute reliability in operations have brought great credit in himself and have contributed greatly to his squadron." So that's that.

13:30 **So the DFM only came basically you were back home when that was awarded?**

Yes, well that had been awarded in April in England in their Gazette by the time the red tape got through – we didn't know about it. I'm not sure we were told about it up there, I don't think we were, I think the first I knew about it was when I was down here when I was on leave before going to Malta.

How many DFMs were there awarded?

14:00 There were 19 awarded in Korea over the whole 3 years. There were about 4 or 5 in the squadron at that time while I was there and a few later and 2 or 3 on Meteors but after that every pilot that went through training in Australia was commissioned out of course so there were no more sergeant and flight sergeant pilots so the DFM was wiped so there's only nineteen world-wide awarded in

14:30 Korea – so that's unique, yes. [Note: The DFM was not awarded to commissioned officers. The equivalent for commissioned officers was the Distinguished Flying Cross].

So you were, for that whole period you were a flight sergeant?

Initially I went up there as a Pilot 3 because after the war, the Royal Air Force in England got rid of NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] pilots and started to called the P4s, Pilot 4s or Navigator 4s, then you went up the ladder to P3s,

15:00 P2s, P1s which were Master Pilots. We followed out here but it became absolutely ludicrous because the rank of a P4 and a P3 was about equivalent to a corporal, well – later in the sergeant's mess you'd just have virtually no disciplinary powers so they got rid of that pretty quickly and we went back to sergeants and flight sergeants. So I

15:30 started back as a sergeant in March '51 and then flight sergeant came while I was in Kimpo on Meteors before I went to Japan, to Japan before I went to the States.

Can you describe to us some of the people in 77 Squadron some of the characters that you remember?

All right. Well

16:00 two of the people that were there initially they'd both been there in BCOF, British Commonwealth Occupation Forces, they went into the war as soon as it started. One of them was the guy that I said lived over the other side of the mountains, well the hills, not the mountains, Les Reading. The other one was Blue Thornton and he was in fact the first guy in the RAAF to get a thousand hours on Mustangs. But between the two of them they liked their beer and they had – I shouldn't tell this, well, I suppose if this isn't shown for

16:30 10 years it doesn't matter. They used to swap their false teeth and chew razor blades, swallow razor blades in the bar, yeah, so they were a couple of characters. There was another character that I knew called Syd Squires.

I don't know what to say about that.

If you ever interview Les ask him how the razor blades are going, Les Reading.

17:00 **Was this just like a dare?**

Just a fun thing in the bar. Another guy called Syd Squires who'd been a pilot who'd trained on Spitfires at the end of World War II but he never became operational. So he was posted into Canberra before I went up to Williamtown to convert onto Mustangs and I used to borrow his car he had an old, something like a Whippet or a Dodge Tourer and he spent all his Saturday nights in the

17:30 bar along with a few others. So I used to borrow his car and drive to Albert Hall to the dances and take a girl home sort of thing. But when he got up to Korea he always had the idea he wasn't going to return, he was a pessimist, he knew he was going to be killed. Sure enough he did on Mustangs. He and another guy, in cloud, obviously collided and both went in and they never found the remains of the aircraft but they were on there way home from a mission somewhere in

18:00 South Korea, poor old Syd Squires and Keith Matthews. Three or four others as I said have been shot down, Don Ellis, Ken Royal, Ralph Strange one of the guys of course did a belly landing forgetting to put the wheels down coming back to Pusan on a Mustang so he wrote off a Mustang but he also wrote off a Meteor later on just out of Iwakuni

18:30 landing in the water, ditching it, in low cloud he couldn't find his way back. So he ended up being an air traffic controller in the air force. Who else was there of note, oh, Ron Howe, he was the guy shot down on the day that I was shot down. He landed south of Seoul on the Han River on a sandbank, picked up by helicopter. But he was of Indian descent, Ron Howe, a little short tubby bloke and he'd been flying Thunderbolts

19:00 in Burma during the war and he was in Canberra while I was there but he got posted up to Korea with the first lot. I'm not sure what happened to him I think he stayed on afterwards but he never flew Meteors he was sent home probably because he'd been there 6 months before I was virtually. And another guy called Alan Frost he was hit by a bullet through the windscreen in a Mustang

19:30 and I think he lost his nerve. He disappeared shortly after but I've heard in years since he joined one of the airlines out of England and he was killed in an airliner crash in North Africa. So I saw something on television recently about an airline crash but it was a different name and I was wondering whether he'd changed his name for that reason but he was the only one killed in the crash – well he died a day later after a forced landing of a

20:00 Hermes airliner. And who else, there was another guy, Blue Thornton, the guy that I told you exchanged razor blades. He was also hit through the windscreen and he came back also with wire, a big cable, across the front of his aircraft because they stretched cables between two hills or mountains, so if you were low flying you might

20:30 fly into them. He got one but he got back all right. Exciting times.

I've got so many questions I don't know where to start. That story at first the cable spread across the, what were the difficulties you faced in terms of the terrain and weather, not just, forget enemy fire?

Well the weather was something we'd never experienced in Australia. We only flew in

21:00 VFR [Visual Flight Rules] conditions over here and beautiful, well, blue skies virtually, well you didn't fly in cloud at that stage although we had done it in formation going down to drop bombs in Dunstan Range in training operations being led by the leader of the squadron who was O.K. on instruments. We weren't, we'd done some instrument training in Wirraways but certainly not enough to make us competent which came later in

21:30 courses later on. So on that occasion when the two aircraft collided, going out on trips up and down roads looking for things you'd fly down valleys in conditions that jut wouldn't be normal down here. Low cloud, snow storms, fog in between valleys and I suppose we were lucky to survive, not to hit something. But down

22:00 here of course in general aviation in ordinary charter flying unless you had instrument rating you couldn't fly in conditions unless you had three miles of visibility. You had to be able to see 3 miles in front of you before you could take off or fly. With an instrument rating which I got anyway you could take off in any weather so it was a benefit from there, learning something up there.

But how bad did visibility get for example in a snowstorm?

22:30 Oh, hard to measure it now. Maybe half a mile, a mile. You'd be flying at low power, low speed just so you had the opportunity for the leader to say "Right, we're going back". I suppose that would happen but I can't recall it in detail but I do remember the very low level of visibility and low cloud which was absolutely not something you encountered down

23:00 here.

What about the, obviously Korea's a very mountainous place?

All over, yes.

How difficult did that make the operation?

Well if, I suppose, you're doing one particular highway that you'd been allotted to go up and follow. If you followed that you knew it was in the valleys. So if you went up and back and kept to that, looked down and saw it down there, the leader, of course, you were following him. You weren't so much navigating as following the leader. If he was

23:30 confident about where he was going you'd eventually get up and there might be a clear spot and you might reach the end of it and you'd just climb up through the cloud or through a gap and come back home over the top. In the training out of Williamtown before we went up there we did a big bombing mission down to Dunstan Downs which was down near Sale which is now in the

24:00 news because of the State Government wanting to put, what do they call it, one of those uranium dumps down there. And we were coming down past Nowra which is the naval base on the East Coast and we were attacked by Sea Furies and, just part of the training, so

24:30 Sea Furies were the navy aircraft. They dived on us and as we turned into them, in my flight, the two Mustangs collided. One, two of the guys that were going up to Korea with us, we were all going to Korea. They both bailed out, they went into the sea, I was circling one of them and I was told to leave them because the navy's got it in hand. So we went on, we landed at Nowra and the navy never picked them up.

25:00 One of them was found later after having suffered a shark attack and they never found the other one.

The guy who'd been attacked by a shark was he alive?

No, no, his head had gone. Gus Mackenzie and Roy Robson, not Roy Robson, Roy Robson came to Korea. Merv, Merv, oh, I can't think, it'll be in the log book there anyway.

25:30 Doesn't matter now I suppose.

Do you know what the cock-up was there?

Yes, they'd turned, one had turned too fast into the other. In fact when you attacked you're supposed to turn as fast as you can but if you're in too tight formation – again which you see in books about all these people flying in tight formation looking for the enemy, you've got to be separated like that. So if this guy turns to the leader you follow him like that or else you can either cross over like that. But they were too

26:00 close and I can remember seeing the whole reduction gear and propeller coming off the aircraft nearest to me - this propeller rotating slowly and the whole nose coming off.

What about, you were told the navy had it under control, there was obviously

miscommunication, what was the story there, did you find out?

Yes, we were told to go and land at Nowra for debriefing but the navy never apparently even saw the two people in the water. It was a couple of miles out to sea, anyway we were over

26:30 Shell Harbour I think it's called. So the navy cocked up and we lost two pilots. Well, they could have been picked up by a launch I suppose if they'd been seen. Merv Greville and Gus Mackenzie, yes, they were the two.

Just now you were talking about attacking in formation and how you were dispelling that

27:00 **myth of there being tight formations. Can you explain how you did attack in formation? What the positioning would be and how that was undertaken in Korea.**

You were in finger 4 which was two pairs. The leader there and number two there, and number three was the leader of the second pair, he'd be there and number four there. But if you were attacking anything in the air you certainly wouldn't leave drop tanks on or bombs. If you were attacking another aircraft or being attacked, you'd drop them to

27:30 enhance your turning ability and your performance. So one pair would go down and the second pair would move back behind if it was only another pair but if they were flying in two pairs, one pair would go there and the other pair to the other pair, the enemy pair. So after that it would get into a melee with everybody going in all directions. Hopefully you'd follow, if there was only one left, after you'd attacked the

28:00 first pair and then it would be two onto one instead of two onto two – it was tactics.

When you were shot down that one time, when you were fired at was it from ground fire?

Ground fire, yes.

Where would they have been obscured or hiding those ground fire?

Oh, possibly on the hillside because we were up somewhere northwest of

28:30 Seoul as I said and Kimpo, and we were up a valley heading towards the northeast and somewhere along that valley I heard the ping. Whether it came from the hillside or a gun down underneath on the ground I don't know but I turned around immediately and headed back.

Can you sort of outline the different operations, you'd be attacking, you just mentioned the power station,

29:00 **can you sort of give a brief list of what they were and maybe we can explore a couple of those operations?**

Well we attacked Pyongyang as well, powerhouse and what were supposed to be ammunition dumps. Pyongyang of course was the centre of North Korea, it still is. Saw it on television the other day and it doesn't look quite the same. Generally we didn't get many of that sort of operation, mostly it was going up

29:30 roads or railway lines. Occasionally there'd be a big strike against something like a power house or an ammunition dump, supposed ammunition dumps. But we lost one of our guys, a flight lieutenant, attacking Pyongyang, a mission that I wasn't on. He was shot down as they were going in and he landed and I saw him getting out of the aircraft and he waved just on the outskirts of Pyongyang. But he was never sighted

30:00 again and he ended up spending 2 ½ years as a prisoner of war - badly treated of course in the North Korean prison camps. And he came back and became the CO of a Sabre Squadron here. A couple of our guys, another of our guys was shot down in Meteors, he also became a POW [Prisoner of War]. He's recently published a book which is up there about his time in North Korean

30:30 prison camps and the horrible treatment they got. He actually escaped but got caught again. There were about 3 or 4 people who got shot down later on in Meteors after I'd left to come home or to go to America. I think there were about 4 or 5 on Meteors that got shot down and quite a few others were killed in Meteors during the changeover from Meteors at high level down to

31:00 ground attack work with rocket rails and strafing because the Meteors – it was decided they weren't good enough to match the Migs because the Migs weren't fighting with us. They were grounded for a little while until they changed over to ground attack work so they finished up the last year or so of the war doing ground attack.

Were you flying them when they were doing ground attack?

31:30 No, I was only air-to-air. I'd gone across to America before that happened. In fact, while I was in America, in Washington, I think it was Washington, somewhere, it might have been New York, I saw the New York Times and it had a big headline about the great dog fight in Korea where about 3 Meteors were shot down. The Migs were shooting down, attacking, they were in the B29 super fortresses and the Meteors were escorting

32:00 them and I think there were about 3 missing - two of them became POWs and one disappeared, we never heard of him again on that occasion. We did quite a few escorts of B29s as well before I left. On one occasion I flew a Meteor 7 which was the 2-seat trainer which an American Army movie camera man in the backseat on an escort of B29s so that he'd

32:30 film them for their archives. Whether it's still around I don't know. But there was another film taken in our Mustang days, I've been trying to get National Film and Sound archive, the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation], Channel 7, a professional organisation to follow it up. On the last mission of Mustangs on the 6th of April 1951

33:00 there was a fellow when four of us got back from the very last mission – the last mission was supposed to be in the afternoon but the weather was so bad it didn't happen. So we were the last and when we got back there was this guy with a camera – and we'd never heard of TV. There was a fellow called Clint Roberts who was doing a thing for some big TV network in the States to interview the last Australian Mustang mission. So myself and three others but no one's ever done anything about

33:30 chasing it up. I thought we should have it in archives here. Well, I can give you the details if you want to follow it up later on.

We might be able to look into it. Well, you've searched the databases here have you, the Australian ones?

Well, I've asked them to follow it up. I think I've even asked the War Academy up in Canberra and we haven't

34:00 got it. But I thought there should have been something done about finding it because it's a historical document – it's the last Mustang missions flown in Korea and the last ever flying with Mustangs anyway, we never went to war with Mustangs again.

Can you tell us about Pusan where you were based with the Mustangs?

On Pusan aerodrome?

What was your set up there and did you get to see

34:30 **much of the town and the people and that sort of thing?**

I think I only went in there once as far as I can remember. We used to walk around the local area. The aerodrome was right on the beachfront, you landed over the beach sort of thing and in the harbour there were ships unloading material into lighters but there wasn't – it was too shallow to come in so they brought them in on lighters. The aerodrome was surrounded by hills, it wasn't a proper

35:00 aerodrome it had pierced steel planking over the mud or the dust in summer and pierced steel planking, I don't know if you know it, it's a metal thing that they make in big strips, that long and that wide, they interlock it and they put it over the surface to stop you going into the mud or into the dust. And of course it throws up mud when you're taking off in winter and dust when you're taking off in summer.

35:30 But we operated out of that, it was a very makeshift sort of operation. It wasn't a proper aerodrome like Tullamarine or Essendon, it didn't even have any permanent buildings. It was just something put there as the war started as we moved down there. We had United States Marines there with Corsairs and Tiger Cats and the United States Air Force squadrons with

36:00 Mustangs and a lot of our replacement parts came from the Americans. They were very good at handing stuff out. They also fed us and the food there was absolutely marvellous compared to what we got with British food. Instead of bully beef and stale bread or whatever, you got eggs over hard or over easy, bacon, pineapple juice, tomato juice, ice cream, apple

36:30 pie, anything you wanted. It was absolutely marvellous, the Americans, the food that they gave us was excellent. We were actually part of an American fighter wing, we were attached to the 35th Fighter Wing, 77th Squadron was part of it, so we got briefed with them every night as well.

So what were the other squadrons there, all the other squadrons were American?

American, yes, either air Force or marines and the transport squadrons used to come in regularly too, probably

37:00 a couple every hour, DC4s, C119s, Dakotas, bringing in supplies and taking out wounded or sick people back to Japan.

So it wasn't like the Aussies kept to themselves, because everyone was there under the UN [United Nations] therefore –

We were all mixed up, yes.

And what did you make of Americans and Poms and say Indians or were there just Americans there?

Just

37:30 Americans at Pusan. They had their own tarmac area and maintenance area and parking area. We were on the other side of the aerodrome and there used to be a bus run round the aerodrome on a regular basis so if we wanted to round to the other side of the aerodrome we'd just hop on the bus which came round probably every ten minutes. But our only shower was round the other side too. The thing called the Choofa which our engineering flight sergeant made. It was something, you dropped

38:00 a drop of oil onto a very hot thing we caused steam of course which heated the water – it was a makeshift type of operation but you'd go round there to have a shower every now and again. So if you were flying in the morning and you weren't going to fly in the afternoon you'd go around and have a shower. But there's also a wrecked American C119 which was an American transport aircraft. That had been wrecked there and the fuselage of that was placed on the end of the

38:30 aerodrome. You'd go there 24 hours a day and get a meal – there was a chef on duty there cooking American food, bacon and eggs, hamburgers, fruit juice, whatever you liked – so that was available all day long for you. So if you missed out at meal times you'd go round there. So the amenities were pretty good.

And how did you get along with the Yanks?

Oh, O.K. I've still got flying suits and equipment that I managed to get off

39:00 them. If we went to Japan to take a Mustang back for maintenance you'd go to the Australian or the British NAAFI [Navy, Army, Air Force Institute], the British were based there as well, and you'd buy a bottle, or Australian canteen, you'd buy a bottle of what we'd call COR Ten which was Corio Whiskey. You'd take that back, you'd get a flying suit or a beautiful winter jacket. Because at that stage the RAAF had no

39:30 winter equipment at all. You'd fly in whatever you had and it wasn't suitable for being down without the heater working or forced down and trying to walk home. You'd freeze to death so you got what you could off the Americans. I've still got my American gear inside – so a bottle of COR Ten was quite good, it was quite amenable for your arrangements with the Americans.

40:00 **But you weren't, you yourself weren't drinking at that point?**

No I wasn't, no.

And what was in general the relationship like between the Aussies and the Americans?

Oh, quite good, yes. We were in different huts for accommodation. We had ours in one lot and the mess was up between their area and ours so we all went to the mess at the same time and sat together and ate and

40:30 whatever, conversed.

What would you generally be chatting about, when you got a chance to relax?

I can't remember anything specific. I don't think it was anything about girls, probably about flying.

Where there girls in Pusan?

No, No. They wouldn't have toured in Korea apart from, there was one

41:00 American correspondent, Margaret, she was very well known in Time Magazine, I think she might have come down [Marguerite Higgins, New York Herald-Tribune]. Later on at Kimpo we had Gladys Moncrieff and Mabel Nowson her pianist, they came and entertained us but they were just flown in from Japan and probably went to two or three bases, army bases as well, and flown back and I think we probably had a couple of

41:30 American entertainers as well but I can't recall them. So the entertainment was there, we also had films occasionally and that was it.

Tape 6

00:31 **Can we sort of discuss the same sort of things with Kimpo, Seoul anyway, the base there, what was the set up like there.**

Kimpo was the major airport for Seoul that was the capital of Korea and that was attacked on the first couple of days because there were North Korean aircraft there at that stage after they'd driven across the border. That was before I got there but United Nations aircraft

01:00 attacked aircraft on the ground, destroyed quite a few of them and they were also used to evacuate people out of there back to Japan, the DC4s and so forth. So the main terminal building which was nothing like the terminals you see now, just a big concrete three or four storey building. As I recall, on the far side of the aerodrome from where we were, that was pretty much bombed and

01:30 shelled and when we got there with the Meteors the Americans were already there. They'd resurfaced the tarmac area and laid down pierced steel planking to cover up the mud and the dust and whatever. It was actually summer when we got back with the Meteors, July, late August, July, sorry, late July early August. I think I made a mistake there earlier so you can get them to correct that if that's the case.

02:00 But Kimpo was fairly busy it had Shooting Stars there which were American aircraft which were used then for photo reconnaissance. We had Sabres there and we had our Meteors, we had search and rescue amphibians from the American Air Force, Albatrosses which I managed to get a trip in one of them. Dakotas and Skymasters coming in all the

02:30 time and probably C119s as well, Tiger Cats, all sorts of everything because we were well forward at that stage and it was a fairly busy operational base. So being summer one of the things we did have drawing back or causing a problem on our aircraft was melting tar. When you taxi down the taxiway, the tar being so

03:00 soft it would fly up on the bottom of the Meteors. Anything hanging on the bottom is like barnacles on a boat so one of the things I used to do and probably most other people was to get a bucket of kerosene or petrol, I'm not sure which it was now, and go out in my shorts and sandals when I wasn't flying and clean my aircraft for every extra mile an hour that I could get. But I can still smell that beautiful smell of burnt

03:30 kerosene from the engines, absolutely beautiful.

What does it evoke for you that smell?

Oh, nostalgia. I wish I was there again, I wish I was flying Meteors again, I don't suppose I wish I was at war. But there's one Meteor flying in Australia now based up at Temora. I've seen it on the ground, I haven't seen it flying yet. But Meteors, they used to have, with the four guns on the nose they had

04:00 shoots at the bottom of the bridge of the cannon and as they flew past at high speed at low level those shoots would make the most magnificent whistling noise. It was just a magic blue note but then in the latter days of Meteor operations in the air force here they'd taken those off. And I remember an air force display down at Laverton and there were Meteors in the display and I think it might have been about the last

04:30 war, there was no note, it was what you might call a bastardised Meteor. So this one up at Temora I think has still got it so if you ever hear it listen out for that beautiful blue note.

What was it like because you said you were in that last mission with the Mustangs and when you landed you were interviewed by –

Clint Roberts.

Clint Roberts. What was it like saying farewell to the Mustangs which you'd been flying and working on for so

05:00 **long?**

Well we flew them back to Japan the next day and we did do some more flying on them. In fact one of the things to be done over there was spraying the aerodrome with DDT [pesticide] to kill all the mosquitos that were around. So occasionally, if you were lucky you'd get a flight on that or you'd do a cross country just to practice navigation. In fact we lost a guy I mentioned earlier, Roy Robson, who I got mixed up with Merv Greville, they were mates in

05:30 Australia but Roy Robson came up and one night we were doing a Mustang cross country, sort of 10 minutes apart, out to Matsuyama Island, out east of Iwakuni and somewhere up to Kure perhaps and back just for a practice run. And he caught fire about ten minutes ahead of me and he never bailed out he just went straight in. so that was the loss of one Mustang, we don't know why he did it, why he didn't bail out

06:00 but – so Mustangs we flew occasionally but then most of them were given to the South Korean Air Force, they weren't sent back to Australia.

So in 77 Squadron there were a number of losses, how many men went down?

Oh altogether in Mustangs and Meteors I think it was 39 right from the first day of the war to

06:30 July '53 when the war ended.

In your time, how many losses were there?

Nine. Nine on Mustangs, Meteors, oh, just that Ron Mitchell who collided and the RAF [Royal Air Force] fellow and they were the only ones I think on Meteors when I was there.

When those incidents happened what sort of effect would that have on the morale in general?

07:00 I can't recall anything deleterious to anybody, you just accepted it as one of those things you trained for.

You were anxious to get into the air force and become a fighter pilot, you became a fighter pilot and if you got lost, well – I don't think it had any, not to me anyway, I often think about what affect it had on my morale or mind and I cannot recall

07:30 any, anything that I – and that's honestly I'm not trying to hide anything but I can't think of anything that sort of upset me.

What about with other men in the squadron though did you see it sometimes having an impact on them?

There was two guys that were sent home, that guy that I said ended up, I think, well he was killed in North Africa and I think it might have been him changing his name, recently on television,

08:00 and another fellow who was on my course back at Point Cook. He was absolutely, what would you call him, he went US [unserviceable] on taxiing out so often, his oil pressure would be low or something was wrong, he did it so many times and the spare would have to take his place, the CO, Dick Creswell, eventually sent him home. And I think that was the end of his air force career.

08:30 I know he ended up in Canada with an aircraft company over there, De Havilland, but I don't know whether he continued flying or not but he was obviously not made out to be a fighter pilot or ground attack pilot.

What did you need to have, what was the essence do you think of a good fighter pilot?

Oh I suppose some sort of determination and a desire to get on top of the enemy somehow.

09:00 prove yourself, having been trained to be one you wanted to prove yourself and the big drawback is that I never got anything in the air. Because we didn't see anything in the air in Mustangs and in my time anyway they were all – anything there was had been shot down in the early days and nothing more came down. In the Migs, we never managed, apart from me chasing one and not being able to catch him

09:30 and being shot at by them there was no other ways of meeting them so that was a drawback.

What did you make, I mean I know you only had a few encounters in terms of aerial combat but what did you make of the skills of the enemy pilots?

Not much because of their training regime which might have lasted four weeks. Where they'd

10:00 fly for perhaps a week backwards and forwards high above you and then they'd detach two or four, probably four, at a time from the formation of about 12 or 16 just dive through you learning how to get as close as they could onto your tail and fire. But that gradually built up and up until probably the last of the, I'm not sure if it was four or six weeks now –

10:30 well we covered that earlier anyway didn't we.

Yes we did. O.K. Can you sort of talk us through or describe to us the Meteor. The look of it the shape, the feel and the sensation of being in one, what was it like to fly?

Well there's a model of one there, see the middle one?

The one with the star, yes?

If you'd like to hold it in your hand

11:00 and look at it then I can describe it.

I'll look at it over my shoulder.

It's a single seat jet fighter with two engines, it had four cannon in the nose alongside you, firing forward, it had a big tank in the fuselage behind the cockpit and a 170 gallon drop tank under the belly which later on proved to be very dangerous, you might say, a lot of people apparently got hit by ground fire in that

11:30 tank which was right underneath the belly, a big tank, and I think we lost a few Meteors through that which was in the air to ground operation. It was pressurised, as you closed the canopy, the thing was pressurised so that you got ground level, not ground level, but probably 10,000 feet or 20,000 feet pressure when you were up at 30 or 35,000. You also naturally had oxygen which we

12:00 also had in Mustangs in case we were flying high, but we didn't in Mustangs really. It was a nice aeroplane actually. The first jet aircraft we got onto after Mustangs, it was quite exciting. The first I knew about it was going to happen was when I was home on leave in Preston, just before I went back up to Williamtown to be brought up to Sydney I think to be

12:30 posted to Korea. And when I was home at leave for that week in the news Mr Menzies [Robert Menzies, then Prime Minister of Australia] announced Australia was going to equip 77 Squadron with Meteors – so great excitement. Here I was going to go up there and convert onto Meteor jet fighters which took two or three months but still it was quite a kick. It was a beautiful aeroplane – I wish I was still flying them amongst other things.

13:00 **I want to ask, we've sort of gone there a couple of times talking about – now with the Meteor it was set up, it was basically there for air-to-air so was there ever any need for air-to-ground or was the Meteor not, sort of?**

Afterwards when they were found as unsuitable by the hierarchy, as not suitable to mix with Migs at high altitude they were

13:30 also put on to B29 escorts which I had done a few of. But they lost a few in December '51 through Migs attacking the B29s and the Meteors and after that they were relegated to ground attack work which I think was probably wrong but they did quite well at that anyway by fitment of those rocket rails and bomb racks. So they carried rockets and bombs.

14:00 **And were you doing that as well at that time?**

No, I'd left for America before they were taken off air to air work. So one of my last missions I think might have been a B29 mission, I'm not sure – I'd have to look at my log book to see what that was. And we took Meteors back to Japan for maintenance as well, took one back and brought another one home as they ran out of hours or got a bit of damage.

How long was the flight from

14:30 **Kimpo or Pusan to Iwakuni, it was back to Iwakuni for all those trips?**

Yeah, oh, in a Meteor probably, I don't know, maybe three quarters of an hour. I can look it up in there and get a definitive figure if you want. In the Mustangs it was more.

And when you were in Japan and you went back to Iwakuni how long would you be based there?

Just overnight. Sometimes you'd

15:00 come back in the same day if you went in the morning there'd be another aircraft for you to take back and you just exchanged aircraft and came straight back again. K14 to Iwakuni, one hour ten, but that might have been with a let-down through cloud as well with GCA [Ground Control Assistance].

15:30 I didn't think it was that long in Meteors but in Mustangs it would have been longer.

What was the maximum speed of both Mustangs and the Meteors?

Oh the Mustangs it would have been, well, we never used maximum speed of course, it would have been, well, with everything hanging under the wings probably about 390, 400 miles an hour with full

16:00 power to wind up. With the Meteor it would have been 600. Iwakuni K9, one hour twenty in Mustang. So ten minutes difference there but I don't know whether we did a let down as well in the Meteors from high altitude to let down through cloud perhaps so I didn't think it was an hour ten but still I might be wrong.

So if you were back to

16:30 **Japan and you were there for the day and stayed the night what would you do? Was that like a bit or respite for you?**

Oh a rest, yes. Go to the PX [American canteen unit], I bought some plastic model aeroplane kits which the Americans had which I'd never seen before in Australia so I've still got those upstairs. They were made up into aircraft, a Sabre, Shooting Star – I never completed them actually but they're still here. And buy some chocolate milk shake in cans which the

17:00 Americans had – that was a luxury because I was into milkshakes, I still am and some luxuries in the PX which is the American Post Exchange, much better than the NAAFI, which was the Navy, Army, Air Force Institute, the English thing, which we had another name for but I won't tell you in mixed company.

You can tell us, she's heard it all before.

They were called DCAs here in Australia, the

17:30 NAAFI. It was No Ambition and something else intelligence.

Spell it if you don't want to say it, tell us, these are good details.

All right. No Ambition and Fuck All Intelligence. That's what we called the Department of Civil Aviation here – they're still named the same as far as I'm concerned.

18:00 **Did you have much to do with, I know in Korea it's still war torn and it's refugees and it's a mess but in Japan this was 5 years after the war, were you ever able to mix with the locals there?**

Oh quite a lot, yes. We were just outside Iwakuni village and we used to go in there shopping and visit what, they weren't what you call night clubs in those days, just some sort of little social gathering, pubs.

And we were quite friendly, we had a Japanese working force working on the

Mustangs for instance and the Meteors they were employed by the RAAF. In fact I met one of the well known Japanese pilots from World War II in a shop in Iwakuni. He was running a toy shop so I got to meet him but I never saw him again, I don't suppose.

Were you able to sort of exchange pleasantries?

For a little while yes. I was taken in

by one of the guys who'd been out there with BCOF, one of the sergeant ground staff blokes, he introduced me so it was just a matter of saying hello and a few words but I at least met him.

What had you heard about him. Was he sort of an ace?

He was a Japanese Ace on Zeros during the war but long since dead of course.

So relations were reasonably good?

Oh, quite O.K, yes.

No hassles at all, quite safe in Japan. They'd been indoctrinated by General Macarthur and the occupation forces and of course America was giving them great amounts of aid in all manners, all fashions, so there was no problem there.

Now what about in Korea, the South Koreans, obviously the South Koreans you had to come into contact with, were you working alongside

South Koreans very much?

Yes, we had South Korean room girls eventually at Pusan. Just after I got there they started employing room girls to make your bed, clean your shoes, do your washing sort of thing, sweep the floor. So they took the load off the pilots who might be flying too much or getting too tuckered out to worry about such things. But you'd go down walking down the roads

and they'd be there carting home fire woods or whatever. And they were quite amenable, they'd stop and let you take their pictures for instance, no problems at all. They knew we were on their side.

Any other particular specifics of contacts that you may have had?

Nothing that comes immediately to mind. I remember going up to

Mitsu what's the name of the island, another island, up Kure with Ron Guthrie, the fellow who was shot down in the Meteor from the highest point ever at that stage, 38,000 feet, he bailed out and he got frozen on the way down he got shot up and he was a prisoner of war. But two room girls and he and I went up to this island were there was a big, what they call a

shrine which you went out to by boat. And there was a, not a museum, a zoo with deer and we spent a day there – very entertaining, very nice. So that was one of the social events on a day off at Iwakuni. Went into Hiroshima, saw the remains of where the bomb blast hit. In fact there's a piece of, there it is, this comes from the –

You just lost your leash there.

You've lost yours too.

You're keeping us on our toes, that's for sure.

We did a day trip up to Hiroshima and we went right to the area where the atomic bomb had dropped above that shrine and that's supposedly a piece of that shrine. There was some priest there flogging them

off for I don't know what, it was a minimum amount of money. So that's part of it's engraved, not engraved, it's endorsed.

Yes, "To Mr Keith Meggs from the priest of (can't read that) from the explosion centre of Hiroshima"

So it might still be radioactivity so I hold no responsibility.

It's been a few years.

58 years, yes. We also went up to a place near, well about 50miles south of Tokyo, it was a leave centre, everybody got a week's leave while you were at Iwakuni. And that was the most beautiful place you'd ever see – it was built for millionaires pre war. It was a great big hostel right on the cliff front and we had everything served, there was girls bringing us food, girls doing our

washing for the whole week. And there was a beautiful swimming pool. You could go down to the cliff face and you could see the Japanese female pearl divers diving for pearls so that was a magic holiday

you might say. What did they call it, Kowana Hostel, so I presume it's back to millionaire status now.

So how long were you in Japan all up?

24:00 We got back on the 7th of April and we went back to Korea on the end of July. April, May, June, July - four months. We didn't get back initially because General Robinson who was chief of BCOF insisted that all Meteors be fitted with automatic direction finding equipment which they didn't have. The Americans had them in their Sabres and he reckoned we needed them so we wouldn't get lost so then a big

24:30 argument went on about that for I don't know for over a month or so perhaps. Finally it was arranged that because we couldn't get them in numbers in a hurry that one in every four would be fitted so I think those pieces of equipment came from England and they had to be fitted somewhere in the cockpit. I don't think I ever flew one with an ADF but somebody in the flight always had one. So if you couldn't find your way home the bloke would have been lost, that was the

25:00 end of you, you couldn't find your way home could you, you didn't know which way to go. But that was one reason we didn't get back to Korea earlier than we did for that reason.

So you're talking about that period in between the Mustangs and the Meteors are you?

Yes, after we'd converted to Meteors while we were waiting to get back to Korea, held up at Iwakuni for that to be resolved.

So held up just basically R & R [Rest and Recreation] it was sort of a holiday in a way?

25:30 I think we were still doing training, still flying, but I suppose in that period we might have got our week's leave because we'd basically finished the basic training we needed but we were sort of getting a bit better with the further weeks whatever.

How difficult was the transition, the conversion from Mustangs and Meteors?

Not really, not at all. I think I did

26:00 one or two trips in the Meteor 7 with a Royal Air Force instructor in the back and then off on the Meteor 8, the fighter. So it wasn't much at all. The main thing was to train you how to handle an engine failure. With two engines, if one engine fails, you've got all the power in one side, it wants to turn you. We'd done a bit of that in Oxfords there at Point Cook and just that indoctrination

26:30 in the Meteors and really what the safety speed was. If you had an engine failure below the safety speed there was no way you could halt it from turning so you had to close the other throttle and land straight ahead. So I think it was two trips in the Meteor and I was away in the Meteor 8. But later on when Randy Green was up there they had a training organisation at Iwakuni to train new pilots from Australia, give them a proper

27:00 training regime.

Did you ever have a problem like that with losing an engine?

No, luckily. If you were at high speed it wouldn't make any difference, you'd fly back on one and land at a higher speed than normal, that's all. If you lost it at low speed that's when you were in trouble, too much power on one side and not enough control, movement, to keep the

27:30 aircraft straight and level.

I just wanted to discuss a little bit more of the sorts of missions that you were flying. We were asking about actually firing upon ground forces, North Korean ground forces – we've heard some, we've read the history books about North Koreans hiding amongst the refugees, that sort of thing, did you, were you aware of that or did any of your squadron come across that sort of thing?

We were briefed that it was happening

28:00 but you couldn't do much about it because you couldn't go shooting up three or four hundred civilians in case there might have been one or two infiltrators coming down, snipers. We were sniped at from the hills around Pusan for quite a while after I'd got there, there were still North Koreans up there firing at aircraft as they went past.

We were talking about the North Koreans?

You'd get briefed on the fact that infiltrators were coming down

28:30 and you couldn't really shoot up the roads which were just dirt tracks full of refugees. But soon after they were moving north again, the North Koreans were driven back, but there were still snipers in the hills if you were at low level.

Is it possible for you to sot of describe to us a successful

29:00 **mission. Pick on that maybe particularly hangs in the memory that you thought was quite a**

rousing success. Just the sensation of finding the target and locking on and then?

Well, can't remember what those three tanks were that were marked on the map. I can recall attacking a railway tunnel which we thought there was a train in there full of supplies so we bombed the mouth of the

29:30 tunnel to blow it down so the train was trapped in there. I can't recall what we did at the other end whether we went to the other end or not. I can recall hitting those troops crossing that big paddock and as I say they were in quilted jackets, winter jackets, which the North Koreans used, probably the South Koreans had them too but I can recall quite a lot of them crossing a big

30:00 field. There was a village somewhere nearby and maybe they were making for that so we strafed them to get rid of them. That's about all apart from bombing roads, we'd go up and were given a road, one of those big, not highways but big tracks. You'd bomb one end of it and you'd go up and bomb the other end so if there was anything kept along the way hidden in villages during the day there was

30:30 no way they could get out and down unless a work party came out and detoured round the road through the rice paddies which was a bit difficult of course because rice paddies are all full of water. So they had their problems in that respect. That was quite a common thing, to go and bomb roads and if you didn't find trucks and carts you'd just destroy the roads as much as you could. Two 500 pound bombs on, say, two aircraft,

31:00 2,000 pounds of bombs along the way – if you hit the road you'd blow a reasonable hole in it. Probably then the North Koreans got the South Koreans to come out and fill it up and whip them or something.

With the train tunnel for example can you just sort of talk us through like beat by beat the actual finding of the target and what communication was going on in the squadron and your role in it?

It wouldn't have been a squadron, it would have been just

31:30 two of us. And you'd fly along the railway line and you'd come to a tunnel and if you were lucky there might be a bit of smoke coming out of it so you'd say right, whoever was the leader would come in first, number one and number two, and say "Here's the target, I'll see how I go". The first one would go and drop perhaps his two 500 pound bombs if we had bombs on board – sometimes you wouldn't. If you had napalm you'd try and get napalm into the thing

32:00 which wasn't as good as a bomb to close the tunnel off. But if you closed the tunnel the second aircraft would then go on keeping his bomb to go up and look for something else but I can't actually recall a train on a track in my day. In the earlier days up in the first four or five months they had been finding them but then they were doing all the travel at night and the American Air Force were using

32:30 B26 Invaders, they were flying out of Iwakuni and they were finding those by just seeing lights going along and they'd drop bombs on them and rockets. So how good they were at night I don't know but there were also Dakotas, Douglas C47s, going out at night dropping flares for

33:00 aircraft to bomb and strafe. And I managed to get a trip in one of those from, it must have been from Kimpo I think, a night trip, just going up to North Korea and dropping flares so anything could be picked out by the United States Navy Corsairs which were then dive-bombing targets in North Korea so they'd work together and be on a common frequency.

Did you do any night flying on your

33:30 **own?**

Only pre-dawn take offs and post-dark landings. A few of those, not many, but we did night cross-country of course back in Iwakuni but we didn't do any night flying as such after targets in the valleys, a bit dicey.

So is there a difference when it comes to like if you're firing upon a

34:00 **road or a truck or train, that sort of thing, and like that example you were talking about the Koreans crossing the paddock, in terms of your job and what you've got to do is there a difference at all in your frame of mind when you're doing that sort of thing?**

Well, no, you had to get rid of the enemy and whatever it took, you did whatever with whatever you had on board, bombs or rockets or napalm or machine guns, anything at all. Nothing, we didn't have any

34:30 qualms about it because they were out killing anyone they could get of ours and the thing was to kill them before they killed either South Koreans or any of us. So that's the way war goes I guess and the fellows in Iraq are facing the same thing although they're in a different position now.

Can you think or any, just before we move onto other areas, any

35:00 **other sort of missions, ops that might be noteworthy that you can maybe talk us through, anything that comes to mind. You did 102 of them?**

104 in Mustangs and 2 in American aircraft. Oh sorry, no 62 in Mustangs and 42 in Meteors, yeah, sort

of half and half.

35:30 That was about all apart from the search and rescue one in the Drummond Albatross which was an SA16, an American Amphibian operating out of Kimpo. They went out every time there was a big mission up north and they flew up the west coast of Korea up to a place called Chodo Island. And Chodo had a place where any of our guys who were badly hit wanted to belly land or

36:00 bail out they could go to Chodo and get picked up because the American and British Navy were patrolling up and down that coast to keep the North Koreans away. So Chodo had an organisation on board where you could be picked up, rescued and picked up. But this Drummond Albatross also flew up and down the coast while a mission was on with Sabres and Meteors or ground attack aircraft to fly

36:30 off shore and if anybody bailed out into the sea it would land and pick them up. But while I was on board nobody bailed out so I didn't get to see anybody picked up but that was on for every trip.

Can you talk to us a bit about the sort of relationships back at base with ground crew, between you and the ground crew, I mean how, obviously -

37:00 Oh quite good. In fact I've got a letter there I've got to answer, a fellow who was in ground crew up there on Meteors and he might be at this lunch, no he won't be at the lunch, he'll be at a lunch in December perhaps. But I thought he might well like to fill in for this interview as well although he's not very well so it's up to them to decide in Orange but yes we had good relationships with the ground crew. Some of them we'd known before at

37:30 Point Cook or at Canberra or Williamtown, no problems there with ground crew. They did a very good job because they had to get up, with Mustangs in winter, they'd probably be up at 3 or 4 o'clock to get aircraft ready for us to take off at 6, before daylight for instance. They'd have to load them up with armaments whatever the mission called for from the briefing, what targets we were going

38:00 for, how many aircraft were going out and to make sure they were refuelled, they'd run the engines to make sure they were warm and ready for us to start up. We'd all start up together and taxi out behind the leader in the order we were briefed for, 1, 2 and 3 and 4 and the spare bloke, the one I told you about before, he'd go U/S, no he wasn't the spare, he was the bloke that was replaced by the spare. Invariably he'd go

38:30 U/S, he'd taxi back "Oh, there's something wrong with my aircraft" and the spare would get a ride then so that's why he got sent home during the Mustang period.

When that chap actually did take off what sort of a pilot, fighter pilot was he?

Oh, hard to say. He'd just be somewhere in the formation, you don't know, he was able to keep formation but if you got into a combat situation you don't know

39:00 how he'd really react whether he'd find something U/S beforehand and turn round and come home and that seemed to be what his reaction was.

Back with the ground crew now you knew the Mustang probably as well as anybody, so I can imagine you maybe had a bit of a reputation with the ground crew, if there was something wrong you probably had your fingers in it?

Oh probably not, no. There's one aircraft called A68715, that was a bit of a rogue

39:30 aircraft because 3 people had engine failures on take off or an engine misfiring in the air. And I can recall they had it in a tent over the nose, they'd changed magnetos, they'd changed carburettors they'd changed induction manifolds but it still played up. And eventually it was the one that Ces Sly, he bailed out of. I was with him up there, just the two of us, and

40:00 I first saw him on fire. I said "You're burning Ces, get out". So what he didn't do, to bail out of a Mustang you had to pull the emergency release for the canopy to fly off. You had to put your seat down and put your head right down so you didn't get hit but he didn't do that he just ran to the back. And when he got to bail out and the aircraft was then going like that, it was actually burning, smoke coming out of it, we were in North Korea, it was going down like that and as he tried to get

40:30 out his parachute down here got caught in the top of the canopy. So he eventually kicked himself free at about 400 feet I think just in time for the parachute to open. But that was the aircraft that we'd been having trouble with it and I'd had an aborted take off with it, same aircraft, some time I think in March. About 4 people had trouble with it but they never cured it but that certainly cured it, it never came back.

Tape 7

00:42 **So Mustangs you took whatever you could get?**

We took whatever was allotted to us during the planning for the squadron by the operations officer he'd say "right, there are 6 Mustangs there, 8 Mustangs, so you will fly that one, you will fly that one" It was just put up on the board so you went to that one. If a Mustang had a

01:00 problem it would go in for maintenance during the day and you couldn't say, well, I'm going to have that one tomorrow, it might be having a plug changed. Because with a piston engine spark plugs could give trouble fairly readily. Whereas on jet aircraft there are no plugs so they didn't have plug changes so that was one of the things that you could have the aircraft down for.

Some of them,

01:30 **well, I've heard that some of them would get a battle weary and they would have a hole in them or dents or, which could affect the way the plane flew. Was that the situation with you?**

It was. Up in, well, that time we got hit in the fuel tank in the starboard fuel tank, I was losing fuel on the way back. They took the bottom door off which is the tank door behind the wheel between the bomb bay. They'd take that

02:00 off, drop the tank out, put a new tank in, put it back up again and they'd do that there. They would probably have got a spare tank from the Americans because I imagine that possibly we didn't have spare tanks there. But we could get things off the Americans fairly easily. It might well have been that one was flown across from Iwakuni but then I don't know but that aircraft would have been flying again the next day probably. They did things like that, minor things they would fix there but if it was anything

02:30 major it would be flown back to Iwakuni. If it was too badly damaged it had to be scrapped. That one that I mentioned, the guy that did the belly landing coming back to Pusan, that was just scrapped. I've got a picture of that in the scrap yard sitting up on 44 gallon drums, all bent wings, so that never flew again. But I guess it supplied spares for anything that was wanted it might have been a new taken out of it

03:00 or a replacement gun or gun sight or something so they were always used as much as possible.

So there was never a bit deal sort of adjusting to whatever aircraft you got into?

No. they were basically all the same, identical. The 4 Australian built Mustangs that we got up there in the last couple of weeks – I know the numbers of those 121, 125,

03:30 130 and I've forgotten the 4th one, but they came up because we were losing so many American Mustangs and the squadrons were becoming depleted. So Dick Creswell had ordered 4 and they came from Richmond almost at Christmas time '50, but would you believe they were held up over the Christmas period because of a wharf strike. They weren't loaded for some weeks on the ship to come to Japan and I've got that in reports, in writing.

04:00 So we got them up there, they came across, of course they had to be cleaned and so forth and assembled at Iwakuni then they were flown across. And they were used for, I think it was about the last two weeks of the Mustang operation and then one was lost in Japan during that night cross-country and the other three as far as I can find out from records they never came back so I think they might have been given to the South Koreans,

04:30 like a lot of the American ones we had.

But this was after you'd returned?

After we'd withdrawn with Mustangs, yes.

Now I hope you don't mind but I wouldn't mind going back to the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation days – I mean we've covered it, you know, quite well I think but I'm just wondering if there's any more that you can tell us about the work there, the building of military planes,

05:00 **and apparently you were repairing American planes?**

Yes, repairing and even with the Liberators they had, initially, in the nose they had a turret which was hand operated and that proved to be inadequate up in New Guinea because Japanese fighters were attacking from the nose, head on. So one of the jobs done at Fisherman's Bend in the Yank hangar was to take the tail turret, not the ones out of the tail, but new ones they got shipped out which was a power-operated turret and

05:30 fit it in the nose to make it more amenable and power operated. So that was done down there until finally Qantas got the job up at Dangarfield to take on all of that. The C47s were Dakotas that came down with bullet holes in them from up north for repair. There was a C47 converted into a VIP [Very Important Person] aircraft for an American Navy Admiral called Carpenter who was in charge of

06:00 all the Australian and American Navy over in West Australia where the submarine base was for submarines out in the Indian Ocean plus all the other ships. So he got a conversion done at CAC into his aircraft for VIP travel which probably wasn't necessary, it was war-time of course, but I've got a picture of the inside of that with fancy tables and drinking material, fancy seats. Still, that's part of the

06:30 aircraft industry isn't it, what Macarthur or Carpenter wanted they got.

So that workshop down there was servicing and maintaining planes that were being used in the Pacific, the American planes up there.

Yes, not too many for too long because the Americans soon after I think in late '43 they all moved up to Townsville because the war had moved forward so far that everything

07:00 was moved up including the hangar which was a big, what they called a Butler Hangar, as against the smaller hangars which were Bellman. Bellman hangars are still about in fact you can probably still find a Butler Hangar somewhere about, they were much bigger, they'd hold Liberators, but they were dismantled – the one there was dismantled and shipped up to Townsville. The Americans did all their new aircraft coming in by sea, all their maintenance and all their repair up there at

07:30 Townsville so we lost out on that then.

But up at that time that was what was being done at Fisherman's Bend?

Yes.

So the assembly of the American planes?

Yes after they were towed off the ships down there at Port Melbourne. When I say assembly they were perhaps brought round without their wings on or without part of the fuselage and they would be assembled after they were cleaned off with steam hoses to get the grease off them

08:00 and the tape which kept any water, sea water getting into them. They were assembled and test flown and off they went.

So what was your involvement in those workshops?

Not there at all with the Americans, no. They had virtually gone by the time I went down to the flight hangar. There was an American United States Naval and Army Attaché based in Melbourne and they had aircraft based in their hangar and I worked on those a bit and I got a

08:30 couple off flights in them with the Americans and in fact one of them lived in East Preston, one of the United States Navy blokes, and he was a non-commissioned pilot so one Saturday I went with him and flew over East Preston, round and round, and saw home, East Preston from the air. So they were there for well long after I'd left the CAC organisation then they moved out to Essendon after the war. And

09:00 also Associated Airlines were there as well which was BHP's [Broken Hill Proprietary] private airline. They were used during the war, the Lockheed 12, to even fly Menzies about because at that stage there were no VIP aircraft. Menzies or anybody else would travel between Melbourne and Canberra by train but if it was an urgent job and they wanted to go somewhere he'd call on BHP to fly him and even Makin, no I think by the time Makin was in,

09:30 it might have, they might have got a Dakota form the Air Force, yeah.

There weren't any passenger planes?

There were but you had to have a very high priority. People travelling between Melbourne and Sydney in DC3s, the airlines had still DC3s but very few because a lot of them had been taken over by the Air Force or been converted into something, being repaired. I don't know you might get

10:00 one or two flights a day between Melbourne and Sydney. At that stage they were 21 passenger aircraft so you can imagine there wasn't a lot of room for people to travel up and the priority was given to people who had a defence job on hand. Perhaps the Minister for Defence going up or the Minister for the Navy going up to inspect Cockatoo Dockyard or Garden Island something like that. So civilian passengers got a very rough

10:30 time even on trains.

So what was the sort of output at the CAC?

In aircraft? Well, we could turn out 35 to 40 Wirraways and Boomerangs a month at one stage. That was in late '43, early '44 and we were also developing a twin-engine bomber then the prototype of which had first flown in September 1941.

11:00 And that was developed into what they call the CA11, the Woomera, and the first one which had a lot of deficiencies in its aerodynamics that flew until the 15th January 1943 a week before I started at CAC. And it crashed up at Kilmore. It had an engine fire which caused it to blow up and one guy out of three got out of it. But the CA11, the production one, was on the production line,

11:30 we had an order for 105 of them. And there were nineteen actually on the line with the first one flying when on the 27th September '44, the War Cabinet decided it was no longer wanted because the war was moving on, it was too late to build them so within a day they were all being scrapped, cut up with bulldozers and axes, except the first one which did some test flying in the air force just to evaluate the test

12:00 procedures.

So did you witness the scrapping of these planes?

Well I was working on it actually. Before I went down to the flight hangar I was actually working on the first set of wings and centre section, riveting them, and the first set of wings are still in occupation down near Morwell I've seen a photograph in the last twelve months of it. The first wing that I worked on for the Woomera. A bloke who collects aircraft

12:30 scrap, well not scrap, pieces for museum purposes, he owns it. And he sent me up a photocopy of a coloured photograph of it actually.

So what did they do, I mean scrapping those planes I imagine it's an awful lot of metal, it's an awful lot of material, what did they do with it?

Probably most of the aluminium went through furnaces for melting down and feeding into whatever came in the next year of the war virtually. It was scrapped in

13:00 September '44 and the war ended in August '45 although the, what do you call it, wasn't signed until September so there was virtually twelve months of initially being put into Bellman hangars down near the flight hangar and then gradually being taken off to scrap metal yards. In fact one turret remains, apart from the wing, in the museum down at Moorabbin airport. There's one sighting turret had one of those

13:30 it might have been the first one.

The Woomera?

The Woomera, yes. So that's all as far as we know that's left instead of keeping one for a Museum. They scrapped everything after the war Boomerangs, Beauforts, Beaufighters. Yeah, hundreds of aircraft just melted down no thought whatsoever to keep any for a museum. Luckily we've got a few people now who have found pieces of Boomerangs all over the country.

14:00 In fact I've sent one of our guys over to Kalgoorlie where I was operating at one stage. I said there's bits of Boomerang over there so he drove from Melbourne to Kalgoorlie and brought back bits of Boomerang and he's built it right up except for the wings and there's now two flying, people who have done just that and rebuilt them. So we've got some Boomerangs, some local designed fighter.

14:30 **So there's no, what else are there still examples of like the Beaufighters, the Beauforts?**

Yes, there's a Beaufighter down at Moorabbin museum, not flying. It can't fly for one reason because it can't get serviceable propellers. It's got propellers on that are suspect so it wouldn't fly. There's another one being rebuilt up at Sydney and there's another one at a museum in Sydney. There's one of our Australian ones in England, one of the British ones that was out here over

15:00 in America at Dayton, Ohio, in the American Air Force museum so that's all we know of, Beaufighters out here. There's one Beaufort up in Brisbane being rebuilt to fly and conditioned but that's been going for probably oh 15 years and there's probably about another 5 years to go. There's one in the War Memorial at Canberra,

15:30 non-flying. What else, Australian built – Wirraways, there's quite a few of those flying now, probably about 5 or 6 or 7 Wirraways flying people have built up from scratch. So they're quite common. Wicker trainer, that was another thing designed and built at the CAC, two hundred of those were built. There's a bloke building one of those down at Lara, he's been working on that for probably 15 or 20 years too. But he's

16:00 mixed up now in trying to preserve Point Cook which, before you go, sign my petition please. Don't go out the door without signing it, we've want to save Point Cook like Point Depend has been saved and all the naval bases in Sydney. They're trying to sell it. Anyway, I think that's the only Wicker trainer flying but there are a couple of other people working on them.

They were also built at CAC?

They were a local design.

16:30 It was to go initially between the Tiger Moth and the Wirraway but in fact it was eventually used just for radio training in Ballarat and up at Maryborough in Queensland there was a radio school for teaching radio operators or wireless operators they were termed then.

So why did it just end up being a training aircraft?

Well that's all it was designed for. It was only a 165 horse power

17:00 engine, not much more than the Tiger Moth which was 130 so it was only a low performance small aircraft. It wasn't meant for anything operational – in fact it didn't have any guns or bombs or anything. There's one of those down at Moorabbin too. If you want to take a trip down there one day. Beaufighter, Wirraway, Wacker Trainer, Sabre, Meteor, or it's a Meteor trainer, the two seat one.

17:30 So take a day off one day and go down there.

O.K. Is there anything else about the CAC which is really useful for the archive?

Well, post-war things fell into a heap around ‘46, ’47 - there were no more orders. They were still building Mustangs very slowly, in fact a lot of people left or were retrenched because there was nothing much doing. And those that were left

18:00 on the factory floor just did a bit of overhaul work on Mustangs or building very slowly the last 20 or 30 mustangs. But then the design team started work on a twin-engined supersonic jet fighter called the CA23 which they built a mock up of, a full-sized mock up.

18:30 The CA23 was a twin-engined supersonic jet fighter which they’d started building small parts for, for testing and mock up, the mock up, and some structural test pieces. By then I was in the air force but I’ve since found out all about it and because the Sabre had been selected to build at CAC under licence from America

19:00 work went into converting the Sabre to Australian configuration with an English engine of much more power than the American one and with 30 millimetre cannon instead of .5 machine guns. So there was quite a lot of, about 40 per cent of new fuselage design went in to the Australian Sabre. So after about five or six months work on that I think it was the government decided we weren’t going to go ahead with the CA23 so that was

19:30 cancelled but if it had been built successfully I’m quite certain from my research it could have been sold to Canada which wanted supersonic aircraft for the (UNCLEAR) in case Russian missiles came across the North Pole over into Canada and the USA and the Royal Air Force was looking for something suitable to replace their Gloucester Javelin so if we had continued with the CA23we might well have had a big export industry. A lot of people

20:00 employed.

So what happened with the CAC after the war?

Oh it kept going with the Sabre production and then it did Mackie trainers and also Mirage pieces first. The Mirage was a delta winger fighter from France which GAF [Government Aircraft Factory] did the fuselage of, GAF was what had been DAP [Department of Aircraft Production]. They built the fuselages although they got behind so much

20:30 through union trouble that they had to import fuselages from France. CAC had a bit of union trouble but not enough to hold up production of wings, tail unit and the engines. CAC was the engine manufacturer in Australia for all sorts of engines, piston and jet. So we built those, then we built the Mackie which was a two-seat trainer, jet trainer, from Italy, the Mirage incidentally had come from Switzerland.

21:00 After that we built pieces for the Nomad which was next door at GAF which also had got a very rare treatment from the government and from bureaucracy. We ended up killing that, 170 were built when we probably could have sold three or four hundred around the world. So, you’ll get me started on the aircraft industry one of these days – it’s a completely separate thing but the aircraft industry has been treated very badly here.

21:30 CAC eventually was taken over by Hawker De Havilland which started in Melbourne in 1927, moved to Sydney at the end of 1930 and formed a bigger organisation which during the war had built Tiger Moths and built De Havilland Dragons, which were a two-seat biplane trainer, twin-engined, and then Mosquitos which were attack fighters, ground attack fighters and after the war they

22:00 designed and built a thing called the Drover which the flying doctor service used and various small charter companies. But then that ended up building various things outside the aircraft industry, well for the aircraft industry as well, like engine parts for export to America under contract, sub contract. But then eventually in 1985 Hawker de Havilland bought out CAC and in 1985 CAC disappeared as

22:30 such and was called Hawker de Havilland Victoria and then North American Rockwell came and bought them, no, bought the GAF which had also become Astor. So North American Rockwell from North America bought them and then Boeing came and bought them. Now Boeing owns Hawker de Havilland as well, Hawker de Havilland Victoria. Although Hawker de Havilland is still up at Bankstown but they’re still part of the American Boeing organisation and Boeing

23:00 organisation is now the biggest aviation company in Australia. So that’s Australia for you, let the foreigners take over.

O.K. So we’ll move on from there just now to your return to Australia coming home. When was that and what were the circumstances?

That was at the end of January, beginning of ’52.

23:30 Yes, right at the end of January I think it was, it might have been the first few days of February in ’52. I came back again by Qantas DC4 via Labuan and Darwin. And I can recall at Darwin the Customs got on to me because I had an escape knife. The Americans gave us, well I suppose we won them somehow, but a beautiful big knife with a saw tooth on one side so that if you were

24:00 shot down in the jungle or something you could cut your way out or whatever but that was confiscated, I wasn't allowed to have that and I think I had some silk stockings or nylon stockings from the PX as well to bring home to Mum and sisters and whoever else was about. I'm not sure whether they got confiscated too. A few things got confiscated anyway. And some Japanese china, Noritake china.

24:30 So landed in Sydney and came home by train, The Spirit of Progress. My Mum and Dad and two younger sisters were waiting at Spencer Street of course and that was all. When you hear the Vietnamese people saying "Oh, we didn't get a welcome home", neither did we, we just came home and we didn't worry about it. Later on in 1953 when the Meteors came back they were flown around Australia and did a fly past over the cities

25:00 but there was no march as far as I know through the streets with cheering and waving and so forth so we just came home. I think the Vietnamese people have gone a little bit overboard and of course they get all the mention now. People on radio and TV say, "World War II and Vietnam", most of them never mention Korea, nor Malaya, Malaya was another war which we were involved in.

So when you came home

25:30 **and there was, you know there was no, no really grand reception, how did you feel about that?**

It didn't worry us it was just like going away and you came home. So you were then posted up to Williamtown to convert on to Vampires, it didn't worry you.

So tell me about that?

Well because from Korea I'd heard I was posted to 78 Wing to go to Malta, that was 78 Wing then based at Williamtown. I took leave of a

26:00 week or two weeks or whatever it was and went up to Williamtown and did a conversion onto Vampire jet fighters which are much smaller than the Meteor. So we did probably March, April, May, June we were there doing further training on Vampires and attacking Lincolns and other Vampires just getting a bit more training before we eventually sailed for

26:30 Malta. And I got married up there in Sydney, my fiancée came up from Melbourne and we had our honeymoon there the week before I left and Mum and Dad came up from Melbourne to see me off on the Asturias but I don't know now, and I'll probably never find out – one of my sisters might remember, as far as I know my father never flew, I think he came up by train, I flew Mum later on in civil life a few times

27:00 in aircraft but I never took Dad up. I think he might have come up by train and Mum came by airline. I must ask my sister about that. But anyway they saw me off on the Asturias and we sailed to Malta and we flew there as part of 2 Squadron, 78 Wing comprising 75 and 76 squadrons, both on Vampires. There was a New Zealand Squadron in parallel over on Cyprus flying the same model Vampires.

27:30 So they were part of that reinforcement for the Mediterranean as well. But in that time we also go to, well, we got to Baghdad you might say. The RAF aerodrome outside Baghdad, we went there, we went to Cyprus a couple of times, went to the Middle East, went to North Africa, went to Bizerta, went to England for the Coronation Review we flew up to England.

I'm not clear about

28:00 **why you were posted there.**

Why we were there?

What it was about?

Because of the Cold War between Russia and the NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] forces. It was still thought that the Russians might get obstreperous and the Royal Air Force had two squadrons on Malta, they wanted to move them out and put them up into Germany so to keep something on Malta for the Mediterranean and on Cyprus the three squadrons were sent across there until things

28:30 calmed down a bit in two years.

So why the Vampires?

Well the Royal Air Force was still operating Vampires and Meteors. Maybe they didn't have enough Meteors, which were better than Vampires really for interception and ground attack and I don't know why the selection but that's what we were allotted. We were flying Vampires in Australia but they were different because out here we fitted CAC

29:00 built Rolls Royce engines instead of the De Havilland built cobalt engines from England. So ours had a better performance in some respects in Australia but in Malta we got the high powered ones, the same as the English ones. So there was a bit of difference between the two. We flew those across to England for the Coronation Review in June '53 I think and

29:30 we stayed over there for 3 months up near Norwich, an aerodrome called Horsham St Faith.

And what were you doing?

We were practicing for the review. In the review there was, god knows, 199 aircraft all had to pass over the Queen at a place called Rodium, a Royal Air Force base in perfect timing. You know 20 seconds behind and the slow ones were doing 110 miles and hour and others back there doing

30:00 500 miles an hour so it was a matter of co-ordination and training and they all fed in from different directions to meet a gate. And the leader had to be there within 5 seconds and if he couldn't make it and he was too late or too early he'd have to disappear, go back home, it was very well co-ordinated. Somebody in England has written a book about it some years ago, about that review. So we all flew over, well I didn't, I flew in the practices but I didn't fly in the actual thing because there was a

30:30 ground party as well with some of our aircraft on the ground and a march past of or ground staff. But I didn't do the march past, I was just there with my wife then who'd come across from Malta and we just were there in one of the review boxes watching things. So a very interesting time although I would have liked to have flown in the thing as well but there were only about 12 aircraft and 20 pilots so I suppose it was the luck of the draw.

31:00 But we did some interesting exercises in England as well. We even attacked an American base where they had what you might call at that time secret aircraft which nobody knew until just a few years ago were operating in England flying over Russia, taking pictures, Sculthorpes. And in magazines recently in the last few years there's been pictures of them. They were even given Royal Air Force

31:30 cockades, decorations and RAF pilots were flying them but they were American aircraft secretly in England. They were like U2s, you've heard of U2s have you?

No.

They were flying over Russia and Gary Powers was shot down over Russia many years ago and captured – that was the end of the, well there was going to be a great discussion between American and Russia but that put the kibosh on it so it didn't

32:00 happen.

So how long was that period of time?

In England about three months. We got leave of course to go into London and Norwich up the Norfolk Broads, we hired boats, launches, explored the Broads, all sorts of things like that. It was beautiful. I'd been there in 1951 when I went

32:30 across from France after that United Nations Tour but this again was just a reinforcement and by that time there were more foreigners, Jamaicans, whatever else there, they were conductors on buses, shopkeepers. I went across again in '69 and there were even more.

So how long did you stay in the air force for?

Until the middle of 1956 and I got out and I went back to CAC for about

33:00 two and a half years on structural test work. The CA23 had been done at that stage, it was finished but I did some work on the Ceres crop duster which was a CAC adoption of the Wirraway. It was converted into an aircraft with a 6' long span and a great big hopper put into the middle of it, in front of the cockpit to hold about a ton

33:30 of crop dusting material or seeds to drop over the agricultural areas. So they built 20 of those so I worked on that for a while. Then I worked on Sabres again. Then I left to, I got a grant from DCA to work on this book, to do some research on the book – it had started there before but I got about six months full time work on it. Then I went into

34:00 DCA as an air traffic controller hoping to get a flying job with airlines taking the air traffic control as a temporary job but that turned out – I was interviewed by airlines but I was too old then, I was 28 and 26 was supposedly the upper limit so one of them kept me for a couple of years in case they couldn't get enough but finally I got a letter saying sorry. So I left DCA and went into charter flying and I'm glad I didn't get into airlines.

34:30 I had a far better time flying charter work all over Australia and parts of the world in a wider variety of aircraft.

So during that time from when you were discharged and went back to CAC did you fly at all?

Oh yes, mostly down here as a member of the Royal Victorian Aero Club. I used to take people for rides of a weekend or whenever I had a day off or they were able to take time off in

35:00 Chipmunks and Tiger Moths, that sort of thing, Piper Tri Pacers and so forth, Cessnas so that was just keeping my hand in. I got flying for nothing because I used to go down there occasionally at weekends and work on the flight line, helping to refuel aircraft and start them up and guide them on taxiing out so you got an hour of flying in return for a day of work like that. So bringing up three children at that stage, I'm not sure if the fourth had arrived, anything I could get for

35:30 nothing was good.

So what about your charter work, what did you?

I started off doing that, I was working part time on the book then and I thought, “Well, if I earn 25”, it was after ‘66, “If I can earn $25 a week that’ll be enough. So I’ll fly part time, I’ll make myself available to the companies down at Moorabbin.” So I did that and I was working on the book at the same time doing

36:00 research and travelling to Archives in Brighton then. It’s now in Castleton Place in Smith Street. So I started earning more and more money, there was more and more work coming in flying. I got known around the place, all the companies knew that I was available anytime, anywhere so eventually that took first place to the book. I still worked on the book and I flew for everybody anywhere in anything.

36:30 And built up and built up until I was finally flying off to places like Indonesia, the Philippines and to England and back – I went over there for an air race between England and Australia. All over Australia, survey work up in the Northern Territory, North Western Australia, Indonesia. So I built up and up and up so I couldn’t give it up, could I until I finally had a little medical problem

37:00 in mid to late ‘85. I was sent down for a cat scan and that proved nothing, no, sorry, I was sent down for a heart thing but there was nothing there. I’d had a little infarction on the side of my brain, it just causes a little black out a little dizzy spell so maybe that’s what I did this morning, I don’t think so though. So that was really the end of my flying career commercially, I lost my licence and the

37:30 doctors over in Wyndham in the Hospital “You’ll never fly again”. And I said “I will”. And I came back and I eventually got a private pilot’s licence back so I did some more flying but I’ve given it away now because I just can’t stand the way CASA has gone and ruined the whole industry. We haven’t heard an aeroplane all day since early afternoon have we, not one. Once there used to be ten an hour, they’ve

38:00 ruined it. People don’t even stay on the aerodrome now if they’ve got aeroplanes that they own they’ll move out to Lilydale which were private aerodromes not owned by a big organisation which Moorabbin is now. So as you might say, it’s been stuffed.

We’ve got one minute, I wanted to ask you about your book.

38:30 **Do you want to just quickly tell us about your book?**

All right. The book is a four-volume thing covering every aircraft ever built or designed or proposed for manufacture in Australia. During the war years of course a lot of American and English companies had planes built here, they never eventuated but there are 540 types of aircraft described in it in great detail. And some of them go to 70, 80 pages, the wartime ones in particular. Because there’s so much went on there that we

39:00 don’t really know about, it’s never been covered except in very sparse manner in magazines and occasional books. But this is the definitive history of the aircraft industry in Australia. So if you come across a millionaire looking for something to invest his money in send him down.

All right thank you, thanks very much.