Australians at War Film Archive

Billie Collings - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:52 **Thanks for taking part, we couldn't do it without you.**

01:00 **To begin with we need a summary of your life so I'll lead you through this, but if you could tell us a little bit without too much detail about where you grew up with your family?**

Well I was born in 1932 and when I was quite young my mother moved to Brisbane but my father died about three months before I was born, she was widowed and I had two older brothers

01:30 and I started life really in Brisbane and started school there. In fact I went to my first school at South Brisbane which is no longer there, it's the Southbank area now in Brisbane and I lived in Toowoomba throughout the war except we were evacuated during the war to Killarney near Warwick for a couple of years.

02:00 Then I moved to Toowoomba and went to primary school and high school in Toowoomba. Then I went to university for a year and then I joined the air force. And I trained as a pilot, went to Williamtown, north of Newcastle and did my fighter operational training and then I went to Korea

02:30 and that was at the end of '52 in early '53 and did my missions in Korea. Left Korea in the middle of July and in fact I was getting back on the Qantas aeroplane in Port Moresby when the captain came out and said the truce had been signed. Then I went back to Williamtown as an instructor for about six months.

03:00 Then I went to East Sale and did an instructors course, went to Uranquinty which no longer exists, I don't know if you know it near Wagga, for six months then I went back to CFS [Central Flying School] as an instructor and I was there till, when was I there till? The end of '57,

03:30 I think, and then I was posted to Amberley on the flying Canberras and at the end of my tour there at the end of '59 I went to Farmborough to the test pilots school and I came back and went to our aircraft research and development unit and when I started, no then I was sent on

04:00 attachment to France, to Paris when we first brought the Mirages and I was a project pilot on that and then I came back after eight months and then was posted back again for two years with my family. And from there they sent me to the UK [United Kingdom], to Bracknell, to do the staff course and from there I went to Pearce in Western Australia and commanded the training school there for three years. Then I

04:30 came to Canberra and went into what was then called Org and Es which is the backwater; organisations and establishments, it was pretty boring stuff and then I was promoted to group captain and made Director of Aircraft Requirements, which is operational requirements really, and then I was posted to Amberley as what's presently called the executive officer

05:00 who is responsible for operations on the base, at least he was then and I did it two years on F1-11s and then I was made head of a group called Services Analytical Studies Group. It's an ops [operations] analysis group that I ran with civilians from DSTO [Defence Science and Technology Organisation] and I was posted to Operational Command,

05:30 which is now called Air Command as the chief of staff and from there I went to London to the defence college, Royal College of Defence studies and when I came back from there I was posted as Air Officer Commanding Support Command in Melbourne as it was then. And from there I came to Canberra as Chief of Joint Operations and Plans in Central.

06:00 And I moved from there to Deputy Chief of Air Staff as it was at the time and then I went to Chief of Air Force Material which is all changed now the designations and form there I retired.

What year was that?

In '89, May '89. After that I had some consultancy work with Dassault and

06:30 then with a couple of Israeli firms, I still have one with an Israeli firm which is more watching brief. And during that period I flew with general aviation. I used to do night freight and charters and that sort of thing so I did ten years basically in general aviation. And that's it.

07:00 **Have you kept up your pilot's licence?**

Not now. I own a glider with another partner but we're trying to sell it but there's a point where you know you're slowing down and you should give it away. Some people like to keep going for some sort of esoteric thrill but no it's all passed now.

What about your family? You married early on in your career?

No I was married when I was twenty four, that was

07:30 when I was at Sale in 1956, to a Brisbane girl and I've been married ever since, which is unusual I suppose. We're still together, I've got five kids, two daughters and three sons and five grandchildren, just a recent one my youngest son had a daughter so I've got two daughters here that live just down round the corner,

08:00 two granddaughters I mean, the eldest she's sixteen, and then I've got a grandson and daughter in Noosa and another granddaughter now near Gosford.

That's great. While we're still with the summary, the focus of the interview is going to be on Korean service, could you take us through a summary of 77 Squadron's actions in Korea while you were there and what you were doing at the time?

Yeah, well I got there in January '52 and

08:30 at that stage the war was static and the front line was basically where the demarcation line is now. The squadron's role was bombing escort now and again but the main role was interdiction was attacking road transport and rail transport.

09:00 And that was about it, there was some escort of B26's bombing but generally it was just the interdiction and that remained that until I left. At that time the negotiations for an armistice had been going on for a couple of years believe it or not in P'anmunjom and where I was at Kimpo was until two years ago the national airport for Seoul,

09:30 it's now Inch'on where MacArthur landed, it was about sixteen nautical miles from the front line and from P'anmunjom which was called the holy land because we weren't allowed to fly over it, it was forbidden, so you always had to fly around P'anmunjom. And our area of operations was from the front line to about

10:00 a hundred miles north, which was the road from Wonsan on the north east across the peninsula and we used to do what were called first light and last light missions which meant getting up at about three or four o'clock in the morning and you had to get off just as sunlight was appearing and the same thing at night, you had to

10:30 get back just as it was getting dark because the North Koreans and the Chinese moved at night. We did very little, there was night work done, by the Americans mainly. But we didn't do it until a couple of months before the armistice. And say you would try and catch trucks or whatever on the road in the early morning and late at night and that

11:00 was basically it.

How many missions did you fly out of Kimpo?

Me? One hundred and sixteen and generally people flew something like that in their six months, it was a six month tour and during the three years the squadron operated we lost forty four pilots, which is the equivalent of two squadrons. It was a very flak

11:30 intensive environment, anti-aircraft but it was all what they called PI-ed, it was all photographed and interpreted and you updated your map every day and you avoided areas of flak and you never attacked fewer than two trucks, because generally it was a flak trap. But that was basically what we did, there

12:00 were some close support missions with the army but they were pretty rare, for us anyway.

So close support, interdiction and just ground attacks basically?

Yeah, it was all ground attacks.

That's great. Hopefully late we can talk about your post war career. We're very interested to hear about Mirages and F1-11s, we'll see how much time we have left.

12:30 Every boy should have one.

I only wish. Let's go back to the beginning and talk about growing up in Brisbane. What do you remember of the early days before the war in that area?

I remember when I was three or four, I started building model aeroplanes,

13:00 believe it or not. I lived in several places in South Brisbane, West End, that area; although at one period we lived at Ascot. I went to South Brisbane School for a start and then I went to West End, then I went to Ascot. All before the war because my mother, she just had to find work where she could.

13:30 She had three sons, a pension of two pounds ten a week I think and that was it. It was pretty tough times for her and so we lived all round and went to different schools. She had friends in South Brisbane, Maoris in fact and I played with Maori kids, with Aboriginal kids, you know we had no problems,

14:00 it was fine. Of course a bit different from now, kids had the habit then of making things themselves, you didn't buy ready made plastic things and most of the fun was in that action rather than playing with them you know. So you'd make billy carts, you know what a billy cart is? You'd make them

14:30 out of what you could find and roar up and down the footpath and injure yourself and that sort of nonsense. And generally that was life before you went to school and even after you started school and I can remember at school, the first school, I can remember the first thing I did, it's funny how things stick in your mind, but we learnt how to make a pom-pom out of wool and I can still remember thinking, "What the hell am I doing this for?" You know?

15:00 I thought I was going to school to learn how to read and write. And the school was right next to South Brisbane Railway Station which was then the service from Sydney stopped at South Brisbane railway station and we used to watch the trains going in and out and that sort of thing. But that's what it was like then.

How aware were you of the financial hardships on your mother and your family?

15:30 I was aware. I was hungry. Those were the days you really worried about getting enough to eat and we didn't have a lot to eat so you know you were never sated fully, you were always hungry ready for a meal. It's interesting because these days we eat for pleasure and we eat a lot of rubbish and we overfeed ourselves and it's interesting if you grew up in the age where you didn't get enough

16:00 how you can go wrong by eating too much. Instead of it being a way of surviving, it's now a way of amusing yourself. But yeah, you knew and once a year, or twice a year you got a present of some sort. On your birthday, you waited for your birthday and then you waited for Christmas. They were your presents. You didn't get something every week and I mean I go into my grandson's room and see the pile

16:30 of toys and he just can't possibly play with them. I think it's difficult for people to learn to live with plenty, it's a real problem for them. And it's not amusing after a while, they throw the toys away as soon as the functions been seen and instead of making it themselves, which is a real pleasure. In fact, my youngest son though strangely had the desire to make things out of cardboard and all the rest of it and he's pretty well rounded.

17:00 **What sort of presents do you remember getting as a boy?**

I can remember, you generally got something like a card board model aeroplane which would be on a cut out sheet of thin cardboard and you'd put it together and glue it you know. I once got a little cardboard garage with cars, there wasn't any plastic,

17:30 it was all wood or cardboard or something like that. And model aeroplanes you'd buy stick models you know? And you'd have to bend the wire yourself and all that for the undercarriage and it was all really do it yourself and there wasn't a lot of it but twice a year was your big event when you waited for a present.

18:00 **What sort of food was on your table during that time?**

I don't know, it was food. I don't remember that, all I know is I was always bloody hungry but in 1937 I guess, '37 or '38, my mother put us in a, I guess it's a orphans home really, we weren't orphans, but it was run by the

18:30 Presbyterian Church and it was at Oxley, Kuranda area in Brisbane and when we were there I remember the food there. The thing I remember most was you could either have dripping on your bread or have syrup but you couldn't have them both because they didn't have all that much money and the big deal was to get some syrup

19:00 and dripping together and I'm castigated by my family these days that I like mixing things like peanut butter and syrup. Dripping is marvellous, properly made it's really good. They say it's bad for your health but that was the big deal then was getting both. And I remember that, I can remember in those days big cans about this big of molasses and syrup you know on the shelves.

19:30 I got some rather esoteric tastes from that period and I think there were about twenty eight or thirty kids in this place and during the war some of the old boys came back. They joined the services, one was a pilot I remember him. I had a cousin in these with me as well, and we lived in this great big house overlooking the river at the back of Kuranda and

20:00 it was full of lantana and we used to play in the lantana. Why? I guess there was nowhere else but that's, I remember that food.

How long were you there for?

Five years, but we were moved during the war. That was my first rain trip I think of any length was going from Oxley to Warwick and then to

20:30 Killarney, which is east of Warwick, in the ranges there. In fact there's a waterfall there called Loch Lomond and we were sent there during the war to keep us away from the coast and we lived in an old church hall made up with bunk beds and this sort of thing. And I went to school at Killarney State School and in fact I remember one day

21:00 a Fairy Battle forced landing in the paddock next to the school and seeing the pilot. That was a big event that was. And the kids in those days came in from the country, we went to school barefoot and they rode their horses in bareback and the horses were tied up at the rail all day while they were at school and then they'd ride home. And in fact one day I got given a stock whip by one of the farmers and

21:30 unfortunately I gave it to the person who was running the school and she used it then to whip us if we misbehaved. Well, those were the days when physical punishment for kids was meted out quite readily. It got a bit extreme with that but nothing wrong with a bit of discipline.

What sort of kids were you with in that place?

I don't know. Just obviously in the same condition as I was in

22:00 but I don't think I ever formed any friendships at all. I had my two brothers and they were older and they used to look after em a bit but no I couldn't tell you anything about them. I could tell you about the people that ran it. One was a middle-aged woman, they were called 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' in those days, it was Aunty May that ran this place and I forget the uncle bloke that was there for a short time.

22:30 But Aunty May was there for years. Every year we used to go to, when we were at Oxley we'd go to Stanley for a holiday. We were treated pretty well really, there was a bit of brutal discipline at times but a holiday once a year wasn't all that bad. I've seen some kids on television recently that had a real hard time of it. My wife thinks I had a real hard time

23:00 at this place but it wasn't all that bad. But the funny thing was of course they never gave you any sun protection and every year we went we'd get sunburnt on our arms and sores, it was really dreadful. Anyway, that's the way it was then, people didn't know any better.

Before you were moved can you tell us your memories of the war going on, of you recognising that that was going on?

23:30 Well that happened when I was in this place when the war started and in fact you're not far from Archerfield there at Kuranda and we used to see the yellow Tiger Moths flying all around the place gyrating. In those days of course it was radio that was entertainment and every Sunday night at dinner they would put on the radio with a program called, what was it called?

24:00 The bloke that started the Empire Air Training Scheme, or had a bit to do with that a bloke called Doctor Goddard and they had this program, I forget the name of it but Dr Goddard featured in the name of it, and then they would talk about the war and what was going on and we'd listen to the war news but just, you know no different from any other kid I guess, but then it was the British Empire really and everything was run as the British Empire a bit

24:30 still like the First World War but we listened to the news and we'd follow it. Just as a kid of that age does, but we could see the Tiger Moths flying and at Leyburn, I don't know if you know Leyburn, it was a wartime airfield and they had P38s there and you'd sometimes see them flying over and you'd often see aeroplanes so you know it was going on. And in fact my mother had a boyfriend then who used to come and see us. He was a nice bloke and he was in the army

25:00 so you know we knew about the war by direct contact that way but other than that just same as a kid of that age, as deep as it gets. And as I say some of the old boys of the place they came back and they were in the services and they'd say hello.

You mentioned a couple of people already but who were the main male role models in your life as a boy?

25:30 I didn't have any. I never knew my father so I didn't really have that. In fact I guess I was really attached to my mother. My brothers looked after me, my older brother but no, I didn't have any male role models at all.

26:00 In fact, it's probably something that affected my make-up, and I'm accused of course by herself that not having had a father I don't know how to treat my children that sort of thing. But no I never had a role model.

Did you feel the lack of a father as a boy?

Well, it's strange. I was never of anyone having a father, I just didn't know any different.

26:30 I don't know what people feel when they have fathers. You know I watch a lot of movies and things with all this business about the father not being there for his children and all the rest of it. For me it's a load of rubbish, I mean you have to take life as it comes. I was there, I didn't have a father. It never entered my mind to worry about it. I never missed it cause I didn't

27:00 have it. But I can see later on that it would have helped me immeasurably if I'd had some guidance. Not in how to behave or anything like that but in just providing knowledge for me, you know I had to find out everything myself. Most of what I've done I've found out myself and done myself and it would have been nice if I'd had some guidance. And of course having kids of my own you find out that they don't take any notice of you anyway.

27:30 You know, everyone has to suffer his own pain but hopefully you influence it at least that they're good people but they've got to find out things themselves.

Can you tell us a bit about your brothers?

Well, I had two brothers, they're both dead now. We're not a very tall family but my eldest brother was only five foot two and I think it affected him

28:00 quite a bit. He was a stubborn cuss and my mother had a hell of a lot of trouble with him. My middle brother was a bit more easy going. Both of them left school long before they should have. My older brother, he joined the air force in fact, he was an instrument fitter and he did a stint in the occupation force in Japan.

28:30 And in fact he was at Archerfield when I was at Williamtown training. He was a misfit really, is all I can say about him. He used to look after me at this place I was at. My middle brother was not all that bright because he didn't finish his education. He did a pastry cook apprenticeship which he never used, then he became a vulcaniser

29:00 and I talked him into joining the air force and he ended up with the airfield construction squadron at Darwin and when I was Air Officer Commanding Support Command he was a sergeant in the equipment branch and strangely enough he played the bagpipes would you believe?

29:30 So I had him in one night for a dining-in in the mess and he piped in the port so that was good. He then left the air force, he went to Perth for a few years, in fact he married his oldest brother's wife. They were divorced and then he died a couple of years ago.

What's the difference in ages between you?

My oldest brother was about five years older; my second one was about two years older I think. I mean,

30:00 we grew apart, we were never, other than when we were in this place, we were close then but we've not been close since. It wasn't a close knit group because he was in the air force, I was in the air force and so was the other one and we were all over the world so we never. We got together now and again but we were never close.

30:30 **What did your mother's boyfriend or some of the other blokes that came back teach you or tell you about the services?**

Nothing. The boyfriend never spoke about it. It was just he wore a uniform and I knew he was in the army and I knew the war was going on. Later in when I left that place and my mother worked as a housekeeper for the next mayor of Toowoomba, old bloke called Patterson and we lived in a place that's now a tennis court for the Echelon School in Toowoomba and

31:00 she still had that boyfriend but that was near the end of the war. I missed the point I was trying to make now. What was the question again?

It was about what you learned from them.

Oh no. I was going to say that there were other, you know when I came out of Killarney and we lived in Toowoomba in the last stages of the war, then I saw lots of military people.

31:30 They were everywhere. In Killarney, in a little town, you didn't see military people. There weren't any establishments there at all so when we came back to Toowoomba there were military everywhere and there were lots of Javanese which is where I first learned to dislike Javanese and so we knew that there was a war on but kids of that age, they're not too concerned about it. There was rationing and

32:00 those were the days of the corner store and we lived not far from the corner store and in fact after the war the bloke who bought it was an ex-air force bloke and you'd go up with your ration card and get the food. Kids did that then, did the shopping for Mum up at the corner store, that was one of your chores. And in fact when I went to high school

32:30 my chemistry teacher was a Baltimore pilot, my French and Maths teacher was a Liberator navigator

and my Latin and English teacher was a Liberator observer, bomb aimer and I remember him, old MacCallum, he had slicked back hair with a part in the middle and he had ten kids and he said, “One of these days I’m going to have a full bloody cricket team,”

33:00 because he was a mad cricket fiend and he sent me a letter many years later saying, “I’ve got the cricket team.” He was teaching up in Hughenden or somewhere, nice bloke. The chemistry teacher, he was a lousy teacher but he was a Baltimore pilot in North Africa and the French and maths teacher, he married the, what did they call it then? She was a physical training instructor. He married

33:30 her while I was still there, that was in Toowoomba high school and in those days there were a lot of ex-servicemen doing their repat [repatriation] training and most of them had khaki coloured motorbikes, BSAs, you know? They obviously got them at disposals and they would use that for transport and they arrived at school to do their training on a brown BSA motorbike. That’s the sort of thing I remember.

34:00 And in fact I remember at the end of the war there was a great big gathering in the main intersection in Toowoomba and there’s a memorial there and a bloke fell off and killed himself. You know, survived the war and then fell off this memorial afterwards and killed himself. And I remember thinking at the time, “Well, that was stupid,” you know, “What’s the point?” And just after the war was the first time I heard a

34:30 magnetic wire recorder as they were then and the first American car appeared in Toowoomba without the mudguards separate, you know with the mudguards fared in? That was that period of time when that started.

What did you see of Americans during the late part of the war in Toowoomba?

Don’t remember any Americans really. I can’t recall now,

35:00 particularly seeing Americans. I must have but I don’t think they were in large enough numbers where I was to make an impression.

Can you describe in detail those celebrations at the end of the war as you recall them?

Oh it was just a big, people just all gathered in the main street of Toowoomba at the main intersection. The Margaret and Ruthren Streets and there’s a war memorial there in Margaret Street, just off the corner

35:30 and the whole area was just full of people shouting and carrying on and half smashed and that sort of thing, climbing up on the memorial. That’s all I remember about it really. I don’t think much more happened probably there were civic events and everything but I was too young to worry about that.

What were you thinking about at that time?

Didn’t have any

36:00 really I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I liked aeroplanes and in fact after the war my mates and I would hop on a push bike, ride out to Oakey where there were aeroplanes spread everywhere, they were all over the place, every type you could think of and we used to take out instruments and blow through them, you know, a turn needle, you would blow through it

36:30 in reverse and get it going to watch the needle working and this sort of thing. And that’s about it you know.

What other interests did you have at that time?

Well, I was studying at high school. I was just trying to get, in fact I didn’t want to keep going after

37:00 what they then called ‘Junior’, year ten in Queensland, but my mother talked me into it thank God and I went through and matriculated and really that occupied me pretty fully other than trying to act normally with girls and the usual things and that’s where not having a father didn’t help because

37:30 I didn’t have a clue about how to behave with girls. I was very gauche and awkward and shy and just the normal interests that I had with my brothers, we’d ride bikes or whatever, as we got older we’d go to dances. In those days you’d have a Saturday night dance, several of them in town and that was the thing you did then.

38:00 You’d go down to the dancehall and try to pick up a Sheila or whatever and I remember sort of learning to dance reasonably well. Doing school activities and in fact in my final year we had to out on a play and I was

38:30 what’s his name? I was King Lear and I can remember one of the sheilas playing a part in it, she had the hots for me I think and she kept trying to get close to me and I was getting embarrassed for obvious reasons at that age and it was very awkward. But the thing I remember about that was since I was in the air force I learnt how to

39:00 speak French and I did two languages at school, Latin and French and I dropped French because the teacher was lousy. But Latin I did all right at, but the thing you remember is how badly they taught languages at that time. It was just an academic exercise. You didn’t actually learn to speak it, you learnt

to read it and write it and it was academic and it was pretty boring because you'd wonder why you were doing it. I've learnt since of course how useful it is.

39:30 But now I speak four languages and I enjoy it but in those days it put me off so much that I just wondered about it. The teaching was really bad. It's changed completely now, it's much better. And Shakespeare was a mystery. You'd sit there trying to read this text and you'd do it line by line and you'd think 'I'm never going to understand what these people are saying, but then

40:00 this MacCallum took over English and the next thing I know we go to see Henry V at the cinema and after that we had no trouble because when it's spoken completely you get the sense anyway even if you miss the odd word and that just made life so much easier. But I can remember seeing Henry V with old Laurence Olivier, that was after the war, it was really good.

40:30 It certainly helped understanding Shakespeare.

Tape 2

00:31 We have ways of making you talk, you know?

How were you following the war? I know you were quite young but was it a big part of your life as you were growing up?

No. I don't think kids of that age think of it any more than as another part of life. There are much more important things when you're young like I said trying to play it right with girls,

01:00 trying to handle all your awkward male characteristics when you're young. I mean boys have some serious problems that girls don't have and just growing up as a boy can be awkward. I didn't have a father so I didn't have anyone to teach me how to play tennis or cricket or anything so I had to just borrow a racket,

01:30 because I couldn't afford one of my own, and try and hit the ball and to these days I still cannot keep my eye on the ball as I hit it. Even in golf, I have to really concentrate because unless you have someone early on to teach you how to do it and what to do you just don't learn properly and so I really grew up on my own in a way. My mother, she was so busy looking after three kids and eventually

02:00 she got married again and she really didn't know much about training young men, she had plenty of discipline. In those days you helped clean the house, you had to because she couldn't do it so there had to be discipline but there was plenty of affection and all the rest of it but you knew you had to do what you were told.

02:30 You're still boys those and break the rules but at home you had to do what you were told. So you just, I don't know, I never thought about life very much. People these days examine their navels in detail you know, it really worries me. It's like, I don't know how we'll fight a war next time because we'll have to stop every second day to be counselled after we've done a mission or something.

03:00 Life just wasn't like that then. People accepted things and got on with it and until people are told they've got a problem they generally don't have one. So that was just growing up as far as I was concerned. I mean, being young is just a part of life. These days being young means you're the centre of attention and you're the most important thing in the world according to the adults and consequently you're thinking you are. But when I grew up

03:30 the big deal was to become adult, not to be important as a child. I mean silly things like, kids in those days, boys wore what do you call them? They were shirts with a waist but the adult wore a shirt that tucked into his pants and that was a big deal when you were old enough to wear long trousers and a man's shirt. These days of course kids wear everything because there's no distinction

04:00 but it was different then. You were trying to become an adult and that's all you were worried about. It's different.

My dad gave me a piece of advice, always keep your head still, in sports. You were interested in model aircraft, what was your first aircraft that you built?

I don't know, I think it

04:30 was just a stick model when I was about three or four. I could read and write when I was four. When I went to school they moved me up two classes in the first year, so I skipped the first two preparatory lessons and so I could build little stick models when I was three or four and I remember doing that. Then during the war, you couldn't get kits,

05:00 but there was a limited supply of them and you'd build what they called solid models and the fuselage was a block of wood and you had to shape it, you know whittle it, and sand it and all the rest of it to make the body. Same with the wings and all the rest of it. Not like today where it's all ready made

plastic and you just push it all together. And flying models, they were, generally then during the war, about eighteen inches was all you could get wingspan and then

05:30 after the war, in fact, a Hurricane pilot, ex Hurricane pilot set up a model aeroplane shop in Toowoomba and then you could get some good kits and you could build some really good models. In fact, this bloke was a modeller in the true sense. He wrote to me when I was at Support Command, he was the modeller for Mount Isa mines and he would model all the shafts

06:00 and ventilators and everything of the mine and he reckoned he saved them a fortune in doing this so they could plan what they were doing. You'd do it on a PC now, on a computer, with graphics but in those days he modelled it for them to see what they were doing and his name was Niall Harp, he was a Spitfire pilot during the war. And I used to buy models off him. I used to make my own. I would

06:30 draw plans of a model and make them myself. They used to fly, they were rubber powered. I never could afford a powered one and then years later when I was at Pearce I built a radio controlled one so, bloody thing crashed. But by then you're too old. You've got to do that when you're a kid.

What was your favourite aircraft as you were growing up?

As I was growing up?

07:00 Probably the Beaufighter. I always wanted to fly a Beaufighter, I just missed the chance of doing it too, just before they retired them but yeah, I liked Beaufighters.

Before you joined the air force though, as in when you were growing up?

Yeah. It was the one that interested me. It was impressive.

What about stories, books?

I wasn't a good reader when I was young, I am now, I love reading

07:30 and I think school put me off reading because we did Shakespeare bit by bit. You know and we did Aeneas Gunn, We Of The Never-never and you had to dissect it in detail and there was no pleasure in just reading it for the story. There was always it was an academic exercise and you had to analyse it. Consequently I wasn't a good reader. My oldest brother was. You could never get near him. He'd sit down for hours and read a book.

08:00 If I'd had that urge I'd have appreciated English much better but no, I wasn't a reader. I was a dreamer, always imagining I was doing something. Not a Walter Mitty but I guess I just imagined doing things all I could.

Is that how you would characterise yourself growing up?

As a dreamer? Not completely,

08:30 I wasn't a day dreamer, I was a dreamer in that I would think of how I would do things and what I wanted to do. I was a bit academic, still am I suppose in a way, but I wasn't all that bright no.

As you were going through school were you advanced quickly because of your grades?

No. I did initially, when I first went to school as I said I was

09:00 I missed the two preparatory, I did them both in one year I went into the second grade or something like that, I forget the detail. That was at Kuranda and consequently I've always been young in my year because in those days they didn't insist that you stayed with your cohorts in age, they actually advanced people who were doing better and I guess I was naturally a bit bright

09:30 with language then. I used to win spelling contests and that sort of thing but later on at high school it was just hard slog really. I won a scholarship, I got a scholarship for uni [university] which was I think first twenty five in the state but it was interesting in those days, talk about incentive and people complaining about HECS [Higher Education Contribution Scheme],

10:00 my mother being widowed I could get a commonwealth grant of three pound fifteen a week to go to uni, my scholarship, which was a state scholarship, was worth twenty five shillings a weeks but I could only have one of them, couldn't have them both. I mean, my socio-economic situation had nothing to do with my ability or vice versa and

10:30 consequently I paid three pound five a week at Kings College in Brisbane and I had ten shillings a week for my lunch and travel and in those days you could go from the city to Saint Lucia for a penny I think and a penny back so you know. And I could get a sandwich or something for sixpence,

11:00 the money was completely different value from now but then for next year they were going to put the board up to three pound fifteen a week and I'd lost a bit of motivation anyway so I said, "Blow it," so I went and joined the air force.

What was your dad's profession?

My mother never really talked about her family

11:30 much, I don't know much about my family really. He was in World War 1, he was at Gallipoli, he was wounded at Gallipoli, he was evacuated to a hospital in France, he was gassed and wounded in France and then he came home. It was 1917 or '18, I'm not sure. I've got his records there,

12:00 that's the only reason I know these things and then he died three months before I was born with a brain tumour but my mother told me they were brunt out of their homes twice and had no insurance. They lived in the northern rivers near Lismore. And

12:30 I think he had a postal contract, he was a contractor, he used to deliver the mail. I don't know much more than that.

How strongly did you feel his presence as an old digger in your house?

Not at all. My mother never really talked about it much except when she got a bit maudlin or unhappy. The time I did

13:00 feel it was when I was working in France with the embassy. We used to go up every year to Villers-Bretonneux. One year I represented the ambassador at the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Somme and I toured all the Somme area, and sort of walking on the ground I started thinking about the fact that my father was walking the same ground

13:30 but that's as far as it got. I've never really, I don't know it must be a characteristic of our family, my mother didn't talk about it and it was just history. There's nothing you can do about it. I'm not a military person if that was the thrust of the question. I've had no military influence to make me join the military,

14:00 I joined the air force to fly. The thing furthest from my mind was going to war as with a lot of people who join, particularly today.

It wasn't really. I was sort of thinking about growing up in the heritage of the ANZAC [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] tradition and how that affects people?

I'm not military inclined that way. I don't like reunions; I don't like all that side of military life at all. I don't believe

14:30 it serves much useful purpose. It does perhaps for younger generations maybe I don't know; I don't like that side of life at all. Try that for size.

You went on to do well at school and got to university. Were you swept into medicine because of your results or because you wanted to become a doctor?

No, my mother wanted me to be a doctor

15:00 when I won the scholarship and in fact at that stage Legacy had accepted her story and were assisting the family. We used to get help from Legacy, we used to get fruit and stuff once a week through them and they lent me money to buy my books and when I left I had to pay it all back so it wasn't just a gift you know.

15:30 But my mother wanted me to be a doctor and you know in those days being a doctor was something. It's not any more. I wouldn't be a doctor at the moment. Not in a fit. But in those days a doctor was an important person in the community and it was looked on as the top sort of profession to go into if you're bright enough and I guess that was it and when I got to uni though

16:00 I wasn't, I was on my own for the first time without my mother and it was, there was a lot of growing up needed in a short space of time and I don't think I was really up to it. And consequently I lost motivation but then when the money was going to run out that was just an excuse I guess to say, "Well, I'll give it away."

16:30 And the one thing that I disliked intensely at uni was orientation week. In the college, what's called now the initiation stuff and I really disliked that. It's a personal thing and I don't think anyone else has the right to do that to anyone. Even under the guise of some sort of tradition. And the silly thing was when I joined the air force

17:00 I wasn't really switched on about the world at that stage. I guess being without a father I was really tied up with finding out what I wanted to do because I had no guidance and I wanted to fly and I saw an ad [advertisement] for the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] college and so I put in a late application and in fact, they took me to Melbourne and interviewed me and then they accepted me and

17:30 I stayed there for a couple of weeks waiting for the intake. But the first thing I found in driving onto Point Cook was a sign saying 'Number 1 BFTS [Basic Flying Training School]' and I said, "What's that? That's not the college?" And they said, "No. That's the direct entry where you just learn to fly," and I thought, "Oh my God, I've really made a boo-boo," because I didn't do my homework properly I just saw the ad and I thought that was it.

18:00 So I thought, "All right, I'll have to put up with it," because I wasn't going to fly for three years. I was virtually going back to school and that's what happened. I started maths again and all the stuff that I'd

done for matric [matriculation] but the worst thing was the initiation. And I thought, “I thought the air force, the military would be grown up not like uni students,” but it wasn’t, it was the same. Any organisation where you give students power ends up the same. They have

18:30 to exercise it over someone else and consequently I left there in a month and went to the direct entry system at (Bocal UNCLEAR). It’s interesting because the first thing the chief ground instructor said to me and he only died a few years ago, he was a member of my golf club, Bill Keens, he said, “Okay, welcome to BFTS. Now you can stop behaving like a child and behave like a man,” and I thought that was pretty telling at the time because

19:00 I was really browned off with being treated like a child again and a student, you know just going back to school. And in fact I found that the air force gave me the benefit of being adult and I learnt a lot. I started to grow up. I was brash, I had no father, I really didn’t know how to behave properly and I got the edges

19:30 rounded pretty quick and I learnt and people helped me. That’s the thing I liked was the older blokes would help you and that was it. That was where I sort of went off in the direction I went.

Can you tell us about hearing of the end of the war with Japan?

Where was I then?

20:00 How old was I then? Thirteen, I was one year into high school. All I remember is that celebration in the street at the end of the war. That was the end of the war in Japan. Europe didn’t, no one celebrated that because the war was still going on. They celebrated in Europe but not out in Australia that I know of anyway.

Back to some of those motivations of joining up,

20:30 **can you reflect on those? You were obviously very keen to fly but were there any other motivations?**

I didn’t know what to do. I’d left uni, I really couldn’t stay at home, my mother was married, I really had, I guess my whole life has been like that really, finding what to do, but that was it I really didn’t know what to do and I thought, “Well, it says here you can learn to fly,”

21:00 and it’s interesting because when I first went solo I thought, “Do these silly buggers really understand what they’re doing? Here I am, I’m green, I don’t know what I’m doing and they’re letting me go solo in a government aeroplane.” But the interesting thing was they were paying me at the same time. I couldn’t understand that. Being paid for doing this sort of thing was a novelty to me.

I’ll come back to that.

21:30 **If you could tell us more about the bastardisation issues you encountered there and you sort of rebelled against. Can you tell us about that?**

I didn’t rebel against them I just didn’t like them. I find it degrading in that someone invades my personal space and makes me do things I don’t want to do. That’s why I didn’t like it. I didn’t rebel against it

22:00 I did it. But to me it’s immature, it’s an immature thing and when I went into the flying training school direct there wasn’t any. These were older people, they weren’t students. When you joined the college and go through the academies your virtually straight out of matric, you’re still quite young. A lot of the blokes in direct entry were twenty five, twenty six up to twenty seven, they’d been around.

22:30 They’re not going to stand for that sort of crap and that didn’t go on in the flying training schools.

To what extent were those things part of the training to deconstruct the personality and turn you into a military person, part of the disciplinary system?

No, it’s part of any student organisation. One of the things that’s really worried me with academies, military academies is this sort of

23:00 behaviour were you give people who are under training, not people with experience at all the power to do this to younger students. It’s just basically, for me it’s wrong. It’s not an authority you should give them. It’s fine sort of giving people duties and responsibilities but to give them the power to do this sort of thing is wrong.

Can you give us an example of what you went through, what they did to you?

23:30 I can’t remember it. No I can’t really remember the things now. I’d rather put it out of my mind. It’s degrading stuff you know. I remember in fact it wasn’t the college thing but the orientation week, I had to go to Johns College in Brisbane, across Brisbane from Kangaroo Point, get into the college and do something, I can’t remember what it was, and then I had to

24:00 come home naked in a tram and I went all the way back naked in a tram. Now this is just stupid. Is that to test your initiative or what? It’s not really. I mean university is the study, is the personal study you know, it’s the reading.

What would be an analogous thing they put you through in Point Cook?

We did

24:30 all the physical abuse type. Not bad abuse but you know, I can't remember what they actually did. I remember one bloke though, the first course you see didn't undergo initiation. This was the first college course after the war where they decided they'd train the permanent officers, the senior officers of the air force and the rule was that when they graduated they were to undergo it

25:00 by the junior courses and one bloke wouldn't be in it. I don't blame him. It's ridiculous. It's stupid business. I don't know what useful purpose it serves. If you're talking about military bonding or obedience that's one thing but training officers in the air force it's hardly a necessary part of it.

Where doe the ritual come from? It

25:30 **goes across the services?**

It goes across everything. Its human behaviour, it's a part of human behaviour I dislike intensely. I don't see the necessity of it and I wouldn't permit it if I were in control. It's unnecessary. I mean when I went through the flying training system without it and you know a lot of those people ended up as senior officers and all the rest of it. It wasn't necessary but it's

26:00 very conducive to the oddball getting a bit of power and people do like it. You know, power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely? Well in student organisations they're never found out and they can do this sort of thing. Schools are a perfect example when you get prefects who are actually megalomaniacs and they can get away with a lot of stuff the

26:30 teachers don't know about and it's not the right way to police a student body.

Yes. There's now a lot of bullying really isn't there?

Yes. Basically.

We'll move onto the flying training.

I didn't think I was going to talk about that!

Yeah they'd given you a government aeroplane to fly?

Yeah, I couldn't understand it. The world was a wonder time at that stage. I mean, my life had been pretty limited, pretty closed in a way

27:00 and suddenly I was out in the big world. I mean Toowoomba and Killarney and places like that and the Brisbane suburbs in the '30s and '40s was no big deal and suddenly I was in the real world and these were wartime aeroplanes and they were paying me to fly these things. It was brilliant. I can still remember it.

Can you tell us about one of the most memorable early flights?

27:30 My first solo on a Tiger Moth, my first solo in a Wirraway was great because in a Tiger Moth the wind is whistling past you, you've got this speaking tube that you have to yell into basically, you're hoarse after teaching someone for an hour and the thing I remember at the Wirraway was lovely. It had a radio and an intercom and you could close the canopy. It was really terrific. And

28:00 some years ago when I was flying PC9s out of Bankstown for Hawker DeHavilland. They said to me, "You'd like a ride in our Tiger Moth?" I said, "No thank you! I never want to see one again." They couldn't understand it, "Don't you want to fly in our Tiger Moth?" "No! Awful aeroplane." So I remember that.

Can you take us through your first solo?

Oh no. Not really. The only bit I've got in my mind is taking off.

28:30 Only a little circuit and by that time I'd got over it and I said, "Well, I'm up here," and then I had to land. The one I do remember is the Mustang. When we went to Williamtown, to fighter OTU [Operational Training Unit] we flew about twenty seven, twenty eight hours in Mustangs to prepare us for flying Vampires and I remember going off in a Mustang and I thought,

29:00 "This is fantastic!" That was a beautiful aeroplane I must say. One of my favourites and I got up there and I had to do a stall, so I did a stall and I had to do a spin, I did my spin and I had to do aerobatics and turns and things and then it hit me. What's next? I've got to land it. And that really made me start thinking. And anyway it turned out that I followed the rules. It was interesting in fact that the

29:30 lack of knowledge we had at that time. Briefing in the Mustang, you were given this, have you ever seen a set of pilots notes from those days? I've got a set there, for a Vampire, little blue book. You read that and then you did and exam to learn the figures you know the speeds and everything and then we got the briefing and the bloke said, "Now two things to remember in the Mustang," the Mustang had a big lever here for the undercarriage and it was

30:00 die-cast metal. He said, “Don’t use your foot to put the gears down,” because someone one day had got his foot on it. He thought he’d use his foot and he broke it off because it was really crap metal and the other was, “Now if you can’t get out of the spin and it’s really getting late, jettison the canopy and it’ll even out.” And it turns out that a bloke called Tom Murphy was spinning a Mustang one day and he screwed up, couldn’t get out of the spin because he was doing it all wrong.

30:30 So he decided he’d jump out, so he let go of the stick and the rudders and jettisoned the canopy but then of course then he had a stick in the rudder which is what got it out of the spin but he didn’t know. So that was the rule if you’re having trouble getting out jettison the canopy, bloody marvellous!

Takes your hands off the controls.

Exactly

31:00 **Just take us through the Tiger Moth training to the Wirraway and the important landmarks for you personally for you at that time?**

Well, the Tiger Moth we did I think about forty hours. That’s just basic flying training, you learn to fly but you don’t learn to apply it to anything you just learn all the basic manoeuvres; taking off, climbing, descending, turning, spinning, aerobatics and all that sort of thing.

Who were your instructors?

31:30 I had a bloke, a Kiwi actually, MacKinder I think his name was. In those days we did what was called flight grading so you had all, we had about, how many people did we have? Must have been forty or fifty and you would all, out of this group would be drawn the pilots, navigators and signallers

32:00 so you all did ten hours instruction in the Tiger Moth. They still do it these days even though it’s a waste of time, at the end of ten hours you did a test with the chief flying instructor and then you were graded, flight grading. You all gather there in a big group. I’ll never forget it, I was thinking, “If I don’t make the pilots course I’ll have to think of something else here because I’m not going to be a navigator or anything else.” And your names are read out as to whether

32:30 you were going to be a pilot or a navigator or a signaller and I made it. So you’d one ten hours so then you did another trip with your instructor and then you went solo and you kept going. They still knocked a lot of people off the course. You’d generally lose about thirty per cent even after that and so after about forty hours. I could tell you, it’s in my log book. You went on to Wirraways and

33:00 generally it didn’t take, I mean I could actually look it up if you want the real figures, but after a few hours you went solo for four or five hours I think. Because you’d learnt to fly, you were now learning to fly another aeroplane. The basic rules hadn’t changed but you were learning to operate this aeroplane. And in fact the bloke that did my solo check, Fitzy,

33:30 I’m not sure if, I think he got killed later, he really taught me something because a Wirraway on landing with a tail dragger undercarriage you can’t see much, you’ve got to be very careful to control direction. You can not relax until you’re down to taxiing speed. And I got it landed and Bill would go, “Aw, beauty. It’ll be right,” and then

34:00 I relaxed and the next thing this thing started swinging and he really hammered me about it and consequently I learnt that and you never forget it. The big secret in instruction is letting someone go far enough to learn the lesson. A lot of instructors never let you deviate at all cause they’re not game to let it go any further but that’s the way you really get lessons stuck in your mind and then in the Wirraway

34:30 you did all the basic manoeuvres again. You did take off, landing all those sorts of things, formation but then you started to apply it. Instead of straight formation you would start what’s called a “tail chase” which is chasing another aeroplane round the sky and he trying to get you out of position so you started to learn spatial orientation to a great degree and it’s at this point that you start to pick the blokes that are going to be fighter pilots

35:00 and those that’d be crash orders and fly transports. Because some people don’t really have an ability to operate in three dimensions other than the aeroplane itself but two aeroplanes or more. And then you did a bit of dive bombing, not actually dropping bombs but doing dives.

What did you want to do?

I didn’t know because at that stage Korea was on and I thought,

35:30 “Jesus, if I go into fighters, I’d probably have to go to the war.” Didn’t like the idea of that, frightened the hell out of me. Anyway, I just let things happen. I’m a bit of a fatalist and whatever happened happened. I just did my best. I, in fact, was dux of my pilots’ course and I was second in the flying so I was supposedly pretty bright

36:00 with flying.

What happened to Fitzy your instructor?

I can't remember now. I'm pretty certain Fitzy got killed. I think he was with a student in a Wirraway and they got killed in the bay. Can't remember now but I think he did. Anyway…

This was after you graduated?

Yes after.

36:30 **Were there any other accidents during your flying training?**

Oh yeah. We were always burying people. Last one I buried on a course was a bloke called McKenzie. He was a funny bloke. Every Friday night he would shove a pound note in every pocket he could find and he'd go down to Werribee and get smashed. And he worked in the principal that as he got more drunk there'd be a pound note that he couldn't find so he'd always have one available to get a cab home to the camp.

37:00 He really punished himself, he relaxed at the weekends. And he got killed in a low level nav [navigation] accident. The Wirraway like most of the aeroplanes of that era had the compass on the floor and you had to bend down like this to set it. Marvellous system, really great. Because the thing with the magnetic compass is your aeroplane has to be perfectly steady to get it to read properly so there were all sorts

37:30 of errors so you had to get this aeroplane steady, then you had to set the compass and then you had to set your directional gyro and at two hundred feet you had to be pretty careful of what you were doing and the usual thing was they would run into a tree or into the ground. And he did, so we buried him and that was the last funeral I went to at Point Cook.

How did that affect you those training losses?

I don't know how it affects other people.

38:00 Me personally I'm always glad that I'm still on the right side of the ground and still looking at the grass from the top. I had my Number 1 in Korea was shot down in front of me but you know that's just a fact of life. The worst bit of it is not the mourning or any of that stuff, it's one minute he's there and the next minute he's not and you've got to adjust and that's the difficulty. McKenzie was no more so that was it.

38:30 But I think people got, people didn't mourn publicly like they do now. They didn't have anniversaries of these things, it's maudlin now it really is. But when I came out of Korea I buried a bloke, it's just part of life to me. As they say the greatest risk in life is dying, or the greatest risk in death is living, whichever way you want to look at it.

39:00 But anyway we did something like, we ended up with one hundred and eighty five hours flying when we graduated and on the Wirraway and in fact I've got the picture there. There was a Brit then was our Chief of Air Staff, bloke called Donald Hardman, and I've got my picture there of getting my wings off him and I was dux of the course and big deal. I had my mother down, brought her down to Melbourne

39:30 and put her up in a hotel in Melbourne and then we graduated as sergeants. Drinks and that at the sergeants' mess in Point Cook. My instructor on Wirraways was a bloke called Jack Carter and he was a trash hauler, a transport pilot, and the thing I remember about old Jack was always on the cross countries

40:00 the back cockpit was always full of smoke because he used to smoke all the time and when we went night flying for the first time he said, "You know enough about flying this now, I'm not going to demonstrate it. You just go and do it." Because the Wirraway at night at the back, I instructed it for years, was really bad, you couldn't see a thing and you had to actually line up the angle of the fuselage with the edge of the runway and be able to see

40:30 two lights. If you did that you were down the middle. That's how you did it but Jack he said, "No. I'm not going to demonstrate it," and he ended up later he was flying in 34 Squadron.

Tape 3

00:33 **You mentioned a couple of instructors, who was the most influential person in the aircraft training for you?**

At flying training school? Good question. I suppose your instructors are the most influential, not for character building, just from learning to fly. I don't really.

01:00 The chief ground instructor, like I mentioned, met me when I left the college but no, none in particular. Your instructor is the bloke that you're with every day and the testing officers but no, there's no one in particular.

Apart from flying what other things did you learn and have to come to grips with in the air force in the early days?

01:30 What still undergraduate? At training school?

About maybe the institution you joined into and the way of the world.

Yeah we did lessons on RAAF history and stuff like that. You had your ground school contingent. You did six months ground school initially and then you flew and you did ground school every day but generally the lessons were technical, you know to do with flying but you had the other bits

02:00 about RAAF history and that sort of thing. You had to do something about administrative law and all that side of it but pretty limited. I mean after all you're going to be a sergeant and just cannon fodder, you don't worry about that too much. Whereas in college of course you do a lot more of that, write erudite papers on how to fight a war without ever having fought one you know? It's good theory.

02:30 **You joined the air force very much to fly but you were still part of that whole deal. What did you think of the rest of the air force? The discipline, the organisation, the uniform…?**

I liked the air force as I said earlier, the older people helped the younger people you were treated as adult though. The first thing they said in the Operational Training Unit was, "You've now got a set of wings, we assume that you know what you're doing and

03:00 you get on with it and if you make a mistake we'll sort it out," and it was a pretty adult way of doing it. It wasn't the best way in a way in that you can assume too much about what people know when they've got a whole hundred and eighty five hours of flying but at least it made you feel that you were to some degree in control of your own destiny and it put you in control and it put the responsibility on you to do

03:30 the right thing. But I liked it, it was adult. I went to uni and seventeen, I was just eighteen when I joined the air force and I wasn't even twenty when I graduated and I had my twentieth birthday just before I went to Korea so I was young and brash and gauche and inexperienced in the world and I found the whole milieu

04:00 was great. It was almost, it was just like starting a new life. It was really enlightening it was great. I enjoyed it, it was adult, I was a pilot, I was a military pilot and I just suddenly realised that I didn't know what it meant exactly at that stage but I felt like I had got out of my childhood. It was good. I enjoyed it and the blokes were good.

04:30 **Who were the blokes you were with into that recruit training?**

Recruit training?

Coming into the air force at that time what kind of people were you with?

I was with all sorts from all different walks of life. I couldn't tell you now what they did then but several of us stayed in. I don't know if you know Newham who was Chief of Air Staff at one stage. We were on course together. Blokes now

05:00 in fact we reunioned at Williamtown a couple of months ago for the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the war. We had a 77 Southern Squadron reunion and we had seven of us off my course. One became a farmer and he's still there with his wife, he came up and he was in fact captain of Melbourne Football Club team, Geoff Collins in '55,'56 when they won

05:30 the three what's-a-names? So he was a footballer. And we had sorts. From anywhere they come in direct entry. The college and the academy they get, they're straight out of high school. I was I suppose too, but the others weren't.

What was the bonding like amongst the trainees?

Not all that much.

06:00 You were a group but once, I mean schooling to me is just a stage in doing something. Personally I think it's too much made out of school classes and going back to them and once you get through them you disperse anyway. Happened with my own brothers, you know we were bonded when we were young but we hardly

06:30 saw each other then for thirty years. But you don't really from close friendships, your colleagues, you work with your colleagues and you either admire them or you don't, you either hate them or you love them but every couple of years they change and the other good thing about the service if you stay in it, is it's always

07:00 refreshing. It's always getting new material in and the old stuffs going so it's never static. It's moving all the time so I don't think there's a string bonding, certainly not from my point of view. I don't think from my colleague's point of view. You might get a different opinion on that.

How were you feeling? You wanted to learn to fly and you'd learnt how to fly, what next for you? What were you thinking at the time?

Then I had to go to the bloody war.

07:30 That was the frightening bit. I don't know what other people think but I was shit scared. I mean it's not a very nice thing. When I started in Korea I flew with a Brit called Bugs Burly and the rule was you never attacked trucks near a known flat position and every time I flew with him we attacked trucks near a flat position and I got shot at and I saw all this stuff coming at me and I thought, "This is not right. Some little Korean is shooting at me.

08:00 He's not allowed to," but it was true and I said to him one day, "Listen Bugs, we're not supposed to be doing this. Why are you doing it?" He said, "It's the only place you'll find trucks." And here I'm a green twenty-year-old, frightened as hell partnered with this bloke he must have been twenty seven, twenty eight, very experienced in the service and he just couldn't care less about it and that really opened my eyes. And finding out about that some Korean mother had given

08:30 her son authorisation to shoot an Australian, that's when you know it's serious, it's not fun.

How much did you know about Korea before you were told you'd be going there?

Zero. We got some preliminary talks on it and what had happened, the demarcation and all this sort of thing after the war but not much. We were given briefings during the war. There was in fact a well known

09:00 correspondent, I can't think of his name now, during the war, and he gave a talk to us one day about the reasons for the war and all the rest of it. The general sort of talk and I don't know if we got formal briefings was that this was against communist aggressions, see this was only in 1951 and we all knew well enough by then from our education

09:30 about appeasement and what had happened to lead to World War 11 through appeasement and not stopping this sort of thing so this was the first post war example of not appeasing someone and letting them invade another country and apart from all the aspects of politics that go into it that was the sort of simple message for the servicemen; that we were fighting communist aggression otherwise it'll continue so that

10:00 was the first time that we'd done it and what's this bloke's name? This correspondent? He was well known then but the only other briefing I think we got was by an RAAF squadron leader who was an, what do you call them? He was an air defence officer, in other words he was part of the RAAF regiment which was a sort of ground force in the RAAF that defends airfields and things like this and he

10:30 would come and brief us on the methods of where we had to be careful if we were evading, if we were shot down and had to evade and in the middle of it he'd say, "Now we checked this last week when we were up in so and so." These blokes used to go in North Korea and walk out so that they could check what tricks were being set for you and this sort of thing and brief you and I really admired these people. They were

11:00 brave. Air fighting, air to air or air to ground is pretty impersonal, you're shooting at a machine. You know there's someone in it or you're shooting at trucks and you know there are people in them but it's much more impersonal than being on the ground and I can remember coming back and the Qantas aeroplane I came back in was a medivac, it had some army people being medivaced out and I was talking

11:30 to some of the troops and he said, "Oh, you were 77 Squadron?" And I said, "Yes, I couldn't do what you blokes do," and I said, "Listen buddy, I couldn't do what you do." Everyone's got a different slant on what's the best way to get killed you know?

When you left your initial training school the war wasn't the only option for graduates from there. How did it come to pass that you were sent to join the 77th Squadron?

12:00 Just that, I was sent. In those days you were given orders and you did them. These days you argue about it. I was posted to the fighters, they were recycling all sorts of people right throughout the air force. The same happened in Vietnam, we had fighter pilots going into choppers you know and this sort of thing. I was sent to Korea and I said, "All right, I've got to do it." But I was pretty apprehensive, I could

12:30 tell you. I was a young bloke with my background. I was the youngest pilot in the squadron when I got there. It's only young people that go to war you know. It's not old people, only young brash people that do it.

The OTU in Williamtown must have been quite a step up then in intensity, can you talk about that?

Oh yeah that's when you first learn to operate an aeroplane as a weapon platform. After you

13:00 did your initial mustang flying just to get used to handling the aeroplane then you went out to Soldiers Point, which is near Nelson Bay, and the bloke on the ground would have a dive screen and you had to practise at different angles because you had to control your angle to the extent that it's related very

13:30 closely to the aiming allowance you make for the particular weapon and so it was the first time you actually started flying your aeroplane at a target. And then you'd get, you'd do gunnery once you'd done the angle training you would then start doing aerial gunnery on targets. Then you would do rocketry and then you would do bombing with practise bombs and gunnery is a shallow angle twenty degrees,

rocketry is thirty five degrees,

14:00 but bombing is sixty degrees and it really looks steep when you start doing that so you gradually build up and so you did your weapons training and then you did air to air on a Banner. I don't think we did it in Mustangs, we did it in Vampires but that's the final thing on the air to air side. Then after the hours on Mustangs we flew Vampires. There were no two seaters, you just went off in a single seat Mach 30

14:30 Vampire. And the funny thing about that briefing was the only thing you were told was, "Don't panic if you get smoke in the cockpit on take off, it's the heating system." It used to put smoke in the cockpit. And that was the first time we flew jets. We'd never done it before, all we had was lectures on jet engines when we were in undergraduate training and you would go off the same way, you would go and do stalling and spinning or whatever.

15:00 But then you had the extra bit that this thing could go to very high altitude relatively so you then had to learn to dive this thing from height to look at what happens when you get transonic effects on aeroplane and we had a couple of blokes killed actually doing that and I went to two or three funerals while I was at OTU.

15:30 But the training was primitive, it really was. I mean we were sent off in pairs to do air to air combat. No one briefed us, they just said, "Go off and do air to air." And everyone's idea of air to air was just you tried to turn tighter than the other bloke. You weren't given any briefing on the best speed to turn at or how to use vertical

16:00 development to change your turning radius and all this sort of thing. But we would just go up and we would chase each other and learn nothing and one of the reasons that we were taken off air to air fighting in Korea was we didn't know how to fight. We didn't know the best way to use the aeroplane and we didn't really have any training in how to fight air to air. Neither did the Americans for that matter but theirs was a

16:30 slightly different situation and consequently that was why we were put onto air to ground but in fact if we'd trained with the knowledge we have now we could have been quiet successful in Meteors. It happened during World War 11, it happened often and it's funny how we never continue with the lessons because people move on and during the war with P40s they were getting shot

17:00 down by zeros because they tried to hassle them to turn with them. Eventually they learnt that the P40 could out dive the zero easily so they attacked at high speed. They would go through the formation, fire, keep going and then climb up again and have another go. This is what we should have been doing with the Meteors was learning where its best range was and use it. So our training was really very primitive

17:30 compared with what we do now.

Looking back with hindsight it's very easy to say that but what about at the time? How did you feel about training and what you were doing at the time?

I didn't think much about it actually. That's the thing. I just did what was the thing to be done at the time. When I got to Japan to fly in the Meteor we actually had a bloke – he wasn't actually a qualified flying instructor but he did your dual in the two seat aeroplane but he was a hopeless instructor but he was there really as a

18:00 safety pilot and to guide you. In fact I remember, Dick Whitman was his name, he lives in Canberra and Dick was one of these blokes you could have a conversation in a group, you could ask him a question, you could come back half an hour later and he'd just be finished answering it to someone else. He always went off on a

18:30 sidetrack, funny bloke. When we were at Ardeer he used to do the weapons work on the Sabre and someone would say, "Why is the Sabre taking off so late in the day?" And they'd say, "That's Dick. That's his first trip." Yeah and he was the instructor at Iwakuni and we were lucky to actually get, I think I got eighteen or twenty hours in the Meteor before I actually went to Korea, initially they didn't and

19:00 you had to learn to do your gunnery properly in your plane on your own. You didn't do it in a dual, you'd learnt basically in the Mustang anyway but you had to apply it to the Meteor, new aeroplane, and shoot at this rock in Iwakuni Bay and then you went off and you went on your missions. But in fact one bloke there threatened to send back because his gunnery was so bad. But it wasn't a systematised training at all.

19:30 It was very primitive and very bad.

How much was that a cause for concern taking into account that you were about to be sent off to battle?

It wasn't a cause for concern for me. I didn't know any better. It should have been a cause for concern for the senior people but you see during the war a lot of the senior people never flew, they were in staff positions and planning and that sort of thing and the only people with experience were flight lieutenants and squadron leaders who were with

20:00 you in the game. You could learn from them but they weren't very good at teaching either and they were

too busy doing their jobs. It should have been of concern. It became of concern later on to the point where we systematized it properly and we documented it properly and we had a proper training system to the point now where a lot of pilots are too scared to bloody well fly unless they've got someone doing it initially with them. But

20:30 when you're young and brash you just do what everybody is doing and you just hope you survive. You think you're good and you find out later it was a lot of luck.

Can you talk a little bit about the transfer from the Mustang to the Vampire and then to the Meteor and the differences between the piston driven and the jet engine for a pilot?

Oh hell, there's a big difference. The jet's a lot easier.

21:00 If I could just say in general aeroplanes now are easier to fly than they were then. You spent a much larger proportion of your time just handling your aeroplane in those days than you do now because most of the handling now is taken care of automatically and you can actually concentrate on your job and you've got the information systems to do it. So in those days there was a lot of effort went into flying the aeroplane but

21:30 going from a Mustang to the Vampire was just. Well, the propeller and the Mustang had a relatively large propeller and a lot of torque and when you took off as your mate will know there, the aeroplane tends to swing one way on takeoff as you apply power. The Wirraway wasn't really bad at all but the Mustang had quite a swing. In fact,

22:00 I was in the tower one night with the duty pilot of night flying and this bloke took off and he crashed after takeoff and he was all right strangely. He said he knew he'd overcorrected the swing because he could see two rows of lights on one side and he was so worried about it that he just overcorrected, stupid. But it swung quite strongly but I mean the thing's designed to

22:30 handle it anyway it's just a matter of training but on a jet of course you've got no swing at all. But the biggest thing is to convince yourself that this thing will actually move because it hasn't got a propeller but once you start taxiing you know that it's pushing it so it goes. You've got the briefing, you go and do it and once you've done it once it's like riding a bike but handling a jet engine is quite different

23:00 from a piston and on approach you've got to have a minimum rpm [revolutions per minute] to get response from the engine. A jet engine only really operates right at the top end of its rev [revolution] range, particularly the old engines. I mean the mean went from three thousand five hundred revs idle to something like ten thousand,

23:30 eleven thousand and only from about nine to eleven did you really get much response. And on approach you've got to keep a certain minimum rev so you can get a response whereas with a piston engine it's, or even a turbo prop like an MU2 [Mitsubishi] it's instantaneous. But we didn't know much then. When we flew Meteors we were told

24:00 you hit one hundred and twenty five knots, about four hundred metres from the end of the runway, and then you cut the power completely. There were a few blokes sort of landed short of the runway and the reason was they thought if you had the power up and with a jet engine that was causing problems with people behind you, with their wings wobbling. We didn't know then it was actually wing tip vortexes, nothing to do with the engine at all.

24:30 So we had a lot of ignorance. I spent a lot of my career in the period of development of jet aviation. When I was on Canberra's, just to digress a bit but to illustrate it, the engines in a Canberra could not be accelerated in a crosswind and to actually take off in a Canberra in a crosswind you had to face

25:00 in the wind across the runway, run the engines up till you got the inlet guide reins closed and then you had to jump around on the brakes and then go down the runway so you know the development of the jet engine was very early, in the very early stages. There wasn't a problem with Vampires because they had what's called a "centrifugal compressor" but the axial compressor like all modern engines

25:30 they, at that stage, were very tricky and you had to watch it very carefully. But in Korea the engines were fine but we had these strange ideas about jets and it took years before we actually learnt what was the right thing. But no, you just did it. The proof of the puddings in the eating, it worked you know.

26:00 And it was good, it was quiet, you were pressurised, you had heating, didn't have cooling unfortunately until years later and it was just good fun. It was good fun. The first minor problem was information where you've got this engine that doesn't necessarily respond that quickly but you'd very soon sort it out.

26:30 **It's so hard to sort of take ourselves back there having jets become so much a part of our lives. But when you're put in that position, the example you gave of not having a propeller in front of you for example, what other things about a jet did you look at and think were new or different or just a different concept for you at the time?**

Nothing really. Strangely enough that was the period when we went from tail draggers basically

27:00 to tricycle undercarriages as well. cause jets don't take kindly to being tail draggers, they tear up the tarmac. But no, it's just that when you're in the business professionally, and someone says you're going to fly a jet well, you know, so what. Someone's already flown it. The test pilots have developed and all the rest of it, you've just got to follow the rules

27:30 of your flying training. It's just an aeroplane as they say when you pull the stick back the earth disappears, when you push it forward the heavens appear, or the earth reappears sorry, they're all basically the same but the jet of course was higher altitude, you had to pay more attention to oxygen, you had to pressurise otherwise you'd get the bends and all sorts of things. You had compressibility effects, you had to be

28:00 very careful with your top speed but these are limitations you learn anyway. And these days of course you've got a two seater and you can demonstrate it all. Those days you couldn't and that's why we killed people with high speed flying.

Can we step back a little to your weapon training in the Mustangs, can you explain a little bit about the difficulties you might

28:30 **have had with the different weapons or the first introduction you had to the weapons in the Mustang?**

It's mainly one of awareness. I mean when you're diving at the ground you've not only got to sight and fire at the right range, you've got to avoid the ground. So you've got to be aware of all the cues that are necessary to make

29:00 sure you do it safely. And you've got, in those days you didn't but these days you've got some other severe limits like avoiding your own rounds with ricochets. So you've got a pretty small envelope in which you can actually fly your guns though, you've also got to with rockets. Guns are specific, guns you have a cross and

29:30 you put it on the target and you have to judge the range. It's easy on a firing range because you've got a target of a certain size and you know the angle that the cross attends so when the cross is on the target you know what range you're at. But in real dun firing over ground you haven't got a, what was it? Thirty feet square or something I forget. You haven't got it so you have to learn

30:00 to judge your range from the target just visually and it's amazing actually how you improve with practical experience. When I first went to Korea the rules were; to claim a truck destroyed it had to burn, to claim it, if it didn't burn it was damaged if you reckoned you'd hit it and for the first month no one could get one to burn. Ever after you couldn't

30:30 stop it. And it's just because you got used to the site picture and all of this. In the end you could see we had four twenty mil [millimetre] guns in the nose, and you could see the rounds, no tracer, you could actually see the rounds going. You became aware of what was going on around you because some of it became more natural to do with experience. With rocketry and bombing you have to know,

31:00 you have to get he angle right and then you have to know your height so you have to keep an eye on your altimeter or whatever as well as aiming with your sight picture which is not a cross. So it's mainly really getting all that awareness, the number of people in Meteor, Meteor did not turn that well and quite a few people ran into the ground and you had to be really aware of it. I scraped

31:30 the ground once with my ventral tank and I came back once with a picture of the target as if you were walking up to it, I didn't hit the ground but I was bloody close. And it's funny because the one where I scraped the ground, they were bushes you know, like salt bush sort of thing, I could hear it going into the fuselage but I wasn't even worried about it. I thought, "Oh Christ," and

32:00 the thing eventually, because I was going up the side of a hill, that was the trouble, but yeah it wasn't a good aeroplane so you've got to be aware of all of these things. There's no point losing an aeroplane and a pilot to take out a truck.

What about bombing? This was very steep diving for you, can you talk about your first experiences of using bombs?

Well I never dropped practise bombs. We didn't bomb

32:30 in Korea. Right at the end before I left they had someone over who started doing some trials on dropping bombs. They always did that when the war was ending didn't they? But practise bombs it's just a steeper angle, you've got to get used to it. Sixty degrees looks like you're going straight down but you know the Stukas in the war they used to go vertically but they had speed brakes and all the rest of it.

33:00 No, it's just another thing you do. You learn the cues you need to get that angle and you do it. Pretty simple then you've got someone on the ground when you're training that gives you the angles so you just adjust it. The biggest thing is watching your altimeter.

It must start out as theory and as you say it becomes instinct in a way, is that a gradual process or is it something you have to get your head around very quickly?

33:30 **It's not instinct, it's familiarity and training and you get familiarity with doing it so that the, how can I put it? Each dive is different, you have to judge whether you got the angle right or wrong, make an allowance to adjust the sight picture and let it go but a lot of the basic things you're doing without thinking to get the angle**

34:00 **right. You set up right and you roll in, in the normal way, all that gets pegged, it's just when you're in the dive you've then got to say yes I have or I haven't and I've got to adjust. But the mechanics of it gets familiar but each attacks different. And particularly in Korea, because the terrain was so mountainous and the biggest problem was you had to plan your attack so you could get**

34:30 **out and that's where I nearly blew it. But a lot of people actually flew into the ground.**

You mentioned there were accidents at Williamtown. Can you tell us about any of those accidents specifically?

Yeah, there was one guy on my course, a bloke called Edwards and he was doing what's called mark and compressibility's where you'd fly the aeroplane to it limits with

35:00 respect to transonic characteristics where you get compressibility which in the Vampire which was about mach number 0.76 I think. I can't remember. The early Vampires we had, the Brits their Vampires had an engine called the, not the Ghost, can't think of it now.

35:30 But we put a bigger engine in. It had three and a half thousand pound of thrust, we put a five thousand pound thrust Nene in. And to get sufficient air flow they put in what they called elephants ears on the back of the fuselage here. Now when you get into, you part of the aeroplane. You get turbulence and these two things were causing turbulence on the tail plane on the elevator. Consequently to get out of the dive

36:00 if you really got seriously into it you didn't have an effective elevator and you had to actually put your foot on the panel to try and pull this thing back and this bloke got too fast and he couldn't get out of it. He could've if he'd been better trained, he just need to pull his power off on his speed brakes and wait, it's an awful thing though to wait when the grounds coming up but eventually it would have slowed enough to get out of these effects and he could have got out of it.

36:30 There was, I can't remember the other bloke but there were two of them.

What happens when there's an accident like that at the OTU immediately after?

Anywhere in those days there was a court of inquiry. There'll be a bloke appointed by he commander, the air officer commanding, he'll appoint an officer and a court to do a court of

37:00 inquiry and they'll take evidence and they'll reconstruct it an come up with the cause and of anything, any lessons come out of it they're sent off in safety bulletins, that sort of thing. It's a bit different now because in those days there used to be a fight between the Director of Flight Safety and Air Force Office or the Department of Air as it was, and the court of inquiry and when I was DCAS [Deputy Chief of the Air Staff] I changed it and now what

37:30 happens is the team that reconstructs the accident, purely and simply the actual sequence of events, then there's a court that meets to apportion blame or take administrative action whatever but this generally would happen.

I know you've said times have changed in response to memorialising death and stuff but surely that must have had quite an effect on trainees at OTU when an accident like that happened, what was the atmosphere like?

38:00 I don't know about the others but I didn't feel anything. It wasn't me. I mean, when you're in the business as long as you stay alive that's the main thing. I don't recall the blokes ever getting maudlin or anything about anyone dying, it was a fact of life, you lost a good buddy or whatever, I mean when Spence went I wasn't there but the

38:30 blokes, they liked Spence, he was a good CO [Commanding Officer]. And you looked after the family and you know you went to the funeral but I don't think there's anything more in it than that.

You by your own admission you were scared at the prospect of going to Korea, was there a moment for you when you realised the gravity and the reality of the situation you were getting into?

Yeah like I said earlier

39:00 when some bugger started shooting at me. Then I really did realise it. Mind you the only time I was ever hit was with a ricochet, one of my own. That's the silly thing. Yeah, when they were shooting at me I realised they could kill me. Yeah, it's not much fun.

I guess you can't really be prepared for that moment until it happens.

No some people it doesn't worry much. It worried me I can tell you, I'm into self preservation.

39:30 I'm a coward.

Well, we'll come to that moment in a moment, I'll just change the tape.

Tape 4

00:32 **Just on the training and especially at the OTU what training were you given on bailing out from the Mustang?**

Well you're briefed. That's all you're briefed, to jettison the canopy, keep your head down while you do it and where to dive over the side, that's if you're in normal flight. If you're in a spin, I don't think they briefed on that.

01:00 The spin can be difficult because you end up going in the propeller, or if you've got difficulty you can fly upside down with the trim forward and drop put that way but you just got a briefing. In the Meteor of course that was the first time we flew with an ejection seat. The Vampire we had didn't have one and the Vampire I think the briefing was to do it inverted to get away from the tail plane because this was a bit like a P38.

01:30 The Meteor was the first ejection seat aeroplane I flew and so you were briefed in ejection seats and what to do and that's matter of sitting in the seat properly and pulling the blind. Jettison your canopy first. But it's just briefing, I don't think at that stage we had an ejection seat trainer but they had one afterwards where you had

02:00 a half charge and you were shot up the rail so you go the feeling for it but it was just basically briefing.

Particularly when you weren't using the ejection seat, the pulling of the chute what training did you get in deploying a parachute after you'd bailed out?

No training. They tell you, "There's the rip cord and you pull it." The main thing is if you're in a Vampire for instance that you waited until you were down at lower altitudes

02:30 you're biggest problem then if you had to bail out at altitude was the emergency oxygen, you had to activate that in the Vampire in a little bottle and you had to wait until you got lower but it was all just briefing. There's no way you can actually demonstrate that to anyone. The best thing to do and I did it later on at Williamtown with the parachute training used to run water drops for air crew,

03:00 and you'd go out in a Gooney Bird or a Caribou and you'd jump into Port Stephens and then you'd get picked up and that way you didn't break your legs or anything. You might drown, but didn't break any legs and I did about five drops of that, five jumps. And if I'd had my way I would have made every air crew do it. Because the thing about survival and particularly getting out of aeroplanes the people who survived

03:30 and we got lectures on it often enough, were those who continue to try and survive. Now I heard a modern air force pilot not so long ago say that once he'd ejected he'd given up and I couldn't believe it because if you've been in a parachute than that's not

04:00 of concern to you, you know what it feels like. If you've done a run on the ejection seat trainer you know what it's like to go out. Generally it's automatic, but you should be there saying, "This is what I expect next," and if it doesn't happen then you're ready to take the backup action. So you've got to be trying all the time to make sure you've taken every action

04:30 you can to survive. If you just say, "I'm ejecting and that's the end of it," which is what this bloke said, that's stupid. You've still got to go through the whole sequence and we were taught that. To keep trying to survive whatever you do. Now in the Meteor in the early seats in the Canberra, the seat was not automatic. You had to eject and then you had to get rid of the seat and then you had to

05:00 pull the D-ring. With the later seats it's automatic, but while it's happening you should be seeing that it's working. At low altitude of course there's little you could do if you're down right at the lower limits with modern seats it can go out zero, zero but you've got to be ready for the landing and try to survive that as best you can. Because if you're in enemy territory it isn't just getting out that matters, then

05:30 the whole nine yard starts. You've got to land, you've got to try and make sure you're not injured as best you can so you can evade and get back. That's your duty. It's also a wise bloody policy to try although I don't think any of the blokes who were shot down in Korea got back out of North Korea. There have got to be some but I can't recall any of ours. They were probably Americans who may have, I don't know. So that's

06:00 what it was, you were just briefed.

What training did you receive in being shot down over enemy territory before you arrived in Korea?

Can't get training in that. Do you mean on escaping and evasion?

Yes.

You do an escape and evasion exercises with the army, although we didn't do any. We did it later when I was at Amberley on Canberras we did some. They stopped them in the end because the way they screwed up the exercise, but you do escape and evasion exercise, you do survival training

06:30 in the bush and that sort of thing. You got lectures on the topography, if you're talking about Korea then it'd probably be North Korea; what are the best ways to evade. You always had to go, if I remember rightly, half way up the hills, don't ever go down in the valleys of course or on the roads that's obvious, but don't go on the tops of hills, you'll get sky-lined and that sort of thing. You generally went along half way along them.

07:00 It would depend on the particular warfare what you were briefed. You had a silk what did they call them? I forget what they were called now, it's a map and has language on it that asks certain things if you meet anyone. Your basic survival training for that area will tell you

07:30 what there is to eat, the best place to get it and that sort of thing. You just carried it in your head basically from your briefings.

Just back to your training at Williamtown and those losses, the air crash investigation is always a bit contentious and often the blame is called pilot error, as a pilot at that time how did you feel about findings that might come down?

08:00 I didn't feel anything, I didn't know about it. You've got to remember if you're a squadron pilot flying every day you're not concerned about the policy and all that sort of thing except if it relates to you what you've got to do to cover your ass sort of thing or what you've got to achieve on your course and that sort of thing. It's not something you were worried about.

08:30 **So during your training to what extent was as you say other peoples mistakes used as a teaching tool?**

Oh yeah, all the time. And the Director of Flight Safety issued a monthly bulletin on accidents with comments on what the cause of it was if they knew, any lessons there were. There were safety bulletins, there would be amendments to flying orders and things like that. There was a flying order book in every squadron so if there'd been an accident and something had come out

09:00 of it as a lesson there would be a flying order written on it. If there were incidents with engines or problems they would go in the flying order book. You had to read that and sign it once a month. You had to sign the news section, or sign it every day. So that you were kept up to date of all the problems that might be occurring in your aircraft type.

When you got to the end of your training at the OTU, where did your heart lie in

09:30 **terms of which aircraft did you like to fly the most?**

There wasn't a point of choice. I was based into Korea. I was happy, I was going to go and fly another aircraft type. That's all that worries you I think in those days, whether it's a good aeroplane. And you'd talk to other blokes who'd come back and they'd tell you about the Meteor which was what we were going to fly and that's the good thing

10:00 of sending the people back to you when they give you information on what you're going to be doing. They're supposed to also train you accordingly but as I say the training was pretty primitive in those days. Training wasn't well done.

So how well prepared did you feel at that time when you finished?

I felt all right because that's what everybody was doing. You're a creature of your age. I didn't know

10:30 any better until years later. I thought I was an ace, then I found out I wasn't. But that's true of all young people.

How many hours had you accumulated in the Meteor when you left OTU?

When I left Korea?

OTU, when you left the OTU.

No I didn't have any hours in Meteors in OTU, it was just Mustangs and Vampires and I think it was about twenty seven or twenty eight hours in Mustangs, about ninety hours in Vampires. So then I would have had about

11:00 three hundred hours total. And then we trained in Iwakuni in Japan and got about between fifteen and twenty hours, I can't remember. And then you went to Korea.

Can you tell us about what you knew of the war when you finished at OTU in Williamtown?

Just what I said before, people from news and comment you know they were all things, you

11:30 knew roughly why the war was on or at least the official view of it and we knew about the fact that the Russians had not been on the security council and couldn't veto it, so that way we succeeded in getting it going. We all knew about communist plans of expansion and we knew that this was the first example since the war of what will happen

12:00 if you appease some aggressor and it was all pretty good general knowledge anyhow.

How well do you think the war was known in Australia at the time?

It wasn't known at all really. I met a sheila I know when I got back and she said, "Where have you been for six months?" I'd told her before that I was going to Korea and she said, "Well, have you been away? Have you been on holiday?" It was a different world then, these days

12:30 a man gets a posting order and he gets all this information and he gets his tickets and whatever, when I graduated at Point Cook I was given a chit to go into the railway transport office in Melbourne and get the train to Williamtown. No one told me how to get there. Didn't even tell me where the bloody base was except we generally knew it. So I got on the train and got to Newcastle on Sunday morning

13:00 and asked someone, "How do I get to the Williamtown air base?" And they said, "Go get the ferry across to Stockton and there you'll find Fogg's Buses." So I got the ferry across and I asked someone where Fogg's Buses were and I waited I think about two hours for the one Fogg bus for Sun Bay, at midday I think it was, and I got to Williamtown and asked someone where the sergeants' mess was and went to the mess and said, "I'm Sergeant Collings."

13:30 "Oh, where are you from?" So I got given a room and then on Monday morning I went down to the OTU, I asked someone where it was. Now you've got orders and I don't know what all and air line tickets and when I came back from Korea off the Qantas aeroplane I got to the airport and I then got, I don't know how I got into Sydney. Can't remember, it was a different place in those days. And I got a train then, I'd been given another chit

14:00 for a railway ticket and I was given some leave and I went to Brisbane, and I had nowhere to stay so I went to Cannon Hill, the stores depot and I asked for a room. So I lived in the mess there while I was on holidays. Went and saw my mother and people in Toowoomba and I went out to Archer Field. It's interesting the bloke I mentioned

14:30 you should talk to, Jim Fleming, I went out to Archer Field, I had my uniform on and my new Korean ribbons and everything on and no one asked me anything or said anything except this one bloke and that was Jim Fleming. He said, "Hey, you're back from Korea, how did it go?" And we had a conversation. He showed some interest. He's like that, he's that sort of bloke. But you know you could have been on leave for six months for all anybody knew. It was called the forgotten war, no one really

15:00 knew what had been going on in Korea in Australia.

What did you know of the fairly high losses in 77 Squadron in that time?

We lost forty four pilots.

But before you were posted there?

I knew we were losing them. It was interesting, just to make a general

15:30 comment if you like on war in the air force, I went to the Korean Defence Attaché's place one night with my wife, we were invited there were two air force, two navy and two army generals invited. We had dinner and it was all very nice because the Koreans really are very punctilious in doing this with Australians and after it the Attaché said, "Right now, you've got to pay for your supper."

16:00 He said, "One from each service is going to talk about one particular battle." So the army got up and talked about Kap'yong or something and the navy talked about the carriers in the ocean and I got up and I said, "Well, the air force doesn't have any names for battles. The air force doesn't have separate battles. The air force is fighting the whole time over

16:30 the whole area while individual battles are going on. Ours is a continuous battle every day." But I can tell you about what we did in the air war in Korea." Now if you look at the statistics on losses between, no use comparing the navy in the war because the navy was quite small and quite small losses, but between the army which in this country is the defence force

17:00 in everyone's mind. In the air force per capita the air force losses were much, much higher than any of the other services. If you think about one thousand bomber raid in Europe where the losses were six per cent, which happened quite often on bad raids, you're talking about a thousand bombers, you're talking about a crew of eleven, eleven thousand people take six per cent of that in eight hours and

17:30 that's going on every week you know, but the losses in the air are quite enormous per capita of the service itself. So you know it's the sort of thing you're talking about. Now we lost in Korea, it's in that book, that's one thing that's correct, we lost forty four pilots. That's two squadrons basically in three years, so in terms of the air force's strength at that time it's quite a heavy

18:00 loss rate. In one month that I was there we lost three blokes; two Brits I think and, it might have been three Brits. We lost three in one month, I think it was March. So you know it's happening all the time, I lost my Number 1 in front of me. Stupidly we attacked a single truck and you weren't supposed to. I guess he thought there was more than one

18:30 but it turned out to be a flak trap. They would just paint a truck on the road or put a thing that looked like a truck and they'd put a gun next to it. And he got shot down in front of me. So it was happening all the time. On the way home when I cam out of Korea we lost a bloke. I was leading the flight actually and he was number four I think and he crashed after

19:00 takeoff and blew up. He was a new weapons officer, McGlinchy, and I buried him in Pusan cemetery with my flight commander when we came home together, a bloke called, Ross Glassop, I don't know if you've had that name mentioned. So it was happening all the time. There were losses all the time. It's different from ground operations where you do have a fight and you lose people and then you do nothing for some

19:30 time. But it's a different sort of war, quite different. And we had to go home, get showered, go to the mess and have a beer, have a nice meal and then go and sleep on a decent sort of a hut, it's a half wood and the top is canvas with an hibachi in the middle burning all night in winter. It's a completely different sort of war.

20:00 **But before you arrived there, there was a particular well known loss of the squadron leader Spence?**

Wing Commander? That was right in the early days he got shot down.

How did that affect?

Well I wasn't there then. That was on Mustangs. That's why I suggest you talk to Jim Fleming. He was the bloke who took the semi sound film for that

20:30 when Spence was lost and it'll affect the blokes in that you've lost your Squadron CO.

How much does it filter back to the air force in Australia?

The people in the air force would know. Most people would know it from the news. You know in the cinemas or on radio. Those in the air force would know, but even a lot of people in the air force probably wouldn't know.

21:00 I mean you all lead compartmented lives in a way. People at the training schools wouldn't know what was going on, that sort of thing. They'd find out, it gets around that's for sure.

Can you tell us about your departure from Australia for Korea?

Yeah it was with Qantas on a DC4.

Who were you with?

I was with a couple of the troops, a warrant officer. I can't remember, what's his

21:30 name? And another, an LAC [Leading Aircraftsman], I was a sergeant. Bill Haley was his name I think the warrant officer, mind you I can't tell all the stories about that. But the departure was just Qantas, then was a big old Quonset hut you know? The old Quonset huts and you hung around.

22:00 I don't think I had a passport actually. I never had a passport, I was in uniform and I had to identify myself. I don't think I even had an identity card, I don't think I did. Jesus life was different then wasn't it? I'll tell you what I didn't have was a driver's licence and when my youngest son was seventeen my wife said, "Damien's got to have his learner's," I said, "Why?"

22:30 She said, "Oh, well he's old enough to have it," and I said, "He hasn't got a car and he doesn't need to drive. When I was in Korea I was flying over North Korea in the war but I wasn't allowed to drive on the base because I didn't have a driver's licence." So you know life was a little bit different. And I didn't have a passport. I got on a Qantas aeroplane and we went via Darwin was the first stop and we stopped at the Berrima Hotel, you remember the old Qantas hotel there?

23:00 And the next day we went to, where did we stop on the way up? Oh, Manila. We went to Manila and we got a briefing from, they had an army sergeant who was the service liaison officer with the embassy and we went to the Manila Hotel and I haven't been to Manila since, but it was opposite a big. That was where Qantas

23:30 stayed. You know it was a big flash hotel in those days and we got briefed, "Don't go across the park, you'll get accosted by these prostitutes and so o"'. So what did we do? Naturally we went across the park didn't we? And this old AC [aircraftsman], I can't forget him. I can't tell that story but he,

No names.

No no. It's too sordid. Anyway then we went from Manila to Japan.

24:00 To Iwakuni. Coming back we went to NAS [Naval Air Station] Agana in Guam and landed there in the early morning and then we went to Moresby and to Sydney and in Moresby, I'm not really good at remembering dates or times, but the one I remember was the end of the Korean War in the 27th of July at eleven o'clock because I was crawling up the steps to the aeroplane to get in the aeroplane and the captain came out and said,

24:30 "They've signed the truce, it's eleven o'clock," and he got it on the radio. I remember that.

Before we get up to there, was there anyone special you left behind? Any girls?

No, only my mother. I didn't have a girlfriend in particular. I was pretty awkward with girls not having had a father I didn't really,

25:00 I had a girlfriend when I was still in high school in fact I saw her some years ago as an ASC Support Command. She married someone else. I was pretty awkward with girls. I didn't leave anyone behind. Only my mother.

And the Qantas flight up, are you with other passengers or is it chartered flight and it was all military personnel?

25:30 It was all military personnel. Qantas had their contract to deliver people to Japan and bring them back so the one I came back on was a medivac. They had a lot of troops in that were injured. Yeah I don't think there were any civilians. That was the first time I ever flew through what is called the 'inter-tropic conversion zone'. You know that? Since you're an aviator and in a C54 at eight thousand feet it ain't much fun

26:00 getting through and they didn't have weather radar in those days. Jeez, that was a rough leg. In Manila, the brief that met us in Manila, part of the briefing was, "Don't argue with the police. Do as they say and argue later," and I could see why we got there and there's these cops. First time I'd seen a cop with a gun you know because coppers didn't have guns in those days and

26:30 to see people with guns, coppers with guns, that really put me off. A rough place the Philippines. And that was it. That was the trip.

What were your first impressions of Japan?

Marvellous. Iwakuni was an old Japanese sea plane base and in fact the hangars still had bullet holes in them from when they'd been attacked. The interesting thing was that's

27:00 where I first learnt to count in Japanese. I learnt Japanese for a few years as well. But the girls that served you in the mess couldn't speak English so the menu was numbered, so you had to pick the number and learn it in Japanese. You know you learn that pretty quickly so you'd say, "Ne ban," and she'd get you number two.

27:30 And you had, the peace treaty hadn't been signed then and these were still slaves from the conquering power's position and you had Japanese girls did your room for you and all those sorts of thing but I was only there a couple of weeks. I did my conversion training and then went over to Korea and they used to send our laundry back to

28:00 the mess from Korea to get it done but you'd go into town and try and talk to some sheila or go to Hiroshima, you know, into the Hirabatsu, the brothels, and the thing about the Japanese trains was they were always on time and always very clean. And you'd hear this bloke coming through on the train

28:30 saying, "Hiroshima, Iwakuni, Hiroshima Iwakuni," he'd keep telling people which way the train was going but I went up there on leave in fact. And in the mid tour you got a week off and you went to this recreation centre in Tokyo, forget the name of it now, might remember it. I'll never forget being there, I was

29:00 sitting there one night having a drink and there was this group of Brits army blokes all getting smashed. They really were half shell shocked you know and these poor buggers were just getting smashed basically and not saying a lot cause you know some of that ground war was really pretty awful. Talking to the army friend of mine who was there,

29:30 he's retired now in Melbourne, Jim Hughes, what they used to do in the static war was they would build their wooden tops to their command posts and holes in the ground and then when the Chinese came they'd call their own artillery in on top of it and they'd just kill the Chinese on top but it was a pretty rough ground war that. I wouldn't want to do it.

30:00 **In your conversion training can you tell us about the Meteor and just walk us through the aircraft?**

Well it was the first time I'd flown a twin engined aeroplane, so we didn't know anything about flying asymmetric. The aeroplane itself was easy enough to fly but I'd never handled two engines. It had Derwents which was a small the first version of, the Nene was a scaled-up Derwent, it was a really good little

30:30 engine. They were good engines. It was faster than a Vampire you could go up to something like point eight two mark. It was nice easy aeroplane to fly. No vices really other than it didn't turn very well and when you got near the ground if you lifted too late you didn't pull out. It had an electric canopy – that was modern because the Vampire

31:00 we had to wind it and shove it in the hole. It had electric canopy which was great, just with two buttons and it had our beloved air force had equipped it with two, what were then called, radio compasses. Now the cockpit in the Meteor was pretty much a creature of it's time; you had the undercarriage lever there and right next to it you had the flap, so what did people do often? They got the wrong

31:30 one in a panic. So there's the cockpit had very little room, it was quite narrow and the only space they had for the two ADF [Automatic Direction Finder] sets was down here on the side so they'd be ADF set sitting there with the dial the face there on the wall so what they did to fix that they took two little silver mirrors and manoeuvred them so you could see them but of course it went backwards didn't it?

32:00 So tuning the radio compass was a real bit of fun. And in Korea in fact we had two beacons which was great you could so a sort of let down with it but tuning this thing at the side was fun. And we were talking about training earlier, we'd never used an ADF when we did instrument flying at Point Cook you got in the Wirraway and you did pattern A and pattern B, you took off and did turns, steep

32:30 turns and then you did these patterns where you would go along level at one hundred and twenty knots and then you would have to do a two hundred and seventy degree turn, lose a thousand feet at rate one. Then you had to go level, then you had to do a right hand turn through two hundred and seventy, no a left hand turn through two hundred and seventy, descend two thousand feet at a thousand feet a minute and so on. It was real precision flying but the only approach

33:00 you did, let down, was what was then called 'Q and H'. The old Q Co and you would go, "Ahhh," in the microphone and the bloke would get a thing in his instrument and he'd give you a heading you see and you'd go overhead and then you'd go out and let down. That was the limit of our procedural work on instrument flying. The actual instrument flying itself

33:30 was quite accurate was, what's the word? It was demanding enough. We did no procedure work except the Q and H. So then we got this, had to do the training on the Meteor and we got the two ADFs and then we had to learn how to do an ADF so they gave us a book. So this is what you do so you went up and you would try and do an ADF homey and this

34:00 didn't have an RMI [radio magnetic indicator], it was just the simple card and no one knew about radials or how to turn the card to make a radial or anything so you had to work this out and I remember doing one let down and I let down in the wrong bloody direction over the hills and then I was in cloud.

Just because it is a procedure that's no longer used could you describe a Q and H let down procedure for us?

34:30 A Q and H? Well, the bloke had a screen, a round screen with a compass rose around it, and when someone transmitted you would get a spiky sort of propeller like this and that was the line through that was your bearing and he would then use a sensing switch and it would cut off one of them and that would show

35:00 which was you right. So you had to press the button and go, "Ahhhh," for five seconds. Later on they said "Oh no, all you need to do is press the button you don't have to say anything you know," so you'd press the button for five seconds, the bloke would get your bearing and then he'd give you a heading to steer to and then you'd do that until you got there. They weren't any good at allowing for wind or anything, you generally ended up doing some sort of curve but when you were overhead the thing would just give a sort of circle and then you would

35:30 turn onto the outbound heading, start letting down at a fixed rate and he would then get you to check your bearings and correct it and you would turn and then he would bring you in on the bearing to the minimal altitude. So you can imagine if you had a whole lot of people wanting to do this – it was good fun. But that was the early days of getting some sort of homing and let down on VHF [very high frequency]. Other than that there was the radio compass but of course we didn't have it in the Wirraway

36:00 or anything in the Vampire or the Mustang so then we got it in the Meteor and then we had to learn it from the book. So you learnt and no one instructed you, you just go the book and read it. And everyone did it, they weren't very good at it. It was years before I learned how to do a manual DF [direction finder] on the radio compass which is much more accurate anyway. And that of course you

36:30 had to people didn't brief you but you had to read what the errors were and night effect was a real problem because we did missions at last light and if you were coming back at last light then your radio compass for a while was pretty useless. So it was pretty primitive. What you did when you got to Korea you got a map and you put a compass rose on it and you drew

37:00 the lines and you only ever did visual missions basically but when you're a hundred miles away you want some idea of where the base is and you navigated visually generally just using this compass rose and the line son your map. But there weren't any nav aids other than that. Oh, you had of course radar and GCA [Ground Control Approach], that was the good thing. GCA, we should never have got rid of

that.

What is a GCA?

37:30 GCA is ground control approach. You remember, you probably saw the films on the Berlin Air Lift and these blokes in the trailers with the screens guiding aeroplanes down into Berlin in the bad weather, that was called ground control approach. That was the best military let down aid there is because all the pilot has to do is follow instructions. The bloke on

38:00 the ground does all the hard work and he's fresh, he's got no battle damage, he's got no engine out or whatever and it's really great but we got rid of it. We've now got an instrument only system which is a civil system and when a blokes been on a mission and he's got a problem or he's even lost his kit what have you got? You've got nothing. But we had that. We had what was called a "GOLD let down," it was just Golf Oscar Lima Delta

38:30 were four points and you had to make a certain height for each point and the radar would guide you. The only trouble is in summer in Korea you get this haze and smoke and stuff up to about eight or ten thousand feet and you can see down but you can't see through. And the only forced landing I've ever done in my life was in a twin engined aeroplane in Korea and we were doing a GOLD let down

39:00 and I'll tell the story now.

Tape 5

00:34 **Can you tell us that problem you had?**

Ah well. I had an aeroplane. I kept complaining that it was chewing more fuel than it should and everyone just said, "You're just a ham fisted bloody throttle basher sergeant pilot, don't worry about it." Because I would be, we were supposed to be on initial with five gallons aside which wasn't very much I can tell you

01:00 even in a Meteor, it might have been ten gallons aside. I kept turning initial with zero, zero just getting down on the gauge, there's always some left. And I made it all the time but this day I was with this Brit, Mike Nicholas Jones, he was a flight lieutenant on loan, he got killed later in a Venom in Europe, the Venom had trouble with fuel in the wings and he blew up. But they used to call him Double Vision old Mike

01:30 and I was with him on this morning, it was in summer and it was al hazy and we attacked some trucks and I called, "Magpies," which was minimum fuel and he said, "No no, we'll do one more attack. We'll be right," which really pissed me off because I kept running short of fuel you know. So we did another one and then on the way home he didn't seem to hear me, he seemed

02:00 to be all over the sky and I thought, "Jeez," I hadn't flown him and I thought, "Jeez, he's a rough Number 1." We were jinking all over the place and I lost the first engine shut down about twenty miles out and he didn't seem to hear me. I said, "I've lost Number 1," he said, 'We'll do a GOLD let down, we'll do a GOLD let down," so we did a GOLD let down and we were into this stuff and we missed the airfield, we couldn't see it. And Ks, that's K14 Kimpo and K16 was the airhead

02:30 on the island near Seoul where all the transports came in and so they started vectoring us around the south of Kimpo and we were down to fifteen hundred feet and I'm on one engine trying to keep up with him, I'm trying to tell him I can't keep up because there's only one engine and he doesn't seem to be listening. In the end the second engine quit and I said, "I'm going to land on the island on the silt," and he said, "The airfield's straight ahead, just keep turning the airfields straight ahead."

03:00 So I looked and out of the haze comes this bloody runway and I just had time to get my wheels down and then it juddered on the end of the strip that I landed and then he said, "Come on. Taxi in. Don't block the taxi way," and I said, "I've got so and so nothing to taxi with." Anyway, I got out and here's old Wentworth Jones, he's got a handkerchief full of crap, he got it on the

03:30 tarmac and he's getting dressed again, well no, he's dressed, but he's got this, I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, I had a bit of a problem coming back." We used to wear an RAAF blue sort of coverall suit and long underwear and he had had too much fruit juice for breakfast and he actually got undressed in the cockpit, crapped in his

04:00 handkerchief, put it on the floor. Didn't tread in it or anything, got dressed again. After that I thought he was the greatest pilot in the bloody world. I couldn't believe this. That's why he wasn't listening to me he was a bit preoccupied. Anyway, the silly thing was we had to get the troops over because in those engines if you ran out of fuel you had to re-prime the lines, you'd never pump, an electric

04:30 pump in the tank. It was all mechanical and anyway we got them over and they said, "How much fuel do you want?" I said, "Oh, don't fill the ventral tank," and Mike Whittle turns to me and says, "No. Fill it up, fill it up," and I said, "We're only four miles away. We're way over landing weight," and he said,

"Doesn't matter. Fill it up." I couldn't believe this, he was a flight lieutenant, he's supposed to know it and we landed heavy, it wasn't going to be slow that day. But that was a good morning that. There was a bloke who used to draw

05:00 pictures, little cartoons we used to have on the wall. I'll show you a picture of them later and he did one of Whitworth Jones in this Meteor with an outhouse in the cockpit you know smelling. Jeez, that was famous that was. What a day. That was my only forced landing. Ever.

I can imagine you might have been feeling…

I was a bit twitchy I can tell you.

I meant a bit of the same thing in your cockpit.

Oh no I was too scared to do that.

05:30 That was a funny day that but that was the only forced landing I've ever done in a twin engined aeroplane. Anyway after that they checked the aeroplane and what did they find? That I had a faulty barometric pressure control unit and I was chewing sixty gallons an hour more than I should. And after that I was right I used to come home with fuel in the tank on the gauges.

What was the particular thing that adjusted the fuel?

06:00 Those early engines had what was called a BPC or a Barometric Pressure Control Unit. With a jet engine, as you fly high the revs will tend to increase, this controlled the rpm with altitude and speed so that you didn't have to keep, every time you change speed or alter it the revs would change and it was one through a Barometric Control Unit. And it was faulty and it was scheduling the fuel too much.

06:30 So I was running out of gas which didn't please me very much. Anyway.

Just staying on the Meteor before we go on to the operational thing, are there any other particular characteristics of the aircraft that you found when you first flew it that were unique?

That was the main one. It was a nice aeroplane, it was great to fly formation in. I remember

07:00 on Anzac day we flew over the regiment afterwards I said to the bloke on the other wing, "Jeez, you should have seen how close we were to the bloody camp there," he said, "That's all right, you should have looked out your side." But it was an aeroplane you could really fly a good formation in. It had a problem with the ailerons in that they were really heavy and you know

07:30 the fighters would come in, in formation and they would break onto down wind and the Sabres that had power controls, they would go 'Choomp' round and we would have to try and imitate them and you'd grab this stick and you'd go 'Rrrrrr', like this, and the bloody thing would roll over but later on they put spring tabs on them which made them a lot lighter but they still didn't roll much faster but they were lighter. That was the only real problem with them. They also,

08:00 the early ones had what they called "small breathers," the intake was too small, we weren't really getting as much thrust as we could so they in fact modified them and put what they called 'big breathers' on them and it was great to get an aeroplane with big breathers because it saved you something like two hundred rpm and it was better on fuel but other than that the tendency to splurge into the ground, that was a real problem. And several people

08:30 did it. But it was a really nice aeroplane to fly but it had this big ventral tank on. It was an English fighter, a British fighter designed during the war. Short missions, so short range, mainly shooting down B1s. And to go anywhere they put this big ventral tank on. It held, the whole thing held five hundred and ninety five gallons at total fuel and this thing had I think two hundred gallons in it so it was a lot of fuel but

09:00 with it we could do a mission of about an hour, an hour and a quarter depending on the altitude. But I once flew on with no ventral on and that was a completely different aeroplane, it was really a nice thing to fly. But it was real sluggish and wouldn't turn with the ventral on.

There was a problem with them at high altitude in air to air?

Well, they had this ventral on, it had no performance,

09:30 if we'd fought at fifteen thousand to twenty thousand feet it would have been fine. If we'd fought without the ventral we wouldn't have fought for long, but it would have been a reason policy to dump the ventral and have plenty of spares if you were doing air to air fighting so you could use it, dump it and then fight. It was a different aeroplane, it was very delightful and if we'd had the right tactics we could have done very well but we weren't trained, we didn't know.

10:00 The people who were commanding us didn't know. They were World War 11 people but they had no real experience or training in how to fight in the air. I mean the people who shot down aeroplanes were lucky in a way, they were either smart fellows or else they survived pretty difficult periods and then they learnt. You know you just learnt by osmosis,

10:30 that was the best thing to do but the training was pretty poor. But we could have done better in we'd been trained.

When you were there were you allocated your own aircraft?

Yeah, mine was 31. It was a small breather and one of the, since I was the youngest in the squadron the duty painter, one of the troops was a bit of a painter he put a cowboy on it and called it 'Billy the Kid'.

11:00 In fact, on the disc I've got it's got a picture of it of my aeroplane. In fact when I got that disc from the reunion I finally realised I'd been in the bloody war because there was my aeroplane, I'd been in it. Yeah it was good. But you used different aeroplanes at times but you're allotted an aeroplane and you generally flew that. But if it was out for maintenance or something then you flew something else.

11:30 We had some eight hundred and fifty series numbers, they had big breathers and spring tabs, they were nice.

Your particular aircraft had neither?

No. It didn't have spring tabs and it had small breathers. I was the youngest and a sergeant. Hell, you got the crap. Gee, that's the normal hierarchy of defence isn't it?

How long had the aircraft been in service when you arrived?

I don't know. They bought a whole lot

12:00 of them and they built them or reassembled them at various times just to suit the maintenance program or the losses. I don't know how long mine had been going. It's in that book. there are records of it but I don't know. I never worried about that sort of thing, I had my own aeroplane, hell! Twenty years old and I had an aeroplane of my own, it was great and I was getting paid! Not much.

12:30 **Around the time you were introduced to the Meteor you were also introduced to the base at Iwakuni, can you tell us a bit about that base and what it was like to be there while you were training?**

Well apart from what I explained before. It was the first time I had been in Japan, it was sort of like getting closer to what the war was, actually seeing

13:00 Japanese. Seeing an old base with bullet holes in the hangars, it was the first time I'd been near Americans to an extent and seeing the size of their operation because they had aeroplanes at Iwakuni. It was the first time I'd seen snow and lousy weather like that for a

13:30 long time. The first time I had smelt rice paddies in which they used human fertilizer and boy, there and in Korea in really was something. A couple of people fell into them which wasn't much fun. But yeah other than that it was just sort of the feeling of being near something that had

14:00 happened you know. There was war against Japan and there I was in Japan. Later on with the peace treaty when that was signed it changed a bit because the Japs weren't so subservient.

What contact did you have with the Japanese while you were in Japan?

Not much. Only in the bars in town with the girls and the people in the bars. With, if you went on

14:30 the train with the Japanese people themselves sitting on the train. People in the village next door, Iwakuni village. One interest was the bridge in Iwakuni over the river, what was it called? Kutabuki, the Kutabuki bridge I think it was. It was completely wood, there wasn't a bit of metal in it. It was a step bridge over this stream, but other than that it was just seeing Japan for the first

15:00 time and that area with the inland sea and the islands, it was just new that's all. New and different.

What about the Americans you were close to, what contact did you have with them on a personal level?

In Korea mainly. That was interesting. We were billeted with the 67th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing which was

15:30 RF80s, which was photographic F80 aircraft reconnaissance, RF, RAs reconnaissance. We were billeted with them, we had some RAAF interpreters with them. And of course the Americans had never heard of NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] aircrew so we all had to take our stripes off, the sergeants did, and we were, I was called 'Pilot Collings', you know, or,

16:00 'Pilot Jones' or whatever it was and so we were billeted in the officers' mess and the boss of the 67th was Colonel Berg and you'd come back in the morning off a mission, go up for breakfast and you'd often see old Berg with a cigar, this was about seven o'clock in the morning, and a martini in his hand, "How's it going fellows?" You know. We had a weather

16:30 man and he was a half colonel I think in the weather service and he, we were on one side of the strip and on the other side was the 4th Fighter Wing, the F86s and then on our side there was ourselves and

then the 67th with the F80s. And this colonel at night used to get half smashed and he'd drive his jeep round the strip which he wasn't supposed to do,

17:00 he should have gone on the outer perimeter road and he'd be chased by the air police and he'd roar up in his jeep, hop out, get into the club and say, "I'm home, they can't get me." This was his second home with the weather man but then he was replaced midway through my tour with a young bloke. I'd never heard Americans before, I'd never heard American accents but then we got this southerner and every morning we would get the, we used to have two islands, Cho-do and Kanghwa-do

17:30 which were emergency landing fields or strips if the tide was low, so you got the tide every morning you see. This bloke come into start, I'd never heard a southern accent and he gave me his brief and he said, "At high tide this morning at Cho-do is at 0745 and low tide is at whatever," and every day after that it was whenever he'd come in we'd say, "High tide," and he'd say, "Low tide." Funny bloody lot.

18:00 And there was an anti-aircraft position near the mess and the bloke who ran the anti-aircraft thing was a colonel and he'd be in there every night poking dollars into the one armed bandits with a stogie in his mouth. God we had some bloody characters. And every now and then the nursing sisters from Iwakuni would come over for the lotto night and they'd have big prizes you know.

18:30 The thing about the Americans is everything is so big and once it became static everybody lived pretty well and they had all the home facilities and the nurses would come over and the nurses used to win the bloody prizes which used to annoy us. We never won any and as I said earlier I couldn't drive on the base because I didn't have a driving licence so I couldn't drive. Wasn't allowed to drive the jeep,

19:00 we'd all go up in the jeep for dinner.

This is all at Kimpo to clarify?

Yeah all at Kimpo.

What about the RAAF in that base, what were your conditions like there?

Pretty good. As I say I was there when the war was static. We had these huts on a wooden floor, wooden walls up to about this height, shoulder height and then you had a canvas top on it. Had a hibachi, you know what a hibachi is?

19:30 A stove, a round stove, Japanese stove in the middle on a metal base with a chimney at the top and I winter that was going all the time. It was run on oil and we had duck boards between the huts. We had pretty flash toilets. They were big drums in the ground, about half a dozen in two rows

20:00 one row they would be burning it off, put oil or whatever and burn it and the other one would be used and you'd sit there trying to read the paper with this smoke in your eyes but it was pretty civilised. But we had showers, hot water but in winter if you went in, in the early morning there was ice on the duck boards so you had to run the water and get it hot to melt the ice or you'd slip and injure yourself. So we were clean

20:30 every day. We slept in bunks, wooden bunks with sleeping bags and we ate well at night. As I was saying earlier, it was completely different from the ground war, you were pretty civilised.

How did you come to terms with the weather, that first winter?

It was the first time I'd seen snow and in fact that was how you found vehicle was because in the morning those that were a bit slow would leave tracks in the snow when

21:00 they'd drive them into farmers hut and things like this so you'd generally attack where the tracks ended and you'd get the thing blow up or whatever. But I mean, that didn't worry you except if you had to get out. Then you made sure you wore warm clothes and so if you were shot down or had to bail out you could try to survive.

21:30 The ground crew had the worst part of it in winter, we were on perforated steel plate matting, you know PSP, in sand bag revetments but if it had been snowing or whatever and they had to clean the snow off or if they got clear ice on it, it was so cold they'd burn themselves if they didn't wear gloves. So they had to clean the aeroplanes down and get rid

22:00 of all the ice and they a really awful job, particularly very early in the morning. And often if there were some ice on the matting you had trouble braking and steering but later on, if you had to ditch or bail out over water you had two minutes, in ordinary gear, of survival.

22:30 Halfway through my tour we got given these survival suits, emergency suits. The Americans made them and they were a rubber suit all in one with a vent at the front and you crawled into it, pulled it over the top and then you rolled this vent up and sealed it and you also had little inlets that you could turn on and off in the boots so you could actually let

23:00 water in and it would warm up like with a wetsuit but it was best to keep it dry and if you went out in them then you could survive pretty well and they had a very good helicopter rescue service. We had one Brit while I was still there, Coleman, he had to bail out, he got hit in the side somewhere and it jammed

his controls. Just north of the line

23:30 he bailed out and the helicopters got him and he was back not long after we got out of the cockpit. And there were blokes who'd bailed out in the water still on the wing and the choppers would pick them up because they had some islands in the coast where they based the rescue helicopters. One of the missions we used to do in fact was capping, combat air control, called "capping," and we would

24:00 fly above a bloke who'd crashed or bailed out and if any troops were anywhere near him we would attack them. Of course we were getting shot at while we were up there but you did as much as was a reasonable risk to rescue your pilots, they're very valuable assets. And I remember one American, there was a pair of Mustangs,

24:30 just if you know the map of Korea, it's the land north of Kimpo, runs east west and just above there's a main road there. And we were up, he'd called for a cap and we were up I think there were four of us and we said to him, "How's he going?" And he said, "Oh he hasn't landed yet." This bloke was going

25:00 to force land. And this bloke was the quietest bloke I'd ever heard, he didn't want to say anything and so we said, "What's happening now?" And he said, "I don't think he's doing too well," and we said, "Why are you saying that?" And he said, "Well, he just hit the railway embankment." That's how serious that bloke was about it. But yeah, there was a good rescue service and

25:30 you did what was necessary to try to rescue people.

What could you do in that situation? What was the set up in a bit more detail of the caps?

Well if someone requested a cap you flew to the area you identified. Generally there'd be someone there who was part of the formation that lost the bloke and if there were any ground troops trying to capture the bloke you would shoot at them.

26:00 In fact, I don't know if you've read the books on it, Cec Sly was a bloke that had this happen to him and I can't recall now the details of his story. I think Cec got away, a helicopter they kept shooting up, the gooks that were trying to get him and they eventually got a helicopter in. I think the first helicopter in then crashed and they got another one in but Cec Sly got out. No, it happened all the time.

26:30 **When you first arrived at Kimpo, what were your first impressions of 77 Squadron at that time?**

In what way?

What was the morale like? What were they doing? Who was the first people that impressed you?

Well, the squadron in an air force is a sort of basic unit and it's got its own ground crew and generally you're relations with them are terrific.

27:00 The CO was not very popular at that time, well not that was later. The CO was good, he was an old friend of mine. Later on he and I served in Paris together and he's dead now but the next CO wasn't very popular. He was a bit of a strange bloke, I won't name any names. But we had good morale, everybody was just interested in getting missions up and getting to a hundred missions

27:30 and I wanted to fly every day, you'd get browned off when you weren't on the program. I mean that's all you had to do and most blokes that age, if they're going to be in the war they want to get their missions up, they want to get a hundred missions up, they want to get the next target number of missions up in the time they've got. They're all wanting to fly, they're all wanting to get experience because if you're going to do it you want to get the maximum experience.

28:00 And morale was great, the troops were great. A lot of my photos were given to me by the photographer he's still a friend of mine, a bloke called Murphy. But no, it was good. It's a good life, it's the best life in the air force in the squadron.

How did those who had already been there for a while teach things to you or welcome you into the squadron when you arrived as reinforcement?

28:30 Funny question

Badly phrased question

You see you ask questions in the modern idiom. No one welcomed you. You just arrived. You got on a Dakota in Iwakuni and you got to Seoul and they'd be a jeep there and someone would pick you up. They'd take you, "There's your bunk, this is where we go." They'd tell you where to go to dinner and all the rest of it,

29:00 but no one welcomed you. There wasn't any welcome ceremony. The only farewells were blokes just got smashed the night before. In fact, one bloke I remember, Harvey Joy, I'm lying in my bunk trying to get to sleep for an early morning mission and he comes in smashed and he's cut is hand and he's dripping blood all over me and he's saying, "Hey there. What are you doing there?" You know. Because I was put in with a pretty rough lot of old hands when I went there. But no,

29:30 you just got in, next thing you knew you were programmed for a familiarisation trip and I went with the bloke I bunked with Ken Murray who's dead now, and you go on your famil [familiarisation] trip. They take you up over the line and show you, "There's P'anmunjom, don't fly over that," you'd go to a navigation point just so you're familiar with it and so on. And the procedures in checking in with the radar and all that sort of thing.

30:00 And in fact the standard joke is you listen out to a bloke doing a famil trip, he goes the whole trip you hear nothing, he hasn't seen a truck or anything and suddenly he screams out, "Oh I've got lots of trucks down here," and a voice will say, "Yeah, they're ours. We're back over our side." It was a standard joke. So you did your famil trip and then you were programmed and either you were a wing man and

30:30 you got briefed in what the squadron requirements were and off you went and did whatever missions you had to do but I a lot of our ground attack missions were in fact sixteen aircraft rocket strikes. We would attack a Korean village which as known to be an army installation and we would use napalm rockets

31:00 and we would generally destroy about ninety per cent of the village. And when I started off I was number sixteen and if you're number sixteen in the formation you sure get moved around a bit trying to catch up for all the errors of the people in between. I was number sixteen for quite a while. Or if you're in a ship of four you're number four or number two.

Were they the first missions you flew in sixteen?

31:30 No, no. No I went on, I'd have to look at my, can I look at my log book? I'll tell you what my first was. One of the troops made this for me when I was In Iwakuni for my log book. No one's ever done it since. Where am I? '53 here we go. Won't be a minute. January the 8th, that's Iwakuni.

32:00 No I didn't get there till February. February I did a local recce [reconnaissance] with Flight Sergeant Murray, that's right and then my, I did two area recces and then I did a B26 escort was my first mission. And it's one of the early lessons you learn, you know you hear all about the precision weapons these days?

32:30 I must have done several of these B26 escorts. There were about twelve B26s bombing a bridge and you escorted them and you'd see all this smoke and dust and everything and when it all cleared away there was the bridge, untouched. These days you just send in one aeroplane with a precision weapon you knock out the important pylon and down it goes. And that really was a lesson

33:00 in how inaccurate bombing can be.

On those famil flights what were you getting used to? What were the conditions in Korea that you had to adapt to?

First of all if you haven't navigated in snow covered country you had to learn to do that by different sorts of means. Towns become more important and the roads are important of course and they're generally kept clear.

33:30 You have to have your map up to date with all the flak. You've got to do that every morning briefing, you've got to learn to navigate in the country because it's just about all hills you know and you have to find your way back, you've got to learn the procedures, you've got to check in with the radar, you've got to learn to use your IFF [Identification Friend or Foe] properly and things like that. It's just all the management that goes

34:00 into a battlefield and controlling people who are using it so you do a couple of famil trips to get used to that.

Were there any good pieces of advice the old hands gave you at that time?

No I can't remember now. You're getting it all the time to make you do the job properly. You certainly get told when you do something wrong. You're also learning,

34:30 not on B26 missions but on the ground attack, you're learning to plan an attack. I had a bloke, he's in New Zealand now, but he was a flight lieutenant and I was his number two for a while and I was really impressed because every time I would call that I'd got some trucks or vehicles on the road he'd say, 'Okay. Roger. You lead in and I'll follow," and I thought, "He's a good

35:00 sort of bloke letting a sergeant do that." It as only years later I found out he couldn't see the damn things, he was half blind. He had poor vision. Ben Hill, great bloke.

What was the relationship like between the older hands and those that were new to the squadron?

Only what exists all the time in that old hands are more senior and if you're a sergeant you call them sir.

35:30 But you're all, in that situation, you're all just good companions you know, you all drink together, whatever, and you all fly with each other, you all depend on each other. It's the thing is with, I mean the

squadron has got its hierarchy, it's got its senior people and you give them the due respect and obey your orders when you're flying, flying is different. If you're a junior bloke and you've got a senior bloke who makes a

36:00 mistake or he's going to make one and you can help you do it. You've got to make some decisions that might go counter to what he might think if it's necessary. If you take an aeroplane with a crew in it for example you might have a pilot officer who's captain and have a flight attendant whose the first officer because he's just done his conversion training he's not a captain. So that he has to do as he's told by a bloke who's more junior.

36:30 And in an aeroplane with a crew or in a formation with a leader, you have to do as you're told regardless of what it is. Now you might have a sergeant which we did, leading a formation of sixteen with senior officers down the back. They would do as they were told unless of course he's going to do something that breaks to rules of war or whatever but just in the execution of the mission that's how military flying works so that in a squadron

37:00 whilst you pay due respect to peoples rank you're generally all good buddies unless you hate someone's guts. But he'll know it.

What did the people on the operational squadron think about the way you had been trained and the gaps you mentioned in that training at that point?

I don't know. People didn't talk about it. If you didn't do things properly they'd tell you. I mentioned earlier

37:30 that one bloke who was off my course, he was in fact our unofficial artist, he did all the cartoons, they threatened to send him back to Iwakuni for training because his gunnery was bad. He was one of these blokes who instead of putting the cross on the target, firing for a second or half second, he was starting to just fire and try and run it through. It's the greatest waste of ammunition you can find. You often see wartime movies with

38:00 rounds going through but that's awful, awful gunnery that is. A great waste of ammunition but how they would have trained him I don't know because they didn't train him when he first went there, he was just told, "Do a gunnery mission," they'd brief him on the safety procedures and you'd go out and you'd shoot at this rock. Whether you actually hit anything or not was another question. No one was actually checking on it. And we didn't do it in the dual, the dual was too busy doing ordinary trips

38:30 for conversion so that was all. We had one bloke, an RAAF bloke, Roy Smith, great big handlebar moustache, he had eight hundred hours on Meteors when he arrived but he'd never dropped a weapon or fired a gun because he'd been on a disciplinary posting in Holland target towing. That was his Meteor experience

39:00 and Roy was a typical Brit, he could play darts like crazy, you always have him in your darts team. Anyway, when you do a sixteen aircraft strike you're in formations four fours and everyone rolls in to space himself in a particular way and the next formation's got to time it so he doesn't get a big gap because you've got to get your sixteen aeroplanes through quickly or you can get shot down or whatever. No, in the Meteor

39:30 you have a button, a trigger for the guns, a button for releasing your rockets and you have a button for your camera. Now when you press the camera button it also what they call "unfreezes" the gun site. The picture you get in your gun site for rocketry stays there it doesn't move until you press this button, then it goes 'Fzzzz' and it relies

40:00 on the G [gravity] of the aeroplane to displace it to allow the gravity drop for the rocket. Now the idea was that you, you unfroze your site, you started your site in behind the bloke in front, when he fired his rockets you got a picture of them, and when they hit the target you were ready

40:30 to fire yours so that each bloke in the sequence had to be a certain distance behind, not too far, but as soon as the rockets in front hit you got the picture and you fired yours. Now Roy Smith couldn't hack it. He was miles behind, he could never, he was holding everything up and they kept complaining. Anyway, after the peace treaty was signed the Japanese started manufacturing parts and we got these new rocket fins made by the Japanese so

41:00 Viv Shearn, who was this bloke's Number 1, was trying out these rockets with the Japanese fins and he came back and, "Jesus," he said, "there were rockets everywhere when I fired the bloody button," and he had a big scratch on the top of his fin and the rocket must have hit the fin, slowed down and gone behind the wing and he said, "They were everywhere." Anyway Roy Smith said, "I did a good job today boss. I wasn't too far behind," and every night they would run the film you see.

41:30 And here's Roy Smith's film and his leader the field of view of the camera only got out to the two engines, that's how close he was. This is not a wide field of view camera, this is the gun site, and the next thing 'Boom!' His rockets are gone. He's fired his rockets past his Number 1. Bloody incredible. But he said he did all right today.

Tape 6

00:30 **Kimpo, your first missions flying the Meteor in Korea were escorting B26s, can you tell us about it? What you did escorting a B26?**

Well you have to pre-brief on timing, you've got to meet them at a certain point, you fly above them

01:00 and you adopt a weaving formation so that you continually weave across the B26 formation. And you make sure no one gets to them. Not that anyone ever did, at that stage there wasn't a lot of MiG activity south of the Yalu. So that's what you did.

I'll just let you check that for a minute if you want.

01:30 **Those operations with the B26s, what sort of formation would you fly and how many Meteors would fly?**

Oh jeez, I can't remember, I think it was two sections of four. And that was it, there was nothing special in them. They were just sort of weaving overhead of formation while they bombed and then following back to the exit point. That's all.

02:00 **Was that the first time you remember seeing ground fire or being shot at?**

Not on that mission, no.

How many missions in was it before you got seriously shot at?

Well, I only did one B26 escort then by the look of it. I didn't do another one till two weeks later. They were just unusual things those. My early missions in were road recces mainly and that's when I first got shot at.

02:30 I don't know, well that's when I was flying with Bugs Burly in the early missions.

Can you take us through one of those early road recce missions through from the beginning and your briefing and how it began and what you did next and in order of operation?

You realty need a map. Well, you'd go to, if you were doing a first light than you would go to early morning briefing, have your breakfast and all the rest of it.

03:00 You'd go to briefing and you'd get your weather briefing and you'd get he flak update and you'd update your map with any new flak positions that they had. Then you'd be allocated your section of road and rail to recce. Each section of four had a particular length of road and rail to do and they'd be split generally north south because that was the main

03:30 and they'd be split generally north south because that was the main communication. Then you would take off, you would fly up to the start point at the southern end of the road, you flew at twenty thousand feet to avoid the heavy flak and you would generally change heading every few minutes to stop the radar tracking.

04:00 But generally twenty thousand feet, you were just above it. You could see flak bursting. Then, when you got to the start point depending how you're briefed, two aircraft, we'd split up into two pairs then and you'd operate in pairs and you'd take half the route. Then you'd drop down to eight thousand feet, which was just above the light flak and small arms and that sort of

04:30 thing and you'd operate at eight thousand feet, you'd just follow the road, you'd avoid the flak, you'd have all you flak positions marked, if you were coming to a flak position you'd go around it and if you found trucks or a train you attacked it. Train you had to be quick because they let of steam, if you could get a train before it did that you could get a result. But trucks you attacked and

05:00 if they brunt then you claimed them as destroyed and if they didn't you'd claim as damaged. And then when you'd finished your allotted run. If you still had time you cam back or then you just came back in pairs.

What would happen when a train let off steam?

Don't know. I only ever attacked one train. Well, when it lets off steam, there's no real pressure in the system so if you attack it doesn't really let go.

05:30 But I don't know, you could still attack it. Particularly if you had rockets. On road recces you'd have a couple of rockets and guns. If you did a sixteen aircraft strike you had sixteen rockets if you were a Number 1 and eight rockets if you weren't. And you just then kept doing your recce till you reached magpie which was minimum fuel for where you were and then you'd join up and fly home.

06:00 **Can you tell us about the first experience you had of being fired on? With Bugs someone?**

Bugs Burly. No I just remember being fired on. I don't remember the first or the last until of course I didn't fly with him and then it was different but no, just whenever you flew with Bugs you were going to get shot at, that was all.

What is that experience like while you're in the cockpit of an aeroplane being fired at from the ground?

It's not very pleasant. Someone's trying to kill you. It depends

06:30 where they are firing from and you can see the tracer what you do or which way you move or whatever. Generally you've just got to keep going, I mean, on one mission we did against Pyongyang attacking a chemical factory there, we did a sixteen aircraft strike. I was number sixteen and I was watching the flak at the point they were rolling in

07:00 so we all just had to go through it, there was nothing you could do about that. The chances of hitting you are pretty low, but then that's the way it is. No, you've just got to do it.

How much can you se of the flak coming at you or exploding around you?

I never got, I saw tracers going past me but nothing ever, I mean, that's down low, that's just light ack-ack [anti aircraft fire] , that'll only explode if it hits you. The heavy ack-ack, you can see that exploding

07:30 under aeroplanes or around aeroplanes, other aeroplanes. I remember on one cap when we got back I said to one of the fellows, "Jeez, you should have seen the flak underneath," and he said, "It's all right, you should have looked under yourself!" But I mean, these things only require thought if they damn well hit you. Other than that its just part of the thing you do. It'd be more dangerous these days with missiles. Then you've really

08:00 got to work differently.

How are you communicating with your Number 1?

Just by VHF, those days no UHF [ultra high frequency] then, just VHF radio. You'd normally after take off you'd go to the radar frequency, they would check you in and you were given a frequency for your operation and you'd go to that and you'd sty on it because you could also report

08:30 to the radar unit, the control unit if there was any other traffic or whatever.

Were you using particular radio call signs that you can remember?

Yeah we were called, if I remember rightly when I was there we were called 'Redmen', but it changes, you know, you change your call sign regularly. I think there might have been another on e while I was there but I think Redmen was the one we started with. That's what I remember.

09:00 So you were Redmen, formations are generally colours, Redman Red, Redman Blue, Redman Black, whatever. And so you might be Redman Black 4 or whatever, but once you were on your own frequency operating then you would just say, "Black 1," "Black 2," you know. Have you heard that joke about Black 1, Black 2? No? Well, it's a Pakistani joke really, or an Indian joke really. Someone might

09:30 call it racist but in the RAAF when they had Pakistanis or Indians they always gave them black section and one day this pair were up and after about half an hour, they were in hunters, there'd be this call, "Black 1, this is Black 2. Are you reading me?" "Yes Black 2, this is Black 1 reading you fine." "Black 1, Black 2, I am running very short of fuel." "Black 2, this is Black 1, don't you worry, I got plenty." You don't have to put that in the record.

10:00 **It's there for posterity now. I know it's a joke but is that amount of conversation the amount that you might be communicating when you're on a mission?**

The communications on a road recce was barely, if you were Number 2, "Black 1, Black 2, two trucks, three o'clock whatever moving north or south," and then he'd just say, "Roger," and then you'd follow him or if I was flying with Ben Hill he'd say, "Right. You lead in."

10:30 So when you get in position just start the attack and then magpie calls, "Black 4 magpies," so the leader would acknowledge and that means you've got to go home. Usually the wing man got to his minimum fuel before a leader because he's the one always bashing his throttles. On sixteen aircraft strikes

11:00 there were just the normal communications. Every time you changed channels you checked in so you'd say, "Black Section," what did we? I think we had channel four go and sometimes the rule would be they'd say when you'd change they'd say, "Black section check in," and you'd go, "Black 2, Black 3, Black 4," or you just did it automatically. Whatever the squadron procedure was so then you all knew you were on that

11:30 frequency. But other than that you tried not to talk, only essential information. And you had to be careful always to give your call sign. You'd get blokes who panicked for instance if they're attacked by other aeroplanes who call, "Bogies six o'clock," and everyone's thinking, "Who? Who is it?" But a young bloke can panic and just suddenly scream, "Bogies." You've got to take your time and do it properly.

12:00 **There's a whole sort of language you use here that may still be in the air force but it's not well known to everybody, what sort of slang words did you have for things like enemy that you would use in Korea?**

Yeah there's a standard vocabulary, a bogie is a unknown. You see an aeroplane and you don't know if it's yours or if it's theirs, you call 'bogey', and everyone looks and then the first one to identify it says 'friendly' or

12:30 'bandit' so there were all these. Your position is the clock code, one o'clock, two o'clock, high or low if you can give the range like 'bogie three o'clock high three thousand yards or something like that. But you've got to give a call sign first but yeah there's a standard pattern and that hasn't changed much. There's always changes but a lot of these things haven't changed, the main changes have been the

13:00 phonetic alphabet which was quite different at that time.

What was the phonetic alphabet you were using in Korea?

Good question. You want me to remember? You're mate will have the present one but it was able, baker, charlie, dog, easy, what comes after e? I think it was foxtrot, George, hotel, item, what was j?

13:30 What's it now? Juliet isn't it? I don't think it was, it might have been Juliet. Kilo I don't know, Lima, Mike, nan, Oscar, Peter was it? Peter? Queenie, Roger, sugar, tango

14:00 What was u? Oh good one. Victor, whisky, x-ray, yolk, Zulu. I probably got some wrong.

This is particularly British as opposed to what became a more Americanised version later on.

No, no. When they changed it I think in the fifties actually it was driven by civil aviation actually because

14:30 you know there were a lot of foreigners then. They had to speak English and there was confusion with some of the sounds so they tried to choose words that were unequivocal, that were clear. You know, Quebec instead of Queenie, whatever they might say instead of Queenie but some people say things differently. I mean for an American for instance I can't speak normal Australian English.

15:00 Most overseas trips of Australian outfits they had Aussie call signs. You say, "Aussie," to a Yank he doesn't know what you're saying. You got to say, "Ossie," and they understand you. But with the phonetic alphabet it wasn't that it was done in English because that's the international language of aviation but it was done to clarify sounds to make them clear.

How much do you have to monitor where your wing man

15:30 **is or vice versa while your in formation?**

You shouldn't have to monitor your wing man, that's the thing. Obviously when you're looking round you see where he should be, if he's not there then you might start looking but your wing man's job is to stay on your wing and you shouldn't have to worry about him. He's there to cover you while you do your job so other than your general appreciation of what's going on and noticing something different or wrong

16:00 you would expect him to be in position. I mean a wing man is on one side, if you're going to turn through an angle he changes to the other side for a while, or he might just stay behind you and then when you straighten up again he'll come out again. He's got to move so that he uses the least power to stay with you so when you're turning you've got your wing man here and you're turning left you're going to cut across so you stay inside and don't use power. Once you start to over take him

16:30 you just start pulling out again until you get into position. It's all just three dimensional manoeuvring.

Can you take us through one of these operations that had a sixteen aircraft formation?

From what?

From the smaller formation you just described. What were you doing on those because you mentioned villages and napalm?

The basic formation section is four aircraft. It's called a finger four and do you know who invented it? The Germans

17:00 and the Brits during the war then copied it and then the Americans. It's a basic formation for fighters to cover each other and to be manoeuvrable. So you'd have four sections of four and the idea is you would approach a target and if the targets down there you would approach it at right angle to go into the right angle and you'd all wing over and go onto the target and as I explained earlier each bloke has to be in the right position so he takes the pictures and fires

17:30 his weapon so you've got four sections, one behind the other, so the leader of the second has to be the right distance behind so that when number four of the previous section rolls in he then comes up at the right interval and that was the secret of being a good leader in those. And then when you're off the target you see the man in front of you and you follow him and hopefully he sees the man in front and you all then, the leader will reduce power

18:00 a little bit and then you've got enough power to overtake him and you all from up again, you go into four sections again, again he's got to pace himself on the approach to the airfield where you come in and then you break, turn one hundred and eighty down wind. Number 1's got to be such a distance behind

as where Number 4 rolls in he then had the right spacing to roll in. So you bring sixteen of them in and they're in, in no time at all.

18:30 The business of, apart from the simplicity of doing an initial to get to an airfield to land a lot of aeroplanes, it started in the war because airfields get attacked and when I first flew on Mustangs we didn't do a straight run in and just turn. We used to dive five hundred feet and then pull up and you did a circuit turning all the way.

19:00 When you got to gear speed you dropped it, when you started turning around base you dropped your flap and then you just kept going round in a circle that was so that anyone trying to attack during the war had the trouble of trying to do deflection shooting. That doesn't apply any more really, but the requirement now is to get your aeroplanes through quickly so when you were in Korea and since you just come in on initial and all turn on a down wind and you all land in sequence.

19:30 On the management of the whole mission each section did it's own thing or in fact the leader would call the while formation to change frequency for takeoff and then you'd all check in so you'd be going, "Black 2, Black 3, Black 4, Red 1, Red 2, Red 3, Red 4," and then when you took off the

20:00 technique in those days was that the lead aeroplane would hold down, the lead pair, the next lot would pull up to get out of their wake, the next one would stay down and so on. It's funny, we still thought it was the engines though that were causing the problem. These days you probably realise when you sit at the end of a civil airport the strip in an airliner. You've got to wait three minutes while the bloke in front

20:30 goes off, and that's because of the wing vortexes but it took a while to learn that. So we got airborne and then the lead would reduce power a bit and you'd all catch up and get in position. The rear section, say it was black you'd say, "Black leader in position," and then off you'd go at a normal climb. And they'd call levelling, generally these days you tend not to but with sixteen aeroplanes you need a bit of information and you'd

21:00 go for the target, join up and come home. In the meantime you had to change frequency in the air also and that's always fun. Depends where, I don't know where it was in the Meteor cause your information and you've got to look here and get the number right an in fact it's interesting with modern radios, they're all digital controls except through channel change because the pilots insist that they've got to have a knob. In fact you can click it and count but if you're

21:30 in turbulence and you've got to try and hit an up or down button you try and get your finger on it, it's impossible. So that's basically what the mission was.

While you're flying in formation like that what are you watching for and what are you aware of?

Well, you're watching for enemy aeroplanes basically, you're above the flak, if you see flak though that's looking dangerous you would call it but generally it's for to watch out for enemy aircraft.

22:00 We did have MiGs come south on one day, I don't know which might it was, must have been about April, May maybe June. It was pretty late and one bloke, he was a teacher before he joined the air force, he was in my course, Dave Irwin, he got his left engine the fairing at the back looked like a flower, it was all peeled out. Another bloke claimed he shot

22:30 down one of the MiGs, George Hale off my course, they keep saying, "The famous Hale Storm," his aeroplane, but he was a bullshit artist. I'm not sure I believe that. But supposedly he shot them down. And I was in the air that day and we just headed south but there was a little bit of a dog fight and that was pretty rare. But generally you're looking out for other aeroplanes yeah.

What did you see in the air that day of the dog fight?

Nothing.

23:00 Not a thing. We heard it, we heard the blokes messing around and we were told to withdraw.

When you are Number 16 in a sixteen aircraft formation what extra responsibilities do you have or how does your role differ slightly?

Trying to keep up. You ever been on the end of a whip? That's what it's like. If you're in a big formation say you've got an echelon of six or eight

23:30 aeroplanes and you're the one out there, you don't look at the one real close to you. You try and look at the leader and the general line and wait for the idiots who are moving to settle down, if you follow them you're on the end of the whip and any, if you're Number 16 and the second section leader then alters his section then Number 3 has to do it a bit faster to try and keep position then your going further and then your Number 4 in the formation as well so

24:00 you're on the end of a big whip. But you're relying on section leaders who know how to do it. It's a matter of correcting slowly. If you've got a bad leader you've always got problems and in fact, even in the Sabre days we had some old World War 11 blokes that they insisted on posting to command the wings and you know most of your effort was spent looking after them.

24:30 But they couldn't fly properly for trying, they should never have done it. But generally the blokes in the squadron were all competent. I don't know of anyone who was really bad at leading.

How close did there come to being accidents in this kind of formation?

No there's no risk, I mean if you've got competent pilots you don't have accidents in formation flying.

25:00 Not just straight formation flying. That's just a basic skill. You can have them, you can have an accident anywhere but not specifically in formation, no.

When you're the Number 16 are you under greater pressure coming through a target because you're the last one to come through?

No. Only unless you can see the flak. Then you're waiting longer than anyone else. I did that a few times, yeah.

Can you talk about what that feels like?

No it's just you can see it and you're thinking

25:30 "Oh God!" You've just got to go through it. The thing is not to think about it. If you think about it you get hit. I fact, on that one on Pyongyang one of the Brits was lost. He in fact flew into the ground. That was just near Pyongyang chemical factory and the area was all mud flats and we just saw him splurge into the ground. Big pity.

26:00 **What sort of mission was that?**

It was to destroy a chemical factory. We had rockets and sixteen aeroplanes and we rocketed it with high explosive rockets. Not napalm.

I'd like to talk about one specific instance maybe this Pyongyang raid for example, can you explain where you were in that formation and what happened on that day?

I was Number 16.

26:30 They were putting flak up at the roll in point and we lost one bloke. That's it, it was just an attack on a target. You have a photo of the target, you're allotted your building or whatever that you've got to try and hit and that's what you do. And then your main job is to keep your spacing because the only, well you get PI coverage afterwards but the most immediate intelligence in the

27:00 pictures you take of the blokes rockets in front and they can see exactly whether it's hit the target or not. Because rocketing is not all that accurate.

How were your targets identified and how did they come back to you?

The squadron was under the command of the general commanding 5th Air Force in the Far East and we got what the Americans call 'fragged' every night. You'd get

27:30 a frag order, which was basically your mission for the next day. The support staff like photo interpreters and others would work out or get the target material for you and work out what was the best weapon loads and all that sort of thing and when you got up to do your mission you got briefed on all that but there was a whole lot of work went on beforehand; the troops would get the aeroplanes

28:00 ready, there'd be fuelled you know. An air base is a logistics centre basically. It's got all your logistics, everything you need to fly the mission. And in fact it interesting you'll hear the RAAF talk about the Harriers and how you don't need a big air base well, that ain't quite true. They're all scattered out in the woods,

28:30 you'd be amazed at the number of trucks it takes to keep them supplied with all the where with all to do their mission. It's just like spreading your base and having an increase in transport requirements to meet it. So you've got to defend your bases because they are important logistic centres. We used to have a thing called 'Bed Check Charlie'. He flew over a lot of the bases at night. He was an old PO2, a

29:00 Polycarp Off 2, biplane like a Tiger Moth, did about seventy knots and he used to come over at night with a couple of hand dropped fragmentation bombs and he'd fly over the base and drop these. One night he damaged some F80s. One night we had slip trenches near our headquarters and every night we would listen, we would see the films,

29:30 then we'd listen to the ack-ack if there were any in the area and then if we got a warning for the PO2 we would hop into the slip trench and you could hear the radio with the ack-ack people coordinating action and then you'd see him fly over and one night we had one bloke, John Seaton, got his pistol out, he was half smashed, and he saw the bloody aeroplane and he went "Boom, boom, boom," just as the CO

30:00 put his bloody face over the edge of the trench. I think he was put on the dry or something but he was a good drinker old John, the night before he went to the Antarctic years later after we had been on our instructors course together and instructing at Quinnie [Uranquinty], he was booked by the police with the highest ever recorded alcohol content in his blood and the paper said that they cancelled his

licence,

30:30 suspended his licence for six months and old John said, “I could care less, I’m going to the Antarctic.” He was a character, yeah but he scared the CO. But Bed Check Charlie did this on a whole lot of bases and it was just nit picking. It kept people a bit tense but he was no probably. It’s very hard to shoot them down, they’re string and bag and one night we were listening to an F94, that’s a version of the F80,

31:00 a developed version with an air born radar and a two man crew, after burners and all sorts of thing. And he was sent up to shoot down this PO2 and three times he asked if the guns were tight and that means that they wouldn’t fire and three times after confirmation he got shot at. And eventually he actually, the crew got killed, he rammed the PO2 because you can’t see it on radar and they misjudged and they ran

31:30 into it. So they had a win the North Koreans that night didn’t they? A F94 for a string bag Tiger Moth.

The war was pretty much static, did you feel like you were winning?

Two years it was static basically. Well, no everybody understood, this was the first time in fact, I think it was clear to people in the field that

32:00 this was called a limited war, this was the first time the term was used. In other words there would be a political aim in this. Not just the aim to win the war, what was winning anyway? We didn’t own the country in the first place. This as to stop communist expansion so it was a limited war and everybody understood that and that’s why you had rules like you don’t attack fewer than two trucks, it wasn’t worth it losing an aircraft and pilot for a two tonne

32:30 truck you know, it’s ridiculous so everyone was aware of the relative cost of what you did but of course it still had to be de done because if they didn’t then the supply of material to the north would unable them to operate much more efficiently. You’ll read in history that says this didn’t do anything but it did, it stopped them from travelling during the day. It made them travel at night, and put a lot of effort into doing that.

33:00 Every bit of effort you put in is something you can’t put into the front line so but there are arguments about how effective it was, the interdiction campaign. But the only trouble of course was generals trying to sell their careers on that you could do more than you really could do.

I know it’s difficult to put yourself back there but how much did the ideas that is was a political war colour your perception of what you were doing there?

33:30 Not much. It was a given. That explained the rules, that gave you an idea of not doing anything foolish just to be smart of something or just to get another truck or whatever. That was just part of the framework you worked in and people work better when they are given a framework and know what they’re doing but I wasn’t going to go on strike, no.

34:00 **Was there any resistance of any kind to being used in this way?**

No. You mean amongst the blokes? No.

Yeah well not mutinous resistance but you know, talking?

No. We never talked about it. I mean when you got in the bar at night you were just shagged you know? I can remember one night the first bar we had was one running out, just a straight bar, and this two Brits Bugs Burly and what’s his name?

34:30 Charlie Babs, they’d get half smashed and Charlie would run up one side of the bar and Burly up the other trying to shoot him with a soda siphon and old Babs would say, “No, you’re not allowing enough deflection are you?” You know people just relaxed, they didn’t want to be serious about anything and of course you read a lot. That’s when I started to read and I read, in fact, I read you know the book “For The Term of His Natural Life”?

35:00 Marcus Clarke’s? Big thick thing like that. We all read that, it did the rounds of everybody reading it. It was good.

You were officer of the bar?

I was a bar officer yes

What did that involve?

For my sins, well I had to manage all the booze. We didn’t have kegs, it was all bottled beer from Japan. It was kirin, or sake , there was another one I think and

35:30 we got supplies in for hard liquor as well that you used to sell to the Yanks to keep them oiled up. But the biggest thing in summer was, in winter the Hahn river, which is a big river that runs around Seoul and next to Kimpo, has the mouth just north of Kimpo, it freezes in winter and so the Koreans would cut ice out of it into blocks, put it under their hootchies, and hold that till summer and then they’d sell it to us for a dollar for

36:00 a block and the good thing was it was bottled beer because it was full of manure and straw and all sorts of unmentionable things. But all the booze was bottled so it didn't matter and I had to go and get the ice now and again and just manage the bar that's all. Make sure there was booze. And that was it.

What would the cost of a bottle of beer to the aircrew?

36:30 I don't think we paid. I can't remember paying for booze there. We must have, I can't remember. But I mean, it doesn't mean anything, we were paid so little then and the prices were so low relatively. When I came back from Korea as a sergeant I was on fifteen dollars a week but I could make do on that you know, three meals a day and board and all the rest of it. It wasn't a lot.

37:00 **How much had the novelty worn off? Were you still laughing about the fact that you were getting paid to do this?**

Oh I loved flying. When I got back I wanted to fly three times a day and they'd all tell me to shut up. I just loved doing it, it was a real buzz. That's all I wanted to do when I was young and stupid I had no other interests except chasing sheilas and drinking. At Williamtown we used to go to Caruah and get a gross of oysters in a hessian

37:30 bag Friday night and we'd take it back and we'd sit in the old wartime showers in the middle of summer and open the oysters and eat them and drink booze. It was marvellous. You can't get it now like that. I think we paid five bob for a gross.

The luxury!

Luxury, yeah luxury.

38:00 **How did you find dealing with the Korean locals when you were perhaps getting ice?**

The only contact I had was in the village getting ice. That was all. It was an arrangement, there was no, the squadron had the padre and some of the people who I think they started a kindergarten or an orphanage for the Koreans in the area but the air crew generally didn't get involved in that side of it. We were too busy really. You had enough to think about. I mean you'd generally fly twice a day

38:30 morning and evening or whatever, sometimes only once. I think we had one day a week off where we didn't fly but I got there at the end of January and I left the middle of July so what's that? Five months really of flying and I did over a hundred missions so that twenty a month, you know? It's one a day on average so you did sometimes two, sometimes none.

Tape 7

00:32 **Technical question, icing conditions on Korea, how did the Meteor deal with icing?**

What sort of icing? Air frame icing?

Yes.

None. The only icing problems were from snow. And then the troops had to clear the aeroplanes off but no, not when you're flying and we only flew visually basically and I can't remember actually any period

01:00 of time where the weather was really bad to stop us flying a lot. The worst weather was in summer when you couldn't see. You couldn't see through the smog or whatever it was, haze. But no, winter was fine. The air was clear, the engines made an awful crackle. It was the first time I'd been in such cold conditions and I'd listen to the aeroplanes take off and they all had this crackle. They really crackled in the real cold air.

01:30 You won't get it in Australia, it's never cold enough. And that was on eof the other things too you had to worry about was the hydro contrails so you tried to avoid the layer of contrails when you were flying otherwise the radar guns could track you easily. No, the weather was all right.

There's quite a famous piece of air space geographically called MiG Alley, did you come across that at all?

No.

02:00 The Sabres were there all the time. In fact, the 4th Fighter Wing was one of the main ones just on the other side of our strip but no, we rarely went further than a hundred miles from Kimpo which was a line, there was a road across from Wonsan on the east across to the other coast and we sometimes recced that. In fact one of our blokes sighted the

02:30 biggest road convoy of the war. It's noted in there, over a hundred trucks just south west slightly of Wonsan where the hills rise, Wonsan's on the coast, and this lot got caught out on the zigzag road in the morning and old Bob Turner the warrant officer, we used to call him "Warrant," he called up and we did something like eighty odd missions that day with sixteen aeroplanes and that's the only time I got hit.

03:00 I got hit with one of my own ricochets because you were shooting virtually straight into the hill like that and the rounds if the ricocheted would go up and I caught one coming out. But when Turner got there they destroyed a truck to the top and another couple at the bottom and this lot were there all day shooting them up. It was marvellous.

03:30 **What could you see as you were shooting up that convoy?**

Just trucks. Trucks. You'd just aim at a truck, put your cross hair on it and when you reckon you're in the right range go 'Brrrmm' and 'Shoom!', it'll flame. Particularly if you aim at the cab near the petrol tank. So as I say after the first month, couldn't stop making them flame. I don't know why. I think probably because you tended to aim near the cab rather than when you start you're a bit vague and just aiming at the truck initially.

04:00 But once you get precise that's all you do, you just see the trucks and we were going around in a racetrack and shooting up trucks.

Any men on the ground that were shooting as well?

Yeah there were men there but I we weren't shooting specifically at men. They were trying to hide I should imagine, but there were men there, that's for sure.

Were there any times you had to use the gun not on a machine but on men?

Not me. In fact, the only close support

04:30 mission I was going to do was with troops that they'd bottled up in the open and we were going to go and shoot them up. And that's when this weapons officer killed himself on takeoff so we were recalled. I can recall I was really browned off. What didn't they let the section go and do the job? Why recall them? And then I buried him on the way home. There were people who shot up

05:00 civilians who exploded. What they would do is they would dress up in white in winter with an A-frame on their back looking like peasant but they were carrying ammunition and there's quite a few people who shot them up. It never happened to me, it just didn't occur. Mainly mine were trucks, the odd train, one train. And then rocket attacks on villages. There was one film one night, there was a bloke there who was married to a Japanese I think so he was sort of

05:30 cross culture and just as he pressed the button to release his button a woman came out of the house with a baby in her arms. And we got that in the film. Another one was a cow but we didn't worry about that. But yeah, it could happen.

So the woman was shot, was she?

Undoubtedly. We destroyed the village but she was a Kang follower I guess. But that, you can't stop doing that.

Were there any concerns about the possibility of civilians getting involved in that situation?

06:00 Never entered into our heads. We didn't go looking for civilians but if it happened we didn't stop. If it's a military target and that's what the information was then you had to do your job. He wouldn't have known if she hadn't come out just at that moment. Because the Meteor makes a particular noise, I don't know if you've heard one. It gets a sort of a blue note, a bit of a roar

06:30 as it gets faster. And maybe she heard it and came out but it was a military target. No doubt about that. But in those we used an Australian developed napalm rocket, cause one of our weapons officers invented it and it worked really well. It was a sixty pound head of napalm and for indigenous villages, you know straw and brick and that sort of thing, they burnt, they just destroyed them. We'd get over ninety per cent destruction in the village with sixteen aeroplanes.

07:00 **Napalm is no longer used by the air force was it …**

I should imagine we've still got napalm for specific targets. They used it in Vietnam. We didn't, we only had Canberras there.

What was the feeling of napalm as a weapon of war?

It was great for the villages because they were straw and wood. So they burnt. No one thought about who was inside. Hell, I mean that's,

07:30 it's interesting no one ever argues about whether they should kill anyone, it's just how you shouldn't do it you know? It's all right to kill them if you, I mean, I hear all the talk about Hiroshima and all that, have a look at what went on in the islands. People disappeared you know? They just disappeared like with the suicide bombers. Is that worse than getting napalmed?

08:00 You know it's a bit hypocritical some of the stuff like that. It's killing in the first place that's the problem but it's either you or they, if you don't do it, they're going to do it you. It's as simple as that really. I never thought about it. I was just trying to do it accurately. I mean it was a technical problem for me, to try and always get a result. I don't think you, that's why wars are only fought by young people.

08:30 When you get some common sense you think, “What the hell did you do that for?” If it weren’t for the brashness of youth none of us would be here but let’s face it.

Were there any particular rules of engagement for the Korean War that you were working under?

No, the only rule was on the bomb line. The bomb line was part of the briefing every day,

09:00 you had to update your bomb line. You didn’t touch anything on the other side of the bomb line, anything on the other side of the bomb line, if it move you’d shoot it. It was a target, a legitimate target and we had a limit on the amount of trucks, a minimum amount of trucks for us to make an attack. No there weren’t any other rules, if it was an enemy you shot it north of the line.

The bomb line demarcation was fairly fluid on the ground, how could you be sure that you were always shooting at an enemy target?

09:30 For our operation we didn’t do close support, that’s only a problem if you're doing close support with the army. The road recces, the start points were never near the bomb line basically, but close support, that’s when the bomb lines were important, but then you don’t rely on the bomb line, you then have a person marking on the ground.

10:00 Either a flak or a forward air controller or the troops themselves will mark with smoke or whatever and so that’s the mission I aborted was the one I was going to do but that’s a very controlled thing and early in the war of course when it was really fluid you probably know there was a story of our squadron being castigated for shooting Americans. It was their fault, they marked it. But it happens,

10:30 it’s war, it ain’t pretty and it isn’t necessarily accurate at the time. Things can change quickly. Friendly casualties are a fact of life.

What was the mission you aborted?

I was scrambled to attack some troops that they had. They’d caught them in the open and they had bottled them up so they wanted us to

11:00 attack them but it was aborted because my number three or two or four I don’t know which crashed after take off. We had a problem with tyres at one stage. They kept giving us tyres that weren’t properly re-treaded, and in fact that tall bloke the CO I mentioned in the photo got himself into trouble

11:30 by telling the headquarters that it wasn’t satisfactory and the cause of this accident was a tire tread coming off. We would take off with takeoff flap and they think that the cause was he lost a tread, it went into the flap and locked it on that side, when he raised his flap after takeoff it just rolled and he wasn’t quick enough to say you know,

12:00 “Do what you were doing before,” it was too quick for him. In fact his aeroplane was exploding for hours afterwards with ammunition. He wasn’t, hadn’t been long in the squadron, McGlinchy, he was the new weapons officer.

Where were you during this?

I was airborne leading the section of four and I think he was number four probably.

What was your first indication that something bad had gone wrong?

They called and told us to come back, that number four or whoever it was had crashed and I was really browned off.

12:30 But then I was young and what’s the word?

Stupid?

What’s the word?

There’s an American expression from the Vietnam War, I won’t mention it. Back to that day that you were on that large convoy you had sort of essentially trapped in daylight,

13:00 **just take us through the day, I mean you were doing, how many missions did you fly on that?**

Probably three on that I would imagine. Well I think we did eighty seven sorties or something, that figure sticks in my mind. I guess we had twenty aeroplanes, I don’t know how many we had in the squadron. I was too young then to worry about those numbers but most people did three or four sorties. You’d just do one, come back, refuel and rearm and

13:30 the section would take off again and we just kept doing it all day.

Was there a sense of heightened engagement at the base when you got back and everything was happening?

No. Just it was a great target, we’ve got to get as many sorties in as we can and of course the marines kept wanting to get in and we said, “No, bugger off, it’s our target.”

Was there a sense of competition between planes or sections?

No. Just

14:00 you get your turn and just go and do it but it was just such a marvellous target you get to do road recces all day am sometimes not find a vehicle and here was a hundred or more of the buggers stuck on a hill. Marvellous.

Were pilots accredited with individual…?

You had to report how many you'd destroyed and then when you were debriefed, after each mission there was a debrief, you had to mark where the

14:30 targets were that you had destroyed and they would count them up. That would then go into the intelligence summary of the squadron on such and such a day destroyed or damaged or whatever so many trucks, light vehicles and trains that would end the intelligence picture and that's what they write book about you know. Of how it didn't work.

At the time though was there some sense in the mess that you'd talk about this after your missions?

Yeah we reckoned it was a great

15:00 day and I think we probably bought old Bob Turner a few beers for being the bloke who found it. He was a funny bloke Bob Turner, he was a warrant officer, he's dead now, I'll tell you later how he died, he was in that picture that bar is it? We changed the bar eventually and we had a u-shaped bar. Down the length of the hut and you had the wires on each lattice in the roof and this bloke when

15:30 he got half smashed he'd start, he knew all the dirty poems like "Eskimo Nell" and the "Hermit of Shark Tooth Shoal" and all these and he could recite them all no trouble at all and he would get on the end of the bar and he would start to lean out and then he'd garb the wire. And he'd hang there with his pot in his hand and go, "Yes. The hermit of shark tooth shoal," and he'd go through it.

Bob do you want to recite one?

Oh no I couldn't they're rude.

16:00 Jeez! I mean Eskimo Nell you know she was no infidel, she left to bide her time? Jeez. And he, I heard at the reunion how he died the bugger. He got out of the air force and then he was in Adelaide and he decided to learn to sail so he learnt to sail with some people and then he went and ordered a yacht, a biggish boat in Melbourne and he drowned himself getting back to Adelaide in a storm.

16:30 You survive the war, in fact, it's funny because we were talking about training and we weren't all that well trained. In the Meteor you have a gyro magnetic compass but you've also got your standby, your E2. Now Bob lost his compass one day over North Korea and he forgot he had this standby up the front and he landed at this airfield, he reckoned he headed south and he landed at this airfield and he asked someone,

17:00 "Am I in North or South Korea?" That was a standing joke but he forgot he had a standby compass. Funny man. But he'd just rattle off these poems one after the other, it was incredible. Every outfit's got to have a character and he and Roy Smith that played darts were something.

On that day you were hit by your own ricochet can you describe that particular moment?

17:30 Yeah I heard 'thunk' and I thought, "I've been hit! Oh Jesus, I'll be a hero," and anyhow it knocked twenty knots off my speed and I just reported it to my Number 1 and he said, "Okay. Head back to the airfield." And they kept doing the mission because I didn't know what had damaged or anything. As it was in the Meteor nose there's two big lead ballast blocks and it just went through the pressurisation control I think

18:00 it was and just embedded in the block but I lost about twenty knots speed with a hole in the nose. And I just headed home and they changed the nose and fixed it, that's all. I mean, in everything you do in life I guess, but in flying in particular you've got to take it as it is. Your aeroplane is still flying. There doesn't seem to be anything wrong

18:30 with anything at the moment, you might find something later, so you just keep going with it and whatever develops you just take appropriate action but the best thing is to get closer to home, that's for sure. But if it had really caused some damage and I couldn't fly I would have headed out to sea because I could get picked up. I told the story earlier of the bloke who took off in the Mustang at night and knew he'd over corrected and at Williamtown in those days there wasn't a long strip now, there was an east west strip and a north south and

19:00 they were only five thousand feet long but all around the area was salt bush and what the shrub about this high? Not bottle brush, Banksia that sort of thing. Tea tree. And when he got airborne he felt the aeroplane scrape the tea tree so what did he do? He's still flying but he pulled the throttle off. You know it's just absolutely incredible because Bruce Gogerley

19:30 who I was in the tower with he said, “Oh well, we’ll go out and get the body,” and then when he was walking out of the bush afterwards and he couldn’t believe it but he’d actually pulled the throttle off while he was still flying. So he’d brushed the bushes, so what? And that’s stupid, he could have gone around. I remember one day the strips where the join, one strip had a hump in it like the, the north south one. And I was landing one day number four I think in a Mustang

20:00 and I just either inattention or whatever but as I hit the bump I probably pushed the stick and the aeroplane started to do this. And so I decided to go around and what I was going to do this engine shaking like mad. So I pulled the throttle off a bit just I case and went around and did a circle and landed and then my number one said, “Why didn’t you use full power?” And I said, “Jeez, it was shaky enough as it was and I’d had enough. I didn’t want to shake the guts out if it.”

20:30 It was funny because the next day there’s the propeller on the ground and I wrote on the maintenance sheet, “Prop [propeller] chipped and bent.” Now there’s this prop and it’s bent at the tips all right and it’s chipped so the ground crew had written on it in crayon, “Bent and chipped,” this poor propeller lying there. But you know I wasn’t going to shut it down or anything, it was still giving me power and that sort of thing. I remember on an F1-11

21:00 trip I had, it was mandatory, if you had a find alight you had to shut the motor down and I don’t believe in that and I had a fire light in takeoff so

Sorry, a fire light, that’s an engine fire?

Yeah an engine fire. But that means something but it doesn’t mean there is a fire it means, a, the light’s U/S [unserviceable] and is shorting out or yes there’s some heat or whatever but so I just closed the throttles and aborted. Someone could argue I should have shut it down but the light went out as soon as I pulled the throttle back so

21:30 if there’s no fire there should I shut her down? Every system has got its limits on what it can tell you and information and you’ve got to keep going until the point where you leave the aeroplane if you have to. But luckily in the air force we were never mandatory on some of these things. The French were and one of our blokes in a Mirage one day north of Newcastle, between Newcastle and Williamtown there’s an old strip called Hexham

22:00 near the Hexham bridge. It’s very short and this bloke force landed a Mirage. Now the Mirages final speed is twenty knots in a forced landing and he’d put it on the strip. They couldn’t fly it out. They had to pull the wings off and take it back by truck and one of the senior commanders tried to have this bloke reprimanded for force landing a Mirage. Said, “You should have jumped out.” Doesn’t matter that you did it. Results are what count.

22:30 Anyhow that’s always been my philosophy.

Backing up to Korea, your squadron was taking some losses, what was the morale of the squadron towards the end of your tour?

Chris [interviewer] asked me that, it was good.

Was there anyone in particular who perhaps because of their training or otherwise were sent back?

23:00 There might have been but I don’t know about them. I wouldn’t have, I was too young and junior to probably know about it. They threatened to send Gilmore back to Iwakuni to do more gunnery training as I said he just wasn’t a good gunnery bloke. Everyone did an annual assessment

23:30 and I had mine and I was told I was over confident even though I was under confident to hell but that’s how people judge you on your outer appearance and behaviour. And any of those who were lousy at gunnery or whatever they would be written up and it would govern perhaps what happened to them afterwards. But you generally, if you had

24:00 a more experienced bloke with you and you were flying and he saw you do something he would tell you what you were doing wrong, like Roy Smith, who kept getting too close or too far away from his number one and then got a bit close. It’s done all the time. Flying is like that as you know, if you’re not current you go flying with someone and if you make a mistake they’d point it out or whatever but that’s how it was done. I didn’t know of anyone being sent back.

24:30 **What’s your understanding of LMF [lack of moral fibre]?**

I know of one case of a bloke, of a CO who didn’t fly very much but he should never have been sent there. He was a bloke who was shot down a couple of times in Malaya in World War 11 and they really shouldn’t have sent him up there again. There is a limit for people and whilst you do it while you're young and you survive it’s not something you’d, if the bloke didn’t want to do it you shouldn’t make him do it.

25:00 It’s got to be someone who’s ready to do it otherwise it has a bad effect on the squadron but I wasn’t there then. But no, there was, I don’t know of any cases of LMF in my group. There may have been but I was young and I wasn’t taking notice of everything that was going on. I was just innocent and flying. I’m sorry that’s as simple as it is. There’s no D&M [deep and meaningful] stuff for me

25:30 in the war, not really. Not at that time anyway.

Is courage a finite resource?

Courage? I don't know what courage is. Sometimes it's stupidity, sometimes it's peer pressure, I don't know really what courage is. There are some people who are fearless. I'm not. And who don't seem to have a feeling of threat to themselves or worry about it. I'm sure there are people like that but courage?

26:00 You could say that people are courageous if they are shit scared and they still do the job. Is that courageous? Or is it peer pressure? Or is it an inability to admit you're scared? You know, I don't know how people feel. I find all that deep and meaningful stuff just, it's too imprecise. It's objective

26:30 and it's all done in the framework of your own experience. We all tend to judge people by what we feel ourselves but I certainly know people who are, they frighten the hell out of me, that just have got no regard for their own safety sometimes. Or they're going to do things I would never think of doing. We had one bloke at Laverton when I was at Ardeer, ex-patriot Brit, ex British army, I think he was SAS [Special Air Service],

27:00 he's knifed more people than I care to think about. He was a sort of half doddery old bugger at that stage with a little red-hatted wife and you wouldn't thing butter would melt in his mouth and this bloke's killed more people personally than I could ever know. How he did it I don't know, I could never do it. I couldn't kill an animal physically myself. Who knows?

27:30 **You went on R & R [Rest and Recreation] to Japan once before. Can you tell us about that?**

It was a chance to go to Tokyo, I didn't want to go, I'd lose missions wouldn't I? When you're young and stupid you don't want to go on holidays. I went to Tokyo, I went to the

28:00 Bofu, no, it was a recreation centre for the forces there, you know British Commonwealth because at that stage you know we were all under a British general called "Red Robbie," he wouldn't give us our bloody medals. And I stayed there and then I'd go into town and I'd go to the Imperial Hotel. Do you know the Imperial in Tokyo? It was a really

28:30 nice hotel and another one was the Mainichi, every day in English and I can remember having a steak for a dollar, well not a dollar, it must have a pound in those days. It was still good because steak in Japan was pretty expensive but it was an American facility and I bought a camera a Mamiya. A Mamiya 6 I bought, my first camera ever

29:00 and I took pictures of the Diet building. I've still got them, my daughters got them. I took pictures of the palace and the moat and all that sort of thing. But gee, don't ask me to tell you where it is now. That's my only visit to Tokyo ever. I guess I just did the normal thing.

What was it like to decompress I guess away from

29:30 **the excitement of the squadron?**

I didn't feel any. It was just a chance to go to Tokyo. I didn't want to go on leave. Later on just before the end of the war, it must have been in June, I had ninety nine missions up. I don't know what's magic about a hundred, I don't know why a hundreds a magic but I wanted my hundred missions like everyone else and my flight commander sent me to Iwakuni to do maintenance flying

30:00 for a week or a fortnight and I was really pissed off I can tell you. And I said, "But the wars going to end, can't I get one more mission?" This is the bloke that assessed me as over confident, I was just keen you know. Anyhow, he punished me so I got back there and I got another seventeen missions in.

Can you describe your hundredth mission?

No it's just a number in the book got a hundred. It's like cricketers, if they score ninety nine they're useless, if they get a hundred they're suddenly aces. I don't know what

30:30 the magic of numbers is really. But everyone had to have a hundred missions. It was like the American when they got their hundred missions up they would come into the circuit and they would say, whatever their call sign, "Permission for a hundred mission pass," and the tower would say, "Roger, you're cleared for a hundred mission pass," and I was up one with a mate of mine, Ken Murray, the bloke I shared the tent with, and I did my first famil with him, he was

31:00 on his third tour would you believe and this day he had three hundred thirty three missions and this Yank called up and said, "Permission for a hundred mission pass," and he was given that and then Murray called up with his British accent and said, "Tower, permission for a three hundred and thirty three mission pass." I thought that was a perfect bloody squelch that was. Three hundred and thirty three missions. Then he stopped. They stopped him. And in fact,

31:30 mission numbers get a bit mystic. One bloke was lost on his last mission so then the flight commander wanted to stop people flying on their second last mission and we said, "Well, when do we stop? We don't do any missions?" It's just the luck of the draw but everybody wanted a hundred missions. It's a magic number that's all. Ridiculous really.

Can you describe your hundred mission pass?

32:00 No we didn't make hundred mission passes. Only the Americans. That's not British, you don't do that sort of thing. That's for loud mouth Yanks. This one we were in the air and Murray had his three hundred and thirty three missions so he decided he'd let him know. Christ. That was great. I'll never forget that "Three hundred and thirty three mission pass."

Was there any activates like beating up posts or coming in and doing a hot entry?

32:30 No. No way José. Oh no you don't do that sort of thing. Only general aviation does that. Military don't do that, not unless it's controlled and practised. No we didn't do any of that sort of thing. No. We were well behaved chaps.

33:00 **Can you talk about getting towards your last operation, was there anything mystic about it?**

It's in my log book. I don't know what it was. All I knew was I was going hone and this was my last trip I was programmed for so I just did it. I didn't have any, I suppose you think, "Jeez, I hope I don't buy it on my last mission."

33:30 You know, like Hillier did. But no, no it's just you run out of time and the next thing you're off home and then a year later you wonder what it was all about and did it really happen. It's past.

Was there anything you carried with you as a keepsake or a superstition?

No. A colt .38 that was the best keepsake. And some ammunition, that's the best thing I could think of.

34:00 We ever had practise at firing it before we went to Japan. You always do small arms training in the air force but you had a .38 you had the silk. What did they call these maps?

Escape maps?

No, no. There's writing on it to show to people if you come in contact with the locals. It's got a name, I can't remember it now and then you'd have signalling mirrors and flares

34:30 and that sort of thing in your kit and water. Well the water was in the seat bit it stayed with you when you got out of the seat. But no, I'm not superstitious. It's just not rational to me to have that sort of thing because you've got to rely on your own actions. They won't save you. I'm very boring aren't I?

35:00 **Were there pilots in the squadron who were superstitious?**

I don't know, you don't know anything about them personally. Not in that media, you all fly together, you drink together, you sleep in the same huts and eat together but you're not bosom buddies or old mates like that. One of the blokes in the squadron, I was best man at his wedding

35:30 and I haven't seen him till a few months ago at the reunion you know. And his wife doesn't remember me. Life's a funny thing. It's ships in the night. It passes.

Going back to the bar, are you doing all that fighter pilot stories or describing your manoeuvres to the next guy?

36:00 When you do that it's not in bravado if you want to use your hands and do that it's actually to describe what you were doing, not like a fisherman with fish. It's purely a simple way to explain, I was back here and then we saw him up here, you just use your hands but yeah, you generally wouldn't do it not unless you needed it to

36:30 explain what was happening.

Would there be any incidences when your wing man would drop back and you would have to debrief or even argue over the possibilities of, you know arguments that occurred between you at the time?

I've never had any. I'd curse and swear at somebody in my formation if they weren't doing as they were briefed but then you'd bring it out at the briefing any differences but no

37:00 you generally didn't, no I never got into any that sort of contrition with someone.

Were there any relationships in the squadron that weren't working between the pilots that they just couldn't get on?

I don't know. Not with me. No I don't think so. We all did. I don't know, I've never thought about it but I guess we were all in the same boat and we were all like ships in the night anyway passing each other eventually.

37:30 I mean one bloke in that picture became chief of staff of the Royal Air Force, John Williamson, you're all passing through life. You're all together for a while and then you may come together again somewhere, it's just life to me. But no, there were no deep friendships there no. I mean the chief of the defence force was a flight commander in my squadron, McNamara,

38:00 so no. I don't know of any. You might hear a different story from someone else bit I was young and I was really very much concerned about me flying as may missions as I could. That was my main concern in life. And keeping the bar running.

Tape 8

00:00 **In the fact and figures you mentioned before there were seven pilots that ended up as prisoners of war from 77 Squadron. How afraid were you of that possibility?**

I was really, really scared of it yes because this was the first time that they talked about brainwashing. As you know, in World War 11 generally in the western world

01:00 POWs [prisoners of war] were treated reasonably well, at least the Brits and Americans. The Russian side of it was another thing. That was really brutal but that was just sheer starvation and conditions, and brutality. But in Korea for the first time and this was trying to indoctrinate people, and as you know there were people who got up

01:30 publicly, and said they were on the other side, and all that sort of thing. Really it happened in Vietnam as well with really degrading conditions, people made to eat their own faeces; all this sort of thing and really that scared the hell out of me, having to go through that. Years later when I was at Amberley we ran an exercise. They were still training people on the techniques of brainwashing. It was run by the Army Psych [Psychology] Corps unfortunately

02:00 and it had to be stopped because it was out of control but that frightened everyone to end up, I mean in the conditions for a start in winter, you were going to die of something if you weren't strong. There was a difference between North Koreans and Chinese. When the Chinese came in things improved a bit but just the very thought of it, if could affect your whole life forever.

02:30 **How much information did you have about what might happen to you or what had happened to prisoners?**

We had briefings on what the conditions were. We were taught, I mean you're taught the usual things, your name, rank and serial number but you were taught things like, "Don't get into conversation with them. It will be turned against you. Just say nothing." Of course people are weak and they can't help it, and that's what the technique relies on.

03:00 You were briefed on all the aspects of what might happen to you and how to try and counter but you can't guarantee anyone can really. We're all different. That was it. You hoped it didn't happen to you.

How did you feel about your enemy, about the Chinese and the North Koreans?

I didn't feel a thing, no thought of it at all. The whole

03:30 concept of the war was to stop communism, it didn't matter whether North Korean, Chinese or Russian. I mean the Russians were flying in MiG alley. There's no doubt about that. They've now interviewed Russian pilots who talk about it. At the time of course you don't know. There's no foreign pilots but I didn't care what nationality they were. It was a hell of a place to be in and all you had to do was do your mission.

Was there sympathy or empathy coming

04:00 **that they were going through the same as you?**

I don't think people even thought about it. Every military man in the war knows that the other side is exactly the same. He probably thinks his cause is just as just. You know you're just the arm of politicians. If you don't, if you're really against it then you've got to make a stand but if you're

04:30 given a reasonable rationale, then you do your job. As I say, the proof is in South Korea today as to whether it was going to be worthwhile. Whether the UN [United Nations] should have done it or not is another question but it's like in Iraq. Somebody's got to do it. Who is going to do it?

As you say you were a professional military man and you were doing your job. What is the place for ideology and anti-communist feeling or where did that sit within you personally?

05:00 I had no ideology. I don't think Australians in general work on ideology for that sort of thing. I think they try to give you a rational explanation of what is happening. I mean in Vietnam it was the domino theory and that's got some credibility, let's face it, if you look at Korea, and what happened when we stopped it. Well first of all only young people fight wars. When you're older

05:30 that's when you have trouble. If you had read up on all the Vietnamese side of things, the North Vietnamese it really is easy to say that it wasn't communist insurgency. It was a nationalist movement. They happened to be communists. They still were and they're still brutal but if you think about it too much when you're young, you won't do it!

06:00 But I was already I the service, so I had to do what I was told anyway but no, there was no ideology in it I don't think, except it was, I go back to what I said before, this is an appeasement of an expansionist movement and we'd just been through one of those, and we don't want it to get that bad again. That's what people forget too with this sort of thing, is how bad it was in World War 11, the number of people that died, forty odd million. It's a frightening thing. Countries were destroyed

06:30 but of course the fellow travellers and the communists in the Communist Party here will tell you, "Oh no! We're not like that." It's all political hype. Gietzselt, who was the Minister for Veterans' Affairs, of all people, was on a peace mission to Peking when we were in Korea for God's sake! I didn't know at that time. I know now but no, the rationale they gave us, I thought, was reasonable

07:00 and we had to do it.

You mentioned being scared over there, there is no doubt most people would be in your situation. What were you afraid of the most?

I was afraid of being shot down or having to get out and being taken prisoner, not getting home to my nice warm bed, a change of climate! I didn't want to go through that! I think that motivates anyone. You don't

07:30 want to be caught in enemy territory. You want your life to remain pretty normal.

Was the idea of being shot and killed more or less frightening than that?

No I don't think so. I mentioned earlier that I brushed through low bushes going up a hill after an attack. I wasn't really concerned about it. I was just sort of,

08:00 "Jeez," but it wasn't life or death sort of thing. I could have been killed but it didn't enter my mind and I've really got a high self-preservation index you know? But I was too busy and trying to sort it, to actually worry about the consequences at the time. So that side of it I'd say I was more concerned with the sort of

08:30 physical and mental abuse I'd undergo if I happened to be forced to get out of my aeroplane.

You say you have a high self-preservation index, was there any instances of cowardice that you ever witness in your time in the air force?

No. No not in the squadron, no. There were some cases of LMF at some stage, somewhere. I don't know where. I can't recall but

09:00 in my time in the squadron there was no one who had LMF. It's an awful expression, lack of moral fibre!

Is it still used in the air force in the latter part of your career?

I doubt it. It didn't arise of course. We hadn't been to war for a long time. I don't like the term LMF. I mean people get frightened. It's whether they've got control over themselves that's the hard thing. I don't think it's a

09:30 moral problem at all. I think it's sheer physical fear.

What about the opposite? Are there instances you can recall of extreme bravery?

No. I think I explained earlier that I don't know what courage is and if someone is brave, I don't know whether he's got some super quality I

10:00 haven't got or if he's just stupid, or he has no self-preservation feeling, or like some people, they are just not afraid of anything. They don't have the fear. I don't think that's a mental thing. I think it's just a straight physical characteristic. Some blokes are like that. I know some. They frighten the hell out of me!

How did your operational period come to an end? What was the lead up to your last

10:30 **operation?**

Nothing. I was told I'd be going home at the end of the week or whenever it was and then I just waited until my last mission was programmed, and then I got the transport to Seoul, and got on a C47, and went to Iwakuni. Then I waited around until there was a Qantas flight. I went to the movements people.

11:00 In fact the equipment officer who ran that later joined Qantas. I forget his name now. Then I was just put on the aeroplane, like I said, I didn't have a passport! Things were different then and home we came, and that was it.

The war ended on your way home.

Yes.

Can you tell us again about your recollection of that moment?

It was in Port Moresby, 11 o'clock on the 27th of

11:30 July, 1953. The aeroplane had been refuelled and they told us all to get onboard again. I was walking up the steps. I was the first up when the captain came out and said, “They just signed the truce at 11 o’clock.” I remember that. I’ll remember that until I die.

What are your feelings at that moment?

I thought, “That’s great!” My main feeling was, “Well thank God I got all my missions in before it ended,” because I was scared for a while that I wouldn’t. No, it was good. I wasn’t

12:00 exuberant or exhilarated or anything. It was just, “Okay! It’s good it’s over.”

How much of a foregone conclusion or a surprise was that?

That it was over?

That it ended at that moment?

You couldn’t tell when it was going to end. It had been going on for two years and of course at my age and in my position, I didn’t know all the machinations that were going on at the highest levels. I’ve read about it

12:30 since, as to why it accelerated at the end but after two years, you just didn’t have a clue as a line operator when it was going to end. I just thought, “That’s great. The captain’s said it has been signed. Terrific!” Of course then we could get our POWs out as well, which was good.

Did you personally know anyone who had been captured?

Yes, I knew all of them.

13:00 The names are in there. Col Harvey ended up as the Air Attaché in Paris. I remember seeing him on a visit. It was funny actually. We were on some evaluation visit and we went to his flat. His wife was there and you know what she said after she greeted us? She said, “You blokes have all got your socks too short.”

13:30 I couldn’t believe it! In those days some service wives thought they had one rank more than their husbands, you know? She thought she could tick us off for not having the right socks on! I can’t believe it. I know another woman who did the same actually, gee! But he ended up there. There has just been a book released by Col King and Ron Guthrie. I don’t know if you’ve

14:00 seen that. Ron was a POW. He was giving some presentations with Col King. Col King wrote the history of his capture and everything. Don Peterson, I saw him at the reunion. Hold on, can I have a look at the book. I saw him at the reunion

14:30 in July and Don was only a POW for a short time. They were captured June, 15th of June, so that was only about six weeks before the end. Drummond, I knew Lance Drummond. He got killed in Mirage years later. His widow lives here. In fact she married another air force bloke. Ron Guthrie, I don’t know Hannan, Gordon Harvey, I knew him. I didn’t know

15:00 Berg and Thompson I knew. I knew five of them anyway.

Was there a time that you got together after the war and heard their stories?

No. Well only Ron Guthrie just recently. In fact I was in Williamtown when they flew into Sydney. It wouldn’t happen now but I hopped in a Wirraway and I flew down to Mascot, landed there to greet them. I remember

15:30 seeing them come off the aeroplane. It was great.

How was it to be back in Australia after you had been on active service in Korea?

No different. I’d just been away. I was older, not necessarily wiser but I was more knowledgeable.

16:00 I felt I now had some experience that I could, not boast about but that I could use. Then I got disabused of that idea when I did my annual check with the Central Flying School and found out that I knew very little in technical things, which is when I got put on an instructor’s course.

16:30 I just felt good in myself and I’d got through it, and I was just a bit older, and more experienced.

How did you feel about the public’s lack of recognition that we talked about before?

I didn’t think much about it at the time. I’ve only thought about it since I suppose. Amongst my peers, we all knew what we’d all done. It didn’t really matter. I guess I wasn’t too interested in politics at that

17:00 stage or that side of it. As I said, a couple of people said, “Where have you been?” I thought, “Oh bugger you. I’ve been to the war,” but I didn’t say that to them. They wouldn’t have even known what the ribbons meant. People knew very little about it but I never really worried about it. I was too busy. I was instructing and then I went on the instructors’ course. It was all new progressive stuff. It was part of

17:30 learning your profession because you discover after a while that even though you'd been six months in a war, it doesn't make you any better. It gives you knowledge. It gives a basis on which you can make comparisons and evaluations. It gives you a background where you can give balanced view to young people learning their job. But it doesn't make you

18:00 any better. Some people I think, think it turns them into aces and suddenly they can be a bit stupid but it doesn't do that for you. It's just part of your experience.

It's a good thing to be able to say if you want to advance your career in air force for example. Did that occur to you at the time?

No. I didn't have a career that that time. I was still a sergeant when I got back. I didn't get commissioned until November and

18:30 then I didn't get what was called a permanent commission until 1954 I think. So I didn't have a career then. In fact I was at Sale and I got two letters on the one day. I'd gone to see Qantas about a job. I got the letter from Qantas offering me a job and I got my offer of a permanent commission. So I threw away the Qantas letter and decided then I'd stay in the air force.

19:00 **When you look back on it is that the moment that was the turning point for you deciding to rise up the ranks within the air force?**

It wasn't for that. I guess I'm basically lazy. I enjoyed doing what I was doing. If I'd have gone to Qantas I would have had to learn a whole new thing and I wouldn't have the sort of flying I wanted but I'd gone to see if I could get a job because I didn't know if I'd get a permanent commission. It wasn't until

19:30 I got more senior too that I started to realise how lucky I'd been to sort of fall into the air force because the good thing about the air force compared with say an airline, is that in an airline you never arise above driving the buses. In the air force you don't have to fly later on as you get a bit older but you just run the business and that's a big difference. It's great because you

20:00 know your job and you can then institute changes that you knew needed doing when you were out in the field, whereas in an airline you just fly aeroplanes. You don't get into management or making decisions of any import really. So I was just lucky. I tended to let things flow. I was in the air force. I got offered the commission, so I took it and I'm glad because

20:30 I know blokes who got into Qantas, who left after six months. They just couldn't stand it. When I was in general aviation I'd get people expressing regret that they couldn't get into the air force to do military flying and I can understand exactly why because in civil aviation your aim of the mission is to get from A to B, and land the aeroplane. In military aviation to get from A to B, you had to do a job,

21:00 and then to get back to A. There's quite a big difference in the use of the vehicle. Flying after a while isn't a pleasurable thing. The magic has gone from that but doing a mission is different.

When you got back from Korea was there any difficult in the transition between the high tension environment you'd been in over there and a more relaxed job as an instructor?

No, that's a leading question! There wasn't any high tension.

21:30 **It's something you mentioned though. You were working very, very hard.**

No! I was keen! I was working hard to get on the Flying Program. I was fully occupied but to me it wasn't hard work. It's pleasurable and I really wasn't under stress. I never felt any stress from Korea. I was young and stupid I suppose. When I got back to Williamtown I did my annual check with the Central Flying School, who then used to fly with all the

22:00 pilots and I got embarrassed by how little I knew. I could fly but how little I knew about what I was doing on the information side. I thought I'd been flying jets and then I suddenly discovered I knew nothing about them because I hadn't studied at all. So I realised I had to do something to improve that and I applied for the instructor's course, and that's when I learned to fly properly or that's when I

22:30 learned to fly properly for the first time really. You realise then how ignorant you are when you've just graduated and done one tour. You're as ignorant as anything. Then when I did my test pilot's course, I found out again how little I still knew. So it's a big learning process all the time.

We might skip forward to that

23:00 **if we may. You spent a period with the Canberras and the multi-engine bombers but actually we'd like to talk about the test pilot stuff because this is another thing that we're interested in with the archive. How did that come about and what was your initial introduction to the Test Pilot School?**

I applied for it and eventually I got posted. I just had the idea I wanted to do it, like

23:30 most people who do it. In fact it's at that point that the rate at which you accumulate flying hours drops really significantly because the aim of the exercise it to fly as little as possible to get the results but I

went to Farmborough and did the course, and that was interesting, particularly in those days, because we were still at the stage of being handed

24:00 the pilot's notes, read them, go and fly the aeroplane. You got a ride or two in each aeroplane and then of course you had to start doing test exercises on them, like you might do performance or you might do handling, whatever. I can recall it was in January I was there. It was snowing with a low cloud base and I had to go and fly this DeHavilland Dove, you know the thing with the little Gypsy Queen engines?

24:30 So I had to do a GCA to get back to the airfield but that's how they did it in those days. They don't do it now because the aeroplanes are too expensive and too complicated but you whizzed off in the aeroplane, you had to evaluate it, and that is of course what test pilots do. Then when I finished that I came to our Aircraft Research and Development Unit. It was at Laverton at the time and my first job was

25:00 a little job on a Canberra. We had a problem. They suspected that the tail plane electric actuator that varied the angle tail plane were freezing. I took over the project from someone else and in the back of the Canberra there's a camera, and it's got a space there to put the camera in,

25:30 and it's got a canvas cover over it, and it's got a hot air duct that comes in, and goes under the canvas to heat the area. Well there was no camera in it and they still had this hot air duct with air flowing out of it, and they extended the pipe down to the back, and it wouldn't work. It was pretty obvious what it was. They had no feedback. The air was just going nowhere, so I had the troop make a thing that gave the feedback onto

26:00 temperature probe that operated the cock. It was fixed and we did it. That was my first job. I also was then put on doing the production flying of the last F86 aircraft we had coming out factory. It was the last order. I flew the last Sabre out of the factory. That was with CAC [Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation] then and I also had a job of doing the

26:30 test flying for retro-mods on the Canberra for their fuel system. I also flew the 707A. I don't know if you know this aeroplane. When they built the Vulcan, you know the Vulcan, the V4? They built three scale models, small ones, one for low speed travelling, one for engine takes and one for aerodynamics in general. With a joint agreement with the Aircraft Research Laboratory

27:00 we were given this 707A and we were doing low speed handling on this thing because of the delta wing. We had this 707A WD280. Someone else had been flying it and we were working with the ARL [Aeronautical Research Laboratory]. They had this thing, "We've got this mysterious dual drag condition. We've got a high drag condition and we've got a low drag condition, and we don't know how it

27:30 transitions from one to the other." They had kerosene spray going back over the wing to look at the flow and everything. Anyway, I took over this project and I said to the scientist one day, "I'll go up and you," Is this boring you?

No, no! I was just looking at my …

I mean it can be boring to people if they're given the detail. I said, "I'll go up. You tell me whether you want high drag or low drag." He looked at me

28:00 and he said, "How are you going to do that?' I said, "You just do it." So I went flying and he said, "Give me high drag." So I gave him high drag, more revs on when, "Give me low drag." So when I got back he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well you're the scientist. If you look at the polars for lift and drag of this aeroplane, you'll see that you can do anything you like with the altitude after a certain angle, and the lift won't alter but the drag will." The whole program stopped. Someone bought it and put it

28:30 in his backyard but here we had this mysterious high dragging, low dragging! I mean he was a scientist for God's sake! Then I was hit with the responsibility would you believe, when the Sabre was about to go out of service, of doing all the performance charts for it. We flew missions for months measuring performance on this thing and I had to reduce all the results. Then I got nominated to go to France on the Mirage.

On that measuring of the performance of the Sabre, does that mean

29:00 **you're flying the aircraft to the limits of its capacity?**

Oh no, we had to measure fuel flow, air speed, altitude, the normal parameters to work out the specific air range for each configuration that we tested. We had to measure the fuel in the climb and the fuel in descent, and we had to draw profiles for doing missions. So you'd end up with a chart that would say with thirty rockets, two big tanks, here's

29:30 how far you go can go. It was a lot of work, a lot of blokes working on that. One bloke nearly ran out of fuel trying to do the low eight climbs at Darwin! We went to Darwin on one detachment with it to do the tropical stuff and we had this beautiful bloke, who was the officer commanding Darwin. He's dead now. He got us

30:00 our DFRDB [Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits] retirement scheme, a bloke called Dixie

Chapman, an absolutely magnificent gentleman he was. He was the OC and he said, “Listen I know you’re all up here and you’re going to have a good time but I don’t want to see anyone in a jockstrap, deer stalker hat and Wellington boots or anything stupid like that!” So we had this corporal, I think he was a gunny and he was one of these blokes

30:30 covered in black curly hair you know? So we got him to put on a jockstrap, Wellington boots and a deer stalker hat, and we took a picture of him in front of the front gate, with RAAF Darwin, and we gave it to old Dixie! He was really bloody chuffed! God he was marvellous! I cant’ remember the corporal’s name now. Old Dixie, “I don’t want to see anyone in a jockstrap, deer stalker hat and Wellington boots!” Anyway, Black Murray was doing some low weight, which meant not much fuel, ceiling climbs and he nearly ran out of

31:00 gas one day with that. I nearly ran out of gas in a ceiling climb in a Hunter at ETPS [Empire Test Pilot School] Farnborough. I was above cloud the whole time and didn’t realise how far this thing was going to go. I didn’t prepare properly and I just got back with enough fuel. They’re tricky those things.

Was it a dangerous job in the Aircraft Development Research Group?

No, well people have a concept of test pilots. Now a bloke

31:30 who flies a prototype that’s never flown before, that’s one thing. I’ve never flown a prototype. To do test flying, which leads to modifications or performance measurements, that’s not dangerous unless some of the conditions are a little bit dicky. One bloke that sort of argued with me and I was in France, he did some tests on Sabres with automatic relay, and he had to do that

32:00 in very tight situations, close to the ground. If it didn’t work he could have been in trouble but you try and cover the envelope without getting yourself into trouble. Generally it is well thought out and you usually have a bug out situation, and so on. Then I got nominated to go to Paris to fly the Mirage and prepare for the production flying. I was there eight

32:30 months without my family and I came back, and I ran the flight to schedule, and I flew the first one out of the factory in November ’63, not far from my birthday actually. 833 was the number and when I was deputy chief twenty one years later I flew it again at Williamtown. I went up. I specially arranged it as an exercise for the troops and we had eight Mirages in formation. I was at the front.

33:00 they wouldn’t let me lead. They said, “You just stay there and we’ll follow you!” Cheeky buggers! We had every rank from two star to pilot officer in each aeroplane and the volume was the same age as the aeroplane! It was really something and we had a big party for the troops, and I got up, and told them what a great job they’d done to preserve this aeroplane because it is our great strength in the RAAF. We had excellent technicians and

33:30 they really do look after their machines. That was twenty one years to the day. Not many people can do that and it was the same aeroplane! It looked beautiful! It was in perfect condition.

Can you tell us about going to Paris and what that experience was like?

Oh yes, well I think I mentioned earlier that I studied French at school and Latin. I dropped French. Then when I was posted to Paris I went to the language school for six week. It was interesting because we had an RAF bloke

34:00 on exchange. His wife was French. What was her name? So I used to practice with her as well but I wasn’t real good. When I got to France on my own, I was there for eight months, I went down to Mallam Villaroche, which is where the Dassault company did their experimental flying, and they said to me, “What do you want to do?” This was in English. “Do you want us to speak

34:30 English or do you want to speak French?” I thought, “Well if they speak English they’ve already translated once. If I can pick it up quickly enough, that won’t happen and I’ll get what the original meaning is.” I said, “All right, I’ll try French.” For three months I was buggered, I can tell you! Every day, all day in French, it was really hard but I’ve never forgotten it and it’s the only way to learn a language.

35:00 What the Israelis used to do, when somebody was posted to the Embassy in Paris, they’d given them a travel book, tickets to a town, a provincial town, money and say, “Come back in six weeks speaking French.” That’s what they did but Israelis of course already do English as a second language in school and that helps but that’s the way you learn it. So I did that and it worked pretty well. In fact I was flying one day in our Mirage

35:30 over France and some NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] controller, who was a Brit came up in English, and said, “Do you require any assistance?” I just said to him, “Non merci!” Bugger him! It was good. I enjoyed flying there. Initially we had the first pilots and ground crew went to Mont Marçon. Now that’s in the southwest corner of France, just below Bordeaux. It’s the base that the Germans were going to launch

36:00 their big bombers from against the United States. We went there and did our training on Mirage 3Cs, which is slightly different. It’s the first version of the Mirage. We had an escort officer called Bernard De Roussier, who was later out here as air attaché and then as a rep for Dassault. Unfortunately he got

killed in a civil airliner going out of West Africa somewhere some years ago, beautiful bloke. He in fact

36:30 had a house right on the border of Vichy France, where it was originally. This area in the southwest of France was great for two things; Armagnac and footballers. That's where all the footballers come from. Our ground crew had been down before us. They were the blokes who were going to come back and train the others, and they'd gone to this bar in Mont Marçon,

37:00 and they'd met this big bloke, who was an ex-footballer. His name was Le Ance and his place was called Chez Le Ance. He and his wife, and daughter served in the bar, and he bought his round in turn with these blokes all the time. He was a magnificent bloke. So they said to us, "You go to Chez Le Ance. He'll look after you." So that's where we went and we spent most of our time there. They were terrific people. He could tell you all about football and of course they had bullfight s there. They had bull fights in that corner of France.

37:30 And we went flying on Mirage 3Cs. Before then I'd actually started flying them before the other blokes arrived at Kolmer, near Strasbourg, south of Strasbourg and I did two rides there in a dual. I'd gone solo in what was called a 3A, which was the original experimental one, which had a different wing, very light and didn't have much fuel. I'd done

38:00 two rides in a 40 knot wind. I don't know if you know the geography of France but they get a thing called the Foam Wind in the Rouen Valley and the aeroplane was sort of doing this in the wind but then I went to Mont Marçon, and flew with the other blokes, and did some flying. At the end of my time there, when the first aeroplane had flown and we were going to start the production

38:30 flying, then I came back but I had to accept the first aeroplane in France. I was there in this pub in Bordeaux with these blokes from the Department of Supply, who owned the aeroplane but they insisted I sign for it. They were the most chicken shit lot I've ever seen at taking any responsibility. So I signed for it. What did it matter? Eventually it was flown back to Avalon but then the first one out of the factory Was A33 and I got back in time to do that.

39:00 **How would you characterise how the French operated as opposed to what you had been used to?**

They were marvellous. The French have a very different approach to public service. Napoleon really started them off and

39:30 their democracy is well established and it's part of their life but on the military side they have an outfit called DTA, Direction Technica et Auto and that is staffed by both civilians, and military but mainly civilian under a secretary but the engineers wear uniform when they go out to bases. They're not in the air force but they are given rank and a uniform when they go to a base, so there is no argument. So it's a very integrated thing.

40:00 The chief test pilot at Dassault when I was flying, was a bloke who was killed in an F1 called, God isn't it awful! You're memory goes. He was on what they called 'congé payee'. That's a paid holiday. In other words they fly with the company, he's a trained test pilot, trained at the government school, EPNER [Ecole de Personnel Navigant d'Essais en Vol et Recherche] but he could then leave the air force on this paid leave, fly with the company, and then

40:30 after ten years go back with some seniority. He was going to go back as a colonel. I flew with him this day down to Bordeaux in a Mist Air 20. He was telling me he was just about to give it up and go back in the air force. He'd been offered a colonel's job and then he killed himself in an F1 that had flutter, beaut bloke. They have a very integrated system. The difference between the public service and the services in the technical areas is minimal, and it words

41:00 very well. It's very good. The air force, I don't know the army and the navy but the air force can not change the design at all from what's agreed originally unless they can justify it and come up with the extra money. The thing then tends to run properly and stick to what they are doing. They can modify it later but in the development stage it doesn't get screwed up by grandiose ideas being brought in. Dassault

41:30 was an exceptional company really. The bloke who owned it, Marcel Bloch, changed his name after World War 11 to Dassault. He was a Jew. If you know the history of France, they built aeroplanes called Bloch aeroplanes. His CEO [Chief Executive Officer] Vallieres, he and Bloch were in a concentration camp during the war in Germany.

Tape 9

00:34 **Before we go there, with the Mirage from a pilots point of view what was to fly and can you take us through…?**

Magnificent. The best aeroplane ever. Yeah, marvellous machine. What can I say? It was just a magnificent flying machine. It was in the

01:00 era where aeroplanes were getting higher and higher approach speeds, starting to use more runway, needed drag shoots and that was one hundred and sixty five knots over the threshold you needed a drag shoot, you'd get away without one but normal wear and tear you'd use a drag shoot. It'd do mach two when it was cleared and serviced at mach two it could do more than that but that was temperature limit on the airframe.

01:30 It was easy to fly, but it had no real vices. It would depart and if you exceeded the alpha limits the angle of attack limits, but so would everything but it recovered very quickly. It was just a real fighter pilots aeroplane, it was magnificent, it had a great engine, the engine was a development of

02:00 the UMO 004 in the MEO62. And after the war as you know all the allies went and stole all the designers from various areas the French got the UMO team and it was just a really great engine. I did some, when we got back I did some tests in tropical atmosphere. We had to prove

02:30 the intake laws because the intakes, the little centre bodies called mice move forward as speed increases to keep the shock wave just in the edge of the intake so it doesn't surge. And we had to check that law in tropical atmospheres because in the tropics instead of the tropopause being at thirty six thousand and it's anywhere up to 53 and anywhere down to minus 88.

03:00 And in fact I reckon I got the height and speed record for the southern hemisphere in doing this we had to do zoom climbs so I would accelerate to fifty two thousand feet to 2.2, just under 2.2 and then get up to thirty degrees and then just let it zoom and I had to push it over at seventy seven thousand feet because I'd gone way past the limit on the engine.

03:30 So we had 2.2 and seventy seven thousand feet out of that aeroplane.

What's it like up there at seventy seven thousand feet?

Hey I was too busy there was an equipment bay air conditioning system that's got a warning light and it kept coming on and it was getting hot and it was continually cooling it down manually so I was a bit busy but at that height I can't tell you too much except all you'll get out of that wing is,

04:00 you can push the stick forward and it will go over. Pull it back nothing will happen so then we'd push over and go down and at about sixty six thousand feet it would start to respond again. In fact one of the engineers said, "I want you to stop the descent at sixty five thousand," and I said, "You've got to be kidding me, it won't." And the other things we did were we had to determine the engine surge limits so I

04:30 can remember the first one, we were fifty two thousand feet, somewhere around there and I'm slowing down, slowing down, slowing down and waiting for the engine to surge as the incidence increased and it didn't, it just went 'Schhh' and just went out. Nice and quiet, and of course we'd never relit using JP1, it was all different fuel in Europe

05:00 so we relit and then we landed but it was interesting because before I started the test I went to the air traffic people and I said, "Look, when I do these engine trials and if I don't get a relight I want priority," so they said, "That's not a problem, not a problem." I said, "Yeah but it's going to be quick," and I said, "I'll do a forced landing for you and from then on in you'll see what I mean," and in a Mirage you're at high key, that's you're over the runway at forty five degrees

05:30 to do a two drop thing at fifteen thousand feet, you get your speed back from three hundred to two hundred and forty, put your gear down. Ten thousand feet on turning base, five thousand foot straighten up on final at two hundred and forty knots. Takes a minute, you do them fifteen minutes (UNCLEAR) so I called up High Key and he said, "Roger," and he called up this baron at five miles and he said, "I've got a Mirage he's doing a practise forced landing," and so on. As soon as he finished I said, "Turning base," so the voice sped up.

06:00 He said, "Hey, we've got this Mirage, he's turning base now," this blokes still three mile and as soon as he finished that I said, "Final." Afterwards I went and saw him and he said, "Okay. You got the airfield no problem." He just didn't have a clue about how quickly it was going to happen, you know one minute, not long. So then when we did these I didn't have a problem. But it relit, we did I don't know how many extinctions and we had surges. But…

This is a dead stick landing in a Mirage?

Yes. Two hundred and forty knots,

06:30 well you glide at three hundred that's not bad, that goes for quite a while. But as soon as you're at high key and you drop the gear you're going down at fifteen thousand foot a minute. You can reduce it a bit below two hundred and forty but you want to be careful and you're always rounding out before the runway. You've got a big curve and if you start rounding out at two thousand feet then you've got a big curve so you don't want to be too long but Darwin's a long runway anyway. And it's fine. It'll round out and people have actually done them.

07:00 Real ones, I haven't. No, it's fine as long as you're near an airfield and you've got air traffic that can give you clearance and understand.

This was the first very quick fighter and sound barrier, any problems breaking the sound barrier over urban areas?

Oh yeah, same with the F1-11. You've got restrictions, you've got to be thirty miles out to sea and so on before you can go supersonic. To air

07:30 test F1-11s we went out over Morton Bay thirty miles out, otherwise people were getting upset. But in the air of course the only thing you know in the Mirage anyway, F1-11 don't think so, the Mirage doesn't have a sophisticated flight control system as the F1-11 and when you go transonic then you go like every aeroplane you get a nose down pitch.

08:00 And also the altimeter jumps and so if you want to do it level you have to peg the altitude indicator, stay on that and just wait till the thing stops. Because if you follow your altimeter at about nine six you'll be changing your altitude and then when it finally flips you'll say, "Oh god my height's all wrong," so you've got to do it on your altitude indicator. Then when you decelerate if you've got a load on you'll

08:30 pitch up so you have to watch that. Not badly, I flew the Viggen it did it, but not real badly but the F1-11s got a different system. It's unless there's something demanded by the stick it'll keep you pointing exactly where you're pointing regardless. And that's the trouble you didn't know what the back ends doing you know. And if you get into a spin or something or a departure you've got to cancel all your dampers and just so you're flying manually and you know where the controls are but

09:00 the Mirage was a real man's aeroplane. You won't find a bloke who flew a Mirage who didn't love it. They're a great machine, really good. I enjoyed it.

I will ask you about the period of the Vietnam War because it was a significant period of warfare for the military here but what was your involvement at that time?

I really had none. I never got to Vietnam. I've never been there.

09:30 I was in Paris in '65, '66, I was there in '63 and I was in Australia in '64. I knew about the war but the only time any of it came into my operation was we were trying to buy an air to ground guided weapon – a French thing called a AS30 and it was guided by infrared, it was very precise, it was under five metres, you know it was really good.

10:00 And in the middle of contract negotiations with the makers they sent us a message saying, "The Americans aren't using it in Vietnam so cancel the negotiations," and we thought, "Well that's great. We're buying this for our Mirage so we'll have a precise weapon, a guided weapon, but because of the American's bull pup," bull pup was different because it was aerodynamically

10:30 flown and when it ran out of what was it no? I think it was powered by the engine and once the engine ran out, if you were out of range the thing went nowhere. In fact they used another one later on but we'd already cancelled our negotiation. It was silly. That was the only connection I had with the Vietnam War and it was a stupid decision, it really was. We could have had a precision guided munition for the Mirage.

11:00 **The decision to buy the Mirage over British or American equipment was that in any way seen to be controversial?**

If you read the history yeah. There were lots of things going on with the Brits. Rolls Royce actually engined a Mirage three with an engine, a big Avon engine and Jimmy Roland who was the governor of New South Wales he flew it and

11:30 it was very good but in the long run it wasn't worth changing to a British engine in a French aeroplane cause once you start changing engines you get a mismatch somewhere. They mightn't know about it at the time but it'll pop up somewhere. And at that stage Lockheed were pushing the 104 and some air force people wanted the F104, but old Scherger, he got it right, I think.

12:00 And it was interesting because he was talking to Vallieres the CO of Dassault and Vallieres was trying to speak English well and he was trying to tell him it had no flaps or anything, it's a very simple thing, and he said, "It has no dispositive," which is the French for 'gadgets' and old Sherat suddenly started thinking. It's a very simple air frame.

12:30 See the 104s got blown flaps, it relies on engine, you get below eighty per cent revs and find you're dead in a 104. It's relying on that, the F4s the same. But the Mirage it just looked just a simple wing. Big low pressure tyres, you know it was a simple air frame and it was a good engine and it still got more range than the F18 even though when we bought the F18 they proved that it had more range

13:00 than a Mirage. It's incredible. It was a good choice but Sherat had made it. That's for sure and he convinced the Minister.

Just another thing you spent a lot of time doing was instructing in your career, what's your love of instructing?

Oh I don't have any love of instructing. Not any more. I loved it when I started because I was

13:30 imbued with the joy of teaching. I could teach people to do something. Particularly in flying because I

thought I could do it reasonably well and I was a good teacher. I was dux of my course at Central Flying School and I was actually posted straight to CFS which is stupid. You should never post a bloke just graduated to that job. But they in doing it they attached me to

14:00 Uranquinty for six months but they thought so highly of my ability that they wanted me back at Central Flying School so I did six months at Uranquinty in the second half of 1954 and then I went back and was instructing for three years at Sale.

What makes a good instructor?

That's a gimmicky question. That's one of those awful questions you know. You can interpret it a whole lot of different ways.

14:30 Any good instructor in anything, flying or otherwise, is someone who can teach. When I used to be an examiner I used to go around examining people, that's the only criteria I went on; did he actually get the message across I could have learnt something from that you know? Most people if you sit with them they'll learn to fly. If you tell them what to do and they'll develop their own skill. The old saying is, "You learn to fly in spite of your instructor."

15:00 And you have to with some instructors. You get screaming skulls, you get blokes who never let you make a mistake, you know they're hopeless. But a good instructor is a good teacher. He knows the character he's instructing, he knows how to get the best out of him, the best way to get him to develop his potential and so on. So he's a good teacher and I liked teaching at that time but then after seventeen years you just cannot stand watching someone make

15:30 mistakes. You just have to go and fly yourself and make your own. And it's stressful and when I was at Pearce we had blokes flying. One bloke flew seven hundred hours in a year but the average for all my instructors was four hundred and fifty a year which was a lot in a Mackey or a Vampire. Two sorties every day sort of thing during the war and it's a very stressful job I think.

16:00 But I enjoyed being CO because I could introduce my policies and I remember my ironic sense of humour didn't get through at the start. I had a briefing with my instructors and I said, "Now the first thing is don't let the flying interfere with the checks," and they looked at me and wondered what I was so I had to explain to them, "It's very important that students learn

16:30 to do their checks properly but it isn't learning to fly, it's operating safely. You've got to teach them how to fly." It's great having a pilot who can do all the checks but can't fly. It's funny when I was there the head Psych and Support Commander went round the world gathering information on assessing. Now in the air force we had an A51 hate sheet and you would give a mark B+, A-, C+, and comments

17:00 then on weaknesses and where he needed to be further instructed. This bloke came back and he said to me, "We'd like you to look at this new objective marking system," so what he had was this sheet and you had pre-start checks, start-up, taxi, takeoff – bom, bom, down to land and in the column you put a number, that was objective marking

17:30 you see. So if his takeoff was good you got a number between nought and ten and then you ended up at landing again you had to put a number and then you added it all up and you got this beautiful number so no more subjective assessment. The fact he crashed on landing didn't matter he still got a pretty good mark. This was the new objective marking system, jeez. Only a trick cyclist could think of that.

18:00 **You flew the Canberra, can you give us a quick summary of the Canberra and what you thought of her?**

Interesting. Did you see the Canberra that was out here some years ago? It was at the Avalon Air Show and round the place? It was here at Canberra. Two hundred and twenty nine was it's number and it was an American number N229C. I flew that for the owner. I flew it out of maintenance when they rebuilt it and then an

18:30 American bought it and I flew it with my ex-son in law would you believe as a navigator. Now that was a magnificent Canberra because it had a whole new avionics suite in it, it had good instruments, attitude indicators. The Canberra's I flew had British mach three altitude indicators, they were full of errors – they had a big thick aeroplane there so you couldn't really see where the horizon was and they were hard to fly on instruments, to make it accurate. They really

19:00 were but it was a very viceless aeroplane. It was like a big glider at landing, and on landing if you got in just above the ground and you just kept doing this and this and this and this it would just squeak onto the ground and then you could hold the nose up for about fifty knots. It was a very gentle thing to fly but it had some bad design features. You could have no flap or full flap.

19:30 Now that was marvellous when you're doing a single engine GCA is that when you got full flap down how are you going to control it? It was bad that way. It had no autopilot. It was designed for one, never had one, the air force wouldn't buy one so you hand flew that thing for five or six hours. It really and it was cold up high and it was hot in the tropics down low and you eventually

20:00 got an air conditioning system put in it but it never worked one hundred per cent. Godfreys designed it.

It was the first aeroplane we had Dotmar in, we had a thing called “green satin” and that was good with a nav computer so we were the first people to operate a GPS [Global Positioning System] driven computer for navigation. And if you were going fast

20:30 you’d better be pointing the right direction or you weren’t going to turn it. We used to do a thing called Mod 403. Early on in the Brits had some accident with a runway trim nose up. I don’t think they had a nose down, I can’t remember. So we modified the system so that at four hundred and thirty five to four hundred and fifty knots you had the trim fully nose down. You could not get a nose down runway. You could get a nose up but you could do something about that,

21:00 you could let it go up and you could turn, and you can actually control it till the speed’s low. Now at four hundred and thirty five knots in a Canberra you’d better be pointing right because you’re not going to turn, it’s just solid. It’s also spring tabbed, the Americans when they built the B57 put a hydraulically powered rudder and they had a much lower single engine control spin but in the Mach 109 engine, the bigger one you needed something like

21:30 one hundred and eighty knots minimum control speed because the blow back right on the rudder on the trim tab you just couldn’t get the rudder. It would stop you getting it. So single engine, don’t lose an engine or you’ve got troubles. It was a bit of a beast in that, but that was the era. I told you about the crosswind, trying to run the engines up, that’s the era it was.

22:00 It used to have what they called an ‘N en route T stall’. And a compressor blade stalls when the angle of attack gets too high. Now there’s the rotary velocity and the forward velocity right? That turns the angle of attack on the blade and as you got higher and colder that forward velocity decreased until it reached a stall angle and you got what was called an N on route T stall. The engine would just go ‘brrrmp’ when you were climbing. It was great fun. So then

22:30 Rolls Royce sent us some information they said, “Oh yes, We know about that. Here’s your graph, do not exceed these revs at this temperature,” and then we used to climb with a temperature rev graph that we had to make sure we stayed, reduced the power to it. And the early one had a two position ram for the inlet guide veins, the first row. Then they got progressive but they used to freeze up too and, cause you troubles. Jeez,

23:00 we had some fun with them.

Sounds a pretty British aeroplane.

Great British aeroplane yes sure.

F1-11.

Great cab, great cab. It was terrific. It’s got to be the best STOL [Short Take Off and Landing] aeroplane in the world and I don’t say that lightly because it’s not STOL. I’ll just give you some figures, that aeroplane dry,

23:30 no fuel, no weapons weighed thirty three thousand pounds, no wait…

You don’t have to give us the precise figures.

No, no. It should come back. It weighed fifty six thousand pounds, fully loaded it weighed one hundred and fourteen pounds.

24:00 That’s more than your own weight in load. Now one hundred and fourteen thousand pounds it could take off in six thousand five hundred feet in standard and then at minimum weight, all the load gone and minimum fuel it would land in two thousand five hundred feet and it could do mach 2.5, eight hundred knots indicated and land at one hundred and thirty knots. You know this is, it really is some machine from the point of view of performance. It

24:30 really is but it was a great big cab, it was lovely. It had a wing loading of about one hundred and ten pounds per square foot so going through turbulence down low was just like a Cadillac you know? Like soft springs. It was beautiful. You could fly in turbulence down low without any trouble whatsoever.

That’s what it was designed to do though wasn’t it?

Exactly. Well no actually, McNamara designed it to be both that and a naval aeroplane which is why it screwed up

25:00 of course but McNamara was a whiz, he built cars. So he’d know all about that. He’d still try and do it again with a joint strike fighter but it really was a very good flying machine, very nice to fly.

What is it you love about flying?

Don’t know. It’s just I like doing it. It’s like sex I suppose, do you know why you like doing it?

25:30 I just like flying, it’s a buzz. It’s great being up in the air looking at the world. It’s great if you’ve got an aeroplane you can do aerobatics in and be a bit free. Although flying’s a discipline, you can’t be that loose but it’s a manipulative manual thing where you’re using your coordination and your skill

26:00 to do things. It drops bombs and shoots guns all boys love that. I just like it. It's just something I wanted to do. I just like flying. I don't know why. I don't any more. I mean I like flying but like I say it's not the flying that kills you, it's the trouble you've got to go to, to get it. It's complicated now. I mean you fly here

26:30 and look at air traffic control. You're not going to breathe in case you say something wrong. It's not worth the effort to get around this country. I mean the States is great, "G'day sir. What can we do for you, sir?" When you're finished, "Have a good day, sir," you know? Old Jim Fleming, he was flying over in California and the bloke said, "Are you going down to San Diego?" He said, "Why don't you go over to Long Beach and have a look at Queen Mary along the way?" He thought, "Yeah okay," so he just sent him around and

27:00 said, "Anyone else you'd like to see?" I mean, you try that in this country. I can remember being airborne in my aeroplane here and this poor old farmer's coming up from down south somewhere and he said, "Would there be any chance of doing a practice ADF landing?" You know what the controller said? "Well, if you'd given us some warning we might have been able to arrange it," in that tone of voice and I thought, "I'm living in the wrong country." The air traffic here, it really is bad. They've got total control, which is

27:30 okay, but they grew up as a public service and that's their attitude. No, I don't like flying any more. Not the process of flying. I like being airborne. That's all.

You ever go up the front of a jumbo jet and see the pilot when you're a passenger?

In fact the captain on one flight I was coming back on invited me up front through the landing. So I've got a few mates, one off F1-11s, he lives here where Thatch Phillips who flies 747-400s. Only trouble is

28:00 he shows me the incident reports and that frightened the hell out of me.

I don't want to hear that.

No you don't.

You rose to a very high rank in the air force, how would you describe yourself as a leader in the air force?

As a leader? That's an embarrassing question to ask anyone. You'd have to ask someone else. I don't know I was well known. My middle name is Hicks, Billie Hicks, because my father

28:30 was looked after by the Hicks family and everyone knew him as Billie Hicks and my mother called me Billie Hicks because of that because she was a bit emotional at the time, you know just being widowed. And so everyone knows me as Billie Hicks or Blicks. And in fact a mate of mine Nugget Hibbin, he flew helicopters, he was the one who coined the Blicks bit so my family company is called Blicks. You've always got to cash in on your disadvantages you know. But I was known as Billie Hick so everybody knew me.

29:00 I think I, people that have worked for me have said they liked my style of leadership. I'm a people person basically and I don't like arrogance and I don't like commanders who just use their authority just because they've got it which is what a lot of people do. I certainly, I was known as the boy

29:30 bastard at one stage because I did do my job and people don't like that but I think I did it pretty humanely and with some understanding of people but there's two things, you've got to do your job, you've got your responsibility and then you've got to know you're dealing with people not ciphers and I think I did that. Is that without being over weaning?

30:00 **Proudest moments?**

Jeez I don't know. I said earlier that I sort of just went along with things and then when I was older I discovered how good the job was. And I enjoyed

30:30 doing it. I didn't worry in my day you didn't worry about anything but doing a good job. Hopefully the reporting system would then reward you. It rewarded me. I was never promoted from an understudy job into the next job. I always was promoted into a different job. And I was proud of that because I didn't have to understudy anyone. I could handle all the jobs and the good thing in the air force is you get to manage the whole

31:00 business. That's the most satisfying thing. That's what I really enjoyed when I was older was the fact this was my outfit and I could run it because I knew what it did. I've had great arguments with transport over CASA [Civil Aviation Safety Authority] and the fact they put airline captains in to run the whole safety system when there isn't any comparable experience

31:30 with the military experience in managing safety programs you start right at an early age when you're the subject of it and as you get more senior you get more and more of the program. I was chief of the staff at OPCOM [Operational Command] and I don't know how many types of aeroplanes I had but I had to oversight all the safety aspects of each particular type of aeroplane for the entire operation. Now no one does that but the military. Airlines don't, airline pilots just run their little shop

32:00 and half of them are tyrants and they don't the first thing about safety and as you probably know in civil aviation someone with bad habits who becomes an instructor or a manager can really cause some problems. Some of them have very strange ideas and when I discovered after doing test pilot school how little I knew in the past when I thought I was smart and then you relate that to general aviation and they way it's not standardised and how individuals get to

32:30 run their operations, then you realise how dangerous it can get. But no, I guess the Mirage was my real crowning glory if you like as a pilot. That was, the F1-11 was more of a job. I'd done it all by then. But the Mirage for me and speaking French and doing it in French it lead me on to learning other languages. It really was a

33:00 development period for me. At that time none of us, we hadn't bought an aeroplane outside the British or American sphere. We didn't know anything about the French, we couldn't speak the language, they didn't speak English very well, this was in '63, not like now. Their translations into English had to be redone. I had to do a lot of them with the flight manuals and all the technical manuals had to be done, they were learning to sell to other than themselves. It was a real development period that and

33:30 in fact I was responsible for the design of the photo recce nose of the Mirage. I was walking to the designer and they said, "We've got this job from your people and they want a recce nose," and I said, "Well, that's easy you've got a heat exchanger in the nose for the radar, use it for the camera," and he said, "Oh." Monday morning he had the design out. I really enjoyed working with them. They're not people who

34:00 worried that someone might give them an idea. They'll grab it. The Israelis are like that. I've worked with them in the last few years, they're terrific. And I enjoyed the Mirage I suppose most.

Looking back, particularly with your involvement in the Koreas war, how do you feel about that war? The line still hasn't essentially moved and effectively they're still at a stage of war, how do you feel about war broadly?

34:30 I think it's stupid. I think it's getting outdated too. I don't think you're going to get invasions of countries. No ones going to invade Australia. I don't think the way the world is interconnected now, no one's going to stand for it. How are they going to do it, it's quiet different from when World War 11 started. There was the balance of power system and the blocks and all this sort of thing.

35:00 I don't think it'll happen any more. There's going to be fighting, I don't think humans will ever stop but what worries me with the present talk is about getting rid of F1-11s and stuff like that because we're going to be overseas doing these sorts of things like Iraq but our first job is to protect our own borders. It doesn't matter what else you might do, if you don't do that you're not really doing your job and the government's not really

35:30 doing their job and we have a national air space control system which we're not activating. The F18s at Tindal don't go looking for any tracks. You know the last time we caught an aeroplane intruding in our air space? It was in the Northern Territory and it was done by Hercules. Years ago. I mean I'm sure there's a legion of rubber marks on all those old air strips up there in Darwin.

36:00 **While you were young and impressionable, are there any images that stay with you and perhaps come back in an uncontrolled way?**

Yeah, in the middle of the night. I sometimes sweat some of the things I've done. It's dreadful. I mean I've done some stupid things and been lucky. And sometimes I'll have a bad dream about it but not to the extent of worrying me. I think it's just, "Aw, Christ," you know?

36:30 Go away when I think about it.

Where were they coming from? Can you put your finger on it?

Stupid things. I've done stupid things with aeroplanes and I've been lucky. And sometimes I just think about it and think, "Oh my god, if I hadn't woken up to that where would I be?" I had a one in an MU2 out of Sydney airport. It would be more embarrassment than anything but I took off with the power levers in ground idle. Tried to and the

37:00 revs kept going 'Rrrrr' and finally I woke up and air traffic control were saying, "Have you got a problem?" And I said, "Yeah, I've got an engine problem but I'll let you know." It would've been embarrassing wouldn't it?

What about from Korea?

Well I've mentioned a couple yeah where I scraped the bushes pulling out of a dive, I don't have a bad dream about that but I think about it sometimes. Being lucky and another time when I nearly ran into

37:30 a target. I know one bloke came back with rocks in his ventral tank.

That still comes back to you, that image?

Yeah, well I mean that was the luck of the draw wasn't it? I didn't kill myself so there's no use worrying about it but you often, well not often but you think about it now and again. If you dream.

How much is it a sense now that you've lost many colleagues that you knew, how does that place you in…?

There but for the grace of God go I.

38:00 That's the way I operate. I mean you could be lucky or not. Some blokes aren't lucky.

How would you regard the future?

I haven't got much left.

Australia's future. Optimist or a pessimist?

I have great faith in the Australian character and they'll get through regardless of the politicians or anyone else. And they'll

38:30 get screwed around, particularly the military until one day they're needed and then they'll fix it. You've only got to look at Iraq and the SAS to know just how good the ordinary bloke is at his job, particularly professional military men. And to go in and out of Iraq and do the job they did and not lose one troop, that for me says it all and you know, we'll get screwed around. But the worry is that in the days of plenty and affluence

39:00 we're worrying about such picky little things in our lives now that we're not worrying about the essentials and we'll get people that will talk us into doing things we shouldn't do and then we'll pay for it later. That's what worries me.

39:30 **This will be seen in fifty or a hundred years time, have you got any message for anyone that might be watching this based on your experience?**

Well I suppose the only thing I can say is they should remember the old French saying. Because nothing changes, you just put different names on it and it's got different parameters but nothing changes

40:00 in human activity. That's my only message. There's nothing special in what I did.