Australians at War Film Archive

Charles Wannan - Transcript of interview

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Some parts of this interview have been embargoed.

The embargoed portions are noted in the transcript and video.

Tape 1

00:30 **Thanks so much for you time today. We really appreciate it. Could you begin by sharing with me a brief overview of your life, from where you were born, basically travelling through your military service, to where you are now …**

01:00 Yes, certainly. I was born in Scotland, in the little town of Hawick, spelt H-A-W-I-C-K. That happened because my father went from Australia during the First World War and married a lass from St Andrew's, the golfing town. And within six months or so,

01:30 they put me on the [SS] Ceramic – a ship – and brought me out to Australia; and therefore I acquired an Australian accent. My father for a time was the immigration officer for the Presbyterian Church in New South Wales, welcoming Scotsmen to Australia – and others. I was… he then became a minister of the Presbyterian Church and this meant that we moved from one place

02:00 to another – Port Macquarie, Corindi, Mudgee, Pit Town, Ebenezer, Northbridge, and a few others in between. I went to State schools for the early years, and then went down to Knox. Presbyterian ministers are not well-off, but Presbyterian laymen are generous and they provided a scholarship for me and my brother.

02:30 I went through the cadet corps there, played the usual sports and other activities, and then came the problem of trying to work out what to do. I didn't have any strong ambition for any one particular thing. I decided though, that I didn't want to be in an office, so I applied for a teacher's college scholarship, and I got it. And that meant that for two years I went to the Sydney Teacher's College, which was within

03:00 the grounds of the Sydney University. Whilst there I joined the SUR [Sydney University Regiment] in 1939, around about May, and then went to a camp at Menangle Park with the Sydney University Regiment and rose through the ranks from private to corporal to sergeant to acting company sergeant major, which was the top rank I reached there. But whilst I was doing that, I had decided

03:30 that the army was not for me. In fact, my father declined to give his consent to my joining the army. I've been eternally grateful for that because the group that I was to go with was the 8th Division, which was caught in Singapore as you know, and most of them finished up either dead or prisoners of war.

04:00 I then decided that I should try for the air force. By this time was getting serious. I was at teacher's college in 1939 and 1940 at the time and the… it was … the phoney war was finished and the real war had started, and things were getting serious by 1941.

04:30 Now, when I finished teacher's college I was posted – as deputy headmaster – to a two-teacher school at Boree Creek. You've got to think about that a little. That was Tim Fischer's country. And then within one term I was posted as headmaster to a one-teacher school at Erindale, near old Junee, and whilst I was there I applied to that exclusive club – the Air Force Reserve.

05:00 I went to the local area medical officer and was rejected with high blood pressure. They said, "Now laddie, you take these pills and you come back and see me in a month's time." And I did that, and then

he let me through; and that entitled me to do the twenty one lessons – you've probably heard of those from a number of other sources, but they involved

05:30 the theory of flight, trigonometry, geometry, and those sorts of things. And we'd send those into a central … to the air force. They would mark them and then we'd go onto the next lesson. Having completed that I was accepted into the air force itself. I completed initial training down at Somers in Victoria and then on Tiger Moths for elementary flying at Temora; and then to Uranquinty on the old Wirraways

06:00 and then overseas. We sailed on the [SS] Nieuw Amsterdam, a luxurious South American liner – the New York to South America line – we sailed to San Francisco, unescorted. It was a fast ship. And then it was a Pullman train across to Boston, and then into Camp Miles Standish – possibly a name you've heard from other sources.

06:30 We were intrigued with the meals they gave us, and with their big PXs [Post Exchange – American canteen unit] where you could buy so many things. Then we went up to Halifax in Canada and onto the [SS] Louis Pasteur, one of the French liners. We were packed like sardines on that on the trip across to Liverpool, unescorted again. Then down to Bournemouth where we waited, a wait doing a few lessons and not much else. Whilst there,

07:00 a couple of Focke-Wulfs came across and strafed the park on a Sunday morning, managing to kill a few civilians, and not any air force people as far as I know. It was just packed with air force people. Then as more air crew came through – more air crew really, because there were air crews going there – we were moved onto Brighton. It was not quite as salubrious, but still a very pleasant place on the south coast.

07:30 Then we went up to Peterborough where we did training on Miles Masters and were looking good for Spitfires. We were hoping for Spitfires but we were shocked to be posted to the Middle East. We got over that, though. So this time a red funnel steamer called the [SS] Almanzora – a very interesting name – took us. We were in convoy this time. We went

08:00 out into the Atlantic and then through the Straits of Gibraltar, and were attacked by ME-110s off Marseilles. And it's claimed that the gunners managed to knock down one Airacobra and nothing else – Airacobra being an American aircraft, probably from North Africa.

08:30 So we went onto Alexandria … oh, I forgot to mention that we sailed from Greenock on the Clyde, and the last contingent aboard was a contingent of WRNS [Women's Royal Naval Service], all of them beautiful and young, and interesting company going through the Mediterranean. Then we went from Alexandria to a camp down on the [Suez] Canal zone, and then were put on a train up to Jerusalem

09:00 and spent Christmas Eve in Jerusalem for a few days. I got dysentery there, as did a lot of us. Then we went back to the Canal zone again for operational training on Kitty Hawks and Tomahawks – Tomahawks only because I suppose they were short of Kitty Hawks. After that training – and that was the Wing Training Flight

09:30 there – we were taken up through Tunis, through North Africa, to Italy, where we were stationed at a place called Portici, just near Vesuvius. Vesuvius blew up that year. That was 1944, early 1944. I didn't give you many dates before. Perhaps I could go back on that now: I actually went into the air force reserve in 1941

10:00 and into the air force itself after doing those twenty one lessons in 1942. I sailed for San Francisco in early 1943, arriving in England in April '43; in Alexandria in about November 43. This trip up to the squadron was in February 44.

10:30 So I waited awhile there in Portici to get a posting, and was then posted to 3 Squadron, which was a permanent RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] squadron. It was totally Australian and yet under RAF [Royal Air Force] command. We were at that stage… this was April, April of 1944.

11:00 We were bogged down in … the US 5th Army and Montgomery's 8th Army were bogged down at Casino – Monte Casino – and it was winter that held them up really, the bad winter weather. That's where my first operations began, attacking around Casino.

11:30 And that progressed through many landing fields up through Italy, until I finished my tour in December – around Christmas Eve there. I was then posted to what was called non-ops as the commander of the 239 Wing Training Flight. It was to train them on

12:00 Kitty Hawks and Mustangs. We used to do a bit of blind flying on Harvards. At first we were in Perugia, an old university town up in the Apennines. We were snowed in a bit too much there and the training was suffering, so we moved further south to Naples, to a place called Gaeta, and the … shortly after that, the war finished.

12:30 **After the war, what happened? How did you get home?**

Right. We got a ship from Taranto across to Alexandria and then we were placed in the Canal zone again – in a holding area; and we would see these ships going through with the Australian airmen on them – in their blue orchid suits; but we languished there in the Canal zone for about three or four months

13:00 We used to play bridge from 2pm to 2am, daily. There were occasional trips up to Cairo or Alexandria, but we were mindful of the fact that we might need some money when we got back; therefore we didn't spend it. We'd been there before in Cairo and Alexandria. So we spent most of the time in the camp, and we

13:30 swam in the canal, at a place that was set up for the troops to have a drink and a swim and a bit of relaxation; but mainly we just stayed in the camp. Then eventually, around October, along came the [MV] Stirling Castle and we were put aboard. Again it was loaded with these blue orchids as they were called –

14:00 meaning of course, Australian airmen with their blue uniforms – so we deliberately put on our tattiest gear so we'd look shabby after the tough war we'd had while they were over there in England. And we arrived in Sydney in late October, early November. We went down then to the education department

14:30 as soon as I could and that was for the purpose of asking the registrar of the education department for a posting to a suburban Sydney school. That was so I could do Arts at night, and thereby qualify for secondary school teaching. His response was to send me to Darlington Point … no, not Darlington Point … Barrington Tops, up near Scone,

15:00 making it quite impossible for me to do Arts at night at Sydney University. So I then suggested to him that he might review that, but he didn't; and so I resigned from the teaching department. I then went into the arts faculty, because at that stage the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme had started, and those who had matriculated

15:30 were allowed to go to university and do a course – a free course, with forty pounds a year for books, and three pounds a week for sustenance – which was a wonderful, wonderful opportunity for those of us who had no money. So I stayed at St Andrew's College, which was a Presbyterian residential college within

16:00 the university. There was only one university in those days, and that was the University of Sydney, as you would know; and there I was exposed to law students. They wondered why I was doing such useless things, as they saw thought – medieval English and ancient history and things that didn't lead to a pay ticket. Or so they thought. But I made some enquiries

16:30 of them and found that it was possible for me to do law – possible financially, I mean. I shied away from it, although I had thought of it before, because to get into it one had to become an articled clerk – if one wanted to be a solicitor. And before the war, one had to pay a premium to one's master solicitor, and I didn't have the money to pay a premium; but

17:00 I found that there were some firms that would take you without a premium. I put my name down in a book of the law society as a person seeking articles of clerkship and was contacted by Stephen, Jacques and Stephen – which was a big firm in Sydney. It still exists under a similar name:

17:30 Mallesons, Stephen, and Jacques; and did my articles there. Space was short there, and I remember sitting in a small room with my master solicitor and his secretary, and I had my little table over there in the corner. So when a couple of clients came in, that made five of us in the room – with the typist tapping away on the typewriter …

18:00 so different from the luxurious space that people have today. So I got through the exams and received a remission of some part of my articles because of my war service; and was admitted as a solicitor in 1950. The years at university were '46 to '49, and I was then admitted in 1950. One of the clients Stephen, Jacques and Stephen was

18:30 the AMP [Australian Mutual Provident] Society, so I quickly became an expert in AMP mortgages and discharge of mortgage, and variations of mortgage. So after a year or so, I left… I was most grateful to them. I got wonderful training there and they were splendid people. Really, I'm very pleased that I had the opportunity to go there. I did feel a little ungrateful for not staying, but

19:00 there was a possibility that I could become so specialised and narrow that my opportunity for advancement through the profession could have become limited. There weren't many big firms around in those days. So I went to another firm. This time it was Baldock & McPherson. I was invited there by one of my student colleagues, who was

19:30 a partner there. That… the partnership didn't materialise. I was led to believe that it would come pretty quickly. So I went to another firm – Pickett Stinson, and they gave me more money. And that was necessary, because I'd married in 1949. We had twins, and my salary

20:00 was probably around eighteen pounds and rent was about four guineas – so I really had to look for more money. I got that at Pickett Stinson. At that stage my wife's parents … they really weren't her parents, because she'd been orphaned early; but they were an aunt and uncle who'd brought her and her brothers up.

20:30 But their solicitor died, and they suggested that I should buy his practice. He was a sole practitioner, and he'd died at the age of seventy-five. He was a very highly regarded solicitor but a sole practitioner,

and he had no-one to pass the firm onto. So we approached his executor, who was a Perpetual Trustee company, and they said,

21:00 “Right, we’re selling the practice by tender; and a friend of mine from St. Andrews College combined to tender; and we got a shock when we were accepted. So we kicked off… I say kicked off', because the practice was pretty moribund. This seventy five year old had been pretty ill and tending to turn away clients whose work he couldn’t quite handle. It had rooms in the city. And in those days there was very

21:30 little space. In many cases you had to pay key money', as we called it, over and above the rent to get it. Well none of that applied to us. It was a straightforward deal. We also bought at the time the practice of J.J. Mulligan, who had adjoining rooms. He said to us,

22:00 “Look, I’ll stay on if you like, and pay the rent for my rooms, and as my clients come in I’ll refer them to you.” JJ was a pleasant old Irishman – well, an Irish-Australian, I should say … so we kicked off that way, and most of the phone calls we had were from my friend’s girlfriends.

22:30 But Perpetual Trustee was very good to us. They referred estates and small matters to us, and my wife’s uncle – who happened to be with General Motors – decided that he’d help us, and we finished up acting for quite a few General Motors dealers; and they were having trouble

23:00 expanding at the time. The Holden motor car dealership was said to be a licence to print money, but the increasing profits they were making produced large bills – tax bills – for Provisional Tax, as it was in those days. And so in association with a friend of my wife’s uncle and a barrister – a very

23:30 fine barrister and former deputy tax commissioner, who therefore knew tax inside out – we devised schemes whereby these General Motors dealers could bring their families into trusts, which were separately taxed, and therefore the marginal rates were reduced. So therefore we did scores of these Holden dealerships

24:00 in that way. The practice developed in various ways over the years. In a fluky way we got mixed up with the cotton irrigation industry. Some Americans … well, first of all, the NSW trade commissioner in San Francisco had been commissioned to persuade American

24:30 cotton growers to come out here and bring their expertise and use the water of the Keepit Dam on the Namoi River, which was just going to waste, virtually. There were sheep and cattle drinking it, and nothing else. So those efforts by the NSW trade commissioner were singularly successful, and some Americans came out – two Americans called

25:00 Kayle and Hadley from California. They developed a small experimental plot, which proved to be successful, and then a big American company through a young American named Jim Blasedale came out and explored the situation. They went to Narrabri on the Namoi River; and went to the General Motors Holden dealer and said, “Hey Jack, can we hire

25:30 a motor vehicle?” And he said, “Well, we don’t have any for hire, but what do you want it for?” And they told him that they wanted to explore the cotton area. He said that he was all for that, because he was on the Namoi River agricultural advisory council… or development council. And so when they found the land they wanted, he said,

26:00 “Well Jack, who’s your solicitor?” And Jack said, “Charlie Wannan.” And these Yanks rang up and came down and said, “What do you know about the Water Act?” I said nothing, and he said, “Well, you learn it by ten o’clock tomorrow morning, because we’re going to see the commissioners at the water resources.” So we did that and it developed into a very large expansion of work, dealing with irrigation and cotton in particular on the Namoi River, and then

26:30 onto the Macquarie, and then onto the Gwydir, and then up to the border river [Barwon]; and it was a fascinating and most interesting area of practice.

That’s excellent. We’ll just stop there. Great overview though, so thank you for sharing all that. We’ll now come back to the very beginning, and progress forward through the day, and we might be able to pick up later from there. So coming back to the very beginning, what’s your first childhood memory?

27:00 Certainly not Scotland. I think I was probably less than six months when they put me on board. When my father was a student they lived at Kensington. There was a big pepper tree in the yard, and I remember

27:30 that. The next place was Cronulla, where he was still a student-minister, and there I remember the old steam tram. I remember the snake flowers in the bush. I remember hopping on to, or being placed on to

28:00 this motorbike. That was our only means of transport … with my elder brother and my younger brother – all four of us. You can imagine how you’d distribute small kids – one on the pillion, one on the petrol tank, and one on the handlebars. I don’t remember

28:30 school there, but I… that didn’t happen until Port Macquarie, and I remember that clearly. I must have

had a bit of a Scottish accent at that stage, which is understandable, and I remember I used to be asked by the other kids to talk Scotch. And I used to recite the poem ‘Wee Willie Winkie’

29:00 with a pronounced accent …

\n[Verse follows]\n “Rinning thru the toon,\n oopsteers un doonsteers in his nichte-goon;\n Rappin at the windas, and knockin at the do-ere,\n Are the cheeldren in the bids at haff pass foo-ere.”\n

And I remember the teacher copped me one day. I used to get pencils and various little gifts for reciting Wee Willie Winkie', and the teacher wondered what this little group of boys –

29:30 we were in 1st class I suppose – were doing over there in the corner of the playground; and she came over and said, “Right, if you talk Scotch to me, I’ll talk French to you.” I remember another occasion, when the teacher put a word up on the board, and it happened to be policeman. And the class was asked,

30:00 “What is that word?” And I called out, “Polishman.” And I really meant polish man', as in polishing the windows, and she said, “Right!” And so it was my Scottish accent that got me away with saying “Polishman.” It was a lovely place to be, in Port Macquarie back in the 1920s. You can imagine

30:30 how small it was compared to today. The Manse – our residence – was in a big paddock. We had a cow. My older brother used to milk that. He was too years older than. He was lost… he died in Japan as a POW [Prisoner of War], later on in the war. And we used to get chairs – bent wood chairs,

31:00 that had broken down in the Sunday school next door. So we’d put a couple… I suppose my father did this : we’d put a couple of boards across … get rid of the seat itself – we still had the bent wood – so we’d put a couple of boards across them and that made a good toboggan down the slopes, and we’d pour water down the slopes to make it slippery, and tobogganing

31:30 down we’d go, almost invariably falling off at the bottom and getting mud all over us. It was then going home and getting scolded. But great fun. We swam every morning. My father used to take us down for swimming, and we used to wander around the breakwater with my brother and I – my elder brother and I – because my next brother was a bit small.

32:00 And we had a piece of fencing wire on a stick, and we’d poke that in to any place where we could see an octopus moving. We’d hook it out and put it on our fingers. And when we had five fingers with an octopus on each, we’d walk along the breakwater and give them to the jewfish fishermen. They were good jewfish bait.

32:30 There were various preaching centres. Wauchope was one, and that meant a trip along the bullock tracks. The roads were just slippery … and they weren’t bitumen; and the bullock tracks were beside it. And you’d see these bullock wagons – perhaps eighteen bullocks with

33:00 these big logs on – going up to Port Macquarie where the mills where. And the old bullocky with his long whip that could reach to the front to the leaders. And we lived next to the police sergeant, and he had a couple of boys, and we used to make bows and arrows – huh – and we’d stick a

33:30 nail on with sealing wax, to these reeds that we’d pulled out of the swamp; and we’d go down to the police paddock where the horses were and try to shoot an arrow into the police horse – which we managed to do one occasion. And it stuck in the haunch of this horse. We really disappeared very quickly when that happened.

34:00 **So you went shooting with bows and arrows?**

The bow itself was made out of oleander. We had lots of oleander bushes there. And a good string in between, and these reeds that were about two feet long – ideal arrows – out of the swamp. They were hollow, so we’d push the nail up.

34:30 **So we were at the stage where you were describing how the bow and arrow was made. About the horse, who was there?**

The police sergeant’s two boys, and my brother and me.

35:00 **Who fired the arrow?**

Ooh… it might have been me? It obviously shook it off, and at any rate it raced around, kicking up, and no damage was done. I’m amazed we were allowed to do the thing, because potentially they were quite dangerous – if we’d fired at each other, for example.

35:30 But that happened.

So what other mischief did you and your brothers and the police sergeant’s sons get up to?

Well, we used to find tortoises and bring them home. We’d lose them pretty quickly and we’d go and find some more. The… my father used to make us propellers out of balsa wood, and we’d put them on the end of a stick. We’d

36:00 go up to the lovely old Church of England – to the rector's place – he had some kids there. And they had this wonderful breezeway under some tall Norfolk Island pines next to the church. And on a hot day, it was just a beautiful spot, and we'd have our propellers whirring around at a great pace.

36:30 And we used to go across to what was called the north shore on a flat-bottomed boat which was owned by one of my father's elders. And we would use handlines off a lovely sloping beach. It was ideal for whiting and flathead. The men would set us up with a line with three hooks on it,

37:00 and it was not uncommon to catch two whiting at a time. The fish were so plentiful there. And I remember coastal steamers. They used to ply the coast; and the Pappinbarra – the SS Pappinbarra – used to call in to Port Macquarie, and it dumped two cars. They had tyres and they were fully ready to drive away

37:30 onto the wharf. One was a Buick, I remember. That was the doctor's. The other was a Chev [Chevrolet], a 1928 Chev, and that was for the church, to be used by my father. And that was a big day. And when the ship used to come in, a lot of us would go down to the wharf to see what was happening. I can still see them bouncing

38:00 on the wharf on their rubber tyres, as they were slung off the ship. The odd aeroplane used to fly across, and as kids, we knew about Bert Hinkler, and we just assumed that was him. It probably wasn't, but it was a great sight of course – a very rare sight. And that's … that's probably enough for Port Macquarie.

38:30 **Did planes ever land at Port Macquarie?**

Not that I ever know of. Not in those days. They do now. I don't think it landed there then. It was probably going to some bigger place like Taree or some other place.

You also mentioned getting the little octopuses for fishermen, was there a problem then with blue-ringed octopuses?

39:00 No, we never even heard of those. The only problem was they used to squirt a black fluid. You had to make sure you didn't get in the way of that. But once that squirted, then that was the end of that. You'd put your finger in their beak and carry them around, until you had a handful of them.

Did you get any money from the fishermen for this?

39:30 No, that wasn't even thought of in those days. We used to get our Saturday's penny. That used to buy a comic called Crackers, I think it was. We'd go down to the newsagent and buy our weekly comic. We found two shillings once, down near the wharf. That was an enormous find.

And what was interesting about the comic Crackers?

40:00 Well, any comic to a little boy was interesting. We just liked the stories. I forget what stories they were, now. They were beautifully illustrated. Ginger Megs was probably in it.

Tape 2

00:30 **Your father served in World War I …**

In a sense. He was with the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. He had a commission and he was uniformed, and was in France and Belgium. And he stayed on in Scotland, as you've gathered, since my brother and I were born there.

01:00 He was born here in Australia, of Scottish parents and went back to the war and served in the YMCA.

So he grew up in Australia?

Yes he did.

Can you explain to me and the archive about the work he did before the war and in the YMCA?

01:30 I don't know too much about that. I know he went up to Darwin and served in a shop. His father was a blacksmith and wheelwright. At one stage … oh, he was born in Balmain, and when he was at school, in primary school – he left at the age of twelve –

02:00 his father went up to the jail up near Taree … Trial Bay, there's a jail up there at Trial Bay, and he then, when he left school, he went up to Darwin. I don't know what he was doing in between times. I know he was

02:30 associated with the Hunter-Bailey Church, a lovely old church. He was in the fellowship and a member of the church. He had a twin brother. And I had twin sons, incidentally. They became partners in the law firm, which was an interesting experience. But his twin brother died from peritonitis, which was pretty

deadly in those days. They couldn't handle a burst appendix.

03:00 And I think that probably sent him off to the war – it was a catalyst. But because of his strong Christian beliefs he decided not to be a combatant, but to serve in the YMCA. He was there for a couple of years.

Did he share what he did over in the war?

03:30 No he didn't. The house was decorated, I remember … we had a German Very pistol. We had a broken bayonet. And we had beautiful big brass shell, that my mother used to polish; and some smaller

04:00 bullets – presumably defused. So he didn't conceal, or deliberately in any way avoid talking about the war, but I found the same thing my children – they've never asked any questions or sought any information about the war. And I've never foisted it upon them. But they've seen my photographs around,

04:30 and they knew I was associated with the 3 Squadron Association, and went to reunions. I didn't march much in the early days – too busy studying law, and then once the firm started, once I had my own firm I was too busy, doing everything.

Was your father at all affected by the First World War?

05:00 I don't think so. He died at the age of sixty-seven, which was not all that young. Seventy was the time most of them used to go – late sixties. But I don't think he was affected by the war. He obviously saw the great slaughter on the Western Front, and was involved very closely

05:30 with the troops, and that of course would have affected him I suppose. It would have affected any man. But he got back to normality and studied hard. Having left school at twelve he had a lot of catching up to do in order to graduate as a minister. He didn't do a

06:00 university course, but he went to the theological hall at the University of Sydney.

Was Anzac Day important to him?

Yes, yes. Being a minister, there were always Anzac Day services in the church, and he attended the Anzac Day marches in those country towns that we were in. When we came down here, I don't remember

06:30 him marching. When I say came down here', Northbridge was our only suburban parish. But I'm sure he was very deeply affected by that terrible slaughter on the Western Front. But he just got on with life.

So, working with the YMCA during the war, did he actually… well he obviously went to the front, but how did he actually operate? As a chaplain, or…

07:00 No. They had places where the men could go for coffee, and for recreation. They would provide stationery, and communications with their family. And how close to the front line they were

07:30 I don't know. The YMCA is still going, as you know, and they were going during the war. They were not medical', and that didn't take them forward – to the forward dressing stations near the front line. So that

08:00 it would be a hospital visitation, but I don't know how far those hospitals and field stations were from the front line; but certainly he was exposed to that extent.

Did he ever speak on the Christian side of things, or even the conversion side of things for the YMCA?

08:30 On their behalf? No, I think it was example. Their good deeds were recognised as Christian by the Young Men's Christian Association. I think that was the way he saw his ministry, too, in later years. And good deeds and an example, he saw these as being more effective than words.

09:00 He preached the gospel of course, and visited and did all the things that ministers did in those days. He did lots of visiting, hospital visitations, and whatever advice and counsel they could provide for their parishioners. I caught up on that

09:30 attitude to Christianity in that I joined the Australian Inland Mission. That was the organisation set up by Flynn of the Inland – John Flynn. They were the group who started off the Flying Doctor Service, which was later taken over by the Royal Flying Doctor Service. And I've always been of the view that

10:00 their services to communities, through hospitals and pastoral padres, hostels in remote places for children to go to school – at Innamincka and Oodnadatta and all places out west and in north Australia particularly. They had their hospitals and their churches in the mining towns …

10:30 Whenever mining towns started up – for example in Western Australia – they would approach the mining company and say, "Are you prepared to assist us in setting up a church?" And the mining companies almost invariably said, "Well yes; are you talking about a Christian church? We'll help you build one church and we'll give you the land for it – but you've all got to use it."

11:00 So the various denominations had their various needs in various parts of the church building. And by their deeds and by their social welfare they spread the gospel.

Your father met your mother in Scotland. Do you know how that actually occurred?

11:30 No. I don't know. There they are there. But Scotland's a small place, and St Andrew's is a beautiful old university city, and I'm not surprised he wandered over there. He was a very handsome man, and decked out

12:00 in his uniform… he was an honorary officer, so he had the Sam Browne [military belt] and the officer's uniform. He was a well set-up man. So I'm not surprised he attracted the attention of some of these girls who… and Australians too, they were probably a bit of a novelty in Scotland. And so I just don't know more than that.

12:30 **Obviously your family was religious. What sort of rules or customs did you share while growing up?**

Right. We went to Sunday school as soon as we were old enough to do that. We went to church afterwards. My father invariably had one or more

13:00 of us with him when he went to another peaching centre in the car. We said our prayers at night and said grace at the table. But there was nothing sanctimonious about him, and he allowed us to pick up from his sermons and activities

13:30 by example. It was never thrust down our throats. He was what was called in those days an Angus Man. Professor Samuel Angus was a teacher at the theological hall, who held very what might be called… well, they were actually called heretical views

14:00 of some of the more literal interpretations of the bible. And I think it was pretty clear that he didn't believe in the ascension of the body, floating up to heaven, wherever that is – I don't think it's up there. Even the virgin birth. He saw these things as allegorical

14:30 rather than literal facts to be regarded as fundamental to the Christian religion. So he was what you'd call a liberal. He didn't thrust it down our throats, and never suggested that we go into the church; and…

15:00 but he was always very keen on education. That was one reason why he moved around these country towns. When he moved, he went to a town that had higher education levels. I think Port Macquarie – at that stage when we were there – had just a primary school. Corindi had one that went to intermediate. Mudgee was one west of the mountains that had a

15:30 high school. And then when Knox started off with these scholarships to the sons of Presbyterian ministers, we went to Knox. In those days the fees for a boarder were thirty three pounds for a term. There were three terms, not four as we have now. And the scholarship was a hundred pounds. All my father had to find

16:00 was a uniform and some pocket money. Not that he was able to cope with that very well, and I believe that he didn't pay the term fees as promptly as he should have – he just couldn't. I think that by the time we were at Mudgee, there were six kids, and the stipend started off at three hundred and fifty pounds a year.

16:30 They dropped it to three twenty-five or three hundred. I'm not sure. But it was lean rations, and patches in the pants.

Just in respect again of religion. Were their tensions between the Catholics and the Anglicans and the Presbyterians …

Awful, just awful. They really were just awful. Fortunately my father had no part. The Catholics were Roman Catholics and their football teams

17:00 were supposed to cheat … it was terrible. It was an awful divide, and in country towns particularly. But it just swept over our heads. We were conscious of it. When I came to Knox we played against Aloysius's. We played Aloysius's and mixed and joined with them, because again,

17:30 at Knox, there was never any encouragement of that suspicion and enmity that seemed to exist between the Protestants and the Catholics.

You mentioned awful'. Were there things actually done to one another by the various groups?

Not that I'm aware of. But the way people used to talk – particularly the elders. Not in my family, because as I said, they would have no part

18:00 in that. But the way people used to talk about them was noticeable, as being cheats… and that their religion wasn't a genuine one. They would be able to do awful things and commit sins and then get a clean sheet by simply confessing. And was seen as something that was undesirable.

18:30 And it rubbed off on the kids to a certain extent. We were never allowed to talk about those things, or say anything derogatory. We never wanted to. But kids would say, “Oh, he’s a tyke,” and that was awful that there was that divide and that suspicion

19:00 between two branches of the Christian church – the two denominations.

You used the word tyke and stuff. What language would kids use against each other to put each other down?

One on one it was never done, as far as I’m aware. But coming home from school for instance,

19:30 I’ve heard one group of kids yell, “Oh, you tykes …” I never saw any fights. And kids were… in the early days before I came down from Knox… I came down to Knox in ’35 when I was twelve,

20:00 and the… we were too young really to know what we were doing when we used to indulge in that sort of thing. I may have joined in groups yelling at them, but that’s just the mob mentality that kids have when they’re in a group.

Did the Catholics have nicknames for the Protestants?

I think Wowsers was one that they

20:30 used to use, particularly to the Methodists. The Methodists didn’t believe in drink in those days, and the Presbyterians were either whisky drinkers or teetotallers.

You mentioned at Mudgee there were six kids. Is that right?

Yes, yes.

Could you just go through the names of your siblings?

Yes, My older brother was Errol Stuart Wannan; I as you know am Charles Wilson Wannan;

21:00 my next brother Allan McDonald Wannan – he was in the navy; my sister Elizabeth Jean came next; and then my brother Bruce McFarland Wannan; and my youngest, younger sister, the youngest of the family was Helen Margaret Munro Wannan. In Corindi the church was the Munro Memorial Church, and that’s

21:30 where Bunty – as we called Helen – was born.

The Depression. How did that actually affect your family?

Right, well, I noticed these things more when I got to Mudgee. We were right in the middle of the Depression at Mudgee. The church had a big barn

22:00 attached within the church grounds, within the manse grounds, and we used to use it as a garage and toolshed and for all sorts of other things – for storage. We had WAS DOUBLE QUOTE CHOOK s, and the farmers used it… it was part of the understanding that a country minister would be provided with food by the farmers, not only on a regular basis,

22:30 but when he came into town he might bring a pumpkin or a bag of oranges or something like that. Now, because it was a Manse – and I assume the same thing happened at the Catholic church, at the Presbytery as they called it, where the priests lived. Or the rectory, when the Anglican rector lived. Or the Parsonage where the Methodist parson lived. I’m sure they

23:00 all had similar experiences. But the tramps – as we used to call them – used to call at the manse, and my mother invariably gave them something. Mostly it was tea and sugar they were looking for, and flour perhaps, and a meal. They always got that. And if they offered to do it we would always accept their offer

23:30 to chop some wood or to clear some grass or do an odd job around the place. We would tell them that they could stay in the barn. We must have had some sort of … oh, they had their swag, didn’t they – so they’d use that to sleep on. So we were very conscious of the Depression. There was never any fear associated with these men. They’d come

24:00 to the manse door. They were men just down on their luck, and good men. We didn’t have holidays, except one I remember. We went to Merewether up near Newcastle, and I remember my parents saying that they were able to buy a case of tomatoes for one and

24:30 sixpence up there. For holidays we used to go out to a mud hut that my father and brothers and I helped to build on the Mudgee River. And there was a settlement there for men who were down on their luck. But it was a very happy sort of a

25:00 settlement and a pleasant place. They set up on a river flat which had good soil – good alluvial soil. They built their little huts there. They all had a chimney of course and plenty of firewood around; and the odd fish – mainly carp. I don’t think they bothered eating them. And they’d trap rabbits. We would too. And they’d skin them

25:30 and eat the underground mutton. They had their vegetable gardens and they'd get one or two days relief work a week on the roads – the road up to Hill End was … whenever we travelled up there, to Hill End, which we did every fifth Sunday. There were too many preaching centres up there to go to one every Sunday, so Hill End got only one service

26:00 whenever there were five Sundays in a month. Anyway, they were quite well off, and they were friendly and helpful to us, giving us the odd meal at times. One of them there was a North Ireland man called Carlisle. He was the closest to us, and my parents suggested to him that he might just keep an eye on us, without making it a burden to himself. And he was a crack marksman. He had an

26:30 old Martini-Henry rifle, which was a muzzle-loader. And he used to tell us how he worked in a circus, where he'd shoot out electric lights. So we kept on asking him to show us. So eventually he … kids can be pretty insistent, as you know. But he put a little target on a tree, perhaps twenty five yards away, on a bit of paper – just drew a target.

27:00 And he loaded up his old Martini-Henry and then faced the opposite direction – away from the target – and then swung around and just plugged the bullet right through the centre. So you could understand how he could shoot out lights. But we used to fish there, and wash for gold in a pan. We got pretty good at that, and

27:30 we would work pretty hard at it. When we got a penny-weight, which would fit in a little bottle about the size of your little finger – we'd take it to the local assayer, who ran the local store, and we'd get seven and sixpence for that. It was a fortune! And he'd also buy the rabbit skins. So that it

28:00 was a very pleasant way of spending a holiday. The only thing they didn't have in this settlement were women. It was rather… they couldn't afford to marry I suppose. They didn't have the wherewithal.

The mud hut itself. Can you describe for me what it looked like, and what it was like on the inside?

Yes. It had just one room.

28:30 They'd cut down a sapling, and they were the uprights. The little branches of the tree, they were the cross pieces. That would be the frame of the house. That was the basics of it. It was pretty rough, but then, having set that up you'd plug mud in between those bars

29:00 until you got to a certain height. It was a pretty low roof. I think we had a galvanised iron chimney in one end, but it wasn't cut out in any way at all. I remember my mother sent a cake out on one occasion – so she says … and when we came home after the holidays she said, "Did you like the cake?"

29:30 And we said, "What cake?" and she said, "You didn't get it?" Apparently it fell off the mailman's flat-top. She was mortified about that, as you can imagine.

Did your mum actually come to the mud hut, or was it just dad and the boys?

I don't ever remember her coming out there. He'd drop us one Sunday

30:00 when he was preaching at Hargraves – near where the mud hut was. I don't think mother ever came out. She was so busy with the other kids and with all the church functions that were going on. She had to chair the guild meeting – the women's guilds meetings – and she had to patch the pants and darn the socks and cook the meals and look after these tramps that came through; and visit, with my father,

30:30 so I don't think she ever came out there.

And the roof of the mud hut… what was that?

That was… well, I can't remember. I can understand your interest in it, because that presumably was an intricate part of it. It could only have been bark, but I can't remember anyone stripping a tree of bark, and that's quite a specialist sort of job anyway.

31:00 So, galvanised iron, I'd say. It was a wonderful standby, galvanised iron.

And given that you and your brothers were there, was there any fear of strangers and dangers?

No, not at all. We were in the proximity of these splendid men. There was never any fear at all. In those country towns there was never, ever any fear of anyone. There didn't seem to be any bad people around. Crime didn't seem to exist.

31:30 Obviously it did, but we… we wandered off into the bush around Mudgee itself. We were allowed to go off riding our bikes anywhere. We used to go down to the weir, which was on the Cudgegong River. That's where I learnt to smoke my first cigarette.

32:00 They used to sell five Cavaliers for threepence in those days.

Now you've just touched briefly on your mum … what was she like as a person?

She was very vivacious. She was either crying or laughing, a very highly emotional person. And she was just so attentive to her children. I can remember her putting a towel in our ears to clean out the wax,

32:30 and bathing us when we were small; and seeing that we were properly dressed. I've heard her say scores of times, "I'm just going down to the church …" Or after church was finished we'd meet outside and start talking; and I can hear her saying, "What a beautiful dress that is!"

33:00 to one of the parishioners, or, "What a beautiful brooch that is!" or, "I love your hat!" That sort of person. And yet sometimes she would get so frustrated with the enormous amount of work she had to do – with six kids and church people – that she'd cry. My father would put his arm around her

33:30 and she'd be laughing in five minutes.

So, your mum and dad were close?

Yes, yes … yes. They were very close. It was a tough life, as you could imagine, but they were very close. My mother would have her outbursts of frustration.

34:00 My father had a very skilful technique of just being quite unruffled. He'd listen, and perhaps just pat her calmly… good technique !

And growing up, you'd have your medicines like castor oil and…

Yes, yes, horrible stuff. I think we probably

34:30 had it as punishment sometimes, and sometimes as medicinal purposes. I seem to think of it as… well, yes, more as a medicine. But I think I'm right in saying that when we misbehaved, there was at least the threat of a dose of castor oil hanging over our heads.

35:00 And we used to get spanked … my father had a heavy hand. We didn't mind that. When I say didn't mind, we used to run away. He couldn't catch us when we got a bit faster. I can see him tearing after us, but eventually giving up. The grounds around the manse were quite large. But he believed in corporal punishment. And incidentally, when I went to Knox, the prefects used to cane there.

35:30 So it's interesting: a boy caning a boy, isn't it. Hmm.

So now on the subject of Knox. What are some of those memories of being disciplined and that at Knox?

Well, it was a whole different world. If you can imagine a country boy with the freedom of a public school. I suppose the only activity that we

36:00 took part in outside of school hours was a game of league in the local park, once a week. Down to Knox then. I probably wore underpants for the first time. We had to have underclothing and a school uniform, and of all things, a little black jacket that we had to wear to church on Sundays.

36:30 That was an awful extravagance when you think of it. We wore it once a week and then just to church for an hour. It was a whole new world though. I was a boarder and I was awfully homesick. We'd always lived as a large family. I used to see the train going past Warrawee Station, knowing that it was on its way to Central, and that there I could have picked up the Mudgee Mail.

37:00 And the thought of doing that crossed my mind. But I didn't do it. And the fact that we were caned, sometimes justly, sometimes unjustly. The discipline of getting up at a certain time; and cold showers every morning. Straight out of bed and into

37:30 a cold shower. There were half a dozen showers in a row. You could see the stripes across the boy's bottom's where they were caned. And then off to school, which was just a walk across to the school building, because the boarding house was in the school grounds, and still is. After school

38:00 there was… oh, and all surnames were used. My brother and I were in the same class, so he was Wannan 1 because he was older, and I was Wannan 2 – huh – we called each other Wannan and Gillespie, and Smith, Jones, and Brown. Sport practice was just about every afternoon – swimming, cricket, swimming, athletics, football, rugby…

38:30 **Just coming back to the prefects and the caning – I mean, these days, the phrase bastardisation is used, but was there such a thing that happened back then?**

No, no. The headmaster – Neil McNeil – was a Royal Flying Corps pilot with an MC [Military Cross], and a son of the manse I might add. He was a Victorian

39:00 and he was a strong disciplinarian; and the system he set up was that the house committee, which consisted of the prefects, a probationer, and two or three seniors, had to meet on a Wednesday evening with the punishments that were proposed to be metered out. They would

39:30 state what the default was, what the wrong-doing was, and say, for instance, "We propose to give you two strokes." Or four strokes – they could give no more than four. And they'd say, "Do you wish to

appeal?" And if you did, you could appeal to the housemaster. Ha. The general convention or yarn … the yarn or belief around the place was that it really wasn't worth the risk, because

40:00 if you failed in the appeal you'd get twice as much! But the housemaster himself was a very fine man. He lived on the premises with a wife and twin daughters and a son. He was a New Zealander, and the rumour was that he was an All Black from New Zealand, and that sort of thing. He looked as though he could have been. But they were all very fair men.

40:30 And this fairness filtered down to the prefects, and to the house committee – whereas at other schools at the time, I know that the system was abused. It fell out of favour actually. And I remember being asked by one of the masters, as I was leaving Knox, what I thought of the system. And I remember saying that because

41:00 I had heard that it was being abused at other schools – the prefects were really bastardising kids there – that it really needed to be under strong control, in the way it was at Knox in those days. And I think I indicated to this master that I thought its days would be numbered. And of course, they were.

Tape 3

00:30 **What sort of a student were you when you went to Knox? Were you studious?**

I was average. As I said I got this scholarship, and so did my brother – as did a large number of the sons of the manse – the minister's sons. I can

01:00 think of perhaps a dozen of us there at the same time, and I suspect that our benefactors said, "Look, these are Depression times, and school numbers have gone down. We're going to get some more students from the minister's families

01:30 and rather than have them being regarded as charity, we'll get them to sit an exam, and we'll give them all a scholarship." Now I suspect that. I've never been able to verify it, and I don't even know who the benefactor was. I've never been able to write and thank the families even. We sat – incidentally, this is quite interesting – we sat for the exam at Mudgee. The papers

02:00 were sent up from the school, and the session clerk – who's the chief elder in the Presbyterian church – supervised us in the church vestry. And we heard in due course that we'd been awarded the scholarship, and so we went down to Knox.

02:30 **What were your favourite subjects?**

History always. English… and foreign languages. History and geography though. I … my maths is no good. I had to matriculate on lower maths, and even that was with special coaching at school. The coaching was free, from

03:00 one of the masters. But I did French, Latin, Greek, and English – so that's four subjects, all languages. Plus history and maths. All those for the leaving certificate. I got honours in history, lower for maths, and all the others were just ordinary passes.

03:30 **Were there any masters at Knox who inspired you, or who were role models for you when you were there?**

In terms of conduct, the housemaster of the boarder's house was. We had the one boarder's house and there were about fifty of us in the house. Dick Okey, as we called him … O-K-E-Y. I suppose,

04:00 next to my father, he was the most important man in my life. The… some of the staff were pretty ordinary, looking back on it now. The school got good results, but the headmaster said that, in effect, he was not there to produce exam lists, he was there to educate the whole boy.

04:30 So, a lot of the classes were pretty ordinary. Swots – as we called them – they would have got high marks under any master. They were good students and they had good brains. But by and large, men who became leaders in their professions and in their vocations; if they look at their

05:00 intermediate and leaving certificate results, they'd perhaps rather prefer people not to see them. So, we were so busy – the boys ran the school in effect, under the supervision of the masters of course, but the boys called the rolls and supervised the prep, and had sport and practice every day.

05:30 The hours were limited – the hours of homework were limited, and we were expected to belong to clubs. I, for example, was secretary of the Fairbridge Society. There were homes called Fairbridge homes that you may have heard of. They're no longer existing. There was one at Molong. And we went up to Molong on school holidays

06:00 to work on that farm, and to mix with the English children who'd been brought out here on the Fairbridge Farm Scheme. There was a printer's guild and a photographic society; there was chess, and

library, and the school magazine. So we were very busy, and that

06:30 reflected itself in the results. Nowadays of course it's the reverse. The results are everything and you have to get that UAI [University Admission Index] to get anywhere.

Just before we move on, this house master, Okey. Can you tell us anything about him and what sort of a man he was?

Yes. He was a very solidly built man. He used to strip for football practice and he had big calves and strong legs, and steely grey brushed-

07:00 back hair. He had a little moustache and he was very strict. But he had a twinkle in his eye, and the… he came with us to Molong to the Fairbridge Farm school there. He had a fund of songs that he used to sing around the campfire. He worked in the orchard with us. He was a man's man,

07:30 and he was in charge of the cadets too. I was just thinking as I was preparing for today, that in a sense I had ten years of military-style life – cadets and the regimentation, followed by the university regiment immediately afterwards, and then followed by the air force. So from '35 to '45 …

08:00 The cadets were fair dinkum cadets in those days. We had rifles and bayonets and we went to the range and shot. We went to Liverpool for camp, and we had Lewis guns and we stripped them down and we knew how they worked. We fired them.

08:30 And Okey was the head of the cadets, and he was a man's man.

Was he popular amongst the boys?

With some. Not so much popular, but respected. With that small proportion that you get with any group, there was some dislike because of his strong discipline.

09:00 **Were there troublesome boys at Knox?**

Yes there were. There were boys who turned up at almost every prefect's meeting. I became a prefect in my final year… the prefect actually, as there was only one in the house. There were two other houses – north house and south house, with their prefects; and there was the school captain.

09:30 They were the only ones who were allowed to sock. The masters of course were allowed to sock. And I think it was only the housemasters and perhaps the headmaster who ever did. The others just handed over the boys in a sense. And I think that was probably good in one sense, in that you didn't see them as the beaters, as well as the teachers.

You said before that the philosophy of the school was not just to get academic results but to create an entire sort of man.

10:00 **How else was that done? What other sports or activities did you partake of in that regard?**

Right, well, leadership and steadiness as the Head used to call it, that was taught through the cadets. We used to drill every morning. We had a Kirby Shield drill competition – us and

10:30 other schools; and that was really precise. So that was leadership and steadiness and teamwork. Football and cricket were regarded as team games, and games where you played it in the right spirit. There was no sledging and no laughing when someone got out. There was a very strict view of things. And there was church on Sunday for the boarders.

11:00 There was the regular preparation for the next day in school, in the prep room – which was homework. And participation in those clubs that I referred to. And sport was compulsory. There were cold showers … one hot shower per week.

11:30 The prefect would come into the prep room at night and say, "Right, the following boys will take their showers …" There were six of us and you'd have a quarter hour to get out of the prep and get back to your seat. One of the mothers complain to Dick Okey that the shock of getting out of a warm bed … it was just a big dormitory. They don't have studies like they do these days.

12:00 She said that the shock of a cold shower was just too much for a small boy. And Okey being the wise man that he was, stroked his chin as it were and said, "There's something in what you say, Mrs So-and-so. This is the way it's constructed it anyway. Maybe it's a myth. So after that we got out of a warm bed and ran around the streets of Wahroonga and Turramurra for half an hour, and then got under the cold shower.

12:30 **You liked history and those sorts of subjects. What ambitions or dreams did you have for completing after school?**

None particularly. That was a common problem, and still is of course. I had all sorts of ideas. One thought upon reading the papers that one might like to be a journalist.

13:00 One might like to be a diplomat. The youngest general in the army. That sort of thing. But when my father came to me after the leaving certificate and said, "Right, what are you going to do?" I said … as I

mentioned earlier, I didn't want to be in an office. And that's exactly where I finished up [laughs]. And he suggested that teaching might be

13:30 the thing, because you're not in an office. But I certainly had a leaning towards academic things. I would regard law as an academic thing in one sense – plenty of academic study, anyway.

How important was the British Empire at that time in the thirties?

It was part and parcel of the whole scheme of things. We had Empire Day

14:00 as you would know, when we let off crackers and would celebrate Queen Victoria's birthday – she who presided over those dreadful empire-getting days and wars. We didn't question that. We sang patriotic songs …

14:30 **So where were we? We were talking about the British Empire …**

Yes. My parents both referred to the old country, or in the case of my mother, 'home'. And of course, education being what it is, the Empire was painted as a wonderful achievement and something of which we should be proud.

15:00 And it was something of which we were proud, and about which we sang patriotic songs and said patriotic things.

When things were getting a little darker in Europe, what sort of information were you getting about that, over here in Australia as a teenager?

The whole period from 1935 until 1938 when I left, was one in which

15:30 Hitler's activities were promptly and regularly shown in the press. We didn't have much in the way of wireless at school, and when we were home we didn't

16:00 sit much in front of the wireless much anyway, except to listen to test cricket. And as kids we would also get some English magazines like Punch and Tattler – which pictured the activities in Germany and in

16:30 Europe generally. So we were very conscious of this tension which was building up. And I think Sudetenland was early '38 if I remember, and the Anschluss was also '38, so it was pretty obvious that there was going to be war.

17:00 And this didn't seem to be all that remarkable a thing to us. The war to end all wars, had obviously not ended war, as we could see it; and war had always been happening at fairly regular intervals, so we saw it as not a surprising thing.

17:30 **So can you tell us how the news was received when war was declared?**

Yes. I was at home in Northbridge and heard Menzies announce, "That England was at war, and we as part of the Empire, were also at war." And now again, no surprise really. Chamberlain had been across to Munich and came back with his 'peace in our time'.

18:00 but yet the threats continued against Germany's neighbours. So it was not a surprise; and we accepted this as one of those things that seems to happen every generation.

You were at university at this stage?

18:30 In 1939… in September 1939 when it was announced I was at teacher's college, not at university. The teacher's college was within the university grounds, but student teachers at the college were allowed to join the university regiment.

How did things change around there when war was declared?

I don't remember anyone of my year from the teacher's college

19:00 joining up. From either year – because I continued through 1940, during part of which we had the phoney war – as you know. Then there was Dunkirk, and then there was a bit of a stand off.

19:30 Yes, I didn't ask my father until I'd finished teacher's college, whether I could join the 8th Division.

What were you thinking though? The war obviously didn't come as a great surprise to you. You were a young man. I mean, what were your own personal thoughts at this time?

In those two years at teacher's college I thought that it was on the other side of the world, and

20:00 that it was a very limited sort of a war – it was at the stage. I know the Battle of Britain had been fought, and I remember on the 202 bus from Wynyard back to Northbridge, I'd see the headlines about the Battle of Britain and the scores – so many shot down and so many lost –

20:30 and that started me thinking about the air force. But I was so army-orientated. But at the end of those years I still thought about joining the 8th Division. I'd been to three ninety-day camps, as well as shorter

camps

21:00 with the university regiment. That was serious stuff, even though sometimes we didn't have a Lewis gun, rather, a piece of gum tree that looked a little like a machine gun. That's how ill prepared we were. But I just assumed I'd go to war if things got serious.

21:30 They did get serious and my brother was in Malaya, as it was at that stage. And I decided that having been knocked back, I'd join the air force – there was never any question about that. I didn't want a white feather [symbol of cowardice], and was very seriously of the opinion that it was a justifiable war, and that the consequences of a

22:00 Nazi win or a Japanese win would be dire. So I was going to join up anyhow, and as soon as it looked as though they needed more men.

Was that white feather thing something that actually happen? Did you know of anyone…

It did happen, yes. I was scared actually, that I wouldn't be allowed in,

22:30 because in those days teaching was a reserved occupation, and I was going to resign as a teacher if they refused to let me join.

Historians have said that the period you just described – when you were at teacher's college and before Japan came into the war – that Australia was a bit of a fool's paradise, that we weren't paying enough attention to it …

23:00 Well it didn't affect things much. The 6th Division we used to say – the `39ers as they were called – we used to say that it included a lot of unemployed men who were still staggering out of the Depression. And a lot of adventurers too – footloose people – who… no, that may be a little unkind to the '39ers. But to a certain extent it was true.

23:30 I'm sure there were some solid, solid men in there, and even the unemployed and adventurers were no doubt solid men. But that seemed to be the sort of men who went to war straight away. They didn't go to war straight away because there was a lot of training to do.

24:00 So that it wasn't necessarily a fool's paradise. I think we were aware of the seriousness of it. But we were not closely involved, and apart from Dunkirk there hadn't been a lot of activity that seemed to call for troops from here. Our numbers were so small compared to those of the European countries, and as you know, our losses were so small compared to those of the European countries.

24:30 Until we were needed we felt there wasn't much point joining up if they're not going to need us. But as soon as we realised that we were needed, then the numbers just flocked to the colours.

Tell us about the Sydney University Regiment – how that worked and how you first joined up there …

Right. Having been in the cadets and a cadet under-officer,

25:00 and with all this atmosphere that surrounded us, and with the university regiment headquarters just across number one oval from the teacher's college… there were chaps getting dressed up occasionally for their weekly parades, or whatever it was,

25:30 I was thinking that I might join the regiment. Militia they were called then, or chocolate soldiers', because they weren't real soldiers. Although as you know, militia were called upon on the Kokoda Track in New Guinea. But one day I happened to be down at number one oval and a fella called Frank Reed,

26:00 who was senior to me at school – he was a very fine man who became an eminent physician later on and who lost a brother in Singapore, and another of who's brothers was my dentist. I took Frank's place on the Knox school council … anyway, Reed spotted me there and he said, "Wannan, have

26:30 you joined the university regiment yet?" "No, Reed," I said. "Well," he said, "I suggest you go and there's the headquarters over there. You ought to go and join up. Things are looking pretty bleak." This was round about May of 1939. So that was the catalyst. I went to my first camp in August of 1939 at Menangle Park.

27:00 We were in tents and we slogged around the hills of Menangle and that area, and it was on. And I think because of my experience in the cadets I was made a corporal, and then made a sergeant, and later on a company sergeant major.

27:30 And a group who were leaving the regiment to join the 8th Division said, "Look, come and join us. We'll all get commissions…" It was regarded as a sort of officer's training school, although it wasn't, officially. And I said, "OK, I'll ask my father." But he refused so I went through that period

28:00 of three ninety-day camps : '39-'40, '40-'41, and '41-'42. During part of '41 as I mentioned, I was doing those twenty one lessons with a view of getting into the air force.

So what did those camps entail? What was your commitment to the Sydney University

Regiment?

I think we paraded once a week before we went on the … we used to have a camp in every holidays :

28:30 May, August and long-vacation over Christmas. But because I'd joined in May, my first camp was August of '39. There we would fight mock battles and … I remember at one ninety-day camp we fought the battle of Northland versus Southland.

29:00 We were dug in on the Bulli Pass and were to oppose the advancing enemy from the south. We dug trenches and set up our positions. We reconnoitred the strong points and the fields of fire. We had a battery as part of the university regiment. It used to be called the university scouts',

29:30 but when they had this artillery battery – of which Sir Roden Cutler was a member – they had their limbers, their gun limbers, and they had their horses. We had to put ropes on the limbers and the guns to ease them down the bitumen road at Bulli Pass, because the horses couldn't hold them with their steel shoes, their iron shoes. Another thing was

30:00 to go on a bivouac for two or three days, sleeping on your groundsheets and your blankets that were rolled up in it. And we'd have night exercises. We'd advance across a stretch of country, either as a platoon exercise or a company exercise or a battalion exercise. And we'd have our

30:30 compasses and we'd have certain time strictures and meet-up points. Mock battle? I don't know that we had mock battles where we ambushed and captured and did that sort of thing. There were lots of route marches for conditioning purposes. We had a pipe band. The band used to meet us a mile out of camp, and we'd

31:00 straighten up our shoulders and starting marching to the wail of … it'd give you a bit of renewed energy to have a band in front of you. We used to sing the lewdest songs you could imagine. I would think that because of the academic bent of university students, and the skill of some of them as poets … some of them

31:30 were very, very clever. And very, very crude. And we'd be marching through the countryside singing these songs – not within earshot we'd hoped. And I used to think that the cleverness of them redeemed the crudeness of them.

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

35:03 And they just go on and on and on. We could march for miles on them. Incidentally, just breaking from the university regiment for a moment, I'll see if I can remember the words of one of the songs we used to sing on the squadron …

\n[Verse follows]\n "Get the right deflection, check reflector sight,\n

35:30 Make the skid correction, and see the range is right.\n

Then you may press the tit my son,\n And blow the Hun to kingdom come.\n Twenty thousand rounds, of anti-personnel;\n Forty thousand rounds, of the stuff that gives them hell;\n A flamer to you, a grave for Fritz,\n He's all in bits right where he sits,\n And poor Marlene's boyfriend will never see Marlene…"\n

36:00 And we sang it of course to 'Lily Marlene'. Which, the Africa Korps used to play across loud speakers and across the radio to undermine the morale of the British and American troops in the western desert.

Could you just sing the last little bit of that in tune …

The tune? Yes…

[to the tune of 'Lily Marlene']

\n[Verse follows]\n"Get the right deflection, check reflector sight,\n

36:30 Make the skid correction, and see the range is right.\n

Then you may press the tit my son,\n And blow the Hun to kingdom come.\n And poor Marlene's boyfriend will never see Marlene…"\n

Thanks for that. Was that a particular squadron song?

Yes it was.

Unique to your squadron?

37:00 I don't know if it was. It would not be unique because of the… there was another Australian squadron on the wing – that was 450 Squadron, one of the Article 15 squadrons which had just formed during the war. We had, incidentally, a South African squadron, three English squadrons, and the two Australian squadrons. Normally a wing is just three squadrons, but we had six.

37:30 And this incidentally is the desert air force necktie, depicting the wings over General Montgomery's 8th Army, which had the crusader's shield as its emblem.

What occasions would you sing that song?

In the pilot's mess. We had a pilot's mess as distinct from the officer's mess. Whether you were a sergeant-pilot or an officer-pilot

38:00 we were all together. In addition to the pilot officers we had the ground staff officers, the equipment officer, the operations officer, and the medical officer. And we'd around the piano and we'd sing that and our dirty songs …

This section of transcript is embargoed until 1 January 2034.

38:26 **How important were they in keeping up morale?**

Oh, they were great, both in the university regiment

38:30 and in the squadron. And Barry Finch – the bloke who dobbed me in – he was our pianist during our time there. Oh, they were good. You noticed with the Germans how important singing was to them. You've seen films

39:00 of the songs they used to sing. I don't know if they were dirty songs or what.

I'm sure the Germans had their dirty songs. I hope there's some German oral history project recording them as well. Are there any songs specific to the Sydney University Regiment? Was there a theme tune you sang while you marched?

Yes. Colonel Windeyer was our colonel. He was our CO [Commanding Officer] in those days. He later became a major general and a High Court

39:30 judge – a fine man. And we used to sing …

\n[Verse follows]\n "Goodbye Colonel Windeyer,\n Goodbye Button too …" Button was the adjutant.\n Since we joined the army,\n We've been buggered about by you;\n Our marching is a failure, our shooting is a farce;\n So you can take this three-o-three and shove it up your beep."\n

40:00 **That one's called 'Goodbye Colonel Windeyer'?**

Yes, 'Goodbye Colonel Windeyer'.

And that was that a marching song as well?

Yes it was. You'd just change the metre.

Were you careful not sing this in the wrong parts of the …

No, we used to sing it within his hearing. We were all anonymous if you know what I mean.

It's quite cheeky if you think about it. Did he get angry about it? Did he laugh?

40:30 No. He was, again, a man's man. He knew what men are and he knew the value of this sort of thing to morale… yes.

Tape 4

00:30 **Were those songs taken from books or were they made up? How did they work, do you think?**

I never saw a book. They certainly weren't made up on the spot. They were poems to which a lot of thought had been given. And I suspect

01:00 that they were years old when I joined the regiment in 1939. In those halcyon days before the war when

only those who were very clever and got exhibitions to the university, or those who were very wealthy, could go to Sydney University.

01:30 And there was not that pressure to succeed academically. That competition was not there. And if they got through, they'd become doctors, lawyers, teachers, accounts, surveyors, engineers – whatever they were studying – and they had a leisurely life, relatively speaking, to those who went after the war.

02:00 The returned men had to catch up time. But before the war they had time to meet in the common room and in sporting groups, and there was a culture of vying with one another to … like the real poets with their limericks.

02:30 Some of the smartest, dirtiest limericks have been written by our best poets; so that they were well and truly there, before the war – all of them.

Are there any that stem back to the first war?

The tunes do. We didn't sing them very much, but we sang the 'The Road to Gundagai' –

03:00 'There's a track winding back…' and 'Tipperary'. But these were so attractive to a young man, that these were the one's we sang mainly.

Just getting back to the workings of the regiment – you said you were very ill-equipped. Can you tell us about the sorts of things you were using for equipment?

03:30 Yes, we had .303 rifles and bayonets which were probably made during the First World War. They'd just been stored. We had Lewis guns. And that was our only firepower, apart from that the battery that had cannon. We had Vickers guns – another World War I machine gun.

04:00 I forgot that one. But that was our armament. Now, a platoon of thirty men, they have it's officer – a lieutenant – and it's platoon sergeant, and three corporals, one for each section of ten. Everyone had a rifle and a bayonet, and the officer a sword and a revolver.

04:30 There was one Lewis gun per section, sometimes two. The rest of us, when we were dashing forward to plonk down and set up the guns and get in our position to fight … then we'd put our gum tree down – the branch of the gum tree down – rat-a-tat-tat.

05:00 And if we happened to be marching along and we'd see a piece of wood on the ground that looked more like a Lewis gun than the one we had, then we'd cast aside the old branch and pick up the new one. So that's the way it was with arms. We had the vest, with bullets in the pouches; and in those days we used to wear

05:30 'putties – shorts and putties – you know the putties you wear that wind around. So that's about all I can say on that question.

It sounds … when you talk about using bits of gum tree, it doesn't sound very serious. But there was a war on, and the reason you didn't have equipment was that there was a war on; I mean, how serious was it at the time?

The war?

06:00 **The regiment …**

Oh, the regiment. It was serious. Discipline was harsh. Spud barbering – peeling spuds in the kitchen was the punishment. The refusal of weekend leave was another punishment. It was severe, real army training it was.

06:30 And it was against the background of a war that was going on and getting increasingly serious. We were ready to join, and we were preparing in a very serious way to join, if it got to the stage where we considered that we were needed.

When did that stage come for you?

07:00 It came when my brother joined the 8th Division and went into camp at Bathurst. He went on long route marches and came home for leave; and then was posted to Malaya. Off on the [HMS] Queen Mary. And that's when I sought permission to join the 8th Division, and was refused.

07:30 So I bided my time for a while, and found that they accepted you in the air force younger than in the army, without parental permission. And once he had joined, I was always going to join. My younger brother – Alan – he spoke about these things. He said he was going to join the navy if he didn't get seasick.

08:00 And I said I was going to join the air force if I didn't get airsick. So we booked a passage on the Hunter, from Port Jackson to Newcastle one bright. We had paravanes on the side to sweep the mines away because at that stage the Japs were in the war, and he wasn't seasick. The whole

08:30 thing cost us ten and sixpence and we had a cup of tea brought in to us in the morning by a steward, so

he decided that he was going to join the navy. I said, “Right, well let’s go to Luna Park and see if I can handle things like the Big Dipper.” So we did that and I didn’t get sick, so that confirmed us. I don’t know why we were so

09:00 scared about that, but seasickness was always described as a dreadful thing, and we’d also heard about pilots getting sick.

So you trained for the air force on the Big Dipper at Luna Park?

[laughs]

Just going back a bit. Can you tell us about the discussion with your father about joining the 8th Division?

Right, I simply asked, “May I join the 8th Division. A number of other members of the university regiment have asked

09:30 me to join them and go across as a group, and the promise is that we’ll all get commissions because of our experience in the university regiment.” And my father said point-blank, “No. Your brother is already in the 8th Division and I won’t give you my permission to join the army at this stage.”

10:00 When I went later and asked him if I could join the air force there was no hesitation.

Were there any reasons given or was it just point blank?

My father and I never had long conversations. We didn’t discuss life. We were close and when we went on trips with him in the car as small boys to a preaching station

10:30 away from the central parish, we would usually have the organist with us. We’d pick up the organist. So that would stultify any in-depth conversation. But on the way to pick up the organist they were fairly lightweight conversations. We’d be talking a lot,

11:00 but we never got into any in-depth conversations about his family for instance, which I regret. I regret that I didn’t do that. I didn’t talk to him about my homesickness at school, and matters of that sort. And I find that with my own sons, we talk at a certain level but very seldom

11:30 get serious about our own particular relationship and our own inner thoughts.

Did you ever go back later in life and thank your father for not letting you join the 8th Division?

No, it was so obvious and it was understood.

You decided then to join the air force. Can you talk a bit about that decision and what you did?

12:00 Well, the decision was one that just grew by osmosis. After the knock-back for the 8th Division I thought, “When I can get permission to join the army, I will.” But the… looking over people’s shoulders, looking at The Evening Sun newspaper

12:30 during the Battle of Britain started me thinking. And I knew of one Australian from the university regiment who’d gone across to England to join the RAF – a big fellow called Thorrel Smith. I wondered how he fitted into

13:00 the cockpit of a Spitfire he was so big. But I decided over a course of time, not by anyone’s invitation or prompting, but by this atmosphere that was building up. The air force was becoming such a force. The Second World War elevated airpower to the top drawer. And so as soon

13:30 as I made that decision in 1941 when I was at the one-teacher school, I did something about it. I applied to join the air force and the preliminary to enrolment was passing these twenty one lessons. And I remember doing those lessons

14:00 on a rickety oval table with a centre leg. I think every such table is always rickety, and I did it by a kerosene lamp. This frugal family I was staying with at Junee – they were of German extraction and they had wheat and sheep on a fifteen hundred acre property – they didn’t have electricity. They didn’t have a refrigerator. They had

14:30 a safe on the veranda. The veranda had a dirt floor, and the breeze at the corner of the veranda used to keep the salt mutton edible for a week until they killed another. Having done those lessons I was called down to Woolloomooloo – something street, where thousands went through. It was the top floor of a motor dealership if I remember rightly.

15:00 And having – as I mentioned before – been approved medically by the area medical officer at Junee I underwent a further medical examination, which I passed. Then I was called up to go down to Somers.

There were some things you mentioned which I’d like to pick up on. The German family at Junee – who were they, and what was that all about?

15:30 Their name was Dietrich, and because the local teacher was billeted with parents at the school; and in the ordinary course of event would move from one to another, perhaps at irregular periods. I was there such a short time that I just stayed with the Dietrich family the whole of my two terms at Erindale Public School.

16:00 **How were they faring with the war going on in Europe?**

They were at least second generation, and the Riverina was liberally sprinkled with German families. There was a town down there once called Germantown, which changed it's name to perhaps Walla Walla or Henty or something. I forget which one it was. So they were good citizens of the district, good farmers. There was never any enmity

16:30 as far as I'm aware between them and the real Aussies, if you like. They were all migrants anyway, weren't they?

Did you talk about the war with the Dietrichs?

Only in that I would get up fairly quickly after dinner at night and say that I'd better get onto my twenty one lessons. They weren't great

17:00 conversationalists. They went to bed early and got up early and worked hard. They were frugal, as I say. And they had two children at the school.

What was the substance of these twenty one lessons?

The theory of flight was one. Trigonometry was another.

17:30 You're stretching my memory now …

Like, there were twenty-one of them …

Aerodynamics was another. Yes, there were twenty-one of them, but only about five subjects. Maths was another one …

Morse code?

No, I don't think so. It may have been, but certainly I never remember tapping out. My papers… I'll show you when we look at the papers on the table,

18:00 were branded Pilot Only'. And the first I remember about Morse code was at Initial Training School at Somers, where we learnt Morse. I was so poor at it that I just staggered through, and I wondered why, if my papers were marked 'Pilot Only', whether because of my inability to do Morse Code easily – which air gunners had to do… remember, they were

18:30 wireless air gunners, wireless operator air gunners. And navigators had to do it too. But perhaps that was it? I better have a look at the date to see whether it was actually after I did Morse code or before; or whether it was on my initial medical examination.

Alright. We'll just bring you back to that point then. You considered joining the air force for the reasons

19:00 **you said already. Air power was becoming more important and a bit more glamorous than some services …**

Yes, certainly that was an aspect of it, yes.

But what about the loss rates? You were talking about the casualties you read about in the paper. It wasn't a particularly safe job being in the air force in Europe …

No, and the… and yet thousands joined and were drawn to that adventurous life. And that manifested

19:30 itself all through training. We just dreaded the possibility of being scrubbed, as we called it. We just wanted to get into it. We were actually fearful – genuinely fearful – that the war would be over before we got there, because the process was just so long and thorough, and the Air Training Scheme was so successful that they had more than enough.

20:00 And some never got there, and were doing all sorts of odd jobs.

Just before you went to Somers the Japanese entered the war, and Singapore and Malaya fell. What was that event like and did it change things?

Well, it confirmed my desire

20:30 to get into it. I knew by then that brother had been captured; and the Press was giving the Japs all sorts of bad press, and we knew our own defences were flimsy; and I was more determined than ever to press on.

21:00 **What news did you hear about your brother's situation?**

Well I was in camp and only on leave did I get home and see the odd, brief message that had got through. They were few and far between, and unless one of my siblings has kept those papers, they've disappeared. I

21:30 certainly have none of them.

Did you know where he was?

Not until… I think it was not until I was overseas that I learnt he'd been shipped to Japan and was working in a mine.

You went down to Somers for the initial training. Can you take us through the set-up there?

22:00 Yes. There was drill because not all of us had been in cadets or the militia; and so we did drill. They had to give us that military mindset.

22:30 Then we went through those… we had classes, every day; and a lot of physical training as well as drill. I can remember bounding across the Mornington Peninsula along the well-worn tracks that had been made by my predecessors. It was a wide, open area, and when I went down there the weather was still pretty

23:00 fresh – it was early in 41. But we did theory of flight, we did Morse code, and we did aircraft recognition until we could recognise all sorts of aeroplanes – German, American, British, Italian… and the navigation was another. They were all to do with the theory of flight and aerodynamics

23:30 and Morse code; and some air force regulations, they taught us those.

How did the air force differ from your experiences in the militia?

It was quite a different style really. We were in class for a fair part of the time. We were much fitter because

24:00 we were doing more scientific sorts of exercise, and endurance exercises. I don't quite know why? It didn't help much when you were sitting in a cockpit, of course. Anyway, that dill sergeant mentality

24:30 that you got in the army was not as severe. They had their permanent warrant officers who used to emulate their army colleagues, but the atmosphere just wasn't there; and so it was not as severe at initial training. Then of course, when one went on to

25:00 elementary flying, where flying was the key to it all, there wasn't very much formal discipline at all. Not that it was needed, because you were just so keen to avoid being scrubbed, you just did everything as well as you possibly could.

How did that atmosphere affect the relationship between recruits? It must have been competitive, I suppose?

25:30 Yes, we were. We would rather it was he, than me, that got scrubbed. But we were good companions all the time because we were all in the same boat. We just hoped that it wouldn't be us.

What was the mix of blokes like that you were in those classes with?

It was a cross section of the community. There were jackaroos and

26:00 teachers, lawyers, accountants – the whole cross section… lots of country boys, farmers; and it had more of a mix than the university regiment. And particularly because we had – in the university regiment – we had

26:30 'universal trainees', who weren't all university men. Once universal training started, they allocated … and I remember one of my best mates there was a coal miner from down Wollongong way, and even at Temora I chummed up with a chap who was just a knockabout.

27:00 And a number of them were pretty well just out of school. They hadn't really done very much. Plenty of clerks, of course. There were lots of clerks in those days. Lots of people just went straight from school into the bank – lots of bank clerks.

Did you find that those divisions between what people did made any difference at all? For instance religion?

No it didn't. Although we'd come out of civvy street', where religion was –

27:30 as we were talking about earlier – the divide … Catholics and Protestants … there was none there during training. None whatsoever. The object transcended all that. Of course, when it came to one on one, there was never that tension. Even before the war, I would never have been rude,

28:00 one on one, to a Catholic. And I hope I was never rude at all to them, but as I said before, when one was with a group of boys and they started yelling at the boys from the convent school, then one might have joined in. I certainly don't remember, but probably did.

28:30 **So after Somers you moved to Temora? And that was the first time that planes came to the training?**

Yes, that's right. And I hadn't driven a motor car by that time. I drove an aeroplane before I drove a motor car. That was the case with a lot of young men. But that was a thrill.

Tell us about the planes you were introduced to there …

29:00 Only Tiger Moths, a bi-plane as you know; very light, with fabric covering the frame and the wings. It was a very aerodynamically good aeroplane. So the training that one received on it was good for your knowledge of aerodynamics and of just what an aeroplane could do. I mentioned

29:30 they were light. They had a tail skid and two wheels. They weren't triplanes, no, not triplanes – I mean, they didn't have a nose wheel like later aircraft had. I remember incidentally two B24s … Boston Bombers or B25s that landed at Temora one day. They taxied over to where the Tiger Moths were moored to stop them being blown over by the wind, and

30:00 this American pulled back his window and leaned out and said, "See, where's Wagga Wagga?" And we said, "Over there," and pointed. One of the Bostons stayed out there on the tarmac, and this chap came over. So he says, "Thanks buddy," then turned his plane around and taxied off, blowing over three Tiger Moths as he did so!

30:30 With his slipstream. Anyway, I had a very good instructor there. Well, I had more than one, but I had this fellow called Flight Sergeant Bennett and he was a very good instructor. I think I went solo after six or six and a half hours.

31:00 There was a lot of competition there, to get off before seven. Some took longer and that didn't matter, but some took to it more quickly than others. But six or seven or even eight or nine hours solo, and then off on your first solo.

Sorry, you were up to seven hours of initial instruction in …

In a Tiger Moth, with an instructor in the plane. Yes, that's right.

So what was the experience like, going up in one of these planes? Can you describe what it was like?

31:30 With an instructor? I was very apprehensive and I hoped I wouldn't be sick. I'd never seen the land from up there and I'd never done a steep turn, and he didn't aerobatics the first time… so, thank goodness. But I think it was a normal sort of a reaction for a young man getting into

32:00 an aeroplane for his first ride.

Was there any air sickness for you at all?

No, no air sickness, and no fear of course. It only went about a hundred miles an hour and landed at about fifty. So even if you crashed you might not have got hurt.

So how did the instructor teach you, up in the air?

32:30 Well, first of all he asked whether I'd driven a motor car, because the holding off was a fairly important aspect of any turn. As you know when you turn the wheel of a motor car to go into a turn, you've got to ease off as you go round it, otherwise you'd go into the fence or whatever it is – off the road.

33:00 And that's how it was with a turn. You couldn't just go into a turn and hold it there. You had to ease off. So having established that, he said, "Right, now I want you to fly straight and level." And that meant keeping the rudders in the right position and the joystick in the right position. At first one would be a bit ham-handed

33:30 It was a very light control – very responsive to the controls. And so once you got a feel for that, which you did very quickly, as you could imagine because it's just like steering, in a way. "Then," he'd say, "We'll do a turn." So he said, "I want you to put your hand on the stick and feel what it's like as I go into the turn and as I hold off."

34:00 And then, perhaps if not the first then the next time, he'd say, "We're going to do some aerobatics. Make sure you're properly strapped in …" And I think they probably took some sort of fiendish delight in giving you a fair dose of aerobatics the first time they did that. One felt strange

34:30 of course – strange about the various attitudes, sometimes upside down, sometimes on the side, sometimes with a bit of pressure, a bit of G [Gravity force] when you're pulling out of a steep dive or out of a loop. But intensely interesting. I couldn't say it was enjoyable because we were so intense about the whole thing.

35:00 **How did you communicate with the instructor up in the front of the plane?**

Though a voice tube – no radio, just a voice tube. You'd pick this thing up and talk into it.

You had the same controls? What sort of controls were in front of you?

Same controls. He had a joystick and rudders and the pupil had a joystick and rudders. They were duplicated. And would say for instance, "Right, you've got it," and you were in control.

35:30 And then if he wanted to demonstrate something or you were mucking it up he say, "I'm taking over," and you'd just take your hands off the – your hand I mean, off the joystick and your feet off the rudder.

What did you find the most difficult skills to learn?

The… I suppose a slow roll. The loop was fair enough

36:00 because you just went up and straight over, and the steep turns were okay. Flying upside down and holding it level was a bit tricky. You had to get used to that. But the slow roll was quite intricate in this delicate little airplane. Unlike the high powered monoplanes. It had all these forces on those two wings

36:30 and being light it was very subject to cross-winds and so forth. The slow roll was the one I found most difficult.

People talk about being frightened of doing stalls. Did you do stalls at all?

Stalls were part of the exercises. It's an uncomfortable feeling when you lose air speed.

37:00 The drill was that you'd be going along and he'd say, "I'm going to do a spin." You didn't quite know what was going to happen because you'd never been in a spin before. So he'd gradually pulled the nose up until you lost flying speed, then he'd tip over into a spin. That was quite a sensation. That was more than the Big Dipper.

37:30 **Well what about landings? What were the skills involved in landing?**

There, you judgement of depth, of distance from the ground was crucial; and therefore you tended to come in at a very shallow angle to the ground, gradually getting closer and closer. Bear in mind that this had a tail skid instead of a tail wheel, so you had to

38:00 make sure that you did a three-pointer or almost a three-pointer, so that you wouldn't balloon into the air again – so that your wings were at a blunt angle to the ground. And so you gradually approached and hoped that when you shut the motor she'd just gradually settle down

38:30 in a decent landing, and not drop down too far – because you could damage the aircraft that way – or come down too hard onto the wheels and bounce; and it was essential to work the rudder, because that tail skid would get into a groove if it was at a certain angle, so that would send you around

39:00 that way, in what we called a ground loop… which I managed to achieve on my first landing. You can imagine my feelings: will they scrub me? Will I get another chance?

We'll go through your first solo in a minute. Just one question though – did that cause accidents? Did people crash in your time there?

Oh yes, yes. All through training there

39:30 were crashes – some of them fatal, some of them writing-off aircraft, some just damaging aircraft. The casualties as you may know, through accidents, were very high.

Were there any that made an impact on you in your very early days of flying?

Yes. At Uranquinty we were flying Wirraways – a radial engine,

40:00 not an in-line engine that goes to a point – a radial engine, a low wing monoplane. And we used to do what we called blind flying – they pull a hood over the perspex of the cabin – of the pupil – the instructor would be in the back with full view…

40:30 he wasn't blind flying, he was sight-flying. And we were out at this satellite aerodrome called Belfrayden, not far from Uranquinty aerodrome itself, and I had landed and turned out of wind. That was the drill. You'd land into the wind and when you finished you'd turn around out of the wind. As I was sitting there waiting for

41:00 the aerodrome to be cleared to taxi back to the area where the taxi was, I saw this other Wirraway coming at me… well no, not coming at me, but coming towards me down the aerodrome – it was just a grass paddock – but veering slightly in my direction. Towards the end

41:30 he veered suddenly and his wingtip took out my engine – right to the fire wall, there was no engine at all. I got a slight bang on the knee, but his aircraft immediately burst into flames. And the instructor jumped out as soon as he… well, I think it was stopped by the collision.

Tape 5

00:30 **Where we left off on the last tape you were just sharing the accident that occurred. If you could take it from the plane coming in, just before the impact, we'll take it from there …**

Well… I thought I'd had it at that stage.

01:00 He veered across and it just seemed so lucky that he just took my engine instead of … I was only a matter of a foot or so behind the firewall, and it could have been curtains. But unfortunately it was curtains for the pupil pilot who was under the hood, and who would have never known what had struck him. He may have been conscious when the fire overwhelmed him,

01:30 but he just didn't get out of his seat. The fire truck arrived of course and put foam on it. I had to go and see the MO – the medical officer – afterwards, but I was flying the next day so apparently they thought that it was all right as far as I was concerned.

So given that this accident had occurred, was there blame attributed to anyone?

Oh yes. They would have thrown the book at that instructor,

02:00 because his job was, if his pupil veered, to straighten it. He would have been in awful trouble, and I hate to think what may have occurred for him. You can imagine how awful he must have felt being in charge of the aircraft as the instructor – a pupil under the hood, and that pupil being killed due to his inattention to

02:30 the fundamental need to keep the aircraft straight.

I understand with the Tiger Moths that it was quite hard to see over the nose …

Well this was a Wirraway, the Wirraways at Uranquinty. Well, with just about every aircraft you've got to veer when you're taxiing – clearing the nose as we say.

03:00 But when you're on a take off you've got to keep it straight, so the instructor would be looking out both sides as far as he could … he wouldn't have been blind at the point where he started his take off he would have seen my aircraft if he'd … if he'd been smart, because

03:30 he should have been well to one side of me. In other words, he could look out the side and see me over there. I just can't imagine what happened with that instructor.

Just coming back … we were also going to ask you about your memories of your first solo flight?

04:00 Right, well all went well and it was quite normal – one of those lovely summer days that you get at places like Temora. Flying conditions were quite straightforward. It was just a little fly around and then a landing. Once you've … the take off is fairly easy once you've done a few, and keeping it in the sky is pretty easy. The landing is the critical thing. And I landed

04:30 all right. It was quite a good landing, but I didn't pump those rudders hard enough; and the tail skid got at an angle, which spun me around in what they called a ground loop'. Fortunately the wing didn't touch the ground. Sometimes you could have violent ground loop, if perhaps you'd landed too fast.

05:00 That tail skid could bend you so far over that your wingtip could touch the ground. That would be awful for a pupil.

Was anything said about damaging the aircraft that you were given responsibility for?

Well, I didn't damage it. The ground loop didn't do any harm to it.

No, I mean generally speaking. Was anything said to students about …

Ooh yes. There was an inquiry

05:30 and the air force was very serious about it – particularly the RAAF. I always thought their discipline was stronger than the RAF. We spent most of our time with the RAF once we went overseas. It reminds me of a time at Fano, over in Italy, where there were American Thunderbolts and Liberators operating with our Mustangs and Kitty Hawks

06:00 on the same strip. And we were fraternising with the Yanks one night, and we referred to a Thunderbolt that came in and landed so badly that it was a write-off. The pilot got out all right. But their comment was, "Huh buddy, plenty more where they came from." They didn't waste their time with inquiries!

06:30 There'd be a report written if it had been the RAAF.

Just coming back to Temora… what was the signals or signalling to let the pilots know they could take off or land?

Let me see … now when you had an instructor aboard you

07:00 just left it to him…we had no radio, of course. But whether we had a lamp flashing at us … I can't recall… I think just being in this big paddock

07:30 you would … no, I just think it was the pilot's responsibility to see that all was clear … I can't remember lamps being flashed at us to take off. It was a possibility because there was a control tower … but … sorry, I can't give an answer on that one.

08:00 **What weather conditions would affect whether you flew, and what would happen in the air?**

Right. With Tiger Moths, which were such flimsy little things, a crosswind … you'd normally be taking off in a certain direction. You had a windsock indicating a certain direction for the wind, and you'd try and take off straight into the wind, or as near to straight into the wind as you could. If there was cloud

08:30 or low cloud and rain then you wouldn't take off – not in Tigers. And that, and wind above a certain speed, you wouldn't take off – particularly if it was gusty, because those little things ballooned up, a lot like kites.

Well given that the conditions can affect you, did you ever get caught in such conditions when you were in the air, because the weather changed?

09:00 No, but I did on operations, because we were out for hours at a time. Do you want to hear about that?

We'll come to that later.

But in training, no. The powers that be decided that whether it was good flying weather. They were pretty cautious about that because the planes were precious, and they had a fairly

09:30 comfortable amount of time to get you through your hours.

Could you go through an average day, from wake up to going to bed?

Yes. Up at six o'clock, breakfast … usually our flying was done in the morning because the conditions were more stable.

10:00 And then in the afternoon we'd be very tired. It took a lot out of us because the tension was so great. It was nervous energy that we expended, rather than physical energy. Then lunch, then lectures. And sometimes it was very hard to keep awake. I can't remember whether we had afternoon tea or whether we went straight through to the evening meal; and sometimes there

10:30 would be a film – usually an air force film. We went to bed dead tired, then got up the next morning and did the same thing again. Weekend leave was into Temora where we'd go to the White Rose. They made the best scrambled eggs you could imagine – and the best steak and eggs. And that was Saturday afternoon. That was our only time off

11:00 during the week.

And so from there, we sort of touched on Uranquinty. What did you find there when you arrived?

A big paddock and huts – standard air force huts – and a bit of a rise in the airfield actually. It had a bit of a rise in it, which is unusually for an airfield really, but I guess it was the most suitable ground they could find in the area.

11:30 It was not a permanent air force establishment.

And you were flying the Wirraways …

The Wirraways, yes.

Can you talk me through the Wirraways? Say, the start-up procedure …

Again, we went duel. There was an instructor's seat and a pupil's seat. They're low wing monoplanes, solid, and that actually fought on operations up in

12:00 New Guinea. They should never have had to be put into the front line, but they were. They had one gun each side in the wings, and a radial engine instead of the pointy engine like the Mustang or Kitty Hawk. The name for a pointy engine is in-line', as distinct from the radial'. The cylinders in the radial are around in a circle, and in an in-line they're like they are in a motor car.

12:30 It was basically the same sort of day, the same sort of hours – morning flying and afternoon lectures, and sometimes an evening training film. Similar subjects, though at a more sophisticated level. Navigation became quite important then – weather conditions, and more intensive training on aircraft recognition

13:00 because we were getting closer to operations. The solo… I can't remember how many hours it took for solo, but we would do gunnery there, and we did night flying. We did cross-countries, for instance, we went from Uranquinty out to Darlington Point,

13:30 which is in the south west of New South Wales in the Riverina. We went back up to Parkes. We didn't land at Darlington Point, we just went to identify something there. We landed at Parkes and checked in there, then flew back to Uranquinty. We did formation flying, and all of the aerobatics again, of course.

14:00 It's difficult to tell from the logbook, incidentally, unless you use the key. The letter A might mean aerobatics and the letter D might mean circuits and bumps'. You did circuits and bumps in the early stages to make sure you got that landing right, because these aeroplanes were just so precious

14:30 and they were slow to manufacture and so forth. They were an Australian adaptation of the Harvard. The Harvard was an American aircraft that was used over in Canada a lot. A lot of our student pilots went to Canada to finish off their training.

Just with the Wirraways, what were some of their characteristics?

15:00 It did tend to snap into a spin when you lost air speed, rather than just fall into it like the old Tiger Moth did. And you had to make sure that you kept your air speed up. You couldn't afford to lose air speed at a low height. Otherwise you'd go in. So they insisted on you maintaining your air speed at all

15:30 times. I can still hear the instructor in the back seat as one was coming in for a landing, "Air speed, air speed, air speed!" Obviously you weren't below air speed or you would've spun, but perhaps getting a little too close for the instructor's comfort. It was a fairly hazardous business being an instructor, as you can imagine.

16:00 **If you could share with me… firstly the take off procedure, what you'd do getting your air speed up, then we'll go through the landing…**

Right. You had your cockpit drill. There was mnemonic that we used. I forget what it is, incidentally. But it involved… first of all, before you got in the aircraft you walked around it, making sure the tyres were inflated and that the rudder and ailerons and flaps

16:30 were clear of the pegs that used to keep the immobile. You had to take them off, because otherwise it would immobilise the controls and you would crash. You checked that the chocks were there in front of the wheels, and you … once you got into the cockpit, having done that external inspection – and I still do it on the car

17:00 to make sure that the tyres are up. But you would then waggle the joystick to see whether the flaps were working, and the ailerons; and you'd move your rudder bars to see that the rudder was moving. And then you would …

17:30 you'd say something to the ground crew… the… "All clear," I think, or something like that. You would then start the aircraft, and then you would rev it up and check your

18:00 magnetos – switch one off and … no, sorry, there must have been two switches, because the motor sound would drop when … yes, duel magnetos I suppose. And so when you switched one off, the other would continue going, but at a lesser force. So when those were right

18:30 it'd be chocks away. They had ropes on them so they didn't get too close to the propeller. And then you would taxi out to the take off point. And you would remain in that position until you either got that light that I can't remember – that signal from the control tower – or you

19:00 decided that all was clear. Now, you'd been looking at aircraft coming in, and you'd be looking in the distance at aircraft that had taken off. There was constant activity, as you could imagine. I forget how many were on a course. There were a couple of huts, so maybe fifty of us. Certainly it was a busy time, all the time – we very seldom had weather which prevented

19:30 us flying in those plains … that plains country west of the mountains.

And the landing procedure coming in?

Left hand circuits. You would aim to enter the circuit at about twelve hundred feet. Other people's recollections may be different – maybe a thousand feet – but thereabouts. And you would come in, into wind; and

20:00 you would do a complete circuit, losing height until you were down probably to eight hundred feet. And then you would turn into wind, gradually losing height, until you were ready to land. They had a tail wheel, not a tail skid, so you still had to keep her straight though, because they tended to swing

20:30 a bit on landing. If it wasn't a perfect dead-ahead wind, or you hadn't been straight into… if you had a slight side wind, that would push you sideways, so you just worked the rudder to keep it straight on the landing.

The rudders at the feet?

21:00 Yes, rudders at the feet, and the stick just steady, so that your ailerons were in a neutral position.

Who were some of the characters, either in the course with you, or some of the instructors at Uranquinty?

Right. For the most part it was a pretty serious, deadly business. The instructors were browned off because they were posted as instructors. They – as far

21:30 as one could tell – wanted to be in the war. But they were being kept out of the war, so there was a measure of disgruntlement and some of them showed that, and some of them were decent, and they realised that they had a keen pupil to train.

22:00 They were very decent about the whole thing. Not many characters really. You got those more on operations. The CO was a man called Ryrie. He was a fine soldierly upstanding man, a member of a fine and well known grazing family.

22:30 Flight Sergeant Bennett, who was my principal instructor was a stocky, fairly dour but very decent man. He didn't say much, which was very good in a way. You tended to feel confident with him saying very little, instead of him chattering away and leaving you wondering whether you were

23:00 doing the right things sometimes. He'd let you go until you looked like you were going to do something dangerous, which was a pretty good sort of attitude. There weren't many characters. The students of course were deadly serious – and tired and kept at it all the time. Only when they went on leave did they kick up their heels a bit.

23:30 They didn't drink much. They were only boys, and drinking hadn't assumed the same importance that it has now amongst young people.

Whilst you were on the Wirraways, was it just flying? Or were you starting to use bombs and other armaments?

We dropped smoke bombs. Yes, we dropped bombs and we strafed. Yes.

Can you talk me through the process of doing that?

Right, well, we had a bombing range and they'd fix these

24:00 bombs under the wings. We didn't dive at such a steep angle as we did on the Kitty Hawks and Mustangs. There was a target area and you would go into what I think was maybe a forty five degree dive. If you got your smoke bomb

24:30 into that area – which was probably the size of this house – that's the sort of target you were going for very often, some sort of construction. And with the strafing you would be doing the same and going into that target area.

What tips were given to you in respect of bombing?

Right. They would… the most important thing was to make sure you didn't have a skid on,

25:00 in other words to make sure your aircraft as properly trimmed and going straight at the target. If you were skidding it would skid the bomb away from it. I forget the height that we would go down to in training. We only did …

25:30 we did very little of that. It was really just to get the feeling of being in an aeroplane in a dive and with guns going, rather than serious stuff, of accuracy.

So from that, were you given your wings at that point?

Yes, wings at the end of Service Flying Training School – SFTS.

Was there a ceremony?

26:00 Yes, a big parade. You'd march out in front … I've been looking for a photograph of a bloke with his chest poked out and another bloke pinning the wings on; and that little cap – you know that little Swiss cap. It was called, incidentally, by a rude name… which I won't say on camera.

What was the name?

26:30 It was a 'cunt' cap. And that was a great day. I'm just sorry I couldn't put my hands on that photograph. They took photographs of everyone having the wings pinned on. That was a big sigh of relief. One didn't really expect to be scrubbed after that.

I imagine though that some of the boys had missed out?

Yes, some had been scrubbed, yes. They'd failed and had missed out.

27:00 They perhaps stayed in air crew or were sent off as navigators or to do navigator's courses, or the wireless air gunner course. That meant going to bombers, so their dream of going into fighters – if that was their dream, because some of them wanted bombers – was sunk. And quite a few… I don't know

27:30 what the actual proportion was. There was really an amazing lack of information handed out … a chap would come in and say, “I’ve been scrubbed,” and he would be terribly downcast and you’d be very sympathetic with him. But they didn’t keep any record of numbers, or recollection of numbers.

You then went on to Bradfield Park?

Yes, that was a wonderfully free time, waiting for… it was called an Embarkation Depot'.

28:00 I was by that time… at that time my parents were out at Pitt Town near Windsor. One of the churches there was Ebenezer, which is the oldest Presbyterian church in existence in this country. I go back there every year for what they call the Ebenezer pilgrimage to see some of

28:30 the old folk who are still alive, and buy some marmalade jam. I digressed there, I’m sorry, and lost my train of thought …

Bradfield Park …

Ah yes, we had a lot of freedom there, and we made sure that we had our wings on all the time. We were there a very short time though before we embarked on the New Amsterdam for San Francisco.

And the trip over to San Francisco?

29:00 First of all we called at Wellington and picked up some Kiwis, and then non stop to San Francisco. I saw flying fish for the first time, and was subjected to the King Neptune procedure on crossing the equator. Had a lovely stateroom – the ship wasn’t crowded. They were officer

29:30 conditions, and we got diarrhoea because we turned the fans onto our stomachs and lay on our beds with a bare stomach, perspiring. And the ceiling fans gave us diarrhoea. Shouldn’t have done that.

And the Neptune …

The Neptune procedure – I think they dumped us into a tub of water or something like that as we crossed the equator. And they presented us with a certificate, which I haven’t found either.

30:00 **I think it was just the navy boys giving you a hard time, probably …**

Oh yes, yes. Landlubbers like us …

So what was San Francisco like once you arrived there?

Well, the Golden Gate was very much in evidence. I don’t think we got leave. We were bussed down to the railway station and onto a Pullman train,

30:30 and went right across the States to Boston. We had those Negroes as guards and stewards – like we used to see in the films before the war. They were part and parcel of the Pullman set-up. We used to think that was wonderful, to get on a Pullman. They were more luxurious than the Mudgee Mail, for instance.

31:00 They had heaters with chemical in them, and you’d pick them up and bang them on the floor to stir up the chemicals, and then you’d put your feet on them to keep them from freezing.

So, when you first arrived in San Francisco, what was the big contrast to Australia?

Well, numbers of people, the buildings, automobiles,

31:30 and the Golden Gate Bridge.

Automobiles? In respect of the type or number?

Automobiles… mainly the number. They were the same type because in those days we used to import most of our vehicles from America – the Dodges and the Chevs and the Pontiacs. Not much had changed there.

Had your mother or father given you any advice, or chatted to you before you left?

32:00 No. My mother of course was full of things like keeping warm and making sure I ate properly, and that I looked after my health. But my father reckoned that having been to Knox, which was a black Presbyterian school in those times – physically very demanding – and having been

32:30 in the SUR through three ninety days camps; and having formed no doubt an opinion about my character, probably thought it unnecessary to do one of those famous speeches like Shakespeare used to write … father to son, no, not that. Probably he just wished me god speed and good luck.

So you went to Camp Miles Standish?

33:00 Miles Standish, yes.

What was there?

That was a huge camp, a huge staging camp. There were lots of colonials going through from New

Zealand and Australia, and possibly from Rhodesia. And the PX – the post exchange – it was huge, just like a department store. And the meals were huge and varied. Pall Mall and Lucky Strike cigarettes were cheap, and by that time

33:30 just about all of us had learnt to smoke. And the Americans who lived nearby were very welcoming and hospitable. They made a point of making sure that every man that came through there was given the opportunity of visiting a home. There was snow there when we got there and they issued us with snow boots – thought that was terrific.

34:00 The family that I went to lived in Taunton, which is named after an English town in Somerset. Most hospitable. I was nearly knocked out by the air conditioning. But I got used to it after a while. It was very hot. And they fed us like fighting cocks. They thought food was important to a young man,

34:30 and they just introduced us to their friends – they had friends over when we were there. I don't remember any girls coming to those meals though… but then they'd drive us back to camp. I corresponded with them for years afterwards.

Had any of the effects of the war in Europe, or by now, the war in the Pacific, started to impact upon the Americans?

35:00 It certainly had. We're talking about Pearl Harbour and that had happened a long time ago, and they had forces all over the world. They were very patriotic people. They flew the stars and stripes. Very patriotic people, the Americans. They were very supportive of Britain, as you know even before

35:30 they came into the war, with their lend lease arrangements. So they we just all for us.

Just on the question of the trip over on the Nieuw Amsterdam …

Nieuw Amsterdam, to San Francisco.

Was there life boat drill or …

Yes there was. We didn't have to keep lookout on the Nieuw Amsterdam. They must have thought the Pacific was …

36:00 and the route they took – goodness knows what that route was. But she was very fast and they probably avoided the spots where we may have had to look for subs. And they had a big crew to look after a lot of airmen and others going over. We had on board a man call Hanson – Fred Hanson – who became one of

36:30 the commissioners of police in this State; and on his post-war rise to commissionership he was in charge of a police aeroplane which they got after the war. He was one of the characters. And he was a mate of Johnny Poat on the Nieuw Amsterdam. Poat was the son of a very eminent surgeon, and I remember those two particularly.

37:00 **Given, while you were in Australia at Temora and Uranquinty, the intense hours of flying, getting your hours up and training, what was being done study-wise?**

We had lessons every day.

But what was being done at Bradfield Park or on the ship over?

Oh, right. At Bradfield Park I don't think, anything. We were only there

37:30 for a very short time, and it was almost like a leave period. As far as the ship was concerned, we had to exercise every day. We had an officer in charge of the whole of the troops on board; but whether there were… there were lifeboat drills as well as exercise periods, but most of it

38:00 was just lolling around. What was it? Fourteen days or twenty one days or whatever it was – it was probably regarded as a sort of R&R [Rest and Recreation] period.

So after Camp Miles Standish …

Up to Halifax …

How did you get up to Halifax?

By motor transport, yes. It wasn't far from Boston, just in the south

38:30 eastern corner of Canada – Nova Scotia I think.

Given that you'd travelled from Australia's warm climate to snow and cold, what was the… did you have a range of uniforms?

We did have a summer uniform that we wore before we left here, after we graduated from Uranquinty. We took that with us.

What did that look like?

That was a khaki. I've still got a photograph of that somewhere. And it

39:00 still had the blue cap, this time a peaked cap once we'd graduated as pilot officers.

Shorts or trousers?

Shorts, yes we had shorts; and long socks and shoes, and snow shoes after we got to Miles Standish. And we had our blue uniforms and a

39:30 greatcoat. We had … not cotton underwear, I suppose it was woollen underwear that they issued to us. We preferred to wear our own athletic singlets when we were permitted.

Were the Australian uniforms sufficient for the winter once you'd got to …

Yes, with the greatcoat. Bear in mind that air conditioning was everywhere, in the huts.

Tape 6

00:30 **A question I like to ask people on their way overseas going to the war, in your case on the way to America and then over to England – what did you have with you? What did you pack?**

01:00 Only those things that were uniform. I think my father had given me a New Testament. Writing material. We had our watches of course. That's about it. A kit bag… no, a trunk we had, a tin trunk, hmm.

01:30 **Was the New Testament a special item that you tried to carry with you to remind you of home, or was it just a functional bible?**

It was just a functional bible. I very seldom opened it. Any spare time I had was writing letters home, and to girls, and time spent in the mess. One liked to fraternise. It was a comforting thing to fraternise with your fellow pilots.

02:00 So… I wasted a lot of time.

Did you ever pick up any objects along the way – souvenirs or lucky charms, or things that you always kept close to you?

No. I didn't really … we were never really close to the enemy in the sense that we were not on the ground; and the army pretty well picked those up. It was possible to get them, but I never really wanted to.

02:30 **You left from Halifax at night to cross the Atlantic. What was that voyage like?**

It was rough and cold. We were issued parkas – you know those coats with the hood. They were tough and warm material; and we were required to take watch on this occasion – two hours on and four hours off, watching for subs. That was bitterly cold. We must have gone up near Greenland

03:00 I think. It was a very circuitous route, but that was because we were alone and not in a convoy. So with that, it was broken sleep and rotten cold weather; and we were very closely packed – like sardines – on the Louis Pasteur.

03:30 So apart from sitting around your bunks there was not much opportunity for leisure.

Were there any scares with submarines or …

Not one, no. Well pulled into Liverpool without incident.

And what did you find? What were your first impressions of… well, it wasn't the first time you'd been to Britain, but it was the first time you would remember it?

Exactly. Just fascinated to be in England.

04:00 We'd all heard of that poem, "Oh to be in England now that April's there…" and the black country around Liverpool is not all that attractive; but we were put straight onto a train down to Bournemouth. But as we got further south, the beauty of the country was very apparent, and it was just a thrill to be over there at the centre of things.

04:30 As we got leave – we were doing lessons down there, just a continuation of the training lessons we'd head – but that meant a lot of leisure. They couldn't keep us busy and there were so many of us; and by that time we were pretty well trained in the basics. What we needed was operational flying training. And we got bikes. We went up to London. I had a reference here from one of my school friends to a cousin of his in London,

05:00 who was with the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation]. She was a guide and was proud of being a Londoner, of being a Londoner during the blitz. She took me down to the blitz areas and showed me around London. And all the world seemed to be there. Uniforms from the Free French and the Poles and of course all the Commonwealth troops, and the Yanks; and it was

05:30 a thrilling place to be.

What was the situation at that time with air raids and that sort of thing?

Right. We were talking about roughly a year before D-Day. The bombers were going out. The Americans were going out in big formations during the day – and the British were going out in their Lancasters and Halifaxes at night.

06:00 We didn't see much of that from down at Bournemouth. It was way down on the south coast. And the only incident involving an enemy aircraft that occurred there was when these two Focke-Wulfs – a fighter pair – made just a swift pass, a couple of passes, across the park on a Sunday morning, when people were just enjoying the sunshine. I understand they killed a couple, and then just

06:30 went on flying, back to France.

Where were you when that happened?

I plus two others with our bikes, we were just leaving Bournemouth itself. We weren't in the park but we saw it and we kept going on our way to London.

What could you see from your vantage point?

We saw the Focke-Wulfs come in at low level, almost ground level, strafing across the park, and then making off back to France.

07:00 **Were there other air raid sirens that went off down there, or was it pretty clear?**

No, it was pretty clear. I'm a bit surprised that there was not more concerted action against the accumulation of highly trained airmen there. But it didn't happen during the time I was there, anyway.

What about when you went up to London? What was the atmosphere there like, with regard to the air raids and that kind of thing?

07:30 The air raids had pretty well passed. They were bombing the industrial towns where they could. People were pretty settled. The London clubs – like the Overseas League – were hospitable. They invited us to the lovely Dorchester Hotel and entertained us there.

08:00 They had dancers there and they had meals there. But that's only when we went up to London, which was only a couple of times. We enjoyed that cycle ride through that country, and looking around London; but most of our leaves were spent up in Scotland.

So how was the war in evidence in the south of England?

The war… the damage that this cousin of my friend showed me,

08:30 it was… the blitz had left its mark. But the city of London seemed to be pretty much untouched. We were told to go to Austin Reed, which was a big store in London, which included tailors to be fitted out with… I think my greatcoat was not in very good condition at that stage, nor was

09:00 my cap. So I went over there to buy a cap and a greatcoat at Austin Reed in London. And that was a very normal area, the city itself; and the suburbs that we rode through on our bikes on our way to and from London were largely untouched. It was mainly the docks and the industrial parts of the city. Lots of people were killed, as you know. The doodlebugs

09:30 hadn't started at that stage, so there was not much happening in terms of active war around London at that time.

How were you feeling at this point? You'd been training for a long time. Were you itching to get to it, or were you happy with the…

Yes, yes. We were just itching to get to it; and you would have heard this from many other speakers, I'm sure. It was a genuine desire to get into action. I know that

10:00 there was the counter-veiling fear and apprehension associated with getting into action, but there was just no question about it. All those with whom I was associated just couldn't get there quickly enough, and there was a real concern that the war would finish before we got onto operations.

Did those sorts of frustrations cause any trouble in the holding area like Bristol and Bournemouth?

10:30 Yes. We were still wanting to get there instead of being left behind or in some way prevented from proceeding to our objective, so the large group that I were with were pretty contained … we were probably entertained well enough by the local girls to keep them out of mischief – and all that in a pretty innocent

11:00 way as far as I could understand. I think that things would be pretty different now with the more liberal attitude to sex and the sexes. We were pretty green in those areas. It was nice to go to the pictures with

a girl and it was sad to come out at eleven o'clock when it was still broad daylight – with double summer time; but I don't remember any ruckus or people

11:30 being thrown into the clink. Not like the Australian soldiers in Tel Aviv, where they pulled up most of the trees in the main street and generally made a nuisance of themselves.

I've heard that the Australian blue uniforms were particularly popular amongst the young ladies. What did you see of that?

Yes, I think that was probably true. We were called the blue orchids as you know, and it was a stark difference

12:00 from the RAF light blue, bluey-grey. And we were novelties. A lot of them probably didn't know much about Australia, and wondered what Australians were like.

Did you encounter any of the formal efforts to entertain foreign troops?

Yes, well those we encountered in London – particularly with the Overseas League, they were

12:30 quite formal and well behaved and carefully conducted. People of quite high station in and around London were… mainly women entertaining men. It was all very polite, and all very Dorchester-like.

Were you affected by rationing?

We were, in the sense that we did have

13:00 the powdered egg and the reconstituted potato. But the meals were adequate and very much to the Australian taste. The Australian cuisine in those days was very much the same as the English cuisine. We were well fed.

Where did you want to go? Did you know what aircraft you wanted to fly on?

I wanted to fly out of England on operations.

13:30 I wanted to fly on Spitfires, and operate from England. It was a strange dichotomy, you might say. You would be over Europe on operations one minute and that night you'd be taking a girl to the pictures at the local picture show, or to a dance. Particularly some of the bombers, who'd not go out as frequently.

14:00 You might remember they had a tour of about thirty two trips, whereas our tour was two hundred hours, and in that time that report refers to hundred and thirty two trips, some of them very short and some of them quite long. So that there was that formal side of it. The Overseas League was very formal and very well behaved. They expected good behaviour and probably didn't invite those who got drunk or out of line.

14:30 **So where did you go when a posting came through?**

From Brighton up to Peterborough, which is on the main line running north to Edinburgh. It's really the Midlands I suppose you could say; and there we were on the Miles-Masters. To begin with they took us up in an Avro Anson, which had enough seating for about half a dozen of us.

15:00 That was a familiarisation flight. It happened to be at low level because the cloud level was very low on the day we went. And we were just flicking through low cloud and the visibility was not very good. We recognised the small fields and the stone fences and the

15:30 local landmarks, so we gained some degree of confidence in knowing what it looked like and what our aerodrome looked like and what the surrounds looked like. But if we did run into bad weather after flying away some distance, we would have landmarks that we could identify and get us back into the aerodrome.

16:00 **How did flying in England difference from what you'd experienced in Australia?**

It was vastly different. The distances we were able to fly in order to avoid getting in the way of operational aircraft were limited, whereas here they were vast – unlimited. The summer that I spent, or perhaps the year that I spent in 1942, was spent mainly on the other side of the Great Divide

16:30 in country that experiences drought weather, such as we are having now; and so the railway lines were wonderful identifying items, and so were the roads, and so were the well-spaced country towns. So it was difficult to get lost. Whereas in England, a lot of those little villages and towns,

17:00 whilst being close together, are also very similar. And so were the fields; and the roads were just a network of roads, so you couldn't just pick out the Hume Highway or the Princess Highway – that sort of thing. So it was very different but you had to get to learn it very quickly. You're still seeking the same objective, you still want to impress your instructors

17:30 with your ability to handle different terrain and conditions, so we cottoned on fairly quickly.

Were there any mistakes that you did make in those new conditions?

No, but I had some scares when a cloud got between me and the aerodrome, and looking down and the fields and scattered villages were so much alike.

18:00 But one really had to rely on the compass, and keep a good idea in mind about what your general bearing to base was. A compass is not going to do much good if it can only tell you where east is, and your base is not east'. There were anxious moments there.

Were there any other tools for navigation introduced then, or were you just working with a compass and your eye?

18:30 A compass and the artificial horizon, and the altimeter. They were virtually our only aids, really. And the speed. If one got into cloud then one's experience of blind flying was very limited. In addition to that blind under the hood flying that I spoke of we did link trainer work,

19:00 and as you know, that's just a machine that simulates flying conditions. But we were pretty rusty, well, not so much rusty because it hadn't been all that long since we'd had the training, but we hadn't achieved a great deal of proficiency in instrument flying, so cloud did produce anxieties and you had to try and keep that little aeroplane straight and level

19:30 and above or below the horizon as it showed on your instruments. You were at full alert then, when you had those conditions.

How were you accommodated at that time?

In huts much the same as we'd been in, in the Middle East, sorry, in Australia. In Bournemouth we were accommodated in beautiful private hotels

20:00 and most luxurious holiday resorts. But normal air force barracks, really.

Well finally you were given an order to be posted onto operations …

Yes.

Can you tell us what happened when that came through?

Well that was a vast disappointment, not being posted to a Spitfire squadron in Britain. We just knew we were going to the

20:30 Middle East. We didn't know we were going to 3 Squadron and we didn't know whether we were going to a Spitfire squadron. But it was certain that we were going on to fighters, and the air war was still an item at the time. I'm talking now about October of 1943. So it was momentary,

21:00 really. There were all sorts of other things going on that diverted us from any disappointment.

So, just getting this straight, what did you know? I mean, what information was available to you about where you were going at this time?

The Middle East, and that was the central Mediterranean area you might say at the time. Operating anywhere east of Malta, right through to

21:30 Romania. There were a lot of twin-engined and four-engined aircraft operating out of Italy across to the oilfields of Romania.

Were you given leave in Britain before you left?

Yes we were. From Peterborough we were posted to Blackpool, just another holiday resort. We'd never seen such

22:00 enormous dance floors as we saw there. We thought the Trocadero here in Sydney was pretty big, but it was dwarfed by these twin dance floors of a huge size, just thronging with people, local boys and girls. But we were housed there, while we were waiting, in tenement houses. Our particular group was, anyway – I don't know where the others were. So we just spent

22:30 our time with no formal training at all in Liverpool, for maybe two or three weeks.

What did you do with that time?

Went to those dance halls, wandered around the streets, drank a bit of beer; and fraternised. We were always in a group, and apart from meeting on the dance floor, we didn't have any hospitality or dealings with the Liverpudlians.

23:00 **So who was in that group. Had you chummed up with people…**

Yes. Indeed I often wonder whether a letter I wrote to RAF Headquarters in London, in the Strand, might have changed my posting.

23:30 because I asked that I might be posted to the same squadron as a man called Eric Philp. In the end we were both posted on the same ship at the same time to the Middle East. Perhaps if we had operated

solely they might have accommodated us in Spitfire squadrons. But to accommodate two Australians on an RAF fighter squadron might have been a bit more

24:00 difficult. But I'm just speculating on that. He and a number of other Australian pilots, some twin – engined and some single-engined, we used to hang out together and we got to know one another very well.

Where did you first meet Eric Philp?

In … I think in Peterborough. You've complimented me on my memory

24:30 in some things, but it's pretty vague in some others. But certainly he was on the Almanzora when we left Greenock, with that load of WRNS.

And why were you so close that you decided you wanted to be posted to the same squadron as him?

We had a rapport. He was from Ballina and a trumpeter of some note. He had a wicked eye for women, and he might have been more experienced

25:00 than most of us … but he was just a very pleasant man. We just struck up a rapport with one another. In the end he was posted out to the Middle East on the same ship, and he went to the same wing. He went to 450 Squadron and I went to 3 Squadron. And our progress through those squadrons was very similar.

25:30 I was the best man at his wedding in Alexandria, after the war, I mean, after VE [Victory in Europe] Day. And I was also the best man back here for another one of the group. We were very close. And I think, as you would appreciate, in foreign parts and doing these strange things one tends to cling to the support of the group.

26:00 **It's the stuff of legend when you're talking about the Australian military – this sense of mateship. Do you think of something particular about being at war and being Australian, that you can speak of in that respect?**

Yes, well, I think that we regarded ourselves as Australians as having a lot of initiative, disregard of too much discipline, regarding it as a bit

26:30 of humbug and unnecessary; and perhaps there was an element of skiting there, getting around together and perhaps being a little more overt, extroverted than the more quiet Englishmen, Rhodesians, and New Zealanders.

27:00 We showed the flag, I hope not in an obnoxious way. We were proud of being Australians. As far as mateship was concerned, I think there was mateship in all the forces really. We've given it a name and we've turned it into a national characteristic, but we've got miserable people here too, just as everywhere.

27:30 **Good point. So you were set to sail to the Middle East. Tell us about departing and what ship you were on and that sort of thing …**

After they got us together in Blackpool … they sent us up there but I can't remember how we got there, probably by train to Glasgow and then out to

28:00 the port of Greenock on the Clyde River. We went straight on board, and she was loading all day – with personnel that is. She was no doubt all fuelled and loaded and otherwise armed. And as I say, that detachment of WRNS came on board.

28:30 We sailed at night. Goodness knows where we went, but we finished up sailing through the Straits of Gibraltar, and by that time it was getting towards the colder part of the northern hemisphere year – October, November. It was quite pleasant though in the Mediterranean; and we were on watch again, two hours

29:00 on and four hours off. The guns were only Oerlikons – they were anti-aircraft. They didn't have any ship to ship armament. And then an alarm went and we were all sent below. The crew took over the guns and there was a lot of noise and firing went on. It had transpired that some Messerschmitts from Marseilles

29:30 came down and endeavoured to do some damage. We were told nothing. A piece of an aircraft was being shown around the ship, and it was claimed that we got one. But some claimed that it was part of an Airacobra, an American

30:00 aircraft sent out from North Africa to fight them. But we just didn't know what happened. They didn't tell us – told us very little.

What was your own experience of that incident? What were you able to see and hear?

We could hear but not see. We were all down in our cabins. Everyone who was not crew were sent below and told to stay there until the all clear was given.

Was there much to hear?

30:30 Yes, there was quite a lot of firing went on, and the odd boom from the Oerlikons … frequent booms from the Oerlikons actually. Presumably the lesser noises were the machine guns from the Messerschmitts.

Did it make you think …

31:00 My word, my word. We were quite scared actually, down below, and having no idea what sized force was attacking us; and being well-aware that we might never see daylight again. It was a frightening experience.

Was that a bit of a turning point in the war for you, do you think?

Oh yes it was. In England, we'd watched

31:30 those huge formations go out. In the day time we'd see those Flying Fortresses, and we'd see them coming back in broken formations. Some would land at another aerodrome. And at night you'd hear the constant drone of the Lancasters and Halifaxes going out,

32:00 and you'd hear them coming back, but no longer the constant drone of a large formation of steady aircraft. I remember one night in particular when one of them put down on our strip at Peterborough. They turned a hose – after pulling out the rear gunner – they hosed out his cockpit. And that was

32:30 a stark reminder that things were pretty serious. But those broken formations and the huge losses that we knew were going on. Just near us was flat country, and that flat country to the east of us and slightly to the south of us was good

33:00 aerodrome country and they had huge heavy bomber landing grounds there. So we were pretty close to the operational aircraft. But in terms of personal impact, you're quite right, in that this was a real turning point; and we were apprehensive of course that there'd be more of it, because we were just into the Med [Mediterranean] – just through Gibraltar and near the south of France.

33:30 **I might just skip back to Peterborough for a second and just talk about that incident where you saw the rear gunner … did that happen more than once or was it an isolated thing?**

That was the only one at Peterborough. We knew from talking to the crew – once they'd disembarked and put down – they told us where they'd been. I forget where they been, but they'd obviously run into night fighters.

34:00 And they told us that this wasn't the first it had happened to them. They hadn't been able to make base… the bomber losses were far and away heavier than the fighter losses. Every time one went down there was a crew of seven accounted for, unless they happened to parachute out.

34:30 **From those of them that knew at that time, how do you think those losses affected them? Were they incredibly stressed?**

Yes they were. They were human. Thirty two trips doesn't sound much, but those hours over Europe and into an area where, at that stage, the

35:00 escort fighters – the Mustangs in particular – were certainly not available to escort these bomber formations. Once they were, then they mixed it with the German fighters and the losses reduced. But nevertheless they remained heavy and to get through a tour was regarded as an achievement.

35:30 I don't know what the percentages were, but I would think they were around one in three … got killed.

Given those horrible odds did you ever then – or later on in your own squadron – encounter anyone who just couldn't take the pressure?

Yes. They had an expression that you may have heard of, called lack of moral fibre'; and it was the saddest thing to see someone who hadn't

36:00 finished his tour to be sent back to some non-operational job. There seemed to be a good deal of understanding. There seemed to be no derision that I recall towards the victim of whatever it was that caused this inability to face up to further operations. On our squadron

36:30 for example, there was a chap who was obviously scared, but he stuck it out. And in a way, now, that was a mark of great resolution on his part. Another chap used to take Dutch courage'. He used to drink too much in the bar at night … it wasn't …

37:00 there wasn't a great deal of supervision. The CO didn't spend a great deal of time in the bar, and in any case, someone who's intent on getting a bit full, to drown his fears, is pretty skilful in managing one here and there. So I never heard

37:30 any pilot reprimanded in the mess. But in the end this particular pilot was shot down. This was after I left the squadron so I have this on report. But the night before he'd been enjoying himself and wearing the uniform of a high ranking Italian officer; and this what

38:00 he took off in! I don't know what his flight commander was thinking off. So, as he floated down in his parachute, here was this apparently high ranking Italian officer landing in a parachute. He was caught by the Germans and was sent back to Germany as a POW. But there were times when we were in formation that it was reckoned he was flying too close

38:30 or flying erratically, and we liked to keep pretty clear of him in a formation.

Only a couple of minutes left on this tape, so I'll just ask you to elaborate a bit on the story of that man who you mentioned before who was scared but who went on? Can you tell us a bit more about him?

He was a quiet man, even in peace time – because I knew him later on when he used to attend squadron reunions. But I was

39:00 talking to the padre. There were three padres – Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican. And I was talking to the Presbyterian padre because he enrolled me in this Australian Inland Mission work that I was talking to you about. And he told me how he admired the pluck of this man he counselled, and who sometimes sought out the padre,

39:30 no doubt for comfort. So it was clear that he was finding more difficulty than others in handling the situation. Everyone was scared, and yet everyone wanted to … you see, the average bloke in front of his mates wouldn't indicate any shadow of it. In the mess we'd sing loudly and we'd breast the bar … but we had to keep a close watch on how much we drank because our jobs were usually first light'.

40:00 The first jobs of the day, you took off almost in the dark; but all of us were apprehensive – all of us were human.

Tape 7

00:30 **On the boat over to the Middle East … the WRNS. You met the WRNS. What happened? Any development of relationships there?**

The pilots quickly paired off. Everyone formed a pair, and we used to

01:00 repair to the deck and make ourselves comfortable. I met .. . the one that I formed a relationship with was an Irish girl – a lovely lilting Irish voice and nice blond hair and a good figure to go with it. We used to correspond with one another;

01:30 and we declared eternal love for one another before we parted, and we corresponded with one another during the war. But I suppose we were sensible enough to say to one another, "Now, this is a shipboard romance and all sorts of things lie ahead of us and we may never see one another again,

02:00 and all sorts of impediments might prevent us from resuming this relationship. So the first one to find him or herself in such a position is to notify the other one, so that if it's off, it's off." And that's how it happened. We did correspond all through the war and when the war was over I wrote to her and simply said that I was an impecunious university student

02:30 with little prospect of getting over to Ireland to see her. I could see that she was in a similar situation, and so that was accepted and nothing more happened. But I did receive a call. I was out one day and my wife had taken the call. She said that this Jean Richardson had rung, who knew me long ago. She had left a telephone number

03:00 which happened to be over at Thornleigh – which was only a hop, step and a jump from here, as you know. So I rang her, and after a pleasant conversation I said, "Now, may I come over and see you?" "No, I don't want you to come and see me," she said, in a very pleasant way. So I couldn't forebear to think that she was probably fat and wrinkled …

03:30 that's how I persuaded myself – anyway, she didn't want to be seen. And I was no great shakes myself. I had a good head of hair during the war but … so I thought that she'd be shattered to see what's left of me [laughs]. So I didn't press at all.

You made a comment earlier that relationships back then were different to what they are today among young people …

04:00 In relation to the extent sexually that the relationship went, yes.

So what did a relationship constitute?

It constituted cuddling and kissing, and as far as I know, that went for the generality of these young kids who really would've been scared of getting any closer, in many of these instances. Particularly

04:30 those of us who'd been to boy's boarding schools, where, when we did dancing lessons we danced with a boy. So we were pretty gauche when it came to relationships with women. So the chaps would come

back from Rome on leave and there'd be innuendos as to how far they'd gone, but we doubted anything more than I described –

05:00 petting – had gone on. There were some I should say, of course – one of my good mates – I had to take him up to the Blue Light tent with his blankets because he had crabs, and he'd got those presumably through sexual intercourse. I was trying to keep the blankets as far away from myself

05:30 as I could!

Sorry, what's the Blue Light tent?

The Blue Light was where they dealt with venereal disease and other sexual diseases that were very common. Now I'm saying one thing that seems a contradiction to another. As I said, as far as I was aware, very little heterosexual sex took place between the pilots I knew and was with.

06:00 But there was the odd exception. The army were … there was a lot of venereal and sexually transmitted disease amongst the army. I don't know whether lifestyles were different in Britain and America, but I'm sure you've heard that to a little dark haired Italian mother

06:30 would be born a little blonde child or even little black child. So it went on to a huge degree during war.

And this mate of yours who got crabs. Why were you helping him? Why couldn't he go up there by himself?

Oh, we were mates.

Emotional support for ..

07:00 Yes, he was so frank about it. So he spoke as though it was something he'd been doing it all his life, all of his twenty two years or twenty one years or whatever it was. He passed it off as nothing. I was sort-of goggle-eyed about it all.

Did the air force at any stage educate you, about fraternising with local women or VD [venereal disease] or those sorts of things?

07:30 They warned us about it. Oh yes. We had lectures about the avoidance of sexually transmitted diseases. But the opportunities to fraternise, well, I suppose they were there, but we were always on the move so that meeting girls in Temora or in Wagga – which was near Uranquinty – and Peterborough …

08:00 We got to the petting stage in Peterborough. The girls used to go to the pubs, and I remember the Fox & Hounds was just outside Peterborough and we'd meet there. There were those just passing relationships. And in Rome there was a nightclub we used to go to.

08:30 But the girls would head off for the most part. Maybe we made it pretty clear that we were going home, anyway – when I say going home, I mean going back to the Kiwi Club. The New Zealand division had been over there in the Middle East and Italy for a long time, and they were top troops, and they were always first into town to get the top hotel – Rome, Florence, Naples. And their little Aussie mates were always welcome at the Kiwi Club.

09:00 So that was home when we were on leave.

Excellent. So once you got off this boat that was called …

The Almanzora …

… where did you get off at?

We got off at Alexandria, and we were transported to a holding camp in the [Suez] Canal zone, and then up to Jerusalem to another holding area.

09:30 They were getting full in the Canal zone of the troops coming through, so they pushed us up to Jerusalem where we spent Christmas. Then we came by train back down to Cairo and out to the Canal zone again, to a permanent RAF station with bitumen runways in the sand and squash courts and permanent quarters.

10:00 We did our 239 Wing operational training there, before going up to Italy.

OK, just before we discuss that … given your father's religious background and family and stuff, what were your memories of having Christmas around Jerusalem and Bethlehem?

Well they were very significant feelings. We went to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve

10:30 and certainly to me and some of the others we felt the significance of that occasion, and we took the opportunity there to visit the holy places. That was foreshortened by a spell in the German hospital with dysentery. But we made our pilgrimage to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve.

11:00 I suppose paradoxically we drank some arak out there, which is a pretty tough drink, and which put a woman – who was a flight lieutenant – to bed in the King David Hotel for the next day. She overdid it.

But we tried it

11:30 and managed to survive.

And what were your observations of the Arabs and the Jews and their relationships?

Well it was Palestine in those days and the British had supplied the Palestinian police force – a very fine body of police and highly regarded. There didn't appear to be any tensions there at all. There were lots of Arabs in Jerusalem as well

12:00 as Jews. You could walk the streets quite comfortably. We may not have been related to the Australians who spoiled the streets of Tel Aviv – the soldiers when they went through … but it was pretty normal Middle Eastern city as far as we could tell.

12:30 **OK. Back in Cairo. This is where you started flying Tomahawks and …**

Yes, that's right. There was a lot of what we called battle formation and air to air combat practice. There was air to air firing, actually firing live rounds – not at other aircraft, but at a drogue dragged a long way behind another aircraft,

13:00 and you'd try and hit the drogue. You'd be scored by the number of hits on this cotton drogue.

How would they work out whether you hit it or another fellow did?

Well, I think they must have reeled in that drogue and then let out another one for each strike. I know my score was regarded as pretty poor. Huh.

13:30 Somewhere there in one of the logbooks it says, 'below average'. We didn't get much of it. And we'd dive bomb on clouds – and we'd chase each other in and out of clouds. It was fair dinkum battle training, and it was a great help to go up to the squadron with that under your belt.

14:00 **So actually, when you got to Egypt and started flying, which did you actually start flying first : the Kitty Hawks or the Tomahawks?**

It just varied depending on which one was available. I forget which one I went on first. The logbooks would show it. They were very similar aircraft, similar characteristics. Most of it were Kitty Hawks though, because they were the ones we were going on to.

14:30 **You said they were similar, but from a pilot's perspective, how were they different in respect of flying?**

The Kitty Hawk itself was more highly powered and there'd been various marks of Kitty Hawk as they continued to improve the performance of these aircraft. Just as they did with the Spitfire. The Spit 8 was the last number that I remember. It probably went further than that. But when I was on operations an Australian squadron – 451 Squadron – was equipped

15:00 with Spit 8s – Spitfire 8s. And even the Mustang, which proved to be the most versatile fighter of the war in terms of general duties … the Spitfire was really a defensive weapon. It defended the skies over London with the Hurricanes very effectively against the Luftwaffe. But as a dive bomber it wasn't a patch on the Kitty Hawk or

15:30 the Mustang. It couldn't carry the same bomb load, and it wasn't as rugged. When you put a Kitty Hawk down with your wheels up … if you had to force land, which I didn't have to do, you landed with your wheels up, unless you had a very clear space. They used to land with wheels down in the desert, but wheels up is when you go in on your belly.

16:00 Italy didn't have those wide open spaces like the Western Desert, but it was … there were a number of occasions where Kitty Hawks landed in the desert and they picked up the pilot who'd been forced down and couldn't take off again … where the pilot of his rescue craft – who might be one of his own formation who saw him go down – would land beside him, put him on the seat, and the pilot

16:30 of the rescue aircraft would sit on his knee and they'd drive home… there wouldn't be room for that in a Spitfire. They were very rugged aircraft. Very well built. The Mustang to begin with was quite a poor performer – about fifteen thousand feet, on a Packard engine, an American engine. But they put the Packard-Merlin engine in it … Packard in America had a licence to build Merlin

17:00 engines, so they built those and called them Packard-Merlins. It just transformed the Mustang and its performance was much better.

Just while we're in Egypt… battle formations? What were they?

A squadron in the air was twelve aircraft. Red section and Blue section we used to call them as a rule. Red section was below

17:30 and the person who was in charge of the flight – it might be one of the flight commanders or it might be the CO – and he was leader of Red. So there were six aircraft, three like that with the leader just slightly ahead. The tall one in the middle – he's slightly ahead of the other two aircraft. And behind

those three aircraft,

18:00 just a comfortable distance away, in formation, would be another three aircraft in the same form. So those six aircraft made up a flight. If the full squadron was going out then Blue section would be up top – as top cover if you like, particularly where there were other aircraft around – and it would take orders from the leader of Red section

18:30 for that sortie, that operation. Mostly we flew as flights of six. On a big target we'd send out a squadron.

What was theory behind or the point of having two levels?

That was mainly because in the desert where there was a lot of enemy

19:00 activity, top cover was there to do the spotting. That was it's principle role. The job of Red section, led by the pilot commanding the operation was to look for the target and keep an eye on the ground and make sure they were going in the right direction. So, there were two distinct jobs – look out for enemy aircraft and do the job of getting to the target as

19:30 effectively as you can, and at the right height. If there was cloud about, making sure that if it was possible without too much deviation to avoid the cloud, particularly if it was cumulus cloud which can be quite active within the cloud. Once the German aircraft had been called back to the fatherland

20:00 our main opposition was anti-aircraft fire. The full squadron would mainly go out on a job that was regarded as requiring a bigger punch. So the same scrutiny by the top cover was not as necessary as it was when there were lots of enemy aircraft around.

20:30 **Just in respect of flying – slipstreaming, was that important at all?**

We avoided slipstreaming. Those three aircraft on the second V flew slightly below the slipstream of the aircraft in front. Slipstreaming in terms of cycling for instance, I think

21:00 that's what you're referring to, is it? The sort of slipstreaming from the cycle in front that sort of pulls you along as it were? That's probably … the physics of that might have been different because of the blast of any aircraft engine going backwards would seem to be a counter-veiling factor to the follower.

21:30 You'd want to keep out of it. And landing for instance, if you got into the slipstream of a plane ahead of you, it could be quite dangerous. It could twist you and interfere with your landing. It's buck you and interfere with your smooth approach to the landing ground.

So that's why you wanted to avoid it – because of the effects on your own aircraft?

Yes.

OK, so how long were you flying the Kitty Hawks and the Tomahawks in Egypt for?

22:00 I could tell you exactly, but it was only a few weeks. Each of those flights and what we did on those flights is recorded in my log book. But it was just a few weeks. They were fairly rudimentary. I suppose … we did a lot of dive bombing and strafing as well. That's the first time we really did steep dive bombing and strafing. We had

22:30 done it even as far back as Uranquinty in training, but we were getting more serious by the time we got to Egypt.

When we were discussing Uranquinty we were discussing the importance of getting your time right in your dive bombing …

… and it was certainly the same there with these more highly powered aircraft.

Any further tips given in respect of air to air combat than you were given at Uranquinty?

23:00 Yes, yes. I suppose it's hard to identify them particularly. I confess I was a bit surprised that not much time was given to air to air combat. We sighted enemy aircraft only a couple of times. Our formation led by the CO

23:30 at that stage just did a turnabout as the enemy passed us at a distance. We wanted to make sure that they didn't do a turnabout and come into us while we were going north. But the German aircraft continued on, so we did another turnabout and proceeded to our target.

24:00 I suppose the philosophy associated with dive bombing and strafing was that the target you were going for was the paramount object of the operation. The elimination of an odd German aeroplane was not as important as eliminating an enemy strongpoint, blowing a bridge, attacking a convoy of road

24:30 transport, trains … because they were the obstacles which the army had to overcome. Our role was close support of the army – the US 5th Army and the British 8th Army under Montgomery. So if you could avoid a fight and press on to your target then … that was seen to be the main purpose of

25:00 your exercise. In North Africa things were different. The Messerschmitts were regarded as far more

proficient aircraft than the Kitty Hawks; and the Kitty Hawk pilots had to learn techniques that would allow them to counteract the qualities of the Messerschmitts. The Messerschmitts could

25:30 climb faster, they were – according to the reports I read and the stories pilots have told me who flew in Africa and who came back for their second tour in Italy – the Germans were usually above them, and they'd come in out of the sun … beware of the Hun in the sun was the cry. And they would come down through the Kitty Hawk formation trying to knock

26:00 off whatever they could of the formation as they came down; and then come up again and mix it. The Kitty Hawk pilots were able to develop techniques where they were able to combat this fairly effectively, and I don't know whether the honours were even, but 3 Squadron alone accounted for over two hundred enemy

26:30 aircraft – most of which were taken in North Africa, were shot down in North Africa.

Excellent. Just before you left Egypt you went to Cairo on leave. What did you see? Can you describe Cairo as a place back then?

Yes. A very cosmopolitan place. Most people dressed in native dress. We used to call them Jesus Bags'.

27:00 They had tight legs and a loose bag in the middle. I should have pursued this, but the belief was that the messiah, or whatever the equivalent for a Muslim was, would be born to a man. So that's why the bag was there – to catch the baby. Now that may be so much rubbish, and I feel a bit ashamed

27:30 that I haven't read up on it more to find out if there was any truth to it. But there was a big French influence. All of the countries from around the Mediterranean seemed to have people in Cairo and Alexandria. I mean, living there. The nations of the Mediterranean seemed to have mixed very much in Egypt.

28:00 And we went out to The Pyramids and the Sphinx. Some went AWOL [Absent Without Leave] and went down to the ancient cities on the southern Nile. They got away with it. We were more interested in hanging around Cairo. We were given honorary membership of the Gazeera Club which was a gentleman officer's

28:30 club with sporting facilities and good food and good drink. It was a pleasant place to hang around. There were lots of beggars and lots of Arabs trying to sell dirty postcards or take you to see 'donkey fuck woman' in the back streets – that sort of thing in the back streets. You had to be careful to stay with your mates in Cairo,

29:00 because there were thieves everywhere in Cairo. I know some of our chaps were pretty casual, coming from Australia. They were on a railway station somewhere in Cairo and they went to buy a cup of coffee, leaving their kitbags just there. Little shadowy figures must have come up from the railway line and knocked them off. They lost all their kit!

29:30 Most of us had the feeling that you should at least hang onto the rope of your kitbag when you were in a situation like that. But, it happened.

Around Egypt at that time, the army was there, the navy was there, the air force was there. How did they – the three groups – sort of mix together?

We were always pretty close to the army, because they would always say, "We wouldn't have your job for quids, up there in those flimsy aeroplanes, getting shot at."

30:00 And we, just as forcibly believed that we had the better end of the stick, when you considered that house to house fighting and that close combat that they were involved in … ours in a sense was a remote war, not their face to face stuff. There wasn't as much face to face stuff as there was in the First World War because of

30:30 the armament they had, but … especially the Kiwis, when we used to see them in the Kiwi Club, "You can have that job!" they'd say. And some of them were soldiers on whose front we had actually targeted. We used to have cab ranks – that's a term you've heard of, probably. One formation of six would be told to arrive just south of the bomb line – we were always going north in Italy –

31:00 and wait for a target from ground control. That would usually consist of an army captain and an air force pilot who'd finished his tour. So they'd ring up on the radio telephone and give us a six figure reference, and say, "There's a strong point down there, at that point. It's a certain distance from a farm house which

31:30 you'll find easily recognisable …" or something like that. "Would you bomb it or strafe it?" So we would do that. We'd identify the target and we would tell ground control that we'd done that, and that we were going down. And then the six aircraft would go down and drop their bombs and strafe on the way down. We'd very seldom make a second pass because they were our instructions.

32:00 They reckoned the damage would done in the attack, rather than any incidental damage you might do while flying around near the ground and trying to find a target, exposing yourself to the possibility of loss of yourself and your aircraft. And then, while you were doing your job there was another cab on the

rank – another half dozen aircraft, maybe from your squadron, maybe from the same wing or another squadron,

32:30 waiting for their six figure map reference and their target : perhaps a tank that was giving a bit of trouble. And the army would be good enough to report results, particularly if they were good results, and the squadron used to get commendations from the army for the effectiveness of their close support attacks on the targets. That was quite common.

33:00 **Just on the subject of the cab ranks. You were discussing about how some fellas were quite eager to take the credit, whereas most others didn't. But who was given credit for… if you were successful in hitting the target? Was a particular plane given credit?**

Yes, yes. Sometimes the report would be that all aircraft hit the target or

33:30 were very near – what they called near misses which would be very damaging. And that would be the best report you could get. Others would identify the pilot who knocked out the tank, the others being near misses or perhaps not being near misses. And that would result, from the claim of a pilot – or, if another pilot was certain that it was that pilot's bomb that did the job – then he would report that. He would say that.

34:00 But when you've got six aircraft going on a point and the first aircraft's bomb creates a lot of dust and smoke, then that would sometimes obscure the target. So the next one going down is adjacent to that, and the whole thing is just a mess of dust

34:30 and gas, then it's pretty hard to be sure that your bomb's the one that's done the damage. And you pull out of that bombing dive – you go down from about ten thousand or eight thousand feet – at a sharp angle, and around about fifteen hundred feet you've got to start to think about pulling out. You're going in the dive – particularly if you've got a couple of thousand pounders, one under

35:00 each wing – you'd probably be exceeding four hundred miles an hour; and at that speed you need that height to pull out, so you won't be caught by the bomb blast. So it was difficult to be certain that you were the one who'd done the damage,

35:30 and therefore there would have been a lot more targets knocked out, than claims made. The army sometimes surprised us by these reports back, saying that the attack was so successful.

Just as you're diving down, you said at about fifteen hundred feet you'd have to think about pulling out, but when do you actually release the bombs?

36:00 You release at between say twelve hundred and a thousand feet. It's very difficult of course, at that speed from ten thousand, you couldn't pinpoint exactly the point at which you dropped your bomb … the height at which you dropped your bomb, because you're watching that target and you might be increasing the angle of your attack, or you might be adjusting for a shallower attack, particularly

36:30 if the bomber's ahead of you had gone for the targets you first sighted. There might be a long line of traffic on the road for instance. You didn't quite know which one the leader was going to go for, or for that matter the one in front of you. So if you were the leader you had a better chance of seeing if your bomb did any damage.

37:00 And for that matter, you couldn't see much results from your strafing either – you'd see people running around on the ground, but that's about all.

And once you came down and released your bombs, what would happen to the aircraft … now that it's lost say two thousand pounds …

There was no violent change. I think your forward speed was the main force governing just how the aircraft behaved.

37:30 So as soon as you let those go you'd start to ease out of the dive. You couldn't pull too hard because you could possibly flick – if you pulled too hard. And also the Gs – the G forces on you, they could black you out. It was a matter of just getting used to … the extent to which you pulled back on the stick … after you

38:00 dropped your bombs. You strafed on the way down, incidentally. You were strafing all the way down. They used to advise us to – in order to clear your ears during a steep dive from ten thousand feet – to yell. So you didn't mind doing this. You might as it were yell in an angry way.

38:30 It was all part of the act. But it cleared the ears. And a very steep descent, just driving up and down steep or high hills; and of course travelling in aircraft as you start to land, your ears start to pop, and sometimes get a bit painful.

So you'd do that every time? Give a good old yell?

Oh yes. I developed a yell, yep, yep. Just a loud roar,

39:00 but it was principally to make sure those ears popped rather than stayed blocked. That would cause excruciating pain.

That advice sounds terrific. Was it also given for air to air combat, in your training days?

No it wasn't. It was specifically related to the bomb dive, as I recall.

OK, so from Egypt where did you travel to? Did you go to Naples from there?

39:30 Yes, went to Naples, in particular to a village near Naples called Portici, at the foot of Mount Vesuvius.

How did you get there?

That would have been by motor transport from whatever aerodrome at Naples we put down at. We flew in, in a DC3. They still fly around Sydney, as you know. Anyway, it was an American one, and they let us off at Naples airport, then the RAF took over and took us out to Portici.

Tape 8

00:30 **What were your first impressions of Italy at that time, in its history?**

Its history of course was quite well known to me, at least certain sections of it.

01:00 One knew enough from pictures and descriptions the sort of country one might expect. One knew about the marshes and the mosquito-ridden south and the agricultural land down there.

01:30 The Lombardy Plain and all that. So it was not a surprise. It was much as I expected.

What about the people? What contact did you have with them?

We met them at the opera house. We were always in a group so it was fairly casual connection. We wandered around the Portici area. Because

02:00 Vesuvius was erupting at the time we went to the points of lava flow and at one point we saw a priest with a Virgin Mary on a pole, highly decorated, with his flock, and praying, and presumably calling on the almighty to save their homes.

02:30 Some of them were pushed over by this slow lava flow. We had virtually no Italian at the time. We acquired smatterings of it as the year went on. So there was not a great deal of converse and once we got away from there we were flying every available day.

03:00 There was only bad weather that stopped us flying. So it was only on leave that we had much contact with the Italians.

Was there any tension between the Italians and you as an occupying force?

No. By that that time they were co-belligerents. By that time we had freed them from the 'Tedeschi' [Germans] and the walls of buildings, for example … in

03:30 white paint, they were frequently showing the words, "Viva Tedeschi!" – or "Long live the Germans!" Then there'd be a thin line drawn through that, again with white paint, and underneath that, "Viva Englesie, Viva Americanie!" They're not a warlike race. They're not like the Romans were,

04:00 apparently; and delightful people. While we were at Portici I remember we did go to Capri and the Blue Grotto. That gave us a chance to sit down at an Italian eating place with Italians and converse in the meagre way that we were able to converse. They were an invariably pleasant people.

04:30 We were in effect allies at that stage.

You arrived in Portici to join 3 Squadron?

On my way to 8 Squadron, to 239 Wing. The training flight was a 239 Wing Training Flight. And all of 239 Wing were then on Kitty Hawks. No-one was on

05:00 Mustangs at that stage, so we could have been sent to any of the 239 Wing Squadrons except the South African, which was purely South Africans. And as it turned out, some who did the exact same training as I did – two in particular I remember went to 450 – and I went to 3.

05:30 **What were your first impressions of that squadron, being the first operational squadron you'd been in?**

I felt very much at sea, not knowing what to expect, not even knowing what accommodation they were in – not knowing the destination even, just that we were going up to 3 Squadron. We went by motor transport

06:00 and found the squadron quartered in tents on a beach on the Adriatic coast at a place called Cutella; and the landing strip was just a pierced steel plating – PSP – literally steel, just pierced with round

holes, laid on the sand, about twelve hundred yards long.

06:30 It might have been a bit longer … off which, you had to get off in a hurry, and get down in a hurry – you couldn't linger as it were on a long approach. So that was different to what we were used to. We were used to paddocks or bitumen strips

07:00 in the desert, around Cairo. And we didn't mind the tents. I'd lived in tents way back in my university days, so that didn't matter. I knew all about that. But it was a pretty rude awakening to life on the squadron. For the first few days the new pilots were sent down to the control tent at the strip.

07:30 It was just on the ground, and it sent off the aircraft. They'd already been bombed up and armed with their ammunition, and they'd taxied to the end of the strip – the take-off end; and were making a hell of a noise because the tent was right next to them. And all of a sudden

08:00 there was the sound of machine gun fire and a huge roar as aircraft went over at ground level, virtually. When we finally realised that the shooting had stopped I got up from behind a forty four gallon drum that was filled with sand – which turned out to be pretty good protection – and … no bullets hit the control tent

08:30 but they killed the pilot of a Walrus RC air rescue … when I say 'they', it was just one aircraft apparently. I thought until quite recently that there was more than one aircraft. The noise seemed so terrific, right at ground level, right next to the tent. And that was an American Thunderbolt aircraft that had mistaken where it was – it did that damage and then kept on flying.

09:00 So that shook me up as you can imagine.

Was that kind of thing common in Italy at the time?

It was not common but it happened from time to time. It happened over at Cassino where the allied troops were wounded by

09:30 bombs dropping short of the target. They would not have been from dive bombers but from high level aircraft misjudging their position – bombing close to the front line but not far enough forward. A New Zealander that I met after the war sported just such a wound. And later on in my tour we were in Mustangs,

10:00 escorting a Lysander – a very slow aircraft and one not unlike in some ways a German aircraft called a Fiesler-Storch. And there were two agents allegedly on our Lysander aircraft to be dropped behind the lines to support Tito's partisans in Yugoslavia. Shortly after

10:30 we crossed the Yugoslav coast … there were either four or six Mustangs … four probably … our CO was leading them, the man who signed that report from my operational tour, and the Mustangs – because of their superior speed or because of the slow speed of the Lysander had to do big weaves to keep back with the Lysander as he chugged along.

11:00 And we saw some American Mustangs in the offing, say about the port bow. They were just flying around, and all of a sudden one of them broke off and shot the Lysander down. He was in flames within seconds, and the two agents obviously lost their lives.

11:30 I don't know about the first one, but that American pilot was subsequently cashiered. That was the rumour, anyway. There were no reports of it in any official or formal way. But to my own squadron during my own tour of eight months, those were two experiences we had.

What happened immediately after the Lysander was shot down?

12:00 The CO chased the aircraft concerned and we all followed the CO in line astern. He obviously made a report. We didn't see the report. None of us were asked to endorse the report nor act as witnesses to it, or to add to what the CO had reported.

12:30 I suppose the result was pretty obvious. So, as I say, that sort of thing happening from time to time, and these are the only occasions I'm aware of. But in these modern wars against Iraq as you've probably noticed in the press, friendly fire can account for a lot of people.

Was there a word for it back then? The term friendly fire wasn't around then?

No, we didn't know that term at all. It was just, "The Yanks did the wrong thing."

13:00 **And how did those two incidents specifically affect your relationship with the Americans and the way in which you thought of them?**

We thought they were too quick on the trigger and that they were not cautious enough in selecting their targets. Maybe it was skill, maybe they their training wasn't up to it.

13:30 But I believe, and I think the textbooks and history bear this out, that the reason the Flying Fortresses flew in the daytime as thereby exposing themselves to the enemy fighters defending the Fatherland, was that they couldn't find the targets – or, if they did find them, that their bombing wasn't as good as it

might be, and to put them onto night flying

14:00 would have produced a less effective war effort. So they may have paid heavily for their lack of skill in navigation. Now, having said that, the RAF wasn't doing a very good job either with their night bombing. They were bombing fields and places where they weren't supposed to bomb. There was huge waste apparently, of materials and lives

14:30 for very ordinary results, to some extent. Some were good. They weren't all bad, obviously. But until the Pathfinders came along and lit up the target and identified it for the waves of bombers coming through, then the accuracy of high level bombing was under pretty considerable question.

15:00 **Were you ever in the other side of that situation? Was there ever a time when you were bombing or shooting something up, and you weren't sure that it was the right target?**

No, though there was one occasion when I was leading the squadron on a trip to Yugoslavia. We arrived over Yugoslavia – not that we could see it,

15:30 because of the dense cloud. We were above it. But the briefing gave us compass courses to steer, taking into account known winds. But meteorology was pretty rudimentary and had been taken hours before. You know what happens in Sydney. You start playing a game of golf in a calm situation and you find yourself really involved in a high wind by the time you finish.

16:00 So we were above the cloud running across the coast and we had long range tanks and we had a bomb … and I turned right at the right time – whether it was the right place to turn right was another matter – and

16:30 arrived where I thought the target should be, and it was still obscured by cloud. The mountain tops were sticking through the clouds. It's very rugged country around Zagreb and Sarajevo. So I made the decision, because we didn't quite know how much

17:00 fuel it would cost us getting down and through that cloud. We jettisoned the fuel tanks … no, I think we kept the fuel tanks and we dropped our bombs safe'. You armed your bomb if you wanted it to go off or you leave it on safe if you don't want it to go off. So I got the formation back

17:30 to base without loss… but I had very much in mind a previous trip I had taken with a similar instruction. It was an armed reconnaissance. I had a principle target, but if that was obscured you could go and see if you could find a loco to shoot up, or something like that – or some transport moving along roads. We couldn't get down through the cloud safely

18:00 and we got back with all aircraft and pilots, to base. I don't know what happened to the bombs. Some bombs dropped safe could go off. But we got a message from Tito or from someone on his command – Tito being the leader of the partisans – calling for a report. I don't know what the complaint was – wasn't told.

18:30 But the CO, who signed that report on my tour, asked for my report on the operation – a copy of which is there, I think. And I heard nothing more. So presumably it was not thought to be worth while doing anything about. But I don't know what happened on the ground. Possibly,

19:00 some partisans could have been in the vicinity, and damaged. But my main concern really was to see that we didn't lose a pilot, because on a similar trip before we'd really run our fuel very low; and the cloud was

19:30 down to about maybe five hundred feet over the Adriatic. We decided to make the descent over the sea of course, because it was the safest place. But one pilot never turned up. He probably went straight in. And this was factor, to some extent, of that lack of skill in blind flying … endeavouring to keep those wings straight and level and the aeroplane

20:00 below the horizon line and at a reasonable descent rate; and to find that my information – from flying by the seat of my pants – was telling me not to turn it this way but to turn it that way … you've just got to trust those instruments. And that trust just saved my life, because I was doing all the wrong things, instinctively : when I thought the aircraft was doing this,

20:30 I would accentuate the error. So the message always was, "Trust your instruments implicitly. You will not be able to fly blind, by the seat of your pants." So that … I don't know what happened on the ground, whether those bombs went off. I thought that if they didn't go off they would be the prize of the German troops if they were

21:00 in the territory. I may have killed someone. I don't know.

Was that thought ever the cause of any personal anxiety for you? Or was it just part your job?

Yes, oh, that was a matter of great anxiety. Although the report was a logical one and although there was no criticism levelled at me by the CO, I didn't know

21:30 why it was that Tito saw fit to call for a report. And that's still a matter which troubles me, hmm.

What about then… and I know it's a different issue, but what about the issue of just being the one who killed people of any stripes, whether they're the enemy or not? Did that ever give you concern? That there were people at the end of your bombs?

22:00 Ah… no. One was so convinced of the evil of the Nazi regime, and one was hearing of – even during the war, the treatment of the Jews; even before the war, 'Kristal Nichte' [anti-Jewish reprisals] and that sort of stuff – that we had no doubt

22:30 whatsoever that we were fighting a just war, and that the only way to stop the spread of this evil was to fight back. Argument and logic and philosophy and religion were quite ineffective – in my opinion – against such forces. So I had no … I undoubtedly killed many probably people,

23:00 but it didn't worry me and doesn't worry me. It has worried some, and some have really lost their balance from reflecting upon what they've done. There was a formation from another squadron comprising six aircraft that got into that hilly country, with lots of cloud around. It lost five

23:30 of the six pilots. They just flew straight into the side of a mountain. The only one who got out of it was the leader who led them there. He being the first to see the mountain ahead was able to pull back, but as you know in traffic there is always that fractional delay, and the other five went straight into the hill.

24:00 So that I persuade myself that my job was to get those aircraft and pilots back to fight another day, rather than to be intrepid and take risks losing one or more of them. On that previous flight that I referred to, some of our aircraft had to land at other airstrips. They couldn't

24:30 get back to base because their fuel reserves were so low.

We'll come back to the issue of losing your own men. Just while we're on the subject of bombing the ground, how close did you come to the consequences of your bombing? How much could you see of what was going on?

You couldn't see your bullets hit anybody. If you saw movement on the ground, of persons, they were moving. You never saw one of them stopped by one of your bullets or some

25:00 of your shrapnel. You never saw a face from the height that we dropped those bombs. I don't even recall seeing people running on the decks of those two ships that we sank in Fiume Harbour. That was a clear day and a good background, the deck of a ship, so it's

25:30 an impersonal war in that sense – impersonal particularly compared to the infantry and their close house to house or hand to hand fighting.

The other issue you raised was losing your own men. What happened? What were the repercussions on that occasion when the pilot didn't come back?

As far as I know, there were none.

26:00 The leader of that squadron operation was on his second tour. He was a competent pilot and leader, and he was my fellow flight commander – two flights, one squadron – and my close friend. He and I were closer that we were to the CO

26:30 who tended to be a quiet man; and I didn't hear of any repercussions at all on that.

He'd lost his five people …

Oh no, sorry, I'm talking about when we lost one. On a previous trip and I was on that trip. I don't know what happened to the flight leader – again, these things were not spoken about very much at all. You might

27:00 hear rumours, but you never knew the strength of them.

What were the casualties like in your squadron?

During my eight months we probably had … say … eight pilots shot down who survived. The Italian partisans used to look after them. They were closer to them than the Germans. They'd try to get back, as close to

27:30 the bomb line as one could if one was in enemy territory. Killed? Probably about eight. I think 450 had higher casualties than we had. And all of that damage would have been from anti-aircraft fire.

28:00 Yes, eight to twelve. All told, shot down or killed: perhaps no more than twenty in eight months. And you know, if you were on bomber raids over Germany then you'd multiply that many times.

Were there any of those that hit you particularly?

That I knew? I knew them all. They were there on the squadron when I was there.

28:30 **So what happened back at the squadron when a plane didn't come back?**

We'd have a drink perhaps to Allan Field or Ray Farrier or John Hedger… and that was it. You didn't dwell on it. It wasn't discussed particularly beyond that day or night; and it might be raised

29:00 in conversation. We used to speak quite a bit about John Hedger. John Hedger had a bomb hang-up – he couldn't release the bomb. While he should have parachuted into the Adriatic – because there would have been a rescue boat on the way, immediately – he tried to land with this bomb on. It came off and blew him up

29:30 as soon as he landed. That same day, another chap in my tent – Barry Finch, who gave my name to your organisation – had the same trouble. You did all sort of things: you twisted and turned and did rolls and loops to try and get rid of thing. But he'd been unsuccessful and came back to the circuit area, and they said,

30:00 "Right, we don't want you to land here with a live bomb underneath. Go out to sea and parachute and we'll send the air-sea rescue boat out straight away." Anyway, he thought he'd have a last attempt. I think he put his flaps down or something, quickly. You're not supposed to do that if you're going too quickly, because if you were going too fast you can damage them. But the drag with flaps on must have just shot that bomb forward

30:30 and it came down in the circuit area, not damaging anyone. It wasn't on the strip area. And that same day I was taking off with a couple of thousand pounders, in a Kitty Hawk, and the left undercarriage collapsed. I managed to keep it going for awhile until she subsided

31:00 and fortunately nothing happed. The bomb didn't go off. It probably didn't hit the ground actually. I think the wing was at a sufficient angle to keep the bomb off the ground. So these accidents or mishaps accounted for some, and anti-aircraft fire for the rest.

You had a macabre mascot of sorts at the squadron? Can you tell us about that?

31:30 Yes. That was Stinky Miller. Stinky was a skeleton, fully articulated. And he was on the squadron when I got there and was one of the first people that I saw. They had him up in the corner of the pilot's mess, wearing a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] medal on a ribbon over his left chest.

32:00 I haven't been able to find anyone who knows the real origin of where Stinky came from. It was almost certainly from a hospital in the south of Italy. But he was always with us in the mess. And he was there when I left. But he disappeared somehow. Perhaps he's in some 3 Squadron person's home somewhere.

What did you think when you walked into this squadron and saw a skeleton at the bar, wearing a DFC?

32:30 It was macabre, as you say, using your word. But you brushed it off. You were expecting all sorts of things. Anything could happen after all, couldn't it? To you or your mates. Also it was almost a point of honour not to show too much surprise about these sorts of things – to be blasé.

What role does black humour have in wartime?

33:00 It's a solid factor. "Here's to the next man to die," was a chorus. And, "Little black sheep has lost his way," and bla bla bla. Black humour was very prevalent, very much in evidence. And so was that sort of attitude which was reflected in films about the Battle of Britain pilots –

33:30 you know how they sat in their lounge chairs outside the mess, with propellers ready to roll when the scramble signal was given. They were sitting there with their full flying kit on and parachute beside them, ready to strap on; and off they'd go into the wide blue yonder …

34:00 with a laugh, as it were. It was all affected, as you can imagine, but it was good for morale to say something perhaps shocking. A fellow pilot might produce some humorous response. It was a reality, and I think a useful mindset. I think they set the example

34:30 for all the allied air force, really, those Battle of Britain pilots, in terms of attitude, and brushing the thing off. And it was a reality: that you could be the next one to go. Most weren't the next ones to go. More survived than died.

By 1944 they were already making films about that? You would possibly have been able to see those films?

35:00 Well, we didn't see films in Italy, we just saw opera!

Well, how cultured of you.

Well, we didn't have the films. It wasn't a choice.

Morale, just getting back to morale. Was it a constant thing or did it come and go in waves; and what affected it?

In my time it was constant. We knew what to expect. We knew we were flying into a wall of flak every time

35:30 we went out; and I suppose seldom did the formation come back without some minor damage to an aircraft, caused by shrapnel from the exploding anti-aircraft shells. But the aircraft were strong. They could fly with bits missing,

36:00 so the morale was good. It was high. But there were low points in North Africa. I wasn't there in North Africa but I read the 3 Squadron history and when they had heavy losses, the Australians certainly – according to these reports – did show. And if they had a few of those, one after another, it shook them. But they carried on.

36:30 **You already said you were very busy once you arrived at 3 Squadron, flying almost all the time. Can you give us an idea of what your schedule was, what the routine was?**

Yes. Beginning April one ran into the good weather – through the summer months and into spring.

37:00 Really it was still spring, still cold when I left, well no, it was winter wasn't it, in December. But when I joined the squadron we were still trying to crack the line at Cassino, where they'd been bogged down for months. That really took the sting out of the Italian campaign.

37:30 You'll remember that Churchill had described Italy as the soft underbelly of Europe and it was through that soft underbelly that we were going to strike up into middle-Europe and across to Russia to help the Russians. Stalin was demanding that second front, and so the first such front was Italy. I've digressed again …

38:00 **This impinged on you obviously, breaking the line at Casino: there was lots of work to be done …**

Now, once that line was broken the Germans retreated to the next defensive line, and that meant movement by road. They had no naval force down there at all. They had virtually no air force by that time, either.

38:30 So those narrow mountain roads were just clogged with traffic. And we would sometimes fly three operations a day per pilot. So that left little time for anything else. Two flights a day, two operations a day for each pilot was quite common. It was high summer and the days were long and the targets were plentiful. It wasn't just a matter of having targets, but

39:00 it was a matter of the strategy of the army to interdict this movement as much as possible and to inflict as much damage on men and material as they could before they took up their next defensive position; and so the roads were clogged, and during the daytime, some of the aerial photographs you can still see, just showed these long lines of vehicles.

39:30 Some of them were HDVs – horse drawn vehicles – which we used to claim. That might be more shocking to you than claiming a human target, but they used anything they could to get out and set up this defensive line. And whenever this situation subsisted: cutting narrow mountain

40:00 roads, cutting bridges, cutting railways, hitting at enemy strong points and armoured points in support of the army – all that occurred mainly in the early and mid summer. If any bad weather intervened, then we might be sent off to Yugoslavia – mainly to the coast to interfere with

40:30 marine traffic up and down the coast of Yugoslavia. That was a favourite form of transport for the Germans because there were no partisans out there on the water. They were hiding in the woods and mountains of the mainland … or the hinterland I should say. So the Germans tried to move a lot of things by boat, and we would be sent over to knock those

41:00 out whenever we could, whenever it was considered to be a target which had priority over these other targets I've been describing. And it was only bad weather where we really had such low cloud that we couldn't get at a target without extreme danger to hitting hills that were not clearly, well, they weren't visible at all.

Tape 9

00:30 **Charles, could you take us through your first operation, from the point of being briefed to what actually happened?**

Yes. Our name would go up on what they called the gaggle board the night before,

01:00 and that would show the time of the operation. We wouldn't know what it was to be; and it was usually the first operation of the day that the new pilots would be on. I suppose that's not fair, but often they were off at first light. We'd go down to the mess tent and we'd have a cup of coffee

01:30 and then we would report to the transportations officer who would drive us down to the operations tent – an Operations Garry really, it was a wagon. There we would be told the target and given appropriate information about the weather and the estimated time and the compass readings

02:00 to get there; and the description of the target would indicate what sort of bombs we would carry, whether five hundred pounders or thousand pounders or whether … we could carry three five hundred pounders in the Kitty, one under the belly as well as the wings; or two one thousand pounders under the wings. So off we'd go

02:30 and find the target and break the bridge, put holes in the road – whatever those targets might be. We would make one pass, strafing and dive bombing at the same time, and then forming up on the leader at a pre-arranged point. Our call sign was shabby so the call would come, "Shabby red leader, target at ten o'clock,"

03:00 and "Bombin my bomb, going down," so that was it. It was all over very quickly. He'd be up there, the first to dive, so we'd form up on him and then we'd go back to base. We had screamers on the end of the wings which I assume was copied from those Stukas. Apparently the Stukas used to make a real scream as they went down in the dive. Apart from what

03:30 we hoped would be an unsettling effect on the enemy, they were a signal to our ground staff to get up off their beds and get down to the strip to bring in the aircraft. They'd hop on the wings of the aircraft and they were our eyes in some of those narrow strips we had – say, on a beach. The first operation

04:00 was a tense one. I forget what the target actually was now, though it was over Cassino I think; and I was strapped in just as you see in that photograph, parachute on and harness connected and wireless plugged in. The mouthpiece … well, it doesn't show in that photo. And up on the wingtip hopped the padre.

04:30 Not on the wing tip, sorry, on the wing base – right next to the cockpit, which is strengthened so that people can do that – to get to the cockpit and stand there. So he wished me Godspeed and a safe return which was rather nice for a new pilot on his first operation. That particular one was uneventful, but I think one or two later, one of the pilots was shot down – Ian Rowdier –

05:00 and he was our leader. He was the other flight commander I was talking about. And instructions were, "Whatever you do, stick to your number one," the aircraft in front of you. In this case he was the leader of the flight of six; and accidentally I pulled out my radio telephone plug as I was moving and twisting around there cockpit, so I just followed him. I just followed him and followed him and stuck like glue.

05:30 He was doing steep turns and sharp turns and down on the deck, looking to see if this shot-down pilot was OK. As it turned out, the pilot was OK. And I expected a roasting when I got back, because I'd assumed he'd been saying, "Stick with me, do this, do that," but nothing was said. Apparently he was so busy looking for this fella that he didn't worry about his number two. I was his number two. But that quickly got you into rhythm,

06:00 that sort of thing. He himself was shot down for the second or third time a couple of operations later, but he parachuted to safety.

After each operation, was there much paperwork or debrief that occurred?

Yes. Before we did anything the 'garry' –as we called it – picked us up and took us straight over to the operations 'garry', and there we were asked by the

06:30 operations officer to report individually. The leader spoke first, and then each individual pilot spoke. We were then released to go back to the mess. We were again taken by the transport to the mess tent, and from there we just walked to our tents, which were nearby.

07:00 **Was there any sort of competition between who was the best pilot, the most accurate bomber, or you know, shooter?**

There was a recognition that one of our pilots in particular was the best of the dive bombers – a fellow called Ken Richards, who later became CO of the squadron. He was nicknamed Pee Wee – a little fella. And he also had the nickname of Funnel because it was alleged that one of his bombs

07:30 went down the funnel of a ship off the Yugoslavian coast. That was just about the time I arrived. That gave him an aura which he'd retained ever since. By the time I joined, although there were a number of second tour pilots there, only as flight commanders or COs.

08:00 As far as I know they had not achieved much of a score of enemy aircraft; and I think that was because all of them had joined after El Alamein – up until Alamein the balance in the air was pretty even, but after Alamein it was just a German retreat.

08:30 It was October '42 I think and … yes, October '42. So these chaps had their tour after Alamein from say the beginning of '43, because the squadron was stood down out of the line, after Alamein, for a short time.

09:00 So I imagine that their tour lasted from early '43 until late '43, interrupted by the break when the Germans were rounded up in Tunisia before the allied forces went across to Sicily and onto Salerno in Italy; and it was

09:30 by that time, winter, and so I imagine they had a rather long tour but with not a lot of operational flying because of the end of the war in North Africa and the getting set to cross into Italy. So therefore they may not have run into a lot of enemy aircraft, and perhaps none of them had shot down an aircraft.

10:00 But anyone who was an ace – who'd shot down five – he was certainly looked up to very much.

Just in respect of the aircraft, did they have cameras on board to identify the …

Some of them did. We had them on some operations, but not every operation. Apparently, to put cameras on every aircraft for every operation and to use up all that film

10:30 was regarded as non-essential. They did it more towards the end of the war in Europe. You'd see great pictures of some of the Typhoons and Tempests shooting up German strong-posts; but only some aircraft carried cameras.

11:00 **A tour'… you've spoken of a tour several times. What constitutes a tour?**

For a fighter pilot, two hundred hours. For a heavy bomber pilot over Europe, thirty-two trips – which could have equated … let's say they were six hours long, so a hundred and eighty by three, that's around two hundred hours in the air, the same time in the air as the fighter pilots – but far fewer trips because of the long distances they travelled.

11:30 When it comes to coastal command and some of the photographic reconnaissance units and the air-sea rescue units, transport units … I don't know. I just don't know. They're the only two that I had the occasion to learn. I imagine though, if you take say a Catalina patrol, which can

12:00 stay in the air for over thirty hours, that it was probably a period of months, of time rather than hours.

You mentioned an occasion where you attacked a ship. Can you talk us through what happened there?

Yes. We were briefed as usual down at the operations tent, and we were

12:30 told that ships had been reported. They didn't give us a description, but we were told that one might be a Siebel ferry, which was obviously a carrier ship – probably not only for men but for materials; and the other was not identified. So we were sent off, a formation of twelve – the full squadron this time. I was leading the red section

13:00 and Barry Finch was leading the top section. And as we were approaching the harbour of Fiume we saw first of all the Siebel l ferry right in the harbour, not tied up; and also what appeared to be a naval vessel. I called it a corvette though I don't actually know that it was – I reported it as a corvette. So we went down and followed both of them.

13:30 That was short and sweet. The damage was quite clear, and there was no question of fudging on this one! So we went back and reported our success and we were pretty pleased about that.

Just in respect of when you have a success, did you have your own plane that you could put hits on the side?

At that stage of the war we were not doing that. I noticed that Barry Finch

14:00 put Roselyn across the nose of his aircraft – Kitty Hawk – and that was his fiancé I think. The rest of us just didn't bother particularly. 112 Squadron – an English squadron – was known as the Shark Squadron because they painted a shark's mouth on the front of their Kitty Hawks – teeth and all. But the habit

14:30 of putting kills on your engine hood was more to do with the fighters – the number they'd shot down – and the bombers … they'd put a bomb there for their trips. So you'd see a lot of bombs there – sometimes more than thirty two for a full tour. G for George down in Canberra there, it probably did more than

15:00 one tour.

Was there a time or several occasions in which your plane actually got hit by flak or ground fire?

Yes. It became almost ho-hum after a while. You mightn't even notice it, but your rigger – we had a fitter who looked after the engine and a rigger who looked after the air frame – your rigger would come to you and say,

15:30 "Be more careful next time. You had six holes through your tailplane," or something like that. Some were more serious than others, and some were shot down. But it was a common enough thing to get holes in your aircraft from shrapnel. Not direct hits – that would have finished you. The smallest ammunition they used to throw at us

16:00 was twenty millimetre. The middle one was forty millimetre, and the big one was the eighty eight gun – the wonderful gun that the Germans used in tanks as well as in anti-aircraft.

So what was the most frightening or dangerous operation you were involved in?

I think that one coming back from Yugoslavia, when we had to go down through layers of cloud over

16:30 the Adriatic Sea, and because of lack of skill at blind flying I was in mortal fear, really, that I might not be able to handle the situation. But by virtue of that saying, “Trust Your Instruments,” I was able to control the thing without going into the water.

17:00 I think the pilot that was lost on that occasion may not have run out of fuel – he may not have been able to handle that descent through cloud. I’ve since met his brother at a 3 Squadron reunion. I met him only back in April again when I went into the city march, and we are threatening to have lunch together and talk through his brother’s experience on that trip. It hasn’t happened yet, but it may.

17:30 **Now, there was a transfer … well, a change of planes from the Kitty Hawks to the Mustangs. Can you just explain the lead up and what forewarning you got of the actual change of aircraft?**

We were told towards the end of my tour – probably in November, that we were going to be converted to Mustangs, and that was a great

18:00 morale booster. They were very fine aircraft and streets ahead of the Kitty Hawk – steady in the bomb dive, faster, more manoeuvrable, and really nice to fly, well-behaved. And so the day arrived when a few Mustangs turned up at the strip, and in turn we were shown the cockpit and any differences we might not have been familiar with from the Kitty;

18:30 and told to take her off. They didn’t have two seats, only the one seat. We’d go up and do a few aerobatics and get used to the feel of it, and come back so the next chap could have a ride. We did that for a few days. I think probably the first operation I went on in Mustangs was the one in

19:00 which those two agents were shot down in the Lysander. Incidentally, it seems hard to conceive these days, but we were not on the same channel – the same radio channel. To think that we were fighting alongside these American formations and the two – the British and the Americans had different radio frequencies … we couldn’t

19:30 communicate with one another. It’s pretty primitive when you think of the technology we have today.

Just before we come back to the actual plane – the Mustang – just in respect to that event – the shooting down of the Lysander – where were you in respect to the plane itself?

We were in Mustangs remember, which were far speedier than the

20:00 Lysander, just doing this weaving around the Lysander. Because it was so slow. We had to weave in order to keep back with it. And the American formation was over here at say ten o’clock and they just flew around for awhile and then just suddenly, one of them took it into his head to shoot down this aeroplane which he had

20:30 wrongly identified as a German aeroplane. It had the RAF rondels on it, and was quite different … it was noticeably different from the similar German aircraft, but obviously his aircraft recognition skills were lacking. He thought he’d shot shown an enemy aircraft.

But you guys would have been in the vicinity? He obviously didn’t see you on his way in …

21:00 Oh yes, we saw each other. We were so close. We were buzzing like bees around this aircraft. But before we realised that a friendly formation of American Mustangs – flying the same aeroplane as we were – were going to shoot down this British aircraft, it happened. There was no way we’d know. If we’d been on the same radio channel we could have told him what we were doing,

21:30 or in some way told the whole formation. He was just one of the formation, and he just shot it down.

What about the Mustang itself? What differences did you notice from a pilot’s point of view about how it took off, flew, and landed?

It had more power, more speed, and was steadier in the air because of its aerodynamics.

22:00 It just sat there beautifully. It was also steadier in the dive and had a range which was twice that of a Kitty Hawk. It was able to go over to Yugoslavia on a weather recce for example, and fly around there for over four hours – and then come back for breakfast.

22:30 **Just a side question – and maybe trivial – but when you needed to go to the toilet up there …**

… you had a piss tube. And it was very difficult in cold weather to make the connection, because you were sitting on a parachute and you had a battle dress on – which was pants and a reefer jacket. You had a Mae West tied around you, and you had your harness over that. And the tube,

23:00 depending on what aircraft you were in, it was either there or there [gestures] and you’d pull it out and you’d try to make the connection. Sometimes you failed and … well, worse things can happen than that, of course. But it was quite difficult, especially in cold weather when the penis would shrink. And it was

quite cold

23:30 up there sometimes. So, it was not a very advanced bit of technology. You never had to do anything more serious than have to pass water. We managed to hold onto the other thing … the number one.

Just in respect to the piss tube …

It had a spout about that big, and then a tube coming off there.

24:00 I don't think there was a tank. It was probably just dispersed into the atmosphere. I used it a couple of times. In those days my retention was better than what it is today!

Would you take anything else with you, like water – a bottle of water or something to drink while you were flying?

I didn't, and I don't think anyone else did. You were busy enough and you could last for fours in the Kitties.

24:30 Their trips were much shorter. Some of those cab rank trips … the shortest I think I ever flew was thirty five minutes. Forty minutes was quite common, so there was no problem there. It was only when we got the Mustangs that we had the really long flights.

25:00 **And then… another quick question: the sun, did you have sunglasses or a shade to protect your eyes from the sun while flying?**

No. if we had the canopy open for, say, take off, then you'd pull back your canopy. Some were like a bird cage, others were like a blister. You can see on some of the Mustang pictures over there how it's a blister. You'd just slide that back; and you'd have your goggles on

25:30 because you'd be looking out over the side. But once you closed the canopy you tended to put your goggles back on your flying helmet and the less obstruction you had over your eyes, the better. You didn't need the rims of sunglasses or … I suppose some people

26:00 flew with ordinary glass though … maybe … but I don't think so. But we really continued to weave through the air all the time – for two reasons: one, in case there were enemy aircraft around, and you never knew when you might be sprung … even though we knew that most of the aircraft had been taken back to the fatherland; and the other reason was to vary

26:30 your height slightly so as to confuse the gunners down below with their ack-ack [anti-aircraft]. So you were weaving quite a lot.

Once you came towards the end of your tour – when your hours were up – what did you plan next? Where did you go?

Well, you always went to a non-operational tour. That could vary. Mine happened to be as commander of a training flight

27:00 in 239 Wing. Others I knew went down as ground controllers to work with an army officer on the ground near to a bomb line, and identify targets and instruct the cab rank aircraft to come down and clobber it. Others would go as instructors at wing training flights. Others might go onto ferrying duties – ferrying

27:30 aircraft from one airfield to another. One of our pilots became the personal pilot to one of the British generals – in an Auster aircraft, a very light little aircraft used just behind the lines for spotting and identifying targets and perhaps helping the ground forces to handle the situation.

28:00 There were no doubt other jobs, but that's just a sample of what we called non operational tours'. And that was expected whilst the war was going on, to last for about six months. It was not rigid; and then you went back for a second tour, as a rule.

28:30 **Were you planning to go back for a second tour?**

Yes, I flew up to the squadron where it was … at a place called Cervi in northern Italy, from way down near Naples. I had a word with the CO – Funnel Richards, the one who dropped the bomb down the funnel. He was a CO by that time. He'd taken over from the CO who was there when I was there.

29:00 And he said, "Well, drop me a line." He might not have thought I was serious, but I'd flown from all the way down there, and to see if I could drop back. So I dropped him a line and he responded. The letter's there, but it's not of particular interest. I was out of things by about three months by the time I flew up there

29:30 and so that was December to say March or April. The war finished in Europe in May – so I didn't matter much. I wouldn't have done any damage.

So do you remember where you were when the war in Europe came to an end?

Yes, I was down at an airstrip near Naples called Gaeta, and that's where the wing training flight was –

along with other wing training flights from other wings.

30:00 Different aircraft too. In some cases, Spitfires. And that's where I received that order to immobilise aircraft at a certain date – when the war finished – so that pilots couldn't take them up and sky ride, joyride. And it was a fairly quiet night the night the news came through. We just went to the bar and had a few drinks then went to bed and got up the next morning

30:30 to train pilots… because the program had not been terminated. Now that I think was at odds with the order, saying that you had to immobilise the aircraft at a certain date, on the cessation of hostilities. It explains how you might do that, and where the pieces had to be handed to the engineering officer

31:00 and so forth. But the CO must have had some discretion there. And I think they must have had some concern about how to handle these young colts in that sort of situation, so we kept flying for a few days, after the 8th. I'm pretty sure my logbook can verify that. But no great celebrations, and then we

31:30 just sort of disappeared from that place. It was secured by probably ground crews and officers who were engineering officers. But the pilots just disappeared in different directions – in accordance with orders. I was sent across to a place called Caserta, which was an ancient capital of a part of Italy, at least. I spent time there until they found an aeroplane to take me down

32:00 to Taranto, the naval base on the heel of Italy. I waited there for a ship to take me across to Alexandria. There were other troops aboard, but no others from 3 Squadron because they were still way up north. So I don't know that I knew anyone on that particular ship. And then I went to that holding area on the Canal, where we just waited and waited and waited

32:30 for a ship with space to fit us on.

When you heard the news that the war had ended you were training pilots. Was there disappointment amongst them that …

Oh yes, there was, there was indeed. They'd missed out on the show. Their… some of them were just out of school. Some of them were air training corps boys who had just got old enough to join the air force. They had been through the stages that I had been through, except for operations. They were ready

33:00 for operations, and they were vastly disappointed. I see some of them from time to time and they are very quiet about that part of their war effort, yes. Hmm.

The fact that they just didn't quite make it?

Didn't quite make it, yes.

Was there any hope of you yourself being involved in the war in the Pacific?

33:30 Bearing in mind that I didn't finish until August … we fully expected to be repatriated as soon as they could get a ship for us, and to be sent up north to participate in pushing back Japan to its own shores. But whilst we were still there the news came back that the Japanese had surrendered.

34:00 We then knew that we were free of further involvement in the war.

Given now that the war was over in both Europe and the Pacific, what were your feelings now about the future?

Back to teaching. That was already laid out. There was a job waiting for

34:30 me. There was a political imperative that employers had to take back employees unless there were exceptional circumstances, so there was no strain there. The strain occurred when I asked the department for a posting to a suburb in Sydney which would enable me to do a course at the university in order to qualify for secondary school teaching. And his response was to post me to Barrington Tops,

35:00 up near Scone – up near the famous Bell Trees property owned by the White family; and that caused me to resign and eventually to do Law.

Given the war was over and you're no longer under military discipline, and food's not being catered for you any more, and accommodation taken care of, and you're not going out on missions trying to destroy things, was it difficult to break back into civil society?

35:30 Not for me. But for some it was. The first year that I was in Law, we started off with a class of about four hundred. That was the first post-war class in the Law school. I think about one hundred and eighty finished the course, and that I think indicated a degree of tentativeness about Law, the study of Law

36:00 perhaps uncertainty but, "Let's have a look," as an attitude. But a lot of us came from fairly poor families in terms of wealth and knew that we had to make our own way. There was no patrimony there to enjoy, and we really had to carve out a career for ourselves

36:30 Those of us who were of that mind studied pretty seriously and got through as soon as we could, and got a job as soon as we could – I should say, as articled clerks we were paid amounts varying from ten shillings a week to thirty shilling. Which, on top of the three pounds under the Commonwealth

Reconstruction Training Scheme enabled us to get by.

37:00 Our needs were few.

After the war, were there any dreams – recurring dreams or nightmares – that you had from your service during the war?

Not so much dreams. Sometimes it's hard to interpret a dream, as you know. You may not know what triggered that dream. Sometimes you can work it out perhaps, but I often think of some

37:30 of those incidents that occurred. I used to work very hard and I'd come home and go to sleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. But now that I'm a layabout I sometimes sleep during the day, and have say four hours sleep then wake up and have a cup of tea. And before getting back to sleep, some of these things, I think of. I think of all sorts of things. But I don't think it's got to a pathological stage [laughs].

38:00 **You have a moustache now, but when you entered the air force you were fresh-faced. What was the story about growing the moustache?**

Yes, right … well, we were in this beautiful area in the middle of Italy surrounded by vineyards and farms; and out strip was laid out in vineyard – no doubt we destroyed some vines to put it down. And there were lots of

38:30 bees around, and I remember toying with these bees in the marmalade jar, after we'd finished our meal, and there was someone sitting there and they said, "You know, we're in the air force. We really ought to have a moustache." "Oh yes, so we should. Shall we grow them? Yes we will." So we all started and we all kept them. One of them is still alive in

39:00 Melbourne – a blonde silken little moustache it always was. The other is dead. He had a blondish moustache, and I've got mine, which has changed colours over the course of time. But it was fun, and we were trying to emulate a fellow called John Hobson Hook, whose son Huon Hook writes on wine. You might see it in The Good Living

39:30 section of the Herald on Tuesdays. You could see his moustache from behind him. It came out here. And we thought, "Yes, that would be nice." And he used to twirl it up – he was a bit of a showman. We never got to that stage but as you can see from some of those photographs I got it out a little bit.

Finally, as we come towards the end of this tape – Anzac Day. What does that mean to you?

40:00 For many years I was so busy as a student or a lawyer, and with kids growing up and a wife to spend time with, and a mortgage to pay off, that I didn't go to many marches. Maybe someone would ring up and say, "Going to the march?" And I might go occasionally. But shortly before

40:30 the fiftieth anniversary when they started making a noise about the veterans and started to talk about them more… then I got my medals out. I hadn't had them mounted. I got them out and had them mounted and went into a march. We had a reunion afterwards and I quite enjoyed that. And by that time I'd become a consultant –

41:00 I'd ceased to be a partner in the firm … I left that to my two sons, who were also partners. And that was a lesser load in terms of time and effort. I restricted myself to a more narrow range of law subjects, and started marching and actually going to reunions. We have an interstate reunion, say, at Wagga or in Canberra every year.

41:30 I take the widow of a 3 Squadron pilot with us – Joan – and so, it's become a habit now, and I think it's a good habit. There were still plenty of us left ten years ago when I probably started doing this, but more importantly I suppose …

INTERVIEW ENDS