



TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

[This is Edward Stokes] with Lin Hurts with Catalinas. Tape one, side one.

Lin, perhaps if we could just begin at the beginning. When and where were you born?

Born in Hobart nineteen of the tenth, '13. I went to school ... you don't want that part of it, do you?

Well, I think it is interesting. You left school because of family reasons when you were very young.

That's right. Went to school at the Friends' High School but had to leave after a few years because of financial difficulties with the family. Then went on to Elizabeth Street Practicising School and then to Hobart High School but had to leave halfway through the second year to go to work. I trained as a mechanic in a garage in Huonville, spending seven years as an apprentice and improver after which I was able to buy the garage from money I'd earnt from a fleet of hire cars I'd built up over that period. Then, like a damn fool, lost the lot because of a fire. However the City Motors, the Ford people provided all the money to build a new garage and gave me ten years to pay for it. Unfortunately war broke out five years later and I had to walk out of the business.

Mmm. That's most interesting. Just going back a little bit to some other aspect of your childhood. You were born yourself during the ... or, in fact, just before the first world war. The whole thing of the tradition of ANZACs, you know, the great Gallipoli thing, was that something you were very conscious of as a young man, or not?

Oh yes, yes. I knew quite a bit about it. My first real memory I think was my uncle coming back from the war. We were going down to the wharf to meet him, he was in the navy, and he was the only one of the three boys of the family who came back. He hated farming but he still went back and ran the farm because the other two boys were killed.

Including your father?

No, no. No, sorry, this is my uncles I'm talking about now. No, my father didn't go to the war. He stayed behind. But the two uncles, the two younger boys, went overseas working on the same gun and the gun was hit and they were both killed.

Mmm. Yes, that was remarkable that policy of having family people in the same units where that could happen. Going back a little bit to, again, before the war you did say that you'd taken up flying as a recreational thing when I think in 1932.

Yeap.

What was it that drew you to flying?

I don't know. I just got interested in flying and decided I'd like to, while I was being an apprentice, I'd like to joint the RAAF so I applied and they wouldn't take me 'cause I hadn't done my Intermediate. So I went back and got my Intermediate at night. But by that time I had the garage, business going pretty well and I didn't want to join the RAAF.

But you were, I think, in the reserve?

Yes. I started flying with the Tasmanian Aero-Club and ... switch off for a moment. Yes, well if we ... in those days the RAAF would pay half your flying fees if you became ... joined the reserve, which we did. And so eight years later, when war broke out, I was quite surprised to find that the RAAF didn't tell me to come; they asked me to come. So but I was quite happy to go and everything was fine.

Mmm. That's interesting. Just going back again though to that, you know, the decision to learn to fly. Flying from everything that people say is a very special kind of experience, what was your first memory of flying? Say, of going solo?

Well, the ... I never had any fear of flying, I loved it. And it's a very difficult place to learn to fly in Tasmania where the weather if frightful most of the time and we were only flying out of a cow paddock in those days. There was no airport in Hobart in those days. Even the ... old Bill Holyman was flying the Holyman's Airways out of this cow paddock. And ....

(5.00) So after about ... after getting solo, on my second solo I decided all this time, thirteen months, I'd been trying to ... the boys down at Huonville had been saying, you know, 'You're flying. Why don't you come over and see us?'. I got a bit sick of this so on my second time I decided to go over the mountain into Huonville. But the cloud base was 2,000 feet and the mountains over 4,000 feet. So anyway I went up into the cloud and tried. I didn't make it, I lost control. So eventually when I couldn't handle it at all I just pulled back ... cut the throttle, pulled the [inaudible] back and handed over to the kite and she flew herself out. Bloody beautiful old aircraft, old VHUAU, I think she's down in the business ....

That's sounds very touchy flying, that's with no visibility.

Couldn't see a thing.

And you then obviously wouldn't have had any kind of instrument rating.

Not at all. No instruments either.

Mmm. It's wonderful (laughs).

(Laughs). No, all we had was a ballbearing in a tube and a tachometer and an altimeter. That's all the instruments we had.

The rashness of youth. Well, going on with the story a little bit, Lin, war was declared, the air force contacted you and so on. How long did it take for the process of being accepted into the air force to go through?

About three months. War broke out in '39 and I didn't report to Essendon until I think it was very early in January '40. Apparently they had to get everything ... I was in the first post-war intake. But it took all that time to get going.

Right. And I think you did your initial flying training at Essendon.

That's right.

What's your recollection of the training, both the actual practical in-the-air training and also the theoretical training? How good was it?

Excellent. I would say that in the first three months in the air force I learnt more than I'd learnt in eight years in civil. But, of course, I wasn't being trained consistently in civil, I was only over there occasionally. But, no, the air force training I found was excellent everywhere. The only perhaps one fault I found was that I was given a civilian instructor, not an air force instructor, and when on my first loop with him I grabbed the stick a bit hard - I was going to pull it back too fast - he wouldn't show me aerobatics again after that. He used to tell me what to do and I had to go up and do it myself. But other than that, I don't blame him. He was a civilian bloke with a family and wanted to live (laughs).

(Laughs). Yes, and perhaps you'd told him the story of flying across the middle of Tasmania! Another aspect of course of the induction into the services generally, the air force was the kind of parade ground drill that tended to be deemed essential. How much of that did you do and ...

We did the minimum. We just did enough so that we could get on the parade or something like that. No, practically no fuss and bustle. They put us straight into flying and kept us on flying. They were very good.

Did people see any - or yourself - see any crossover between the kind of parade ground discipline and discipline in the air? Or were they two totally different things?

No, I just, it was never ... I don't remember ever being very well impressed with the discipline in the air. We just took as granted that we had to have discipline in the air. I mean, it was commonsense to have it, why should you think any other way? I never had it laid down to me anyway and I'm sure the other boys had the same. No, we found all our RAAF instructors were down to earth, sensible blokes. Mmm.

What was life like?

Excellent. Good fun. Except for me, you see, the trouble was I was going in through navigation instructing which called for higher mathematics and I'd left school at thirteen. So

when the other boys would go out on the ran-tan at night to have a bit of fun I'd stay behind and study. It was the only way I could get through that way.

Mmm. I was going to ....

I was very lucky because Tony Newal, Professor of Mathematics at Melbourne University was our instructor and he would come back at night with me.

Why was it that the air force selected somebody who, I mean, potentially might be very good but he didn't have the grounding, as you were just saying, in high school mathematics, why did they select you for navigation?

Because I was prepared to learn and the other blokes didn't want to.

You mean in ....

I loved flying and I loved studying and I was prepared to learn and I had a grasp of a lot of things that the others didn't have. They wanted to play. Most of them realised they weren't going to live very long so they wanted to make the most of it whereas my idea was to get in and learn everything I could.

(10.00) How much of that do you think was related to the fact that, I guess, compared to a lot of them you would have been fairly significantly older than ....

Oh, yes. That's a big point of course. I was twenty-seven when I came in and that makes ... I was much more settled. I'd been in business for quite a number of years and, yes, I was more mature than a lot of them. In the squadron I was the old man. Mmm.

That's interesting. One other thing I did want to ask about the period training, Lin, was having actually flown before, if not for a great number of hours but at least being able to fly, how much easier did that make it when you got to the air force? Or did, in terms of your training, did you really begin from ...?

They you from the beginning. They start you right from the beginning anyway. They presume you don't know a damn thing, which is fairly right.

Right. Well, is there anything else that you would remember particularly or see as significant about that training period?

That period?

That training period. Perhaps including ... I know after that you did go on to Laverton where you did intermediate training I think with Hawker Demons - let's leave aside the specialist navigational training - but those two blocks of initial training. Was there anything else?

Nothing really. We just flew and the thing that stuck in my mind mainly was the aerobatics, I loved them. Good fun.

Could you say why?

What's that?

Could you say why?

I just loved throwing aircraft around the sky, that's all. I mean, you've got to do your straight and level flying and that's sort of thing to do ... but when you can throw the kite around you're really having fun.

I think it was after Laverton that you went on to do navigation and reconnaissance course. Could you tell us a little bit about how that began and the kinds of ... the main areas of study and so on?

Well, mainly it was mathematics and geography of course. We had to do - meteorology was a big item. It's pretty well everything to do with the operation of aircraft on almost any conditions. So that it was a pretty ... it was a very broad course and to enable ... by the time we finished the NI course that was up to the standard of world class first class navigator. So that the RAAF are very good instructors. I think, you know, it's the same for all the services, they're all ....

Of course, at this stage in the war I don't think radar had been developed.

No, that came in while I was at Rathmines. As a matter of the new radar bloke's office was next to mine and I used to spend half my time in with him learning about it.

When you were doing that course what were the key navigational aids that a in-the-air navigator had to fall back on?

Ah, mostly astronomical navigation; that was the big item. During our course we even had to navigate without navigation tables - do everything by pure mathematics ... or not pure mathematics but straight mathematics and I know it took me 100 miles to work out my first fix. (Laughs).

Yes. I must admit I always find that idea of people doing that sort of precise navigation while also being up in the air very hard to comprehend. Right, well, I know after that you were fairly disappointed I think because you were sent to Cootamundra to the Number One Air Observation School training other navigators.

Mmm.

Again, how much of that do you think was that choice based on the fact that you were older than most of these fellows and therefore perhaps better able to teach?

I think that was so. I've always had a bit of a flare for teaching I think and when I was doing this study at night, they tried to make me a teacher then and I wasn't going to be in it. But I certainly enjoyed teaching and particularly teaching adults. Most of our pupils were school teachers and they made the best navigators. And it's good fun teaching adults - they want to learn.

> Yes, sure. I was just going to say I used to be a teacher myself - it's that thing of being with people who are really motivated, it's quite different to say being in a classroom of people who ....

That's right. Oh, many of those school teachers probably knew a lot more about [inaudible] than I did but I never thought of it that way, but they were just keen to learn that particular aspect. Mmm.

> Right. I do know that during that period you were saying you were very frustrated and very ....

I didn't mind it for the first couple of years. I mean I realised once they'd spent all that time and money training me that I had to repay it. And at the time I went to Air Board and said, you know, 'I'd rather get into operations but if you train me this way I'll give you a couple of years navigation. Would a couple of years navigation training do and then I'll go back to the squadron?'. And they said, 'Oh, that should be all right'. But when the time came they said, 'No, we want you to stay there'.

> And this is when you ....

That when I put up the black.

(15.00) Tell us a little bit more about that, that's an interesting expression. I mean, who did it involve contacting, what did you do, how objectionable were you?

Oh it was ... no, no, I didn't ... you can't do anything much. You can just apply and ask. So I contacted a fellow I knew in Air Board and he advised me unofficially. He said there only way you'll ever get out of navigation is to put up a black and - in training I mean - so I went away and put it up and I got court martialled.

> Could you ... I don't quite understand completely the process. What exactly did you do?

I pulled down all the telephone wires over a bridge with an aircraft.

> Oh right, by putting up a black you mean you sort of committed the sort of ultimate sin with an aircraft so to speak?

That's right, mmm. I remember Andy Manifold, the Manifold family in Melbourne was our duty pilots at the time. I came back with wires tangling all over the aircraft and he came dashing out and he said, 'Dear Lin I'm sorry, I thought the boys had the aircraft ... the aerodrome clean'. I said, 'It's all right Andy, I brought 'em back with me'. (Laughs).

So when you were court martialled for that why was it a sin that from there you'd get what you wanted, a posting to an operational squadron rather than just being shunted into a back room somewhere?

We hoped that they'd be ... well, actually, what actually happened was they didn't. They posted me to Rathmines because they realised I think, they realised that I'd get sick of that. But all they did was to go from one training job to another. I was posted here as navigation officer, not to fly. It was only because I got Dickie Cohen, the CO of the station, to help me. He said, 'Well, you be kind us straight away'. He said, 'Wait a while and I'll see what I can do' and after twelve months - I was twelve months here - and then he said, 'Oh well, we'll slip it in underneath the lap'. So he slipped it in and I got posted before anybody woke up I think.

How common was that where, I mean obviously being in the air force you're part of a big bureaucracy. How common was it for people to be kind of sidetracked into positions that were, to them, dead-ends and just then not to be able to get out of them?

It happened quite a lot I'm afraid. Mmm, you had to really kick over the traces to get out. Mmm. And if you're in the lower ranks you probably wouldn't get out, there was no chance. I was just lucky, but that time I was a squadron leader and I had a few friends in high places.

Right. Without the friends in high places do you think you could have ....

I would never had made it.

Right. Well, let's go on to Rathmines which, of course, is just here near Lake Macquarie. You came up here I think to 42 Squadron as a navigation officer and there you were dealing with operational pilots. What was that work like? What were you doing most of the time?

Oh, mainly I was working under Scottie Allan. He was in charge of all the flying boat operations and I was doing the navigation side and checking out the navigators, generally organising the ... making sure the navigation equipment was in the ... all the aircraft; devising new methods of handling them. That's why I got so interested in the radar because I knew that was a very important aspect of our navigation and so I learnt quite a bit about radar. Even able to on several occasions repair the radars in the air from what Tony taught me over there. But normally speaking only the radar operators were trained to do that and of course they were never carried in the aircraft.

Right. And the ... the officers you were teaching navigation to at Rathmines, they were there shortly before going off to operational squadrons?

Yes. They all came as navigators, trained navigators, from one of the air observer schools that I'd been at before. And then we just topped them up here and got them into the particular type of work that the Cats were doing. And in the early years ... in the early stages we were still using astro navigation for a certain amount of it.

Right. One thing that might be quite interesting is just to talk briefly about Rathmines because it was obviously a key place in the whole story of the Cats. What sort of a base was it in those days?

Home from home. Cohen's Country Club we called it. Beautiful spot, lovely spot and it was a very relaxed - of course, I'm talking as a reasonably senior officer, we could more or less do as we liked within reason. But I think all the other ... all the ground crew and all other folk all seemed to be very happy there so I'm sure they were treated well too. Mmm. I know when I became CO of the squadron I made sure that the boys had ... if anything came into the squadron it was divided equally regardless of rank.

(20.00) And was it physically fairly well set up or not?

Oh yes, yes. By the time I got there it was pretty well set up, everything was pretty well right. Mmm. They improved it a bit later on but it was the ... they were just building the big slipway when I first went there but we were still using the old wooden one which is not there more now; it's chopped off.

Right. I think it was while you were at Rathmines, Lin, that you finally got out of navigation and began a conversion training course into Cats.

That's right.

I think you'd actually hoped to become a fighter pilot. Could you tell us about that, about why you wanted to become a fighter pilot and why you didn't?

Oh well I loved flying fast manoeuvrable aircraft and during my second course on the Hawker Demons I topped the course on aerial work because I just loved them and particularly on the dive-bombing. I don't know why it was but most of the boys wouldn't put the nose down far enough whereas I didn't mind if it was vertical, I loved it. Mmm. And so the chief flying instructor said he wanted me for a fighter pilot but the other bloke said no.

Mmm. That does seem odd that if you had that skill it wasn't capitalised on.

Well, yes, but the point was most of the boys that came in in those days particularly would make good fighter pilots too. But they couldn't get many to become good navigators. See, 'cause I was a studious type they took me for ... in other words I missed out.

Sure. Anyway, going back to Rathmines, this decision was made to make you do a conversion for Catalinas.

Mmm.

What's your first memory of flying Catalina? Obviously it's totally different to a light manoeuvrable aircraft?

Oh yes. Well, I thought they were a lumbering old thing but still I was prepared to fly anything damn thing at that stage; I didn't give a damn what it was. But also I had a pretty

good idea that the Cats were doing ... were the only ones really getting to the war at that stage. And because of our range we could get to the war and the rest of the poor buggers couldn't. So ... and you see, we couldn't ... they did take a few of our squadrons away but mostly MacArthur used his own American squadrons for the advanced work and we were mainly ... well, we were mainly working - he wanted to take us away. He wanted to take us ... put us in the American Air Force, pay us American rates of pay - that would have been good - but Air Board wouldn't let us go. But they said, 'You can have the squadrons but under our control'. One good thing about that was that every 240 hours, that is when your major overhaul had to be ... because we were based officially in Australia, our kites had to be serviced here and so after every 240 hours of flying we had to fly the kite back to Australia to be serviced, so we got a trip home. That was good.

Sure. Going back to Catalinas ... seaplanes generally, what was it like to fly one? Perhaps if we could go through the different stages of, for example, taking off, getting it up in the air, landing - totally different to a conventional land aircraft.

Not really, no, very much the same. You pulled the nose up. On a land plane of course in those days they were all tail skid jobs, they weren't nose-wheel ones, so naturally you pushed your nose ... your stick forward as you're taking off to get it level and then you ease it off the ground. With this one you pulled the stick back to get the nose up in the air then as soon as she started to fall forward onto the step you just flew her off. But that initial part was the only real difference. Not much. The big difference of course was that if you came in rough water that's entirely different. That wasn't funny.

Mmm. How rough could it be both for landing and taking off?

Ah, on the one job in [Soela?] - I just dropped a commando in Soela Island - and we were taking off and they opened fire on us so I swung out and went straight out through the reef, through the gap in the reef, and I think the waves there were running about twenty-, twenty-five feet, but they were nice long low rolling ones and I remember I took off God knows how many times. As I got to the top of the wave she'd take off but she couldn't climb. Wasn't really had any air speed so she'd sink and I had to land on the wave coming on, takeoff. I know when finally I got into the air young Geoff was sitting there with a half a glass of water, he spilt the other half. I said, 'I thought that you needed it, Sir' and by God I did. I was buggered. But ....

(25.00) Tell us a bit about the step in that Catalina, that's quite important. That's when you look along the bottom of the fuselage where you've got a kind of boat's hull at the front and then there's a kind of little step up. What was the exact purpose ....

That is to break the flow of water. If you've got a smooth bottom you'll never get off. The water sticks to it and you can never get off. But as it comes to that point and breaks, that's what gets ... let's you go. Without that step you'd never get off.

Right. That's, I mean, like a kind of surface tension effect.

That's right, mmm. That's it.

I see. So the first step was to lift the nose up and ...?

No. You got the nose up just to get her going, your rolling, that's right. And then as she got speed you'd let her ... just let her fall forward and just get a slight weight on the stick and she'll fly herself off.

What were Catalinas like actually in the air? How manoeuvrable were they? How easy to handle?

Very manoeuvrable. So manoeuvrable that I've never fired a gun at an attacking aircraft because I think that's suicide. If you ... to give your gunners a chance to fire at anybody else you've got to hold the kite steady and if you're steady you're dead. So the guns boys just sat down; they never touched the guns. I just flew the kite around. I missed them every time so it must have been right.

Mmm, right. Could you tell us a little bit about the layout of a Catalina, the internal dimensions, how much space was there? Could people move around much, or not?

Oh yes, yes. You had your little place in the front where the navigator lay down or the chap went up through to moor, then you had the pilot's cockpit which wasn't very deep. Then you went through a bulkhead into the navigator's compartment. You had the navigator on the port side and the radar operators ... radio and radar operators on the right. And up in the roof - you've seen a photograph of the old Cat I suppose, you know, where the engineer sat in the little eyrie up there - and then behind that you had the galley and then behind that the bunk area with four bunks. Then you went out through the, what we call the blister compartment and then tucked back behind that was the tail. We had a hatch which you used as a lavatory if you didn't fall through and also we had a .303 we were supposed to tuck through there but we never used ours. We never unlatched it.

You mean just a conventional .303 rifle?

No. A little machine-gun, a .303 machine-gun. Mmm. The idea was if anybody came underneath you you could fire a gun at him but that was bloody stupid. He had ... they had the speed and they had the fire power. If you waited for somebody to be fired at by the little peashooter you'd be dead.

Mmm. It does sound like that. I understand Catalinas weren't particularly good at gaining high altitude. What's your recollection of that?

Ah, no, they were slow, they were slow aircraft. You see their top speed, top cruising speed, is about 110 knots. We could come home at about 120 when we're fairly empty. But, as you can see, they were very, very slow in today's business. They were fairly slow climbers but they did climb. I'd say I've never been above ... I don't think I've ever got to 15,000 feet actually with a Cat. We just went through the clouds - bugger 'em. You could knock them

out but that's a way. I knocked my navigator out twice. The Cat's just dashing up and down and the poor old beggar hits his head on the roof and goes out but he come's round.

> Mmm. That's interesting. Just a moment. Just one other aspect about Cats as planes, Lin, what were they like to ... could you tell us a little bit about landing, getting back down into the water?

Yes. They were excellent planes. You could come down in almost any weather. I mean, I wouldn't say a typhoon or something like that. But I've dropped them in into thirty foot waves, no problem at all. If you bring them in on the swell and just drop them in, they'll come in. You've just got to be careful you don't drop them on the top of a wave, you've got to get them in on the right spot. But the beauty of them is you could bring them and hover them and waited till the wave is the right position and then you just ... you had to hang right on the stall and the moment you got to the right switch you pulled your throttles off and she'd just drop like a stone. Of course, oh, water goes everywhere but it doesn't matter.

> The ... unlike some flying boats Catalinas had I think retractable ...

Wheels?

> Well, perhaps wheels too, but I was going to say the kind of outrigger balances?

Oh the ... the wing floats, yeap. Yes, they were retractable.

> Did they have to be used or could it actually land without the floats?

Oh yes, it could land. All they'd do it would tip over a bit if you landed without them and as you lost speed she'd fall onto one float or the other. It depends on what ... how she was balanced.

> Mmm. I see.

It would, you know.

> Normally you would have the floats down when you landed?

Oh yes, so as to keep her reasonably level, that's right.

> Right. I think this tape's just about to run out.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE A

START OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

> Right. This is Edward Stokes with Lin Hurt, Catalinas. Tape one, side two.

> Lin, I think it was from ... from Rathmines that you went up to Cairns flying as a second pilot with both the Laverton 20 Squadrons. What were your main duties during this time?

I had to serve as second pilot to whatever skipper they liked to give me. I wasn't allotted any particular skipper for any length of time. I seemed to be ... they switched me around to various skippers including sergeant pilots who were damn good pilots. And at times I'd do a bit of navigational checking and so forth.

> Two things: was it ever ... or first, I know generally crews tended to be fairly stable and had very close bonds. As a kind of supernumerary pilot, as you were then, did that ever create difficulties that you weren't part of a regular team?

No. No, I seemed to get along well with everybody. I knew most of the boys very well you see. I'd been twelve months at Rathmines and they'd all been through there at various times. We knew each other pretty well. So that I was more or less fitting in as supernumerary very often in the same way that if somebody is sick somebody's got to take in so I was a good bloke to fill in all the odd holes.

> Right. The other thing I was just going to ask you was something to do with rank. You I think at this stage was squadron leader.

Mmm.

> You said a moment ago that you would often be flying with sergeant pilots.

That's right.

> Was there ever any conflict there or did rank almost not matter ...?

No, rank didn't mean a damn thing. I mean, although we had to live in different messes, when it came to do anywhere the sergeant pilots and the others were all together. There was no mucking about. Oh no, the sergeant pilot was a skipper, I wasn't.

> What were the squadron's main roles during that time? What were you involved in doing?

From Cairns they were doing mainly bombing of the various New Guinea bases and the islands. Also convoy work, patrolling areas around ... the submarine areas. They sank a few submarines up there. They carried sub depth charges. As a matter of fact, on our bombing runs we normally carried one depth charge and the bombs, just in case we saw a sub.

> And do you remember the particular localities, for example, for some of the bombing mission you would have gone on then?

Kavieng - what's the northern New Guinea - there was several ...

Lae?

What's that?

Lae?

Lae? No, not Lae. I don't think I ever did Lae. What's that northern coastal New Guinea place? Anyway, but Kavieng and various islands. Wherever there was a naval base or anything to hit. At one stage ... I don't think we ever did Milne Bay. We were working out of there for a while and then we got kicked out.

Some of those flights obviously were quite, you know, of quite some distance. How much tension was there during those flights in terms of potential attack by Japanese aircraft and also how much before you reached ...?

Not a great deal till you got near the target area. We usually had a pretty quiet run all the way up and all the way home actually. It was mainly when you got into the target area that you had any worry and I don't think it was anywhere near as bad as the German-European area where they knew they were going to cop it every night regardless. We didn't, that was the beauty of it was that one night they might throw everything but the kitchen sink at us and the next night we wouldn't see a thing. Just go in and do our job and come out, not see or hear a thing. That helped a hell of a lot.

(5.00) Mmm. Yes, sure. Just taking the edge off that ... the tension. When were you first yourself actually involved in ... oh well, being in a plane being serious shot at, Lin?

I'd say the only time we had any real, I'd say Kavieng one night they caught me in the searchlights and I ... I was trying to get out of these bloody searchlights and I think that was the first night they got the radar on and they wouldn't let me go. And I remember at one stage there were searchlights everywhere, everywhere I turned, and then I found one up in the sky above me and then I woke up, I was upside down. So I just kept the roll going and came out the other side. But that time they were pretty ... that one and the only other real time was with a torpedo run and of course I was down right on the bottom and they were really giving me a going there.

Sure. Perhaps we'll come back to talk about that later. Do you have any other particularly strong recollections of the period with 11 and 20 Squadron?

No. The ... only the ... I was flying with Keith Bolitho one night, the CO of 11 and the radar when out and that was one of the nights I had it to pull to bits and repair it and put it back. And we got it back just in time to find the mountain right in front of us. So we missed out that night. That was good.

What was ... Was weather a very significant hazard on those flights, or not?

Very much, very much so. Yes. The poor old Cats were flying blind most of the time and when you're working in some of those areas where the mountains come up all round you your

navigation's got to be pretty bloody good. Now when you've got your radar working it's a piece of cake, it's no problem at all. It's just like seeing. But when the radar doesn't work you're in trouble. So you're navigation's got to be pretty spot on. Mmm. Because we couldn't climb ... in any case we couldn't climb above the mountains.

> Mmm. Sure. One thing I've never quite understood actually is where you've got radar in a plane. Is that picking out the entire landforms below you or only the land above a certain height?

Oh no. It'll pick up anything in front of you. It won't give you the altitude of it, it will just tell whether it's land or something solid.

> In front of you in terms of on your horizontal.

Well, if you're ... In the early stages we had the old T-bar radio which was just two businesses sticking out both sides and that gave you the distance ... you'd get a distance out there and you'd get a distance out there. So if you wanted to know what was in front of you you had to turn the aircraft until you got that one pointing that way. And so you could swing the aircraft around and see what was around you. But in about 1944 we got the plan radar and that showed the whole area. That was good. You just ... like map reading.

> Right. But when you say the whole area do you mean the whole area of land at your actual elevation?

No, it doesn't matter what the elevation is. All it shows is a plan, like a map underneath you.

> Right.

And you've got no idea the height of it, no.

> But then you could obviously correlate that with maps ...

That's right.

> ... to get the actual height.

Compared that and the map and we knew where we were. Well, most of the time we didn't know where we were. All we wanted to do was to check that we were going along. See, you could DR, what we call direct navigation, you calculated where - with your air speed and the wind - you could work where you should be. But, of course, if you didn't know the wind that put you out. But normally speaking in no wind you could DR navigate your way anywhere, no problems.

> Right. Could I just clarify something. I think it was probably a slip of the tongue then but just to get the record straight, you said a moment ago, if I heard correctly, that most of the time you didn't know where you were. Did you mean to say, 'Most of the time you did ...

Oh, we did know where we were. Sorry, no, we did know where we were. Oh, we made bloody sure we knew where we were.

> The issue of winds is an interesting one. Perhaps I might just ask you, being a navigator, it certainly always interested me: How complicated was it when you were in the air, when you didn't have meteorological briefings and so on from places scattered over the areas as you often did in Britain where you were just flying out into the unknown in a sense, how difficult was it to calculate those winds and therefore to get your drift correctly?

Ah, well, with us it was much easier over the sea particularly because we didn't fly high. We normally flew about 1,000 feet. And we had flame floats we used to drop into the sea and we always knew our drift and that was all we wanted to know. It was just all you needed.

(10.00)I see. And by dropping the flame floats in ....

We used to have a polaris to lane on as we came ... as we flew along the navigator would keep that flame float in sight and then from his little gizzy [sic] he'd read what the angle of drift was and so he'd just use that to correct his heading. But he had to do that quite often because the wind's likely to change any time. And particularly if we ran into a storm we knew damn well the wind's going to change.

> Mmm. That's most interesting. Going ... let's move on a little bit through the story, Lin. I know it was from there that you came back to Rathmines - this is now in 1943 - and you did a skipper's course. What's your recollection of that?

Pretty prosaic actually. It was just more flying in the old Cat and ....

> Were they knew skills you were learning or merely brushing up on things you knew anyway?

Just brushing up more or less. Yeap. Flying is flying, it's just more and more and of course you're getting more and more used to your aircraft. But I think, still, once you've got basic skills of flying it's the same with any aircraft - not much difference.

> Was there ever any - and perhaps was there any, need for any training in terms of the - I don't know, I guess you might generally say - the management skills of being a skipper? Of controlling a group of men?

Yes. You've got to know ... see, normally speaking the pilot doesn't always learn as much about the engineering side as I did because I was an engineer myself. And as a matter of fact when I went into the air force they tried to make me an engineer and I said, 'No, I want to be a pilot'. No, you've got to understand your motors of course, you've got to understand the settings. Although you've got engineers there to do all the work for you, the Catalina, all you've got is your throttles and your stick and a row of buttons and anything you want done you press a button and somebody does it for you. You're just a glorified floor walker in a Catalina; your crew do most of your work for you. But ....

In terms of, for example, what?

Setting the ... all the engine controls are done by the engineer, not by the pilot. I can alter the throttle and the pitch and I can operate the control here. The rest is done by the crew.

And I assume you can alter the trim of the plane and the ...?

Oh yes, naturally, you've got to do the flying controls. But the ... whereas in all the other aircraft you've got to operate all your engine controls, you've got to watch your temperatures, you've got to watch you're oil pressures and all the various things. None of that was done on a Cat; that was all done for you.

Mmm. In a sense that must have made being a Catalina pilot ....

A piece of cake.

You had the pleasure of flying without some of the technical hitches.

Mmm. That's right. It was a glorious plane to fly really: I loved it.

Why were Catalinas designed in that way where I think other large planes, for example, bombers - say the Lancaster - I don't think was ....

No.

Why is that?

I think probably because of the fact that they were such long range aircraft, they stayed in the air for so long, that the pilot had to be relieved as much as possible.

Oh right.

Because after twenty-odd hours you're pretty damn tired, mmm, even though you've keyed up. Coming home about three o'clock in the morning is the worst time. You tend to go off to sleep then.

That's interesting. I hadn't thought of that. Of course that would be a really significant thing in decreasing pilot fatigue.

That's right.

Let's talk about that. That was obviously a very significant issue. Some of these were very, very long flights. How did pilots and also the other members of their crews cope with that level of both fatigue and tedium?

They seemed to be perfectly okay. As far as I was concerned I rarely went back on the bunk. There were four bunks there and the idea was that one pilot can have a sleep every now and then. But the only time I think I ever went back was on those extra long jobs when we were

up to about seventy-two hours without real sleep. But I rarely went back to the bunk and the other chaps, the same. And their job was probably as tedious, well it would be more tedious for radar, I'd hate sitting there just watching a radar or sitting and watching a radio set which never worked ... oh, certain signals would be coming but we never sent them out. We were on radio silence you see. The only time we ever sent them out was in an emergency and I never had an emergency so I never sent a signal.

Mmm. That's most interesting. The ... and how did you cope with things like eating and going to the toilet during those long periods?

Oh well, quite normal. We had a little funnel with a tube went out through the side of the aircraft, that was for one opportunity. The other one, if you wanted to do number two, you opened the hatched and precariously hung on both sides and did it through the hatch. Mmm. Food, we had a good galley. We cooked good food. We had number ....

(15.00) And one of the ...?

The second engineer was the cook. Anybody would take a hand at it but the second engineer and the first gunner were the two best cooks so we made them the cooks and they cooked damn good food. And there was cup of coffee or tea whenever you felt like it. That was all right.

And you'd eat sitting in your seat?

Oh yes. They'd bring it up to you and you'd just sit there and eat it away and a cup of coffee now and then. And when things were really tough old Geoff would always turn up with his glass of water. (Laughs).

Just a moment. There's something I meant to ask was did you generally, when you were on squadrons, fly one plane or did people move around between planes?

No, most of us had our own planes. As far as possible it's a bit like fleet operation. I had a fleet of trucks at one stage and I never changed drivers. I gave the driver, or drivers a truck and that was their responsibility; nobody touched it.

And the idea being that increased the level of care and responsibility?

Mmm.

Did individual planes vary much in their kind of idiosyncrasies or not?

No. Very much the same. No, you could hop into another plane and you wouldn't notice the difference really.

Right. Well, let's move on a little bit. I know after you came down back down south here to do your skipper's course at Rathmines you were posted to 43

> Squadron at Kurumba in the Gulf of Carpentaria. What were the main roles of the squadron when you went up there?

Mainly mining, mine laying and intruder work. From there I did the Soela job where we had to go out over the sea and I remember the commando that we'd dropped ashore eventually radioed home to say that the Catalina had just disappeared over the horizon still not airborne. (Laughs).

> Let's look at the mine laying first perhaps. Where were you going generally, how far were you flying and how effective was your work do you think?

Ah, it was very, very effective. We had good feedback from our coastwatchers and commandoes who we dropped into these areas and we found that a Catalina only had to fly into a harbour and it would be immediately closed until they'd swept the harbour. But they eventually devised so many bits of odds and sods into these mines that if we found that the Japs were sweeping the harbour three times, we'd set it so that could be triggered three times before it would go off. Then on the fourth time it would go off. And so we kept moving it up and up and up and so we kept the poor buggers guessing. And so eventually we found this so effective that wherever possible if we were coming anywhere near another harbour on the way home we'd drop in and just do a circuit of the harbour and go home. Then they'd sweep that harbour too.

> This of course is flying at night?

Oh all at night. No, we didn't attempt any of this sort of stuff in daylight, that would have been absolute suicide.

> That business about adjusting the settings on the mines sounds quite interesting. How was that done?

Ah ... it was done with a various trigger arrangement in the mining that if it was ... see some of the mines were set on noise, some were set on magnetic and some on the wave factor of the ship dependent on the shallow harbours. That particular aspect would trigger and then they worked out another gadget in there which allows them that could trigger and still be held and that would trigger one, two, three, up to ten times. And so nine ships could pass over, the tenth one we'd get. So the poor old Japs didn't know when the hell they'd swept the harbour and when they hadn't.

> That does sound very, very effective. Tell us about coming in on the final run to lay mines. How were you ... I'd imagine the positioning of them was ...?

Critical. Had to be ...

> Precise. You are actually on specific runs as I understand it. And tell us about that and also the height you came in and the whole run into letting them go and precisely where they should be.

Mmm. Well we used to ... we had to pick a navigational spot in the harbour as close as possible to where we had to drop it. So there was that cut down on the margin of error we could make. So we'd pick a spot, come in, we could still see, even in a pitch black - when I say pitch black night, a night's never pitch black - you can always see something. Particularly ... we'd take off from home and anybody showed a glimmer of light any time they'd get shot. And so by the time we got up to the target we were really night adjusted and we could see quite well. Particularly from above looking down you can see ... you can pick out navigational features and you can pick up ships and you can do all sorts of things.

(25.00) Just to pause there for a moment. Did you fly on moonlit nights, or not?

No, no. We kept dark. We didn't want moonlight. They could see us.

Right.

So we worked entirely in the dark and we flew in at 100 feet and 100 knots and dropped the ... that was just the right height ... right speed and height for those mines. Mmm. So that using the data - the navy worked out all the data for us we just followed their instructions.

How effective was the briefing do you think?

Very good. Very good. We had the ... well, they just told us what they wanted us to do, gave us the datum points and the navy boys worked out all the rest of the figures. We were given a set of figures and we just followed them.

Right. And I think, generally, on these mining operations you didn't have particularly significant opposition put up?

No. Very little opposition at all. On one occasion poor old Geoff Havyatt got caught. He went in just ahead of me on this particular night and we went in at quarter hour intervals because we didn't want two or three of us flying round the same harbour at the same time. And he came out from, I think it was Balikpapan that night, and he broke radio silence and radioed that he'd ... he could see five streams of petrol running out. Somebody I think ordinary rifles had shot at him as he went over. He didn't know they'd shot at him, he didn't see a thing. But when he came out there was five streams of petrol running out and he didn't get home. Just the luck of the game.

Were they rescued or was that it? One of the other things that I do know you were involved in doing up there was working with people going behind the enemy lines. How many of those operations were you involved in?

I think all told, four. Four.

And were these commandoes going in to gather reconnaissance information or what?

In some cases they were going in - they were all doing reconnaissance - but sometimes they were going in with specific jobs too to be done. They didn't tell us. We just knew that we had to drop them at a certain spot.

> Tell us about those flights. I'd imagine there must have been some tension I mean with the individuals being dropped off at the very least?

Oh yes. Well, generally speaking, you see, very seldom were we without somebody up there in the job. Very often we were putting somebody in to relieve somebody and bringing another fellow out if we could get him. And so we had radio contact and they were able to tell us that certain areas would be reasonably safe at a certain time. And so we'd try and make our drops there where the enemy weren't about. On one occasion in Borneo one river we landed at night and at night of course we had our radar and our radio altimeters, we knew exactly how high we were regardless of the barometric pressure, we didn't worry about that ordinary altimeter. And we swept this area and it looked clear but there was one bloody log just below the surface and it ripped a great gash in the bottom of the kite. So we jammed her up on the beach and it took us two days to repair it but nobody came near; lucky as hell.

> Mmm. That's remarkable. Tell us a bit more about that. You came in and tore the bottom out of the hull.

Mmm.

> How long would the plane have floated with the kind of hole you'd got?

Few minutes ... few minutes, a few seconds really. We just hit her full throttle you see. It was in the bow and when you are in that position, dropping off the step, if you hit your throttle hard she immediately pulls her nose down ... the stern down and the nose up and straight onto the bank. And we were lucky because of the tide was about three quarter I think and when the tide came up it was covering the back half of the kite. She was sitting up like this on the beach.

> So how did you repair the hole and then how did you get the plane back into the water?

Once the tide came up she'd float you see. At high tide only the top half of the kite was out and the back was under. When we finally got her repaired, naturally, as she floated up she was level enough to come straight off, no problem at all. So we were just lucky as hell that we hit it at the right state of tide.

> And how did you repair the hull?

You see our two gunners were fitters 2A, so Cats are always designed to look after themselves under almost any circumstances. So our fitters 2A just patched the hole. We had all the gear - rivets and plugs and bungs and all sort of things. We carried them all the time in case of things like this.

> Right. I see. So that was part of a Cat's equipment.

Quite a normal thing. Mmm.

(25.00) You were saying before that often when you dropped these people off there wouldn't necessarily be the person, you know, other people to pick up or you didn't make rendezvous, how ...?

What we ... I don't know what the total number were but I know talking to one of the briefers at one stage, I said, 'How many of these poor beggars are we getting out?' and he said, 'Not many'. We didn't know, you see, we'd take a man in, we didn't know whether who ... or somebody else might go and pick him up. So we didn't know who was coming in and going out. But I put in three and only got one out. So ... and when I spoke to this chap he said, 'No, not many of the poor buggers come out'.

Were you ever involved in any air-sea rescue attempts?

No.

Right. Well, just move on a little bit. I know after the period at Kurumba 43 Squadron I think moved to Darwin and you were flying out of Doctor's Gully. I think these again were mostly mine laying operations, were they?

Yes, most of the time. Yes, it was so effective that they pretty well tied us up completely on mine laying. Mmm.

And you were going really quite far afield by this stage I think, even up ... I think you mentioned going to Shanghai.

At one stage, yes. I didn't go from Shanghai from Darwin ... from Darwin. That was done from Cairns. I was the second pilot on that business. But we used to operate Borneo, Halmaheras, I think Singapore was about the farthest trip we used to do. Mmm.

And when you ... sorry, I'm just looking at the tape. When you did go up to Shanghai that time from Cairns were you refuelling on route or not?

Yeah. Refuelled from American submarines.

How did you ... how was that coordinated?

Oh, they come to the surface and float a buoy, they have a buoy with a floating fuel line on it and they float it well behind them so that we can come up and run onto it and overrun as we often do without running into the submarine. So we were well aware from the submarine on this long buoy. That's the normal method. The same method we used when we're refuelling from the tenders. They float this big buoy behind them otherwise if we run into 'em. See the Cat's got no reverse and no brakes.

Sure. Were these submarines specifically set up to do this work or was it just part of their duties?

Ah, well, they'd probably ... they'd have to be set up for it, yes. Whether they've got normal tanks, I'm not too sure whether they had tanks capable of doing this sort of work or whether they were modified particularly for this particular job, I don't know. I think it's the only time that the Australian Cats ever used them anyway.

> Just from the point of view of an outsider it seems the idea of finding a submarine out in the middle of an ocean.

Oh, it usually wasn't in the middle of an ocean. It was in some area. See, although the Japs were up in that area a lot it was a very big area and there's always spots where they were pretty thin and so we'd pick those spots and we didn't have very long. We'd make a time, they'd pop up, we'd refuel and he'd drop and we'd go for our lives. So we weren't there very long.

> How long would the whole refuelling operation take?

Probably do it in half an hour. Mmm. There must have been pretty powerful pumps on board I think.

> Yes. I'd imagine a few hearts pumping well. Obviously if you were caught at that time nobody ....

We'd be finished.

> You'd be goners. An interesting aspect of the Catalina story is the business of torpedoes. I understand right from the very start quite some opposition to it. Why was that?

Well, as far as I was concerned there was no opposition but just the same we considered it was a pretty risky thing for the Cats. You've got to come in right on to the ship, 100 feet. Sometimes some of the ships we had you'd damn near have to pull up to go over the masts. But ... and also once you are committed to a torpedo run you can't pull away. If you do, you're a sitting duck. You see, a Catalina turning away like that is a great big area of wingspan and they can hit you easily. So you go straight over the top of them so naturally they devised the method, they didn't wait to try and fire at us too soon, they just put a barrage in front and we'd run into it. And so, sure, we could get our torpedo away but we couldn't get away.

> Just a moment. I need to turn the tape.

END OF TAPE ONE - SIDE B

START OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A

> This is Edward Stokes with Lin Hurt, Catalinas. Tape two, side one, side three of the whole lot.

Right. So the whole ... the difficulty was that basically you're being put in a situation where you are a sitting target?

Yes, pretty well. I don't think anybody realised that it was quite as bad as it was. We didn't expect it to be that bad because we'd got away with so much in the past that we thought we'd get away with anything but it proved to be otherwise.

Yes. Well I do know about that mission. Just perhaps before we go on to talk about that could you tell us a little ... how far was the conversion to using torpedoes, how much training went into the actual dropping of them?

Not a lot. There was quite a lot done but not a lot per skipper because, frankly, there wasn't a great deal of training necessary. All you had do was come in straight and level at say 100 or 110 feet at a certain gauge which we'd set on our aiming gear, we'd just drop it. That's all there is to it. Eventually we did a bit ... I did sufficient training to be able to judge the distance to send it. If you're too close of course it's no good because the torpedo has to drop into the water and the nose wheel has to spin off before it's armed and unless it can run far enough it ... if you drop it right in front of a ship it will hit the ship all right but it won't go off. So it's got to be a certain distance back and ... but if it's too far back it'll run out of steam before it gets there. So ....

Roughly how far from the ship would you be dropping a torpedo?

I'd say we'd be about 1,000 feet.

About a third of a ... a quarter of a mile. Right well let's go on to the story of this mission because obviously this was a critical episode. I think this was somewhere in the Indonesian archipelago. Three Cats were sent off, including yourself, what was your target?

We don't know. It was a ship. They didn't tell us what the ship was. It was a ship of a certain size.

Oh, it wasn't attacking a convoy?

Oh no, no. It was a ship holed up in a harbour and Bima harbour has got mountains going up thousands of feet all round it except for one little spot on the northern side. So we had to go up to ... fly over the northern side. We went up through the straits and we flew from the time we got within radar distance over the archipelago we flew at 100 feet all the way, just wave hopping and occasionally we had a few little islands, we had to climb up over them and down again. The idea was to keep away from the radar. And we came down through the harbour entrance into the harbour and Dennis George, the navy boy, Lieutenant Commander George, had worked out that the ship of that size could only be in one place in Bima harbour because of its size and the depth of the water. It had to be, because of the tide and the wind, the ship would be in a certain position if we came off this little island, five seconds later we dropped our torpedo, we hit the ship. So I said, 'Well, if we're going to do this, we're going to fire blind, I'm going to put two torpedoes on', the other only carried one because we were overloaded ... slightly overloaded with one torpedo and two and a half thousand pounds more

but the Cat took all of Darling Harbour to get off but she got off. And then I chickened out when we got there, I wouldn't fire the torpedo, I couldn't see the ship. If I'd have done so, I'd have hit it and I would have got away scot-free so I deserved all I bloody well got.

I don't quite understand that, Lin. When you came over ...?

I came over this island at the five second interval, I couldn't see the ship, and I wouldn't fire the torpedo. And as I came a bit farther on it came out of the murk, I could see it and it was exactly where Dennis said it was going to be. And if I'd fired the torpedo when I had it would have ... I could have got away because the ship will never fire at you until it can see you because they never know whether you can see them. But once they fire at you, of course, there's your target.

(5.00) So then I had to go ... I came round again and this time, of course, they were ready and they were firing all the way round and knocking bits off the aircraft and as she was in the right position to fire the second time a shell exploded under the port wing and blew me right off course so I had to go round a third time. And this time I got the torpedo away but just at that time they hit me. So then Ben took over and got the hell out of it. He went back onto the target and fired the second torpedo. He got his DFC for that and good luck to him. But he'd have been too close then. He wouldn't have ....

Right. Were you ... going around three times was obviously highly dangerous yourself. Was that recognised at all?

Oh yes, they gave me a DFC. Mmm.

So there were two DFCs for your flying out of that operation. It maybe difficult to talk about but they are just a couple of things I'd like to ask you because in a way this episode seems to have encapsulate, well, I suppose what it was all about in the end. As you, say, after this first run through that was aborted and you were going around for the second time and then the third time and knowing that obviously, you know, the whole thing is going to be alive when you get back, what was going through your head, can you remember?

Yeap. I've got to get it right this time.

Was there fear?

No. Not at all afraid. You're too busy to be afraid. Can't afford to be.

Right. And as you came in I know the plane was hit, you yourself were hit badly and I think the plane and you were very lucky. Is that right?

Oh extremely lucky. See ... see, on that night that poor old Geoff Havyatt got ... went west all he had was five little holes in his plane. We had bits flying off here, there and everywhere, holes everywhere, the kite was in a mess and yet they didn't hit one vital part and we got away with it. So we were just as lucky as hell.

> And I understand the two other planes ... two other planes involved in the operation themselves ....

They came over high above the ... it was timed that just as I came in they were to come across on the top as if they were on a bombing run. So we wanted the radar and gunners attention to be on them, not on me, you see. That was the idea; they were decoys.

> I think you were saying they later were shot down?

No, they came home.

> Oh sorry. Sorry, I got my facts muddled there. I thought you ....

No, they were purely decoys and they got away quite happily. No worry. Mmm.

> Right. Well falling back I think you were saying that your engines were right and you had a particularly good second officer and those two factors probably saved you. What was it like flying back yourself, you'd been quite badly wounded?

I was pretty non compos actually. It didn't worry me at all. No, the kite was flying so the engineer reported we had plenty of fuel and everything was going all right and everything was working so there was nothing to worry about.

> Did you have much in the way of first aid facilities in the planes and so people could dress you and so on?

Yes, they had quite good gear. The main trouble was that the one piece of shrapnel had cut the jugular vein and it was luckily burnt into place and stayed there. But they tried to bind that up but they couldn't. By the time they stopped the flow of blood completely, instead of spurting out as a jugular usually does it only pulse out slowly. And they tried to bind that up but of course they were choking me so they stopped that and just let it bleed, that's all they could do. Mmm. But it was a very slow bleed and I put myself into a sort of a coma and went almost out and that slowed the blood again too. So we got back all right. Mmm.

> Right. When you got back I think you were immediately taken off to an army hospital. You were too ill to be taken ....

Oh yes. Well, there was practically no ... I had so little blood left. I was lying up to here in my own blood in the bunk. So the old Doc looked at me and said, 'No, you'll never make the eighty miles down to our hospital', so straight up to the army hospital and refuelled me.

> How long did it take you to recuperate?

About four or five months, mmm.

> And I understand that was the end of the ...

That was the end of my operational flying, yes.

And also of torpedoing I think?

Oh it was the end of torpedoing, yes, that's right. They decided that wasn't worth it.

(10.00) How many other planes had been either severely damaged or lost?

Two others, mmm.

And ...

One was the CO of 20 Squadron.

Out of how many missions?

Three; three missions.

That's where I got the three. That's where I was confused before. I see, they'd been three missions with single ...

And each single [inaudible], yes.

And out of those three missions ....

In each case they gave it to the CO and the CO took it himself. Mmm.

Right and you were the only one to come back alive. Right. Do you have any other particularly strong recollections, Lin, of that period when you were the - and I'd meant to say before that at this time you were now the acting CO of 43 Squadron - do you have any other particularly strong memories of that period?

Oh no. I enjoyed being a CO. It ... we had a hell of a good team there, both the ground crew and the air crew all operated very well together. We had no complaints from anyone. I used to go around to the messes myself and just see what they felt. And no, everybody was happy. We had a particularly good catering officer up there. He'd been a chef at Menzies and he had a good way with the Yanks. At one stage he found that they were ... he was talking to the ... the Yanks had just moved in at that stage and they were flying beef out, great sides of beef, and the cooks were kicking up a fuss because they had to cut it up. The Yanks loved their food chopped up into stews and God knows what. So he made a deal: he gave us our bully beef ... or not our bully beef but our cut up meat and we got their fresh meat. They were happy: we were happy. And the whole crew got the same thing. It didn't matter what mess you were in, the food was the same.

And what were ... I mean, Darwin then obviously was ... well, had been bombed but also was a very small place. What was life up there like? Did men get time to unwind a bit? Was there any ....

There was no night life of any sort of course, no. There was nothing at all in the township. There was the hospital of course with some very nice nurses and very few other women around the place at all. As far as I'm concerned there was no night life at all but we didn't want it, we were too bloody busy. We were flying. We'd fly twenty hours, have a day off, and then fly another twenty hours.

> I was going to ask you about how much time you did have between these long flights. That was quite routine was it?

Well ...

> Day-on day-off?

At times. It depends on how things were going. You see when the weather was good, we'd get the break on the moon when we didn't fly. We'd stay off: we'd have our break then. But when the weather was suitable and it was dark nights we flew, flew, flew, so as to get them all in. Then we'd get a break when the moon came. Mmm.

> Right. Well going on a little bit. I know after that, after you'd recovered from your wounds and so on you ... there had been this issue when the chief of air staff had visited your squadron just before the torpedo attack and I think you'd made various complaints to him about materials.

Materials, yes. So we had a word particularly with Bill Down, the Chief of Operations, and while our old CO CAS was driving the coach boat across the harbour I got stuck into Bill Garing in the back and so he said, 'Oh well, squadron leader, we'll see what we can do'. So when I got out of hospital and went home to Tassie for a bit of a break. I thought for the first time in my life I'm going to have a bit of a bludge but I didn't get it. I got a signal to report to Air Board. When I got there they said, 'Remember what you told me in Darwin, squadron leader?', I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'There's your desk, you fix it'. That was my job for the rest of the war.

> Right. And during that time I think you were saying ... it just seems to say something about the way the air force bureaucracy worked. You were anxiously trying to get past the medical board but I think with no success.

No. No. They kept saying that I wasn't yet ready to go back onto operational status. But the work was so interesting I wasn't pushing terribly hard, and I was getting plenty of flying. I could fly as much as I want. There were planes out at Essendon and I'd go out and pick up whatever plane I liked.

> And I was going to ask you about that. Was that flying, was that ... when you say the medical board wouldn't give the okay was that for operational flying only or for flying generally?

Flying generally.

> So all this other flying was ...?

I was not supposed to fly.

How common was that kind of practice? People ....

The same with everybody. The medical board didn't kick up a fuss or they probably didn't ... they didn't know I was flying no doubt because I didn't tell them and nobody else would bother and nobody else knew that I was supposed to be US. So I just went out and asked for a plane and they gave it to me. After all, I rang up from Air Board and tell them I want the plane and that's all there was to it. I needed a plane for my job so that was all right. So when the Board finally gave me it was purely a formality really except that it meant then that I could have been posted to an operational squadron if they'd wanted to. They couldn't post me until I was officially fit.

(15.00) Right. Well I know as things wound down at the end of the war you went up to Saigon, I might ask you about that in a moment. Just looking back though at when peace was declared. It had been, you know, many years and good and bad experiences I suppose, a pretty narrow escape for you, how did you look back on it all?

A great exercise. It was a wonderful experience and I wouldn't have missed it for the world, mmm. But I wouldn't go again.

No regrets?

No regrets, no. No, it's an experience that not many people get a chance to have and I enjoyed it but I don't like war. Mmm.

I can understand. Just tell us briefly about Saigon, I know you weren't there for very long, but I think this was to do with prisoners of war.

Yes. The idea was to use the Catalinas to fly as many as possible of the prisoners, the very serious prisoners of war out back to Australia as quickly as possible. So one of the senior officers from Air Board was going up and I was going along as the advisor and we flew up to Saigon and made the arrangements for it. And then we cleared out, came back.

Right. And then after that I think you ... there was some period at Rathmines and it was from then that you went ....

I stayed on for a while while they were just sorting things out after the end of the war. And when we finished, cleaned up all that work, I asked them to post me to Rathmines awaiting my discharge which I did. Good place to finalise my service.

Looking back on it all, Lin, do you have any other recollections that you think are significant or not?

No, not really. It was one of the things that I liked doing: I liked to fly and I liked to study and it was the first chance I've ever got to do that and be paid for it.

> Sure. Just a moment. Yes, there was just one little area that I thought I might ask you about that perhaps we haven't covered. How much equipment did Catalinas carry to - not to repair them, we've talked about that - but to survive ditchings in the sea and that sort of thing and if you did happen to ditch in the sea, really what chances did people have?

Oh well we had a rubber dinghy which would carry the crew and we had the ... a little radio we could take with us, a radar beacon type thing so they could home in on us. That's about all we had really as far as survival. Of course we had food on board, we always had plenty of food and plenty of water so we could survive quite a long time providing we got out of the kite in one piece. If she crashed in of course, well, you can't salvage very much. But generally speaking you can put a Cat down in almost any weather. You can't always get them up but you can get them down.

> Yes. Right. The issue of the Japanese is quite an interesting one - you were saying before I think something about being a very different situation if people were taken prisoner by the Japanese navy as against the Japanese army. Could you tell me about that?

Well, we had one occasion, that was on the second torpedo run, Pally Carr, Lieutenant Commander Carr was the mines and torpedo expert with 20 Squadron. He went along with the CO, Gordon Stilling, and he was watching the torpedo run. To watch the torpedo run he was leaning out the blister. As the kite crashed in he was thrown clear and wasn't hurt. And he was picked up by the navy and he said - by the way, that the navigator had tried to get out through the hatch and had chopped his legs off - and he said the Japs couldn't have done more for him but the poor beggar died. But he said they treated him very well. He came back after the war with nothing but praise for them. But he was picked up by the navy, not the army.

> And when you said this other unfortunate fellow had chopped his legs off, do you mean he had to do that to get out?

Oh no. As he got that far out of it the aircraft hit the deck and the whole front just crumpled onto him and chopped his legs off and somehow or another he got out of that and still alive for a reasonable time but they couldn't save him. He'd lost too much blood.

> Were people very conscious of the atrocities that certainly were carried out by the Japanese in terms of being fearful of coming down and being taken prisoner?

We heard a lot about it. We'd heard they were real buggers and we were told that things would be very bad and in some cases I believe they were, there's no doubt about that. It's been clarified since. But I had no experience of it of course and this is the only occasion I know through Pally Carr because I met Pally after the war and he told me all about it. He said no, they treated him quite well. It wasn't the Hilton but he said it was quite reasonable and he put that down to the fact that he was taken by navy. Most of the senior navy officers are British trained anyway ... were, and they've got the old school tie idea I think which is, thank God for that.

That's most interesting. Just one final thing that I just say to anybody, Lin, is there anything that you feel hasn't been said that you want to say or should be said?

I don't think so. It covers it pretty well I think. Just a normal operation. Mmm.

Well okay. On behalf of the War Memorial, thank you.

Okay, fine, good.

END OF TAPE TWO - SIDE A.

END OF INTERVIEW.