TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE A.

Identification: This is tape one, side one of an interview recorded on 9th November, 1989, with Allan Lancaster, about Catalinas.

Allan Lancaster, where and when were your born, and what were the circumstances of your family?

I was born in Richmond, Victoria, in 1916. And my father was a cycle mechanic, who built pushbikes, and had a shop of his own in Richmond. Several shops as a matter of fact over a period of time. But at the height of the Depression he had to leave that, and used to build casually then for members of the trade, cycle retailers in the city.

Were they hard times, as such?

Very much so. There was very little money around, and the ....

Well what was the effect of that in terms of the way you ate, and your lifestyle? Do you ever remember being hungry, or was it very basic fare, or ...?

We were never hungry. My mother was a remarkable person for stretching whatever she had, and I would never remember ever going hungry. We might have had the same thing for two or three meals almost, but, no, we lived reasonable well in that direction. Always lived behind a shop, which was the practice when we had a pushbike shop, but even later on, my father was building at home. We had a shopfront we lived behind, still behind a shop, but he worked in the front area, building the frames, et cetera. And occasionally he had a few pushbikes and accessories to sell.

You had a sister, I gather. Did you feel poor at the time as children?

No, I don't think so, I think we accepted it, and I've since thought that we were a lot better off than some are now. Or certainly a lot better off in the line of a consistent, or a regulated household.

What about your father, was he interested in politics, had he been touched at all by the Depression in those sort of terms?

No, not to any extent. He was a supporter of pushbike racing, he was a member of the League of Victorian Wheelmen, the officiating body in the professional side of pushbikes, and was handicapper for a Richmond cycling club, and filled in his time at home, because his workshop was at home. And didn't have much in the way of interests of anything else. He was a little bit interested in trotting, because he built trotting sulkies as well as pushbikes on odd occasions.

Had he been a serviceman in the first world war?

No, his three brothers were servicemen, and my two uncles at - on my mother's side - they were also servicemen.

Was there a sense of the impact of the first world war still being felt in Australia? Was it a matter that was, say, discussed at school, or there was a feeling that the country had been held back at all, because of the loss of its young men?

I don't know that it was a deep feeling amongst the children, or the - my age group. Except that we did know most of the occasions that were either celebrated, or remembered. I don't think that we took a great deal of interest in politics.

Well what did the term 'ANZACS' then mean?

Well we knew full well what that was and how it was formed, and I would, I'd say that we, having service people in the family on both sides, we certainly appreciated their efforts, and ....

(5.00) Did you have Monday morning assemblies at school, salute the flag, swear allegiance to the Queen [sic], those sort of things?

Yes, that went on, certainly at state schools, which impressed us, because we were much closer at - in those years to '14-'18. As we got on to the higher technical schools and that, we still had our assemblies, but I don't think we - well we didn't have a flag-raising ceremony, because we didn't have a, - an area at the Richmond Technical School to have this sort of thing.

So, if from state you went to technical school, where did you see yourself going, what did you want to do with your life?

Well I was always interested in the mechanical side of things. I did well enough in geometrical drawing as well, and found myself doing extra drawing classes, in geometry, and in building. Although I wasn't that keen on the woodwork side of it, I had taken that up, because at the Richmond Tech at the time there was no equipment for the mechanical - metal side of training.

In fact it's now a highly-thought-of automotive training college, school, and that started off with the - when we separated in the school itself, as people who would work in wood, and others who would work in metal. The metalworkers found themselves employed working on the odd motorcars that belonged to the - one belonged to the principal of the school, and another one was another arts teacher who had a good knowledge of art, but very little mechanical. And from that particular instance Richmond went on, and over a period of years became a very highly respected motor mechanics' school.

It sounds like in the tradition then of headmasters having very well-running cars?

Yes, that was so. And then we - well not me, but the school -then had various vehicles in various stages of repair presented to them from local bodies. And they went on to work on these things, until they then got their lathes, and grinders, and various other machinery, to continue on as their engineering facilities were upgraded.

At that time of your life, had you by then developed any interest in aviation?

I was always interested in aviation, right from the very first. Some of my first books were aviation books, and for my sixteenth birthday was a copy of Richthofen's *The Red Baron,* and I read it through and through, and knew how many victories, and I suppose almost every boy of from fourteen to, say, sixteen, would have liked to have joined the air force, and would have liked to have been a pilot, and possibly would have liked to have been a fighter pilot.

I found that when I did finally get to a job, which - it wasn't the sort of job that I really wanted, but it was a case of you stayed at school until you could get a job. And some of the very good students accepted jobs such as brass polishers in foundries, worked at all kinds of jobs, because jobs were that hard to get that you took the - any job you could get hold of, you didn't worry too much about even the future.

Were there air force cadets in those days?

Yes, there were. An air force cadet intake was about every twelve months I think, but out of something like 5000 or 6000 people they would get five or six recruits. They were that particular, and there were that high an educational standard required that, if you came from a technical school, you had almost no chance.

Did you actually apply in fact?

No. I could see - well I thought it would be futile. Although there was one of our - a student who was a year ahead of me, and his brother was in the same year as I was. He left school to go to Bryant & May's, the big match factory in Richmond, as an apprentice turner and fitter, and did twelve months there, and then applied for a cadetship, and got it. And I met him again during the war, he was the CO of 21 Squadron in Singapore when I got there in 1942.

(10.00) Well at the outbreak of war where were you, and what were you doing?

Well I was - by then I was working at a toolmakers' in Carlton, Green Brothers & Miller. Working a lathe mainly.

Were you an apprentice, or ...?

No, I was only able to - in '37, I think it was, or late '37 - there was a government scheme, because of the shortage of apprentices, or the shortage of tradesmen actually in the engineering industry, brought about by the lack of apprentices during the Depression, there was a youth training scheme, which took in people who were then - and by that time were round about nineteen or twenty, but who had a certain amount of mechanical experience, or been employed in jobs that weren't highly skilled, but were still connected with engineering. And they took them in hand, took them to school, on a very small allowance.

In fact I was on twelve and six a week allowance, which had to be accounted for, as in - like a means test, every fortnight. And that had to include the, any other people in your family who were working. That was, included my sister at that time, the wage she got, the wage my father got, and that had to be taken into account before you got your twelve and six a week.

So after eighteen months of that you were considered skilled enough to go out into the workforce on a percentage-style basis, with the employer paying you forty per cent of the going rate, and the government paying the sixty per cent. And then as you progressed through the engineering firm, and still attending night school, and your skills increased, so the government's contribution decreased, and the employer's contribution had to increase, to bring you up to the standard wage.

That's where I was working when the war broke out, and as I'd applied some six months earlier to join the Citizen Air Force, I received a call-up then, the day after war was declared, and - with another application form, asking me whether I was still interested, which I was.

I filled it in that night, took it down the next morning on my way to work, and put it in at the barracks in St Kilda Road. A week later I was down there again doing a medical test, and a trade test in the army workshops. Satisfactorily completing both of these I was then told to report back there on the 11th. And on the 11th I was back there, and down to Laverton on the 18th.

What was the Citizens' Air Force?

Well it was a collection of recruits, if you like, who attended - similar to the Reserve nowadays - where they attended, perhaps, two or three weekends a month. And, every three months or so, they'd do a fortnight training. Mainly - well they were all ground staff, but some of the musterings, of which I was a fitter, were offered air-gunners' courses, and some of the very fortunate ones were offered airmen pilots' courses.

But this was done away with as soon as the Empire Air Scheme came into being, and they took people in as bulk air crew, and then sorted them out afterwards. And the fitters were not considered for any of those musterings, or any of those duties, because it took five years normally to train an apprentice in turning and fitting, where they could train their pilots, or their navigators, or their WAGS much quicker than that.

And for quite - some two, or two and a half perhaps years into the war those things still held. They didn't want to deplete their technical staff when they could get all the air crew really that they wanted, or that they could handle. And some time later - by the time they had learnt, or trained their own technical staff, then they allowed some of the technical musterings to go into air crew.

By trying to join the Citizens' Air Force, did you have some hopes that maybe through that you might get to fly, or was it just to get close to aviation?

Well it was mainly to get close to aviation, and hope that something would happen. The best I could hope for I would - thought at that time was a part-time air gunner, of which they used to allow fitters to fly.

(15.00) And they never took them away anywhere, like overseas, until they were trained as an ordinary air gunner, which was a different training course altogether, that was the Empire Air Scheme Training [sic] course. The insignia that the air gunners in those days wore was a winged bullet, a brass outline of a bullet with wings on it, and you wore it on the sleeve,

between the elbow and the shoulder. And that soon fell into disarray, if you like, when the normal WAGs' badge came in, which was the cloth badge, with the WAG, or just the AG on it.

When you joined up, what were the feelings of your parents, were they concerned, or were they pleased, or ...?

Oh, I think that they realised that it was something that I'd wanted to do for many years. My father took me out to Essendon when I was twelve, and I had the first flip in an aircraft then, in an Avro 504, which was the basic training plane of the '14-'18 war, and they were still being moved around as joy flights in the various states.

So you had a joy flight at that time?

I had a joy flight at that time, and I had one or two other flights later on.

Was it expensive?

I think it was ten shillings, which was fairly expensive in those days.

So - sorry?

It was just a, more or less a take-off, and a circuit, and a bump, and back.

How did you feel, do you remember?

I was very pleased with it. I wasn't concerned at all. And it felt to me just the way I thought it would feel.

Was it something to talk about at school, or amongst your peers, that you'd actually been in a plane, I suppose there wouldn't have been a lot who had?

No, there wasn't any regular airline flying even at that stage. There were only the attempts at airlines, you know, charter flight style. But no, there weren't too many in those days who had at that age flown.

So were they impressed?

They weren't as impressed as the fact that at one stage in the same year my father's car was stolen, and I was left in it. I was asleep in it, this happened in the late, ten o'clock timeslot. And my father, and mother, and sister were in some people's - friends' place. And I'd gone out, and gone to sleep in the car.

I was wakened up by the sound of the car accelerating, with the spectacle of two strange people in the front, driving it. And it happened in, down in Victoria Street, Richmond, and they drove to a place not far, house not far away, and got out, and looked in the back then, and they saw that I was there. And exclaimed, 'We've got a kid in the back', and they came back to the car, and got in, and I was feigning sleep at this stage.

And they drove from the northern part of Richmond, up near the North Richmond railway station, straight down Hoddle Street and Punt Road, to the river. And in those days there was only a footbridge across the river there. And stopped the car and thought they woke me up. And I'd been looking out of the car, to see if there were any police around that I could perhaps attract their attention.

And, when I saw that they were slowing down, I returned to a prone position, if you like, on the seat of the car, and allowed them to wake me up. And they asked me where I lived, and I told them, down in Victoria Street, although I didn't, but I didn't want them taking - we were living at Brighton at the time - I didn't want them driving me anywhere down to Brighton, and have to get back, knowing that my parents would be in a bit of a flat spin.

So they drove me back towards the area, and let me out about halfway. And I said, 'What are you going to do with my father's car?', and they said, 'Oh tell him we'll bring it back'.

So they let me out, and I watched where they drove it, and it disappeared in the darkness, I could see roughly where it was. And then I had to get down to this other corner, if you like, of Richmond. And ran all the way, and got back there as there was much panic going on, and they were pleased to see me.

And then it was a visit round to the police station. Or they'd rung the police, and we were taken back round to the police station in the police car. And I was driven round to where I thought the area was that they'd stopped in the first instance. Then back to the police station. Then back to the friends' house. And we stayed there the night.

And the next morning the police took us around to the area that I thought, and they drove slowly up in the - oh, only 150 yards from where I thought the car would be, they found the car. So we drove then in our own car back home.

(20.00) And from then on it was a .... Several trips to the police station, then several appearances in the local court, and then one or two into the city, into the criminal court. And this is, got me more notoriety than flying in one, once or twice in an aircraft. But ....

It wasn't Squizzy Taylor anyway?

No, but we .... When we had our pushbike shop in Bridge Road, I'd seen Squizzy Taylor go past quite a lot of times in his - he had a Buick tourer, and he used to live only 300 or 400 yards from where I lived. And we used to see also the girlfriend that he had. They had a house not far away, in fact half as far again, probably, on the other side of Bridge Road, near where we lived. So we knew these people by sight almost, could pick them out, you know.

How were they regarded locally, were they regarded as figures of fear, or sort of small heroes in a way, or how?

They were regarded in probably a semi-serious way. I don't think - most of them just looked on him almost as a, perhaps a step above an SP bookmaker, which was, of which there were lots of them everywhere, in all the hotels, at the backs of hotels there were bookies, and bookies' lookouts, this was a way of life. It's like - almost on a level with - well certainly not a real criminal, and I think we were as surprised as this - we were only kids, fourteen at the

time, at the most - we were surprised at the magnitude of his criminal activities, when it finally came out.

> Anyway, coming back to Laverton, when you joined up, what happened there when you arrived?

Well the crew that they'd got together - when I was doing my trade test, and when I completed it at Victoria Barracks, not - yes, Victoria Barracks, in St Kilda Road - the final officer that you saw, you took an oath there, which was satisfactory. But just prior to that he said to me, 'I've just got a signal not to enlist any more permanent air force'. And I thought that was strange, because, as far as I knew, I was enlisting in the Citizen Air Force.

And I said, 'Well what can I do?'. He said, 'Oh well you can walk out of here now, you can forget about anything that you've done so far, and you can walk away from it, or I can offer you enlistment in the Citizen Air Force'. And I said, 'Well that's - you know, that's what I thought I was enlisting in, and so I'll be quite happy to take that action'. So then - from then on we were considered on the same, and we were on the same, pay rank - group - rank and group, as permanent air force members, except that we didn't take out superannuation the way they did, so we were quite happy that we were accepted into that area. Although it only went on for a very short time, I don't know, there was only perhaps - there were four or five people who were in this call-up that were members of the permanent air force, that before the signal came through, and the rest of us were Citizen Air Force.

> Well what sort of uniform did they have?

Exactly the same as the permanent air force at the time, a blue uniform, but we, instead of the eagles that they used to have sewn on their shoulders, we had a triangular colour patch, very like an army colour patch, but it was in the colours of Number One Squadron of the Australian Flying Corps, which was a two blues, and a red in the centre. Red in the centre in a triangle form, with a, two pale blue stripes on the sides of the red, and a darker blue on the bottom corners on the triangle.

> Well what about training and so on, were you basically going through the same process?

No, this - we did the same initial training, which was drill, and army - and riflework, and stuff like that. But this was a mixed course, they hadn't .... A normal course of, say, a fitters' course would be all fitters, and they would then go and do a technical course, after they did their discipline-type training.

(25.00) But in ours there were lots of aircraft-hands-general, which were the equivalent to the pushers-about and the labourers in a unit, there were even a couple of painters, there was a gardener, there was a dental technician, there was a medical orderly, a fitter, a motor builder, and a - myself as a fitter-general.

And I think I was the only fitter on the group, so, when the postings came out, instead of going to do a technical course, of which they hadn't organised any at that stage, we were sent to different units, where we went on with the - whatever training that they could give us at the unit. And I was posted up to Number One Aircraft Depot at Laverton in what they called the

fitter-general shop, where you did lots of diemaking, and toolmaking, and stuff that would - that you would normally do in a job outside.

But after a certain length of time you could apply to be accepted as a flight fitter, which was one step down from their top fitters, which were called at that stage, 'fitter-aeros'.

> Well what was the attitude of the permanent air force people to Citizens' Air Force, were they - did they regard them in a different sort of light?

They used to say that we were weekend gentlemen, only there to play with the facilities. But that didn't affect me really, because I didn't get any of that pre-war training, this was the first four weeks of the war. And we looked on it as - we'd joined an air force that was going to take part in a war where - was certain to take part in a war, and a lot of the permanent people had accepted it as a job.

> Did it ever lead though to people being offended, did Citizens' Air Force people ever take it to heart? Were there fights at all over this jibe?

No, never to that extent, we used to joke about it. And at the present day they allow me to attend what we call a 'permos' reunion', which is a - started out to be a reunion of members of the permanent air force, but they've relented enough to let Citizen Air Force people come to it. And I've met lots and lots of people there that I knew during the days in the air force, and of course there's never any hint of anything like that. I think they were quite happy to have new blood as a matter of fact.

> So what happened after Laverton?

Well from Laverton I was posted - after being there for twelve months I was posted to 10 Squadron on Sunderlands, in England, and I suppose that that was about the best posting you could possibly get, if you're inclined that way. But after being kitted out for overseas service, and posted to the embarkation depot, which was then at the Melbourne Showgrounds, and going on final leave, and getting married, they took all the Group One men off the posting, and put Group Two men on it, and sent us back to our units. Which was a very unhappy experience.

> Why was that done?

I could never find out. They saved about a shilling a day, I think, on each person. But it - whether they didn't have enough fully-experienced people back in Australia, I don't know, but that's what they did, they took all the Group One men off the posting, and sent Group Two men, which was crazy, and most upsetting to everybody that was taken off the draft.

> Well if you'd just got married, and presumably beginning to tell friends you were about to go overseas, it must have been a bit embarrassing?

It was worse than that, it was the people you told in the service that you were going overseas, and sometimes you told them a bit - not coarsely, but you were glad to get away from senior NCOs and people like that, you know. (Laughter). That you'd had at depot. And to have to come back there.

Eat humble pie?

That's exactly right. It would have been much better had they at least posted us to different units.

Anyway I was at depot for nearly another - oh, another ten months I think. And received a posting then to air observer school at Mt Gambier.

And we found ourselves - there were quite - there were three or four corporals, I was a corporal by that time, posted over there - and this is where we weren't too happily received. Because the engineer officer over there, who was in charge of the technical side of the place, he had some leading aircraftsmen that he reckoned should have been corporals, and didn't welcome us at all.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape one of the interview recorded with Allan Lancaster on 9th November, 1989, about Catalinas.

You were saying you weren't too welcome at Mount Gambier?

No, because the engineer officer had some LAs, leading aircraftsmen, who had been there for some time. And he told us in fact that he expected them to be promoted to corporal, and didn't want any corporals posted in, which he had no control over, and we had no control over where we went. And, in the three weeks that I was there, we never did an actual corporal's job. But it didn't worry me too much, because I'd - after three weeks at Mount Gambier I was posted to the embarkation depot en route for Singapore.

This time the whole thing went through alright, we had final lave, and we were kitted up, and on 22nd November, '41, we went - left Melbourne by boat to go to Singapore.

Were you a bit worried up to the final moment, that they might change their minds again? (Laughs).

Well you're never sure until it happens. So that you do keep your fingers crossed, and you don't tell as many people as you did the first time.

And away we went. There were only fifteen air force on this small Dutch ship, and there were twenty-five AIF replacements. The Japanese war hadn't started, and people told me that we were lucky to be going to Singapore, and not overseas to England, or the Middle East, because there was a real war on over there. And I don't know whether they - I don't think they meant it in any other respect other than that you'd be fairly safe, and it would be a nice tropical holiday.

What did you know about Singapore, what - did it seem exciting, and exotic, and those sort of things?

Well we thought it was pretty secure, because there'd been RAAF squadrons over there, 21 Squadron had gone over there some six months or so earlier. Number 1 Squadron had gone over there as well, that was - they were two Laverton squadrons. Number 8 Squadron went over there a bit later, and there was a - what was called an infiltration squadron, which was a squadron with an RAF number, 453, comprised a mixture of RAAF and RAF ground staff, and a similar mixture of pilots, from RAF and RAAF. And they were there also. They were - some were up the peninsula, and some were at Sembawang which was the Australian base on Singapore itself.

We were - on our way, we called into - went up the east coast of Australia, and called into Bowen, to refuel. And we had a day in Bowen, a place that I was to see quite a bit of later on. And ...

Bowen's not a particularly big place now, what did it consist of then?

Oh it was a jetty, and mainly a railway area, there was like a railway workshops there. And not a bad little town. A set of swimming baths there, and - which we had an incident in there later on, a couple of years later. And three or four hotels. Quite a nice place.

Just in case we lose the incident, as we go on, and don't get back to it, what happened?

Oh well, this was when I was on Catalinas, and Bowen became a flying-boat repair depot. And you used to take aircraft from Cairns down to Bowen whenever they had to come out of the water, because there was no ramp at Cairns, in the river at Cairns.

And to keep the air crew busy, while the aircraft itself was being serviced, they used to ask us to, tell us to pull the dinghies out, the rubber dinghies, the inflatable dinghies, and open them right up, pump them up with their bottles, they had inflatable, inflating air bottles on them. Go through the packages on the side, the inside of the boat, and check everything out, and see that it was all there, and then, after it was all checked out, and liberally applied French chalk all over it, again it was deflated, and rolled up, and put back into its valises.

(5.00) This sounds easy, until you come to trying to get all the air out of a fairly big dinghy. And you get it nearly rolled up, and you've got quite a percentage of air then in the last trapped corner which you've got, and it will not go into the valise. No way in the world.

So for all the efforts that we put into it we thought we should get something out of it. So the particular, the five-man dinghy, we took up to the Bowen baths with us. We thought we'd have a day whizzing around in the dinghy in the baths, and serve two purposes, see how five people did fit in this. What - we could have put it in the sea of course, right alongside the repair depot, but we chose the baths.

And when we got up there, and paddling around in the baths, and a bit of horseplay, the dinghy got tipped over. And then we found out that somebody had forgotten, one of us had forgotten to take the seamarker, which was a packet of blue-green dye, that's meant to stain - you trail it behind the dinghy, when you're out in the ocean in distress, and it's easier to see from the air.

Well you can imagine what an enclosed swimming-pool looked like with a complete packet of this seamarker floating around. It went brilliant green, and fortunately it didn't, doesn't come off on you, but it emptied the baths of the other people that were there, and it emptied us too. They weren't at all happy about it. I don't know what they did, I don't know whether they pumped it all out, or explained to the next people that came to swim in the baths, that that's all it was.

Thy didn't try and prosecute you?

No. They just said, you know, `You were silly fellows to do that', only in stronger language. And we never heard any more about it, except that we had to dry the dinghy thoroughly, and everything.

Anyway you were on your way to Singapore from Bowen?

Yes. And we just had the one call in Australia, which was Bowen, and then up the top, and across, and we were just entering the Arafura Sea when the *Sydney* was attacked somewhere in the - vaguely in that area, but it turned out to be over close to the Western Australian coast, which we didn't know about it. And this was a German attack. In other words the Japanese war hadn't started, but it was getting close. And ...

Did you know that, was there a feeling that war was imminent?

Oh yes, but we, and we used to just get little bulletins on the ship noticeboard. Being a Dutch ship they were fairly well interested in what might be going on in the Indies as well. And we didn't know until we were up near Borneo where - they were heading for Borneo, to take on more fuel there, being a Dutch-occupied area, heading for Balikpapan. It was another place that I visited later on, during the latter stages, when we were, when I was flying on Cats.

And we stopped in there, refuelled, and they waited there for information. And didn't get, it hadn't started then, so they went down again to the bottom of Sumatra. And they called into Oosthaven, which is another place we called - I saw later on. And we waited there for information, and the information then came through that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbour, and come from Indochina, and were approaching the northern coast of Malaya.

And we waited there for sailing orders, and we ...

What was the feeling at the time? Did you suddenly feel sort of very endangered, or do you remember - or excited at the prospect that you were going to see action, or what?

Well I think we were - like a lot of other people we didn't think that it would be very serious. We thought that, you know, we were entering a zone that we half-hoped we would have been. But not for a couple of days did we take it as seriously as it turned out to be of course.

While we were in Balikpapan we'd entertained some American sailors. We weren't allowed off our boat, but they were with some destroyers, a squadron of destroyers, and they let some of them come onto our boat. And we visited with them, and we had a few drinks with them.

And they'd come from the Philippines. And I think they had a little more information than we did, because they were certain that it was going to take place.

(10.00) And it was - they were of the Blackhawk Squadron, which - they had, their mother ship was with them as well. And a lot, quite a few of them were sunk in the very early stages of the war.

Anyway we went from Oosthaven. Instead of going up the northern coast of Sumatra and across to Singapore, we went down onto the south coast of Singapore, Sumatra. And went up the outer side, if you like, south side, right up to the northern tip, where we stopped at another little port called Sabang, and they - we were allowed ashore there, and they also stayed there for sailing orders, to see what the situation was in the straits between Sumatra and Malaya.

Anyway we finished up going round the northern tip, and down - heading south down to Singapore. And there wasn't - we weren't intercepted, or interfered with or - in any way. The Japanese hadn't got anywhere near that area.

We got to Singapore on about the 10th, I think, or something like that, of December. Not the 10th of December, because - yes, that's - around that. It was the 16th, 16th December. Took me longer to get round Sumatra than I thought.

And we were unloaded, and taken out to our, what proved to be our base then for the short time that we were in Singapore. And our first air-raid was the second night we were there, that was our first, they'd had one or two earlier ones, but very little damage, and they hadn't attacked the aerodrome.

What was the feeling, was there fear in Singapore then?

I don't think so, it seemed as though everybody was quite happy about the whole situation. Because they had a couple of squadrons well up the peninsula, up at Kota Bharu and up round that area. And they had others down on the island. There was an RAF unit over at Seletar, and it seemed pretty secure actually at the time. And the air-raids that they did have, they - there weren't many aircraft came over, there was not a great deal of damage done early on.

Did you hear the bombs?

You could - from - we were some, I suppose, ten or twelve miles, perhaps, from Singapore. It might have been a bit less than that. But you could hear it when it was on. But quite often the aircraft were very high up, and a lot of the bombing was inaccurate.

And as the days wore on, the bombing was more frequent, and we were continually expecting to be attacked on our area. They'd bombed Salita, the RAF area, and the naval base, which was not very far away from us, and there was a lot of damage done there. And then we got ours, a heavy, fairly heavy concentrated attack, a couple of days after the naval base.

Much damage? People injured?

Well I don't know what happened to people on the naval base. There were quite a - probably quite a lot of natives, native people, injured. Chinese, labourers, even some of the anti-aircraft groups, which are - were mainly Indian, there were some casualties there.

And we were - that is the group that had just arrived there, the fifteen of us, we'd been grabbed to be trained as stretcher-bearers. Mainly I think, because we hadn't been fitted into any particular section on the island. We were - I was posted to the station headquarters workshops, and I only did one or two jobs, I think, maybe three. But approximately two or three jobs in the few weeks that I was there. But we'd been put together as emergency stretcher-bearers, which we started to have to do when we were - our own area was bombed.

What were the first injuries that you saw?

Well we had - our job was allegedly to wait until the bombing had finished, and then go out and look for casualties. Which we did, we had reasonable training. When I say training, I mean, you know, almost a first-aid course. And then when we were faced with it most of the people we'd picked up were, had been killed.

(15.00) And a lot of them were native people, native labourers. We had quite a group of labourers on the area. And engaged in their aerodrome construction-type work. And they would - in the first air-raid particularly, the first heavy one - they would run into gas shelters, which were only places to contain gas masks, and helmets, and gear, of clothing and stuff like that. And they were only fibro cement, and they were.... Obviously they weren't meant to protect you against anything, because most of the fibro cement would be, was blown off everyone that was anywhere near a blast.

And another place they dived in were some of the deep drains, open drains, that would be like stormwater drains. And they'd be perhaps four feet deep. But if you happened to get, like one occasion, you'd get a bomb that drops in the drain, say 100 yards away, the blast go - went up the drain, and blew them all in together, like a pack of cards, up in the end of the drain, which was stepped probably two or three feet, so's that the water, the heavy rainwater, the stormwater that was coming down, like was stepped down, and slowed its progress down.

And we had a lot of those. When I say a lot, perhaps fifteen of those to pick up. And in no time the little morgue, if you like to call it that, was full of people. We had only two - I think two, air force people killed in the first big raid. Because we all had dug air-raid shelters, and if you're digging one for yourself you make sure that you dig it deep enough.

But the joke was to get to them sometimes. You'd be in the wrong place, and you didn't make for your own, you made for the nearest one. And there used to be a saying that `It took him two minutes to get to the slit trench, but ten minutes to walk back'. You had wings on your feet.

How did this business of picking up dead bodies and that affect you at the time? Did it unnerve you, or bother you, or did you find you accommodated yourself pretty well?

Oh I think we looked at it pretty right. I didn't have anything to do with the two air force people, so I suppose I must have thought, `Oh well, you know, it's bad luck, and they went to the wrong place', or something like that.

But you were fairly shocked, because you were shocked by the bombing. Your first real bombing attack is pretty awe-inspiring. You can hear them, but they don't whistle like - well I didn't think they did, I think they made a different noise altogether - but when they started to come close you could hear it, and then you were concentrating on how deep in the ground you were. And sometimes we were caught on one raid in the auxiliary pumping station, which was a fairly solidly-built place, and there was lots of corners that you could hide in from the blast and that.

So we were in there one day, and we got one fairly close. And they'd be probably 250 or 500 pounders at the very outside I'd say. And where the water used to come in in pipes into the pumping station was in a channel in the floor with checker plate, three quarter, a half inch checker plate, so's that they could lift it up, and look in, and see any leaks or anything.

And where I was I - one bomb that landed, it lifted this checker plate, which was probably a piece at least six or eight feet long, and ...

This was steel, I presume?

Steel, yes. And it was a good eighteen to twenty inches wide, and it lifted that, just the blast of that lifted it up I think a foot off the ground right alongside me. And that's when you realised what a blast can do, and that's why you had some of these casualties that ran into areas where there was really no protection. The only protection is in a slit-trench, and in an L shape, which we were taught to dig, so's that you can be in one side or the other of the leg. I was never strafed, so I never had occasion to use the left or the right leg, sort of thing. But it's pretty frightening.

So what happened from there?

Well we - the air force had made arrangements to move over to Sumatra, where the Dutch had quite a lot of emergency landing grounds, and a couple of civil strips over there.

And we went over, we had to go down to the naval base to get on a ship. And you only took, oh, very little gear with you. Just a couple of sets of underwear, and a couple of pairs of shorts and shirts and things like that. You didn't take a full kit, or anything, because you had quite a swag of kit to take with you when you were posted overseas, and they never, ever took it away from you, which we used to think was silly.

(20.00)I mean I went to Singapore with a heavy blue overcoat, and blue uniform, which - their argument against leaving that in storage somewhere was that if you got posted from there to England, or somewhere like that you were prepared to be - you were kitted to go anywhere in the world sort of thing, and you had to carry it with you. I think we had seven different hats. Working hats, and fur felts, and peaked caps, and service caps, and berets. You know, it was really a waste of space, and a waste of money, to send them with you.

Anyway we were - with a skeleton kit anyway, we waited, and we went by boat across to Sumatra, to Palembang, which was a big oil-producing area in Sumatra, Central Sumatra. And we - to get there we had to cross the - from Singapore to the area. And by this time there was a fair amount of naval activity going on.

And in the late afternoon - the ship we were on was the Malayan Navy - it was a civilian ship converted to a, you could call it an armed transport, I suppose. Although it wasn't very big. It had a bit of armament on board, and it was a part of the Malayan Navy.

And we were crossing in the afternoon, and there was a mine seen floating in - a normal marine mine. And the ship was stopped while everybody on board, and I mean everybody, fired at it, to try and detonate it. Now you see on television that one fellow with a .45 automatic detonates a mine that floats past, and that's no trouble, but I can tell you that this one must have been hit, well, conservatively, a hundred times.

Did you have a rifle, were you firing at it as well?

Yes, I had an ordinary service rifle. Most of us did. Some of us had Tommy guns, the .45 calibre Thompson gun. And some of us had even the old aircraft Lewises that they'd taken off the Wirraways, which were up there. The Wirraways were originally in 21 Squadron.

This must have made quite a racket? (Laughs).

It did, and the humorous part about it was that it probably would eventually sink, it would fill with water probably, for the amount of holes that the casing would have in it. But it was never exploded, and we thought that the first shot to hit it would explode it.

But the peculiar part about it afterwards was that, I think he was the Master at Arms, anyway he was the person in charge of the armoury on the boat, he came round and with one or two of his sailors, which were native Malayans, I imagine, they picked up all the expended cases, because every one he could pass in at - when they got back to wherever they were going to go back to, he could get another live one for it. And they were still working under civilian almost style - or unwar - not wartime, you know - peacetime scale of things, where he had to account for everything that they used.

Anyway we finally made it to this river at Palembang, and we went up the river quite some distance, and finished up at P2, which was an allegedly secret aerodrome in the jungle.

P1 was named - that was their - what had been their civil aerodrome at Palembang. And they were quite a distance apart, and the saving factor of P2 was that it was virtually an open space in the jungle, but it - there were no buildings around it, there were no revetments for blast against aircraft, like, to preserve the aircraft that were parked in there, and it was a big area.

And it was never, ever discovered by the Japs until after we got out of there. But they discovered P1 pretty quick, because it was the civil aerodrome, and they bombed that a few times. And they came round in our area, but they never, ever bombed it, not until the very last stages. And by that time we weren't there anyway, we'd made our way out of the place.

But that was the place that we used to - were sending aircraft out to look for convoys that were obviously coming towards Sumatra, and that sort of thing.

What were you actually doing, what was your role at this time?

(25.00) Well I was still in - into - wherever their workshops were, I was in workshops, and working on aircraft maintenance. Like they'd bring an article in that - in good times they'd bring an article in, and you'd have the replacement bits, or you'd have the facilities to repair the ones that they brought to you, whatever they might be.

I had a specialty with the cowl gills, which are the ring of flaps that go round the back of a Lockheed Hudson engine cowling. And you open and close them to control the heat of the engine, which is pretty important. The engines - the type of engine, the radial engine that they have in Hudsons was controlled, you had cylinder-head temperatures et cetera, that you had to keep within a certain range, and this is the way you controlled them. And they had such a lot of different linkages in them that they used to wear, and we used to have to either rebush, replace.

And when we left Singapore the engineer officer gave me about six sets of these as my special cross to bear. I had to bring them, and see that they were packed every time we moved, and that we had enough of them and all this. Which wasn't easy, but we managed most of the time, until we got to Sumatra, and after Sumatra it didn't matter.

But the program - once we got settled at this P2, the program turned out to be a case of - put into groups of about eight, or ten at the most, fitters, et cetera. But, before you went to the workshops, you had to be - you were called at four o'clock in the morning, half past four. You went to the meeting point, round operations room. And you were fully-armed with whatever your armament was.

And you went out, and the first morning you dug a slit trench around wherever you were going to be. We were near an operations room out in the jungle. And we dug our slit trenches near there. And then out of the - say there were six of you, two of you were on lookout, and the four - the other four were trying to get some rest, or go back to sleep, or whatever, in this hole in the ground.

And the story was that ops room had picked up the possibility of an airborne attack on P2 because there had already been a paratroop drop on P1 which was repelled by the Dutch, with their Bofors guns. They'd been able to pick them out, a lot of them out, while they were still in the air. And their native troops, the little Javanese, who were their foot soldiers, or their aerodrome guards, they went into the jungle, and sorted them out. And they didn't take the aerodrome, but it was made unusable almost shortly afterwards by bombing. But I think what they hoped to do was to take the aerodrome, and then use it for their fighter aircraft and that. As I say they didn't find the - our 'drome for the length of time that I was there.

So where did you go from there?

Well then it was, it got untenable in the finish. It got to the stage where I saw stores being set fire to. In other words I think there was a terrible feeling there, that's where we really started

to know just what was going on. Because it was a disorganised panic would be the best I could say for it.

There were people leaving their weapons. I saw, when we were in these guard positions, in these slit trenches, around about eight o'clock two of the members would go up to the mess, and try and get something to eat for what would be your breakfast. And then we'd, after that we could go back, if we had work to do back at the workshops. Or back on the flightline, or wherever. You'd go back, and see what you could do. It was nearly all just refuelling aircraft, and routine maintenance, if you like.

Not a great deal of, I didn't see a great deal of, say, bad damage, because quite often the aircraft didn't come back, from the jobs that they went out on. They were outnumbered, they were outweighed with armament, they were not a real - I'm talking about Lockheed Hudsons mainly. The Dutch had some Glenn Martin B10s, which were very ordinary bombers, and there's so many instances that you could talk about that - things that happen that you don't think should happen.

We had some Blenheims that were operating from the same aerodrome. We had a squadron of Hudsons brought out from the Middle East. In fact they came via the Middle East to - from London, and they - not from London, from England, and they had - all they had was all winter gear with them. You know, but they were out of their depth. They were a mark of Hudson that had - all our Hudsons had Pratt and Whitney engines, and theirs had Cyclones, which put them out of range of the sort of gear that we'd carry. If you had any engine work to do, it had to be, well, improvised.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

Identification: This is side one of tape two of an interview recorded with Allan Lancaster on 9th November 1989 about Catalinas.

You were saying that in the panic you saw weapons left and so on, what sort of things were happening?

Oh just rifles and stuff like that left in the corner of the mess-hut, and that, you know. People didn't want to participate in any ground action I don't think, because after all we're ...

What people are you talking of, would these be Australians?

I'm talking of Australians, English, just the run of the mill if you like, people who weren't ever intended to do this sort of thing. You know, we - technical people who were taught to drill, and to fire a rifle, and that was about the extent of it. Anything else you found out yourself.

I myself thought it was better to have a rifle than not to have one, particularly as it finished up quite disorganised. It was a matter of the Japanese had landed in Palembang itself, after a lot of opposition, and they were coming up the road the way we - to where we were, because that

was the - really the only way to move. It was pretty heavy jungle, and the road - they didn't meet a great deal of opposition, because it just wasn't there anyway. And ...

Singapore had fallen then, by this stage?

Not quite, they were still able to get in there, they were using it as an advanced fighter base. And they could get into there from Palembang, and refuel, and they - it was only a matter - amounted to days really.

Well was the sense of panic partially engendered by the notion that, you know, Singapore was the impregnable fortress, and now suddenly nothing was going like it was supposed to?

Well we'd experienced that a lot earlier than that, when the speed with which the Japanese came down the peninsula, and the lack of aircraft that we actually had there. I mean we'd had a shipment of Hurricanes and arrived there, and by this time we were - almost everybody was over in Sumatra. And we had a group of them landed - land on the strip at P2. And they were very junior members, if you like, NCO pilots, that hadn't had a great deal of experience, and I don't know that some of them might have even not flown very many hours in Hurricanes at all.

But they landed there, I know some of them, one or two of them, pranged on landing, and others had mechanical problems. In fact they didn't do a great deal at all. They were too - it was the old - it was the story that's been told a thousand times. There were too few of them, and it was too late anyway. By that time there was superiority in the sky, and our - any of our aircraft had to sneak out in the odd hours, like this four o'clock in the morning bit, and they'd take off.

We had two or three Blenheims crash on takeoff, and there were stories about flares being laid in the wrong direction, on the short end of the runway sort of thing. And we had one Hudson that hit the trees on takeoff, and bent the airscrews back about six inches, and went on and did its patrol, and came back. Very fortunate to get back, because I'd imagine the aircraft, the engine'd be vibrating like mad. Because they wouldn't all be bent back exactly the same, and you'd lose so much thrust from the props.

But it was a very uncomfortable time, when almost nobody knew what was going on

Did you feel that you were likely to be taken prisoner, or caught?

Well when, specially when it was left to anybody - everybody - to make their own way south to this Oosthaven, which was a point, the closest point between Java and Sumatra, and there'd be some sort of shipping there, was the story. And when you were faced with the possibility of walking, I don't know, it was suddenly - something like 400 kilometres or something, and it didn't look the best.

(5.00) And we'd - the group of us had been asked, would we - Jim Crow for the hospital, there was a little hospital there, and Jim Crow, and he was getting up on the roof, and checking the aircraft that's flying about. Because there was a, virtually a permanent air-raid

warning in operation. And they wanted you to be able to identify the aircraft, he didn't want people getting moved out of hospital for every aircraft that came over.

Anyway we were - as I said, we were fortunate, because there was no Jap aircraft came over at that time, and we didn't - we weren't tested out that way. But we saw a few casualties brought in from the fighting that was down at Palembang at this time.

And then they said, `Well you've all got to make your own way, get out', you know. And I said to the - I was a corporal in charge of this little group, and I saw the doctor, and I - at this small medical unit. And I said to him, `Well', I could see him packing up, and I said, `You're packing up, are you?', he said, `Yes'. I said, `How are you getting out?', and he said, `We've got transport', and he said to me, `How are you getting out?', and I said, `Oh, we'll go with you'. He said, `Oh no, you can't come with us', he said, `you're armed, and we're a medical unit', and, you know. And I thought, `Well this is why people are leaving their arms behind', because there was provision being made for unarmed parties. They didn't regard sidearms as arms, like a - you could have a revolver.

So I thought, well, you know, we've got to get out on our own. So the six of us, there were about six there, we just sat round - walked round, looking at where we were, and looking for the way out of the area, and finished up out on the road, which is a, wasn't hard to find, because there was only one road there.

And we'd walked for a couple of mile or so, and a truck came along, and I said to him - no, a dispatch rider came along - and I said, `Is there a workshops unit, or a headquarters unit down the road?'. He said, `Yes, they're forming a roadblock, but', he said, `when I left they were turning around and they were going to come south'.
They had one Bofors gun, I think, to form this roadblock with.

And we moved off, we walked about, oh, a couple of mile, I suppose. And we came to this, to the railway station, and there was a train in, with about seventy or eighty open trucks on - hooked on it. And it was being operated by a couple of sailors, and an air force person, in the engine, they were driving it. Any anybody that could get on that train got on it.

And we stopped everywhere else that we could - there was anybody, in and around any sidings or stations, if there were any more trucks that they could put on, they put them on. And there was no such luxury as hooking up the brake hoses and that. Which meant that every time it stopped all that slack was taken up, and you can imagine what a big jolt there was at the, when it finally got to the engine or to the back truck, whichever way it was pulling up, or accelerating.

Anyway we went through the night, in the rain. We got down to
Oosthaven in the early hours of the morning. And there was a bit of shipping there, so we were, after a lot of disorganised moves - there was civilians, and there was motorcars, and there was all manner of goods and stuff on this wharf. Cars were being driven to the edge, and pushed straight over into the water, into the drink. And anything you could - we hadn't had anything to eat for, oh, I suppose about thirty-six hours. We'd been part and parcel of an alleged raid by Japanese who were at this junction, and somebody from the back of the train said, `The Japanese are coming down the highway'. And there was quite a big panic, and there was a bit of a demand - for the train to be started, and there was wounded people being

put on. And we had some of those refrigerated covered-trucks, they weren't refrigerated any more, but, and they were putting women, and children, and wounded people in those, and that's why we'd stopped there.

And there was a big demand to move the train. And an English army colonel I think he was, or a major, came along and catalogued what sort of arms we had in this truck and the next truck. And he got, he said, anybody with automatic weapons to take the outsides of the truck, and rifles the second line, and unarmed people in the middle. Did a good organised job, so that at least they had something organised along those lines.

(10.00) Anyway, to cut a long story short, when the thing finally was cleared up, it was a group of Javanese soldiers coming down the road, and the whole thing was a fizzer. But I was astounded to see the sort of people who were in a great panic with this situation.

What sort of people, what do you mean by that?

I mean armed people, like soldiers, and airmen, and there was nothing to be gained by carrying on in a great panic. It was, this English officer I think did a marvellous job to finally quieten everybody down, and he got the ones with the - like there was quite a few army people in it, with Bren guns, and stuff - and he got them all down in the carriages - not carriages, in the car, the trucks, down near the end of the train. In other words he was organising it so as, if there was anything, any enemy coming up, that they'd meet with as much automatic fire as was possible to assemble. So that was the most panicky part of the whole time, as far as I was concerned.

Was there a great sense of relief then, when you finally got aboard on a ship, and left?

Well, yes, but there were, you know, there were a lot of people behind us, and there were a lot of people that went ahead of us. There were a couple of Australian ships around the area, just off the jetty. The *Ballarat* was one, and the *Wollongong* was another. Corvettes. And we went across to Java which is only a short distance.

We finished up with a train there, and we travelled through the night to Batavia, where they shoved us in all kinds of accommodation. I mean nearly all schools, which were of course emptied. Very poor accommodation, but any accommodation with a roof on it was better than what we'd been used to for a few days.

And then we had to be fed in long lines of people. That was breakfast, and then we went out, out of the place, and organised our own meals, more or less. And you had to come back there to sleep. And we wandered around the place, sort of checking back, to see what was going on. It was a whole disorganised shambles really.

Did it make you begin to wonder whether perhaps the war might be lost?

Well ...

One might suppose to that point you would always believe that, well, right would prevail, and you'd win?

Well up to that stage, until we got to that stage, and saw the shambles that was accumulating, we thought we were only being moved back while we were getting more aircraft and more people. Mainly aircraft to come, you know. Because the Americans were allegedly going to send Kittyhawks, and the - and we'd seen the evidence of some Hurricanes. But we'd - I don't think we ever thought that inside of a couple of - from there inside of a fortnight that a lot of us would be lucky enough to be back in Australia, and a lot of us would be unlucky enough to be POWs.

At the latter stage of being in Java I'd developed a very bad dermatitis, which I think I contracted in the jungle of Sumatra, because I'd had - even before the war I had a dermatitis that I contracted from blackwood, a very heavy skin complaint that I contracted from blackwood. Nothing else, and they tested me for years afterwards, nothing else. So it broke out in similar situations in Sumatra. And they.... I was put into a Dutch hospital in Batavia.

But, seeing it was only on my arms and legs and face, I didn't stay there, I got myself out. Because there was a shambles, nothing was organised, and they just said, `Go down there, and report to the sick bay', and the sister took me to the ward, and said, `Can you get to bed yourself?', I said, `Yes, I'm right'. So after that I just, as soon as she went out of the ward, I just put my shoes - I'd only got my shoes off by that time, or boots - and I went out, and found my way back to the wharf, where we'd been camped for a couple of nights, waiting for some sort of a ship.

While we were there the *Orcades* came in, and emptied a lot of their army off. Some of the army from the Middle East, she'd brought them from the Middle East. Let them off there, and they put air crew on, whatever air crew they had around there, they put them on the ship, and it sailed the next morning, and we were still waiting for a ship. And we waited there for two days, I think.

And in the meantime there'd been a call-up, a line-up and just, say, nearly half of the technical people had been lined up, and enquired about their mustering, and they'd selected so many, and they went one way while the others went the other way. Nobody knew what was going to happen, but one group of them was sent up to the mountains, up to - I forget the name of the place, which was an aerodrome - and they stayed there, they were all POWs.

(15.00) And the other line, which I was fortunate enough to be on, was still on the wharf. And, after about two days, two and a half days, we got a ship, with six native firemen, a skipper, and a first engineer, and we supplied all the rest of the bods that was needed on it. There was air force, there was some army, and some civilians. And the main problem was to get enough people with some sort of technical knowledge, so any fitters who worked on steam, railway people, were taken in as engineers, and anyone else was used to trim the ship with the coal in baskets, and we finally set off south, which was the only way to go.

And we got through the straits without any trouble. We averaged four point seven knots from Batavia to Fremantle, with about three stoppages part of the way down, till we came in sight of the West Australian coast.

And we were almost intercepted by a big ship. But the first engineer which we were pretty matey with, said, `Oh', he said, `that's a Japanese ship'. He said, `I've seen hundreds of them'.

Big cargo ship. He said, `Either they haven't wanted to disclose their situation, they're probably a mother ship for submarines or something, or they don't think it's worth expending any ammunition on it'. It, you know, it was a real rusty old tub, it was, the name of it was the *Edendale*, and I saw photographs of it in the ship identification book later on when I was on Cats, so it was still around.

And we finally made it. As I said there were all kinds of ships used. There was a Chinese riverboat called the *Whangpooh*, that brought a heap of air force people out.

> Well, with all this, how long before you finally get to be part of a Catalina air crew?

Well, after a bit of leave at home, and a bit of recovery from this rash epidemic thing I had, I reckon it proved to be a contact with some sort of jungle shrub, or something. Anyway I was home, and I got posted to Canberra, in charge of the workshops there. And I was there for ten or eleven months I think. And by this time with the - my wife had had the first - our first child. And I stayed there until I was posted onto Cats.

It was a volunteer job, they used to call for volunteers occasionally. And as this was the only way at this stage I could see that I could afford to go flying, because, had I gone - they were - by then they were also letting technical people remuster to air crew. But you went back to five shillings a day, and it took you perhaps twelve months to get through the course to where you got back to whether you were going to be an NCO, or a commission.

So, going onto Cats, I was a sergeant, I was married, and I had one child. It wouldn't have been possible to live on that sort of money, and I would finally get to fly, even though I wasn't going to be a pilot. So I accepted that gleefully, and was very pleased to get through the air crew medical test, and then posted on to Cats. I went to Rathmines, and we did about a thirteen-week course up there, which involved the technical side of Cats, the crew side of it, operationals, operating.

And in the crewing up you sort of have strange customs, whoever's going to be the first engineer, who in my case was a chap I knew before the war, who'd done three months up north, as a second engineer - Cats carry two engineers. And I knew him, and I was a sergeant, and he was a corporal, and I'd known him, so I said, `Look, I'll - if you're starting to form up a crew', because it was usually the engineer that formed up the crew, because basically he was called a crew chief, and he was second in charge, or he was in charge of the crew under the skipper. So he said, `Oh you know, are you sure?', and I said, `Yes, well, you know, it'll only be for three months, so', I said, `as, you know, that much about it that I don't know'. And away we went on that scheme.

(20.00) So then he went and saw some of the instructors that were training the second pilots to be captains, and one that he knew, and he said, `Oh well, you know, well who do you reckon for a skipper?'. So he said to - this was the first engineer - `Oh I think so and so's a good bloke, he's had a fair amount of flying as a second dick', and he said, you know, `We'd recommend him'. This is - it's a bit funny, it sounds - it might sound a bit funny, there's a corporal organising a crew for a flight lieutenant.

And then what goes on is they, you've met the people who are going to be the armourers, and the 2As, and the wirelesses - wireless operators, there's two of those. And one of them is - one who's been a second WAG up north, and has come down to do his first WAG's course, so he knows the WAGs on his course. So he picks out a WAG that he thinks would be - fit in with the rest of the people we've talked about.

And then the first engineer approaches the one who's doing the skipper's course, and says, `Well, how are you organised for a crew? We've got so and so, and so and so, and so and so', and Ed said, `Oh well we've - yes, well I've got a navigator, and a second pilot, yes, so we - that's' - who were very companionable, and easy to get on with, and that's the way they liked it, because in my book there'd be nothing worse than flying with somebody who's a skipper that you didn't like, or that you were a bit doubtful about.

What did you think of the Catalinas when you first saw them?

Oh I liked them. I liked the fact that they were flying boats, as against a land-based aircraft. Because you knew you were always going to be in a reasonable situation, it didn't matter where it was, where it was based, it was going to be on the water. And with that area of Northern Australia, with lots of interesting places, as against the uninteresting places, that are hundred or so miles off the coast, inland, and you can well imagine the sort of areas they were in, you know. Eighty miles south of Darwin and places like this. It was much preferable to be on a Catalina. And their technical abilities, or construction, interested me. The engines were very similar to the Pratt and Whitneys, in Lockheed Hudsons, that I'd had a fair bit to do with and altogether the companionship of the crew was good.

So what sort of flights did you start to make?

Well you did - your training course was to learn seamanship, airmanship. Your navigator'd be learning navigation, you'd be doing navigation trips, night landings and take-offs, all manner of exercises. Rough water landings, which are a different proposition altogether to normal landing on reasonably calm water.

They used to do what was called a stall landing, which is not recommended unless you've got to use it. You fly along perhaps twenty feet off the water, and, in round figures, just reduce the airspeed until the aircraft stalls, which means that the back end of it drops down, and the front of it goes up, and it comes down, crunch.

You've got virtually no forward speed, and it hits the water fairly hard, and the theory is that in rough water you do that, you drop that in between, like in a trough. It you happen to drop it on the top of one it means that you - if it's a big peak it takes up all the space, and you hit it a lot harder, because you're still flying it.

And they'd had a casualty on the course two courses before us, which had killed all the people on board. And they - then the next course they cut it out, while they examined the - you know, the possibility of removing it from the course, or whether it was advisable, and then they went back onto it again in the training program.

And ours was the first course that flew it again. And the way they used to do that, they'd send one crew, and about three spare skippers. So it meant, if you were that crew, you did four

rough water landings, as against one, if you were - well, if you were lucky you'd think you could get away with one, well - with your own skipper. But when you had to do another three with strange skippers that mightn't have been as good, or might have been better, but you had more confidence in your own skipper.

(25.00) And then we did air-to-air gunnery. Another Catalina towing a drogue, and you fly up alongside it, and pound some rounds into the drogue, which is a sleeve, a long sleeve. And all the various stations have got, the ammunition has got red paint tips on the - say, for me, and blue for somebody else, and green for another one, so's that they can count the different colours, as they go through the sleeve. If they go through the sleeve.

And it's amazing really. I got 1100 rounds fired on my gunnery course, which is not many if you put it into seconds, I suppose it's three or four seconds at the most, I'd say. And that's two different, it's air-to-air, and air-to-ground. And I got one per cent hits. And that's what you go away up north with as a gunner.

Well what would be regarded as a satisfactory rate?

I wouldn't have a clue. The main thing that they wanted was you to be able to say that you'd fired 1100 rounds through the gun. And the armament instructors, that was their main complaint. `Get the rounds through it, get the rounds through it.'

And we had a system of stops on the machine-gun position to stop you bringing it round. You fired your rounds from the blister compartment, and the aircraft would fly up alongside the other one, and they had it so that you couldn't bring the gun too far forward.

And shoot down the ... (Laughs).

Not so much shoot down the other aircraft, but so as you didn't shoot pieces off your own, off the main plane, or the float. And if they weren't coordinating too good they certainly wouldn't let you shoot while it was there to beam off you.

But once they got up - the other - the towing aircraft got up a bit far ahead of you, and you'd get round, and your gun'd be on the stop. And you could see that it wasn't going to hit the sleeve, but that didn't matter, you had to get those rounds through, and we had to be back at base. And I'm afraid that a lot of people did worse than I did. But ....

So when you finally ...?

It wasn't anything that you had to get five per cent or anything to pass, you just had to fire 1100 rounds in my case, through the gun, and you passed on all the other subjects perhaps, or perhaps one per cent was enough.

And, as you headed up north, did it leave you feeling a little bit unprepared?

Well you never ever considered that you had much chance, really, against a fighter. Your only defence was to dive down - this was in daylight - dive down to the water, and stay down as low as you could on the water. Then a fighter would have to approach, and it would have

to start lining the aircraft up with its preliminary shots, and you'd see them in the water. That's if he wasn't right on target to start with.

And the skipper would be taking control, he'd be flying the aircraft, and getting instruction from the second pilot, who'd probably be standing up, with his head out the top of the pilot's compartment, watching where the splash was in the water, and telling him to veer away from that.

And you'd have the navigator probably down in the blister compartment standing up doing a similar thing, to tell which gunner to open fire. And the tail gunner, which had the gun facing down, well he wouldn't be any good, because they couldn't get down - if you were lucky they couldn't get down below the aircraft to fire up like that.

But several times they had aircraft attack them, with the - different people, and if they made a run one from the front, and one from the side, or something like that, it was inevitable that you'd be very lucky to get out of it.

While we were on course one of the sergeant armourers on course was the - he actually - the armament in the aircraft first were first world war Lewis guns, aircraft-type, but they were basically those, and he shot down a Zero, with a first world war Lewis gun. And he didn't get any decorations for it, but he's listed in the book. And then others just got shot down, and that was all about it. I don't think anybody else ever shot one down from a Catalina.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

> Identification: This is side two of tape two of an interview recorded on 9th November with Allan Lancaster about Catalinas.
>
> Once you began on these operational flights, what did you actually do in the aircraft? What sort of things would occupy you?

Well the flight engineer was crew chief, and you were responsible to see that all the provisions, that's meals, and everything pertaining to that, and to the rest of the crew, everything was right on board. The other crew members were a sergeant airframe fitter who was responsible for controls, and various other features in the aircraft, and the armourer who was responsible that the armament was serviceable, and that the ammunition was stowed correctly.

The water tanks had to be filled, and you were preparing to be away for twenty-odd hours, at least, in the air. And in that time you had to cook at least two meals. Ten members of the crew. It took a fair amount of time, it was a small two hotplate electric stove that operated while you were in the air with the engines going. And the engineer overseed most of that.

He also had - in action stations one engineer would be up at the panel, which was a position in the aircraft that controlled lots of actions pertaining to the running of the engines. Cowl gills to keep the cylinder heads cool, oil pressure gauges, oil contents gauges, fuel gauges, rates of flow of the fuel, so as you can work out, fairly closely too, quite accurately, the range

of the aircraft at various engine commitments such as revs, boosts, control, airspeed worked in with propellor pitches. Lots of stuff like that, you carried scales to give you the correct combination for various speeds and various endurances, so you had to work all this out from your fuel gauges, and your rate of flow.

On those longer sort of flights, were you occupied most of the time, or about what percentage of the time were you doing these sort of things?

The flight engineer used to do two hours at a time at the panel, and then he'd be spared by the second engineer who would go up and do the same thing. We kept a log that was entered every twenty minutes, all the time, completely, with similar things that I've said. The rate of usage of petrol, and the condition of the aircraft, the angle that it's flying at. A lot of stuff that went in, air speeds, air temperatures, and how each engine was functioning. Quite a complicated thing that kept you fairly busy, as I say, writing it in every twenty minutes.

Were you cooking as well?

Well one of you usually cooked, assisted by one of the other crew.

What were you like as a cook?

I wasn't bad with steak, and stuff, but I didn't get round to anything very fancy, and we had our first contact with pressure cookers in those days. The aircraft came out from America complete with two pressure cookers. And nobody, nobody that I knew, knew anything about them.

And I had the engineers' compartment once when I was on station up there, and the other flight engineer was making some soup, or heating up some soup, and he didn't take any notice of the indicator, which we found out later of course. And the jiggler valve, he took that off, when it was - would have been diplomatic to just remove the lot off the stove, and let it cool down. And the pressure that had built up in it squirted hot soup up into the engineers' compartment. And fortunately it was in a fairly fine spray.

(5.00) We used to make custard, and have stewed apple, and stuff like that. But you couldn't get really adventuresome on food, with ten people to feed. And it was - some aircraft you got onto, didn't have enough knives and forks, and some didn't have enough plates.

We got onto one on one trip and we had no plates, no knives and forks. The crew that had been flying it reckoned that it was their aircraft, so they took all that stuff off. And they apparently had had their own style. But we finished up eating off the tin lids of flying rations and things like that, with a knives clasp which was issued to you, and which you usually took with you on operations, was - as you would take your .38 revolver, and stuff like that, in case you had to take to the air, or were forced down or something.

One might suppose you wouldn't be on particularly friendly terms with that other crew when you met them again?

No, well it was your own 2A that you weren't on real good terms with, because it was up to him to see that that sort of stuff was right before you took off. And, although we nearly all used to double-check one another, but on this particular trip perhaps we didn't.

> Given that different sorts of aircraft can have different capabilities and reputations, how long was it before you felt assured that this really was a good reliable aircraft, and it was a good thing to be in?

Well the main problem that we used to find wasn't so much the reliability of, say, engines, it was the different attitude that the aircraft used to fly in that made it use a lot less fuel. And I can name one particular trip that we took, say, twenty hours to do in one aircraft, that meant we had to stop, and we had to refuel at a refuelling area. But we did it only some two days later in another aircraft, and we did it complete, nonstop, without any concern, in four hours less. And that was enough to make you want to be able to fly permanently in these sort of aircraft.

But there was no - you couldn't find any reason for it. If one crew said that they did it in such a time, well you could say, `Oh yes, but you might have been using different combinations of boost and throttle position, and pitch control'. But if you've flown them yourself, within a day or two, and you've got your logbook with the times in it, there was no argument. One aircraft flew beautifully, compared with the other one, which sort of squashed along, staggered along almost.

Because that was another instrument that you had in the engineers' compartment, to enable you to work out the amount of fuel you had, was an inclinometer, which just showed you the altitude of the aircraft in a horizontal position. And they flew perfectly at about a three and a half degree. Whereas, when they were fully fuelled up, and bombed up, they might fly at seven degrees. And it's a feeling that you can - they talk about flying by the seat of your pants. Well in this instance you could - sitting in an aircraft you could even tell. Without an inclinometer you could tell that it wasn't at three and a half, or it was at seven, or worse, you know.

> Do you recall your first flight, where you were going off with the possibility that you might get shot down, or something might happen, you were going to be over Japanese territory?

Well that was a bombing run. Convoys and that sort of thing, which they break you in on for the first couple of operational trips, are just boring, except that you've got a terrific amount of water to fly over, to find them, and stay with them, and fly back.

> Would you be concerned though about the possibility of attack by Japanese aircraft?

Not in the situation where we were, from, say, Cairns to New Guinea. It never entered - the sort of aircraft that you might find would probably only be a similar sort of aircraft, one of their flying boats or something, and you'd reckon that that would be fair enough. But on a bombing run you get a lot of satisfaction out of it, because you ...

> Tell us about your first one though, where ...

Well the first ...

... where it's an unknown quantity, and this is it, would be the feeling?

Well it's - it was at Kavieng, which was a place, a port, on the - on New Britain. New Ireland, sorry. And we were to fly up there, and we were bombed up in the river at Cairns. Fully refuelled.

Were you excited?

(10.00)Well that was .... It was not so much excited as, well now, it's, this is what we came for, this is what we imagined. You were optimistic about the result, for sure. And you felt as though, right, this is the ultimate, this is what we've been trained for, and you know from other people that you've talked to, that have been there and done it, and you talk to them, and you find out, `We - oh yes, you know, we've been there, we were there last week', or something, `and it wasn't bad', or it was this or that, and where there's a problem. So if you get a reasonably good weather run, and your aircraft is right, you've tested it anyway the day before probably, particularly if it's had any service done on it.

And you take a personal message with you, you take some thirty-pound incendiaries which are not included in the bomb load, they're put down in the blister compartment for the three people down in that end to throw their own ones out. Sometimes they're anti-personnel, sometimes they're incendiaries. And this was nearly always done.

So you find the place. And we never flew in any sort of formation, or any groups, or anything of that. The Catalinas were always solitary jobs. There might be five of you go on the trip, but there's no time over the target that you've got to be there.

I think the aforementioned bit about the - one aircraft being slower than the other used to take care of that almost. It was nowhere near as accurately laid out for you as a mining run was. Although a mining run was done at a lot lower. We never ever bombed any higher than 6000 feet, around midnight. And we never had the problems of big formations or anything like that, and we always tried to - the aircraft itself was happier in the night-time. It had more chance of success.

And our first run, we went up, looked forward to it. Did the run, got bounced about a bit with anti-aircraft fire.

Tell us - what about that first occasion then, when you found yourself in an air where there was anti-aircraft fire, was that frightening?

It started you thinking, why you didn't stay at your peaceful - in charge of workshops at Canberra. And instead of that you were up there, and they were really firing at you. And some of them were close, some of them were a long way away.

But it was only an instant, and you were more interested in the, looking to see where the guns were situated, because I was almost always on the tunnel gun, over the target, and part of the job was to look, and see if you could log just where the batteries were. And then you'd check

it out with the navigator later on, on the way back, to see if you'd seen any new ones on the intelligence that they had, or previous form.

And I used to - before we got to the target I used to get a sheet of paper, and I'd draw the target area roughly, from the navigator's chart, and mark in where they were - there were batteries. And then I'd sort of turn it round to the appropriate angle, and have it with me when I - you lay down in the back - in the tunnel gun situation.

How long might you be lying down?

Oh you'd only be - you'd get there, say, a quarter of an hour before the target, perhaps twenty minutes, but quarter of an hour probably.

Was it an uncomfortable position?

Well not particularly. You were laying down on your stomach, and you had a pad to lay on, and you had a strap to hook onto the back of your parachute harness, which you wore on bombing raids. On mining raids you only put your Mae West, your life jacket, on. Because you, at 300 feet, on the mining run, you wouldn't have time to use a parachute anyway.

Would you have a feeling that, lying down like that, if something came up through the aircraft, that it ...? (Laughs).

No, you never thought of it that way. I used to occupy myself in the run up to the target by trying to anticipate it, by edging some of me out, out, and look along the keel, look forward, to see how much longer it was going to be.

Because the only thing you might hear over the target was the navigator telling the skipper that the indicated air speed over the target will be ninety-three knots. And the old aircraft is making its way gently along. And you're interested in how long it's going to take you to get over the target, and then get away from the target.

But you'd see another aircraft, as you were running up to the target, you might see another one ahead of you, say ten minutes ahead of you, and you'd note the anti-aircraft fire coming up to that. And then you'd compare that with the amount that came up to you. And when you got back, the next day up in the mess, you'd be - you'd talk to the - you'd find out which aircraft it was that went in, and you'd note the time, and you'd say, you know, `How did you find it?', and they said, `Oh, you know, we're right, we watched you, and you were getting a lot of anti-aircraft fire', you know. And we were in the opposite seat, we were thinking, well, you know, `You didn't do too good either'.

(15.00)Was it a disadvantage to be coming in later, in one of the slower planes?

I don't think it made much difference. They were all pretty slow, you know, it wasn't a matter of - I think perhaps the first aircraft in might have had a bit of an advantage in that it didn't wake them all up, or they weren't alert. But I think by the time the last one came in they probably had a lot better idea of how quick both aircraft were going. And how high they were, and stuff like this, they had a lot more time to work it out.

> Anyway you were saying that you were lying there, and you would use this outline to try and note any new batteries?

Yes, and roughly mark on it where you thought they were.

> Well on that first run then, when you let go of the load, were you on target, do you know?

Well you couldn't really work it out, not from the sort of situation you were in. Some places you might be over an airstrip, and they were always pretty heavily defended. And you might see bombs in the camp area, or the - where they know that the personnel are, or you might see it to one side, or you might even see it on the strip. Then you'd probably only see an explosion. Some of the other places you'd start a fire. And when you were coming up to the target, perhaps just before the navigator's ready to let go, he might say, `Okay in the tunnel', or `You can let go your incendiaries', and they'd go down, and you might see those go first. And they might start a fire in the huts, or something.

But mining was more dangerous in lots of ways, because you had to put your mines exactly where they were supposed to be.

> So on this occasion, when you first actually dropped bombs, was there a sense, now you'd finally actually struck a blow at the enemy?

Yes, it was - it seemed one-sided up until then. Having been hurried out of Singapore and through the islands home. And putting in a spell, if you like, for about ten or eleven months in workshops at Canberra, RAAF Station, Canberra. And, getting onto operations finally, there certainly was a lot of satisfaction in completing your operational training course, and being posted to an operational squadron in Cairns. And after two or three convoy jobs, which sort of accustomed us to the area, we went on our first mining run, which was not as satisfactory as a bombing strike, because you didn't see anything except a splash in the water. So, I suppose, although the mining jobs were probably operationally more valuable, you didn't get quite as much satisfaction. Although, when you looked at the distances that you travelled, it was something to be proud of I think, because there were 1000 miles of water between where we operated from and where we planted our mines.

> Was there a sense that it was a much more dangerous sort of operation, because of the length of the flight, and that you had to come in relatively low to lay them?

Yes, it was a different type of operation right from the word go. We had to operate at a much lower altitude to get up to the areas that we were going to mine, because we had to set off from Darwin in daylight, and get up into - amongst the islands, say Sumba and along the chain of islands up to Java actually, to Surabaya, which was our first mining port.

And that had to be .... You had to be arriving there round about eleven, twelve o'clock at night. Because you then descended to about three hundred, four hundred feet, at the maximum. Find the datum point to make your mining run on, and unload your mines there. And quite often you were under light anti-aircraft fire, or even rifle fire.

In Surabaya there was an army camp camped along between the island of Java, and Madurah, which is only, oh, ten or twelve miles I suppose, at the most. And you'd get, sometimes from both sides, light anti-aircraft fire would be the best you could call it.

But then you had to contend with if you were coming into the mining area there was quite often a navy, or several navy units, anchored in the area, and the navy gunners were usually alert, and were a lot better shots than the other people. So that was the area of danger really. Finding yourself making a mining run over a destroyer or some such ship.

(20.00) We did it one night on a second trip up there, and it was a very bad night, inasmuch as heavy cloud was very low down. Strong winds, you could see lots of white caps on the water. And our first run took us directly along the length of what appeared to be a Japanese destroyer. At the altitude we were at it was pretty plain for me to see, because I had the best view of the lot, I was laying down, and looking out the tunnel hatch.

And for what was probably two seconds at the most - it seemed like five minutes - before we cleared it, and nobody did anything. One, we didn't open fire on it, which would have been silly anyway, but they kept quiet too. I would imagine that they may have thought we were on a bombing mission, or even perhaps a torpedo mission, which - the Catalinas did a couple of torpedo missions. And we were happy to not disturb them, as I think they were quite pleased that we didn't have anything to do with them.

> Well was there a build-up of tension, as you got to an area where you knew you were likely to encounter anti-aircraft or ground fire? Would you actually almost jump when the first sight of it came close?

You wouldn't bother about, you never went to what you would call action stations unless you were within, say, twenty or thirty minutes from the target, and that was - you were usually pretty well prepared before that. Everybody, I think, myself included, had a good look at the target area on the navigator's chart, and what were likely to be the disposition of offensive fire. So it wasn't really a surprise, and you approached that slowly, you had plenty of time to get yourself in the mood to be prepared for some.

> What was the mood? What do you mean `in the mood', what was the mood?

Well we were all at our action stations by this time, and had been there probably for twenty minutes. And well it was a matter of you'd come ten or twelve hours or something, perhaps ten hours in the air before you got there, and there wasn't any great exultation, or satisfaction, except that you'd got there. And your main problem most of the way was duration of the aircraft, keeping fuel down to what had to be controlled, so that you had enough to get back, and the possibility, which was fairly remote, of night-fighters.

I used to think the biggest danger perhaps was running into another Catalina on the same job. Even though we were all operating on different datum points, I think, I was never told much about this. But it used to seem to be a haphazard way of conducting it, with the fact that you could almost take off whenever you were ready to take off, and some aircraft were quite a lot faster than the others, specially in the air with a full load, coming back it wasn't quite so bad.

We had an aircraft that used to use a lot more fuel than some of the other. And we proved it on a couple of trips, that - one trip to Kavieng we could do a complete trip from Cairns to Kavieng and back to Cairns without refuelling, and on another we used to have to refuel at either Moresby on the way up, or at Milne Bay, or somewhere in that area coming back.

So this used to provide a sort of a net or a ....

> Your flight paths would be criss-crossing at different points then along the line?

Well you're all going to the same place usually, there might be half a dozen aircraft. And I don't know whether I mentioned this before, but on one particular trip to Balikpapan we must have got away fairly early, and we were in an aircraft that was pretty slow, and didn't fly as well as some others, and before it got dark you could see perhaps three other aircraft slowly gaining on you, and it might take - it might have taken from, oh, four o'clock in the afternoon till six o'clock, seven o'clock before anybody came abreast of us. They weren't that much faster, but it was a bit strange to see them creeping up, and then go past, and know that they were all allegedly the same aircraft, but they had such different characteristics, when you - operating them fully laden over a long distance.

> Were there ever any collisions in fact?

Not in that sense of the word. One collision occurred on the water, at Cairns, when an aircraft had just slipped the moorings from the buoy, because of course at Cairns we were in a river. And another aircraft was coming in to land, and they overlapped the wings as they landed, and ripped the float off the taxiing aircraft. So one aircraft finished up with three floats, and the other with only one, on the wings, but nobody was hurt in that.

(25.00) Other collisions that did occur, not with aircraft, the aircraft, quite a few of them ran into hills on various operations. We lost one or two that way. Especially on mining, and/or on supply to coastwatchers, which was another job that these Cats did.

> About how many of these minelaying missions had you run then, before your aircraft was hit?

We did about six or seven, I suppose, mining runs, and we considered ourselves fairly competent at it, and we were quite confident as well. Until we came to this one on Woleai, which was an island north of the Admiralties, where we operated from, from an American seaplane tender.

And it was around about six or seven hours north of the Admiralty Islands. And they'd only been taken from the Japanese, say, oh, a week or ten days before we were up there. And this operation on Woleai was to slow down an attempt to reinforce Hollandia in New Guinea where was to be the next landing by the ground troops, and operations by the navy.

Truk was also a little bit east of Woleai, and it was fairly important anyway. We operated from this Japanese - sorry, Japanese nothing, this American ship, the USS *Tangier*. And we'd done - already done two runs up on Woleai on successive nights.

And on the third night there was only about four aircraft required, and we were senior aircraft crew in 20 Squadron at the time, and we naturally had one of these positions. And everything seemed to be satisfactory and we knew where we were going, and what we were going to do. And we took along with us the squadron intelligence officer, who hadn't been on a trip prior to this. And he wanted to have a look in the Woleai harbour, to see what sort of shipping was there.

We approached it at our operational height, which was about 1500 feet, and came down then to about five hundred feet, to be heavily engaged with anti-aircraft fire. We proceeded across the harbour itself to our datum point, made our run, and just dropped the mines, and were circling to come back home, and the squadron intelligence officer said that he'd like to have a look at the area, so would we drop a flare, which we did, which lit prematurely.

By this time we'd climbed to about twelve hundred or fifteen hundred feet. And the flare exploded prematurely, and lit us up, the - 2000 foot was about the ceiling of the cloudcover, so we were projected in with 1,000,000 candlepower or so just below us, and an unbroken screen above us. It was like being projected onto a black and white movie screen.

And they fired lots of calibre of anti-aircraft at us. And one forty millimetre shell entered the blister compartment, from below of course, and exploded immediately, and killed the two blister gunners, and seriously wounded the squadron intelligence officer.

I was on the tunnel gun at the time, which was about, oh, five or six feet away from where the shell entered, and another one had come up, and peeled a piece off the blister compartment on the way through, and hadn't exploded, apparently. But I was of the mind at the time to drop the thirty calibre machine-gun out, and fire back, but realised it was ridiculous, it wouldn't do any good anyway.

So I was a bit concerned, because everything had gone quiet in the aircraft, and I hadn't heard the skipper calling for a report. When I came in from the tunnel compartment one gunner had been carried through to the nav compartment, and laid on the catwalk, and the other gunner was just inside that bulkhead, and was in the bunk compartment, and the skipper had just come down.

And the first gunner died immediately, and the other gunner who we'd taken through, and thought was reasonably - only lightly wounded, he died about four hours later. It took us about six and a half hours or so to come back from target.

Mmm.

After we'd settled down a bit to come back, and I had a look around I realised how extremely lucky I was that the shell went through at the angle that it did, and that I hadn't been wounded. Plus the fact that the aircraft hadn't been more seriously damaged than it appeared to be.

Other shrapnel wounds. I looked after him after - him first of all, made him as reasonably comfortable ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.

END OF INTERVIEW.

Eat humble pie?

That's exactly right. It would have been much better had they at least posted us to different units.

Anyway I was at depot for nearly another - oh, another ten months I think. And received a posting then to air observer school at Mt Gambier.

And we found ourselves - there were quite - there were three or four corporals, I was a corporal by that time, posted over there - and this is where we weren't too happily received. Because the engineer officer over there, who was in charge of the technical side of the place, he had some leading aircraftsmen that he reckoned should have been corporals, and didn't welcome us at all.

END TAPE 1, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

Identification: This is side two of tape one of the interview recorded with Allan Lancaster on 9th November, 1989, about Catalinas.

You were saying you weren't too welcome at Mount Gambier?

No, because the engineer officer had some LAs, leading aircraftsmen, who had been there for some time. And he told us in fact that he expected them to be promoted to corporal, and didn't want any corporals posted in, which he had no control over, and we had no control over where we went. And, in the three weeks that I was there, we never did an actual corporal's job. But it didn't worry me too much, because I'd - after three weeks at Mount Gambier I was posted to the embarkation depot en route for Singapore.

This time the whole thing went through alright, we had final lave, and we were kitted up, and on 22nd November, '41, we went - left Melbourne by boat to go to Singapore.

Were you a bit worried up to the final moment, that they might change their minds again? (Laughs).

Well you're never sure until it happens. So that you do keep your fingers crossed, and you don't tell as many people as you did the first time.

And away we went. There were only fifteen air force on this small Dutch ship, and there were twenty-five AIF replacements. The Japanese war hadn't started, and people told me that we were lucky to be going to Singapore, and not overseas to England, or the Middle East,

because there was as real war on over there. And I don't know whether they - I don't think they meant it in any other respect other than that you'd be fairly safe, and it would be a nice tropical holiday.

What did you know about Singapore, what - did it seem exciting, and exotic, and those sort of things?

Well we thought it was pretty secure, because there'd been RAAF squadrons over there, 21 Squadron had gone over there some six months or so earlier. Number 1 Squadron had gone over there as well, that was - they were two Laverton squadrons. Number 8 Squadron went over there a bit later, and there was a - what was called an infiltration squadron, which was a squadron with an RAF number, 453, comprised a mixture of RAAF and RAF groundstaff, and a similar mixture of pilots, from RAF and RAAF. And they were there also. They were - some were up the peninsula, and some were at Sembawang which was the Australian base on Singapore itself.

We were - on our way, we called into - went up the east coast of Australia, and called into Bowen, to refuel. And we had a day in Bowen, a place that I was to see quite a bit of later on. And ...

Bowen's not a particularly big place now, what did it consist of then?

Oh it was a jetty, and mainly a railway area, there was like a railway workshops there. And not a bad little town. A set of swimming baths there, and - which we had an incident in there later on, a couple of years later. And three or four hotels. Quite a nice place.

Just in case we lose the incident, as we go on, and don't get back to it, what happened?

Oh well, this was when I was on Catalinas, and Bowen became a flying-boat repair depot. And you used to take aircraft from Cairns down to Bowen whenever they had to come out of the water, because there was no ramp at Cairns, in the river at Cairns.

And to keep the aircrew busy, while the aircraft itself was being serviced, they used to ask us to - tell us - to pull the dinghies out, the rubber dinghies, the inflatable dinghies, and open them right up, pump them up with their bottles, they had inflatable - inflating air bottles on them. Go through the packages on the side - the inside of the boat, and check everything out, and see that it was all there, and then, after it was all checked out, and liberally applied French chalk all over it, again it was deflated, and rolled up, and put back into its valises.

(5.00) This sounds easy, until you come to trying to get all the air out of a fairly big dinghy. And you get it nearly rolled up, and you've got quite a percentage of air then in the last trapped corner which you've got, and it will not go into the valise. No way in the world.

So for all the efforts that we put into it we thought we should get something out of it. So the particular, the five-man dinghy, we took up to the Bowen Baths with us. We thought we'd have a day whizzing around in the dinghy in the baths, and serve two purposes, see how five people did fit in this. What - we could have put it in the sea of course, right alongside the repair depot, but we chose the baths.

And when we got up there, and paddling around in the baths, and a bit of horseplay, the dinghy got tipped over. And then we found out that somebody had forgotten, one of us had forgotten to take the seamarker, which was a packet of blue-green dye, that's meant to stain - you trail it behind the dinghy, when you're out in the ocean in distress, and it's easier to see from the air.

Well you can imagine what an inclosed swimming-pool looked like with a complete packet of this seamarker floating around. It went brilliant green, and fortunately it didn't - doesn't come off on you, but it emptied the baths of the other people that were there, and it emptied us too. They weren't at all happy about it. I don't know what they did, I don't know whether they pumped it all out, or explained to the next people that came to swim in the baths, that that's all it was.

Thy didn't try and prosecute you?

No. They just said, you know, `You were silly fellows to do that', only in stronger language. And we never heard any more about it, except that we had to dry the dinghy thoroughly, and everything.

Anyway you were on your way to Singapore from Bowen?

Yes. And we just had the one call in Australia, which was Bowen, and then up the top, and across, and we were just entering the Arafura Sea when the *Sydney* was attacked somewhere in the - vaguely in that area, but it turned out to be over close to the Western Australian coast, which we didn't know about it. And this was a German attack. In other words the Japanese war hadn't started, but it was getting close. And ...

Did you know that, was there a feeling that war was imminent?

Oh yes, but we - and we used to just get little bulletins on the ship noticeboard. Being a Dutch ship they were fairly well interested in what might be going on in the Indies as well. And we didn't know until we were up near Borneo where - they were heading for Borneo, to take on more fuel there, being a Dutch-occupied area, heading for Balikpapan. It was another place that I visited later on, during the latter stages, when we were - when I was flying on Cats.

And we stopped in there, refuelled, and they waited there for information. And didn't get - it hadn't started then, so they went down again to the bottom of Sumatra. And they called into Oosthaven, which is another place we called - I saw later on. And we waited there for information, and the information then came through that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbour, and come from Indochina, and were approaching the northern coast of Malaya.

And we waited there for sailing orders, and we ...

What was the feeling at the time? Did you suddenly feel sort of very endangered, or do you remember - or excited at the prospect that you were going to see action, or what?

Well I think we were - like a lot of other people we didn't think that it would be very serious. We thought that, you know, we were entering a zone that we half-hoped we would have been. But not for a couple of days did we take it as seriously as it turned out to be of course.

While we were in Balikpapan we'd entertained some American sailors. We weren't allowed off our boat, but they were with some destroyers, a squadron of destroyers, and they let some of them come onto our boat. And we visited with them, and we had a few drinks with them. And they'd come from the Philippines. And I think they had a little more information than we did, because they were certain that it was going to take place.

(10.00) And it was - they were of the Blackhawk Squadron, which - they had - their mother ship was with them as well. And a lot - quite a few of them were sunk in the very early stages of the war.

Anyway we went from Oosthaven - instead of going up the northern coast of Sumatra and across to Singapore, we went down onto the south coast of Singapore, Sumatra. And went up the outer side, if you like, south side, right up to the northern tip, where we stopped at another little port called Sabang, and they - we were allowed ashore there, and they also stayed there for sailing orders, to see what the situation was in the straits between Sumatra and Malaya.

Anyway we finished up going round the northern tip, and down - heading south down to Singapore. And there wasn't - we weren't intercepted, or interfered with or - in any way. The Japanese hadn't got anywhere near that area.

We got to Singapore on about the 10th, I think, or something like that, of December. Not the 10th of December, because - yes, that's - around that. It was the 16th, 16th December. Took me longer to get round Sumatra than I thought.

And we were unloaded, and taken out to our - what proved to be our base then for the short time that we were in Singapore. And our first air-raid was the second night we were there, that was our first, they'd had one or two earlier ones, but very little damage, and they hadn't attacked the aerodrome.

What was the feeling, was there fear in Singapore then?

I don't think so, it seemed as though everybody was quite happy about the whole situation. Because they had a couple of squadrons well up the peninsula, up at Kota Bharu and up round that area. And they had others down on the island. There was an RAF unit over at Seletar, and it seemed pretty secure actually at the time. And the air-raids that they did have, they - there weren't many aircraft came over, there was not a great deal of damage done early on.

Did you hear the bombs?

You could - from - we were some, I suppose, ten or twelve miles, perhaps, from Singapore. It might have been a bit less than that. But you could hear it when it was on. But quite often the aircraft were very high up, and a lot of the bombing was inaccurate.

And as the days wore on, the bombing was more frequent, and we were continually expecting to be attacked on our area. They'd bombed Salita, the RAF area, and the naval base, which

was not very far away from us, and there was a lot of damage done there. And then we got ours, a heavy, fairly heavy concentrated attack, a couple of days after the naval base.

Much damage? People injured?

Well I don't know what happened to people on the naval base. There were quite a - probably quite a lot of natives, native people, injured. Chinese, labourers, even some of the anti-aircraft groups, which are - were mainly Indian, there were some casualties there.

And we were - that is the group that had just arrived there, the fifteen of us, we'd been grabbed to be trained as stretcher-bearers. Mainly I think, because we hadn't been fitted into any particular section on the island. We were - I was posted to the station headquarters workshops, and I only did one or two jobs, I think, maybe three. But approximately two or three jobs in the few weeks that I was there. But we'd been put together as emergency stretcher-bearers, which we started to have to do when we were - our own area was bombed.

What were the first injuries that you saw?

Well we had - our job was allegedly to wait until the bombing had finished, and then go out and look for casualties. Which we did, we had reasonable training. When I say training, I mean, you know, almost a first-aid course. And then when we were faced with it most of the people we'd picked up were - had been killed.

(15.00) And a lot of them were native people, native labourers. We had quite a group of labourers on the area. And engaged in their aerodrome construction-type work. And they would - in the first air-raid particularly, the first heavy one, they would run into gas shelters, which were only places to contain gas masks, and helmets, and gear, of clothing and stuff like that. And they were only fibro cement, and they were - obviously they weren't meant to protect you against anything, because most of the fibro cement would be - was blown off everyone that was anywhere near a blast.

And another place they dived in were some of the deep drains, open drains, that would be like stormwater drains. And they'd be perhaps four feet deep. But if you happened to get, like one occasion, you'd get a bomb that drops in the drain, say 100 yards away, the blast go - went up the drain, and blew them all in together, like a pack of cards, up in the end of the drain, which was stepped probably two or three feet, so's that the water, the heavy rain water, the storm water that was coming down, like was stepped down, and slowed its progress down.

And we had a lot of those. When I say a lot, perhaps fifteen of those to pick up. And in no time the little morgue, if you like to call it that, was full of people. We had only two - I think two, air force people killed in the first big raid. And - because we all had dug air-raid shelters, and if you're digging one for yourself you make sure that you dig it deep enough.

But the joke was to get to them sometimes. You'd be in the wrong place, and you didn't make for your own, you made for the nearest one. And there used to be a saying that `it took him two minutes to get to the slit trench, but ten minutes to walk back'. You had wings on your feet.

How did this business of picking up dead bodies and that affect you at the time? Did it unnerve you, or bother you, or did you find you accommodated yourself pretty well?

Oh I think we looked at it pretty right. I didn't have anything to do with the two air force people, so I suppose I must have thought, `Oh well, you know, it's bad luck, and they went to the wrong place', or something like that.

But you were fairly shocked, because you were shocked by the bombing. Your first real bombing attack is pretty awe-inspiring. You can hear them, but they don't whistle like - well I didn't think they did, I think they made a different noise altogether, but when they started to come close you could hear it, and then you were concentrating on how deep in the ground you were. And sometimes we were caught on one raid in the auxiliary pumping station, which was a fairly solidly-built place, and there was lots of corners that you could hide in from the blast and that.

So we were in there one day, and we got one fairly close. And they'd be probably 250 or 500 pounders at the very outside I'd say. And the - where the water used to come in in pipes into the pumping station was in a channel in the floor with checker plate, three quarter, a half inch checker plate, so's that they could lift it up, and look in, and see any leaks or anything.

And where I was I - one bomb that landed, it lifted this checker plate, which was probably a piece at least six or eight feet long, and ...

This was steel, I presume?

Steel, yes. And it was a good eighteen to twenty inches wide, and it lifted that, just the blast of that lifted it up I think a foot off the ground right alongside me. And that's when you realised what a blast can do, and that's why you had some of these casualties that ran into areas where there was really no protection. The only protection is in a slit-trench, and in an L shape, which we were taught to dig, so's that you can be in one side or the other of the leg. I was never strafed, so I never had occasion to use the left or the right leg, sort of thing. But it's pretty frightening.

So what happened from there?

Well we - the air force had made arrangements to move over to Sumatra, where the Dutch had quite a lot of emergency landing grounds, and a couple of civil strips over there.

And we went over, we had to go down to the naval base to get on a ship. And you only took, oh, very little gear with you. Just a couple of sets of underwear, and a couple of pairs of shorts and shirts and things like that. You didn't take a full kit, or anything, because you had quite a swag of kit to take with you when you were posted overseas, and they never, ever took it away from you, which we used to think was silly.

(20.00)I mean I went to Singapore with a heavy blue overcoat, and blue uniform, which - their argument against leaving that in storage somewhere was that if you got posted from there to England, or somewhere like that you were prepared to be - you were kitted to go anywhere in the world sort of thing, and you had to carry it with you. I think we had seven

different hats. Working hats, and fur felts, and peaked caps, and service caps, and berets. You know, it was really a waste of space, and a waste of money, to send them with you.

Anyway we were - with a skeleton kit anyway, we waited, and we went by boat across to Sumatra, to Palembang, which was a big oil-producing area in Sumatra, Central Sumatra. And we - to get there we had to cross the - from Singapore to the area. And by this time there was a fair amount of naval activity going on.

And in the late afternoon - the ship we were on was the Malayan Navy - it was a civilian ship converted to a - you could call it an armed transport, I suppose. Although it wasn't very big. It had a bit of armament on board, and it was a part of the Malayan Navy.

And we were crossing in the afternoon, and there was a mine seen floating in - a normal marine mine. And the ship was stopped while everybody on board, and I mean everybody, fired at it, to try and detonate it. Now you see on television that one fellow with a .45 automatic detonates a mine that floats past, and that's no trouble, but I can tell you that this one must have been hit, well, conservatively, 100 times.

Did you have a rifle, were you firing at it as well?

Yes, I had an ordinary service rifle. Most of us did. Some of us had Tommy guns, the .45 calibre Thompson gun. And some of us had even the old aircraft Lewises that they'd taken off the Wirraways, which were up there. The Wirraways were originally in 21 Squadron.

This must have made quite a racket? (Laughs).

It did, and the humorous part about it was that it probably would eventually sink, it would fill with water probably, for the amount of holes that the casing would have in it. But it was never exploded, and we thought that the first shot to hit it would explode it.

But the peculiar part about it afterwards was that, I think he was the master at arms, anyway he was the person in charge of the armoury on the boat, he came round and with one or two of his sailors, which were native Malayans, I imagine, they picked up all the expended cases, because every one he could pass in at - when they got back to wherever they were going to go back to, he could get another live one for it. And they were still working under civilian almost style - or unwar - not wartime, you know - peacetime scale of things, where he had to account for everything that they used.

Anyway we finally made it to this river at Palembang, and we went up the river quite some distance, and finished up at P2, which was an allegedly secret aerodrome in the jungle.

P1 was named - that was their - what had been their civil aerodrome at Palembang. And they were quite a distance apart, and the saving factor of P2 was that it was virtually an open space in the jungle, but it - there were no buildings around it, there were no revetments for blast against aircraft, like, to preserve the aircraft that were parked in there, and it was a big area.

And it was never, ever discovered by the Japs until after we got out of there. But they discovered P1 pretty quick, because it was the civil aerodrome, and they bombed that a few

times. And they came round in our area, but they never, ever bombed it, not until the very last stages. And by that time we weren't there anyway, we'd made our way out of the place.

But that was the place that we used to - were sending aircraft out to look for convoys that were obviously coming towards Sumatra, and that sort of thing.

What were you actually doing, what was your role at this time?

(25.00)Well I was still in - into - wherever their workshops were, I was in workshops, and working on aircraft maintenance. Like they'd bring an article in that - in good times they'd bring an article in, and you'd have the replacement bits, or you'd have the facilities to repair the ones that they brought to you, whatever they might be.

I had a specialty with the cowl gills, which are the ring of flaps that go round the back of a Lockheed Hudson engine cowling. And you open and close them to control the heat of the engine, which is pretty important. The engines - the type of engine, the radial engine that they have in Hudsons was controlled, you had cylinder-head temperatures et cetera, that you had to keep within a certain range, and this is the way you controlled them. And they had such a lot of different linkages in them that they used to wear, and we used to have to either rebush, replace.

And when we left Singapore the engineer officer gave me about six sets of these as my special cross to bear. I had to bring them, and see that they were packed every time we moved, and that we had enough of them and all this. Which wasn't easy, but we managed most of the time, until we got to Sumatra, and after Sumatra it didn't matter.

But the program - once we got settled at this P2, the program turned out to be a case of - put into groups of about eight, or ten at the most, fitters, et cetera. But, before you went to the workshops, you had to be - you were called at four o'clock in the morning, half past four. You went to the meeting point, round operations room. And you were fully-armed with whatever your armament was.

And you went out, and the first morning you dug a slit trench around wherever you were going to be. We were near an operations room out in the jungle. And we dug our slit trenches near there. And then out of the - say there were six of you, two of you were on lookout, and the four - the other four were trying to get some rest, or go back to sleep, or whatever, in this hole in the ground.

And the story was that ops room had picked up the possibility of an airborne attack on P2 because there had already been a paratroop drop on P1 which was repelled by the Dutch, with their Bofors guns. They'd been able to pick them out, a lot of them out, while they were still in the air. And their native troops, the little Javanese, who were their foot soldiers, or their aerodrome guards, they went into the jungle, and sorted them out. And they - they didn't take the aerodrome, but it was made unusable almost shortly afterwards by bombing. But I think what they hoped to do was to take the aerodrome, and then use it for their fighter aircraft and that. As I say they didn't find the - our 'drome for the length of time that I was there.

So where did you go from there?

Well then it was - it got untenable in the finish. It got to the stage where I saw stores being set fire to. In other words I think there was a terrible feeling there, that's where we really started to know just what was going on. Because it was a disorganised panic would be the best I could say for it.

There were people leaving their weapons. I saw - when we were in these guard positions, in these slit trenches, around about eight o'clock two of the members would go up to the mess, and try and get something to eat for what would be your breakfast. And then we'd - after that we could go back, if we had work to do back at the workshops. Or back on the flightline, or wherever. You'd go back, and see what you could do. It was nearly all just refuelling aircraft, and routine maintenance, if you like.

Not a great deal of - I didn't see a great deal of, say, bad damage, because quite often the aircraft didn't come back, from the jobs that they went out on. They were outnumbered, they were outweighed with armament, they were not a real - I'm talking about Lockheed Hudsons mainly. The Dutch had some Glenn Martin B10s, which were very ordinary bombers, and there's so many instances that you could talk about that - things that happen that you don't think should happen.

We had some Blenheims that were operating from the same aerodrome. We had a squadron of Hudsons brought out from the Middle East. In fact they came via the Middle East to - from London, and they - not from London, from England, and they had - all they had was all winter gear with them. You know, but they were out of their depth. They were a mark of Hudson that had - all our Hudsons had Pratt and Whitney engines, and theirs had Cyclones, which put them out of range of the sort of gear that we'd carry. If you had any engine work to do, it had to be, well, improvised.

END TAPE 1, SIDE B.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A.

> Identification: This is side one of tape two of an interview recorded with Allan Lancaster on 9th November 1989 about Catalinas.
>
> You were saying that in the panic you saw weapons left and so on, what sort of things were happening?

Oh just rifles and stuff like that left in the corner of the mess-hut, and that, you know. People didn't want to participate in any ground action I don't think, because after all we're ...

> What people are you talking of, would these be Australians?

I'm talking of Australians, English, just the run of the mill if you like, people who weren't ever intended to do this sort of thing. You know, we - technical people who were taught to drill, and to fire a rifle, and that was about the extent of it. Anything else you found out yourself.

I myself thought it was better to have a rifle than not to have one, particularly as it finished up quite disorganised. It was a matter of the Japanese had landed in Palembang itself, after a lot

of opposition, and they were coming up the road the way we - to where we were, because that was the - really the only way to move. It was pretty heavy jungle, and the road - the didn't meet a great deal of opposition, because it just wasn't there anyway. And ...

Singapore had fallen then, by this stage?

Not quite, they were still able to get in there, they were using it as an advanced fighter base. And they could get into there from Palembang, and refuel, and they - it was only a matter - amounted to days really.

Well was the sense of panic partially engendered by the notion that, you know, Singapore was the impregnable fortress, and now suddenly nothing was going like it was supposed to?

Well we'd experienced that a lot earlier than that, when the speed with which the Japanese came down the peninsula, and the lack of aircraft that we actually had there. I mean we'd had a shipment of Hurricanes and arrived there, and by this time we were - almost everybody was over in Sumatra. And we had a group of them landed - land on the strip at P2. And they were very junior members, if you like, NCO pilots, that hadn't had a great deal of experience, and I don't know that some of them might have even not flown very many hours in Hurricanes at all.

But they landed there, I know some of them, one or two of them, pranged on landing, and others had mechanical problems. In fact they didn't do a great deal at all. They were too - it was the old - it was the story that's been told a thousand times. There were too few of them, and it was too late anyway. By that time there was superiority in the sky, and our - any of our aircraft had to sneak out in the odd hours, like this four o'clock in the morning bit, and they'd take off.

We had two or three Blenheims crash on takeoff, and there were stories about flares being laid in the wrong direction, on the short end of the runway sort of thing. And we had one Hudson that hit the trees on takeoff, and bent the airscrews back about six inches, and went on and did its patrol, and came back. Very fortunate to get back, because I'd imagine the aircraft, the engine'd be vibrating like mad. Because they wouldn't all be bent back exactly the same, and you'd lose so much thrust from the props.

But it was a very uncomfortable time, when almost nobody knew what was going on

Did you feel that you were likely to be taken prisoner, or caught?

Well when - specially when it was left to anybody - everybody - to make their own way south to this Oosthaven, which was a point, the closest point between Java and Sumatra, and there'd be some sort of shipping there, was the story. And when you were faced with the possibility of walking, I don't know, it was suddenly - something like 400 kilometres or something, and it didn't look the best.

(5.00) And we'd - the group of us had been asked, would we - Jim Crow for the hospital, there was a little hospital there, and Jim Crow, and he was getting up n the roof, and checking the aircraft that's flying about. Because there was a - virtually a permanent air-raid warning in

operation. And they wanted you to be able to identify the aircraft, he didn't want people getting moved out of hospital for every aircraft that came over.

Anyway we were - as I said, we were fortunate, because there was no Jap aircraft came over at that time, and we didn't - we weren't tested out that way. But we saw a few casualties brought in from the fighting that was down at Palembang at this time.

And then they said, `Well you've all got to make your own way, get out', you know. And I said to the - I was a corporal in charge of this little group, and I saw the doctor, and I - at this small medical unit. And I said to him, `Well', I could see him packing up, and I said, `You're packing up, are you?', he said, `Yes.' I said, `How are you getting out?', and he said, `We've got transport', and he said to me, `How are you getting out?', and I said, `Oh, we'll go with you.' He said, `Oh no, you can't come with us', he said, `you're armed, and we're a medical unit', and, you know. And I thought, `Well this is why people are leaving their arms behind', because there was provision being made for unarmed parties. They didn't regard sidearms as arms, like a - you could have a revolver.

So I thought, `Well', you know, `we've got to get out on our own.' So the six of us, there were about six there, we just sat round - walked round, looking at where we were, and looking for the way out of the area, and finished up out on the road, which is a - wasn't hard to find, because there was only one road there.

And we'd walked for a couple of mile or so, and a truck came along, and I said to him - no, a dispatch rider came along - and I said, `Is there a workshops unit, or a headquarters unit down the road?'. He said, `Yes, they're forming a roadblock, but', he said, `when I left they were turning around and they were going to come south.
They had one Bofors gun, I think, to form this roadblock with.

And we moved off, we talked about, oh, a couple of - a couple of mile, I suppose. And we came to this - to the railway station, and there was a train in, with about seventy or eighty open trucks on - hooked on it. And it was being operated by a couple of sailors, and an air force person, in the engine, they were driving it. Any anybody that could get on that train got on it.

And we stopped everywhere else that we could - there was anybody, in and around any sidings or stations, if there were any more trucks that they could put on, they put them on. And there was no such luxury as hooking up the brakehoses and that. Which meant that every time it stopped all that slack was taken up, and you can imagine what a big jolt there was at the - when it finally got to the engine or to the back truck, whichever way it was pulling up, or accelerating.

Anyway we went through the night, in the rain. We got down to
Oosthaven in the early hours of the morning. And there was a bit of shipping there, so we were, after a lot of disorganised moves - there was civilians, and there was motorcars, and there was all manner of goods and stuff on this wharf. Cars were being driven to the edge, and pushed straight over into the water, into the drink. And anything you could - we hadn't had anything to eat for, oh, I suppose about thirty-six hours. We'd been part and parcel of an alleged raid by Japanese wh were at this junction, and somebody from the back of the train said, `The Japanese are coming down the highway.' And there was quite a big panic, and

there was a bit of a demand - for the train to be started, and there was wounded people being put on. And we had some of those refrigerated covered-trucks, they weren't refrigerated any more, but - and they were putting women, and children, and wounded people in those, and that's why we'd stopped there.

And there was a big demand to move the train. And an English army colonel I think he was, or a major, came along and catalogued what sort of arms we had in this truck and the next truck. And he got - he said, anybody with automatic weapons to take the outsides of the truck, and rifles the second line, and unarmed people in the middle. Did a good organised job, so that at least they had something organised along those lines.

(10.00) Anyway, to cut a long story short, when the thing finally was cleared up, it was a group of Javanese soldiers coming down the road, and the whole thing was a fizzer. But I was astounded to see the sort of people who were in a great panic with this situation.

What sort of people, what do you mean by that?

I mean armed people, like soldiers, and airmen, and - there was nothing to be gained by carrying on in a great panic. It was - this English officer I think did a marvellous job to finally quieten everybody down, and he got the ones with the - like there was quite a few army people in it, with Bren guns, and stuff, and he got them all down in the carriages - not carriages, in the car - the trucks, down near the end of the train. In other words he was organising it so as, if there was anything - any enemy coming up, that they'd meet with as much automatic fire as was possible to assemble. So that was the most panicky part of the whole time, as far as I was concerned.

Was there a great sense of relief then, when you finally got aboard on a ship, and left?

Well, yes, but there were, you know, there were a lot of people behind us, and there were a lot of people that went ahead of us. There were a couple of Australian ships around the area, just off the jetty. The *Ballarat* was one, and the *Wollongong* was another. Corvettes. And we went across to Java which is only a short distance.

We finished up with a train there, and we travelled through the night to Batavia, where they shoved us in all kinds of accommodation. I mean nearly all schools, which were of course emptied. Very poor accommodation, but any accommodation with a roof on it was better than what we'd been used to for a few days.

And then we had to be fed in long lines of people. That was breakfast, and then we went out, out of the place, and organised our own meals, more or less. And you had to come back there to sleep. And we wandered around the place, sort of checking back, to see what was going on. It was a whole disorganised shambles really.

Did it make you begin to wonder whether perhaps the war might be lost?

Well ...

One might suppose to that point you would always believe that, well, right would prevail, and you'd win?

Well up to that stage, until we got to that stage, and saw the shambles that was accumulating, we thought we were only being moved back while we were getting more aircraft and more people. Mainly aircraft to come, you know. Because the Americans were allegedly going to send Kittyhawks, and the - and we'd seen the evidence of some Hurricanes. But we'd - I don't think we ever thought that inside of a couple of - from there inside of a fortnight that a lot of us would be lucky enough to be back in Australia, and a lot of us would be unlucky enough to be POWs.

At the latter stage of being in Java I'd developed a very bad dermatitis, which I think I contracted in the jungle of Sumatra, because I'd had - even before the war I had a dermatitis that I contracted from blackwood, a very heavy skin complaint that I contracted from blackwood. Nothing else, and they tested me for years afterwards, nothing else. So it broke out in similar situations in Sumatra. And they - I was put into a Dutch hospital in Batavia.

But - seeing it was only on my arms and legs and face, I didn't stay there, I got myself out. Because there was a shambles, - nothing was organised, and they just said, `Go down there, and report to the sickbay', and the sister took me to the ward, and said, `Can you get to bed yourself?', I said, `Yes, I'm right.' So after that I just - as soon as she went out of the ward, I just put my shoes - I'd only got my shoes off by that time - or boots - and I went out, and found my way back to the wharf, where we'd been camped for a couple of nights, waiting for some sort of a ship.

While we were there the *Orcades* came in, and emptied a lot of their army off. Some of the army from the Middle East, she'd brought them from the Middle East. Let them off there, and they put aircrew on, whatever aircrew they had around there, they put them on the ship, and it sailed the next morning, and we were still waiting for a ship. And we waited there for two days, I think.

And in the meantime there'd been a call-up, a line-up and just, say, nearly half of the technical people had been lined up, and enquired about their mustering, and they'd selected so many, and they went one way while the others went the other way. Nobody knew what was going to happen, but one group of them was sent up to the mountains, up to - I forget the name of the place, which was an aerodrome, and they stayed there, they were all POWs.

(15.00) And the other line, which I was fortunate enough to be on, was still on the wharf. And, after about two days, two and a half days, we got a ship, with six native firemen, a skipper, and a first engineer, and we supplied all the rest of the bods that was needed on it. There was air force, there was some army, and some civilians. And the main problem was to get enough people with some sort of technical knowledge, so any fitters who worked on steam, railway people, were taken in as engineers, and anyone else was used to trim the ship with the coal in baskets, and we finally set off south, which was the only way to go.

And we got through the straits without any trouble. We averaged four point seven knots from Batavia to Fremantle, with about three stoppages part of the way down, till we came in sight of the West Australian coast.

And we were almost intercepted by a big ship. But the first engineer which we were pretty matey with, said, `Oh', he said, `that's a Japanese ship.' He said, `I've seen hundreds of them.' Big cargo ship. He said, `Either they haven't wanted to disclose their situation, they're probably a mother ship for submarines or something, or they don't think it's worth expending any ammunition on it. It, you know, it was a real rusty old tub, it was, the name of it was the *Edendale*, and I saw photographs of it in the ship identification book later on when I was on Cats, so it was still around.

And we finally made it. As I said there were all kinds of ships used. There was a Chinese riverboat called the *Whangpooh*, that brought a heap of air force people out.

> Well, with all this, how long before you finally get to be part of a Catalina aircrew?

Well, after a bit of leave at home, and a bit of recovery from this rash epidemic thing I had, I reckon it proved to be a contact with some sort of jungle shrub, or something. Anyway I was home, and I got posted to Canberra, in charge of the workshops there. And I was there for ten or eleven months I think. And by this time with the - my wife had had the first - our first child. And I stayed there until I was posted onto Cats.

It was a volunteer job, they used to call for volunteers occasionally. And as this was the only way at this stage I could see that I could afford to go flying, because, had I gone - they were - by then they were also letting technical people remuster to aircrew. But you went back to five shillings a day, and it took you perhaps twelve months to get through the course to where you got back to whether you were going to be an NCO, or a commission.

So, going onto Cats, I was a sergeant, I was married, and I had one child. It wouldn't have been possible to live on that sort of money, and I would finally get to fly, even though I wasn't going to be a pilot. So I accepted that gleefully, and was very pleased to get through the aircrew medical test, and then posted on to Cats. I went to Rathmines, and we did about a thirteen-week course up there, which involved the technical side of Cats, the crew side of it, operationals, operating.

And in the crewing up you sort of have strange customs, whoever's going to be the first engineer, who in my case was a chap I knew before the war, who'd done three months up north, as a second engineer - Cats carry two engineers. And I knew him, and I was a sergeant, and he was a corporal, and I'd known him, so I said, `Look, I'll - if you're starting to form up a crew', because it was usually the engineer that formed up the crew, because basically he was called a crew chief, and he was second in charge, or he was in charge of the crew under the skipper. So he said, `Oh you know, are you sure?', and I said, `Yes, well, you know, it'll only be for three months, so', I said, `as, you know, that much about it that I don't know.' And away we went on that scheme.

(20.00) So then he went and saw some of the instructors that were training the second pilots to be captains, and one that he knew, and he said, `Oh well, you know, well who do you reckon for a skipper?' So he said to - this was the first engineer - `Oh I think so and so's a good bloke, he's had a fair amount of flying as a second dick', and he said, you know, `We'd recommend him.' This is - it's a bit funny, it sounds - it might sound a bit funny, there's a corporal organising a crew for a flight lieutenant.

And then what goes on is they, you've met the people who are going to be the armourers, and the 2As, and the wirelesses - wireless operators, there's two of those. And one of them is - one who's been a second WAG up north, and has come down to do his first WAG's course, so he knows the WAGs on his course. So he picks out a WAG that he thinks would be - fit in with the rest of the people we've talked about.

And then the first engineer approaches the one who's doing the skipper's course, and says, `Well, how are you organised for a crew? We've got so and so, and so and so, and so and so', and Ed said, `Oh well we've - yes, well I've got a navigator, and a second pilot, yes, so we - that's' - who were very companionable, and easy to get on with, and that's the way they liked it, because in my book there'd be nothing worse than flying with somebody who's a skipper that you didn't like, or that you were a bit doubtful about.

What did you think of the Catalinas when you first saw them?

Oh I liked them. I liked the fact that they were flying boats, as against a land-based aircraft. Because you knew you were always going to be in a reasonable situation, it didn't matter where it was, where it was based, it was going to be on the water. And with that area of Northern Australia, with lots of interesting places, as against the uninteresting places, that are hundred or so miles off the coast, inland, and you can well imagine the sort of areas they were in, you know. Eighty miles south of Darwin and places like this. It was much preferable to be on a Catalina. And their technical abilities, or construction, interested me. The engines were very similar to the Pratt and Whitneys, in Lockheed Hudsons, that I'd had a fair bit to do with and altogether the companionship of the crew was good.

So what sort of flights did you start to make?

Well you did - your training course was to learn seamanship, airmanship. Your navigator'd be learning navigation, you'd be doing navigation trips, night landings and take-offs, all manner of exercises. Rough water landings, which are a different proposition altogether to normal landing on reasonably calm water.

They used to do what was called a stall landing, which is not recommended unless you've got to use it. You fly along perhaps twenty feet off the water, and, in round figures, just reduce the airspeed until the aircraft stalls, which means that the back end of it drops down, and the front of it goes up, and it comes down, crunch.

You've got virtually no forward speed, and it hits the water fairly hard, and the theory is that in rough water you do that, you drop that in between, like in a trough. It you happen to drop it on the top of one it means that you - if it's a big peak it takes up all the space, and you hit it a lot harder, because you're still flying it.

And they'd had a casualty on the course two courses before us, which had killed all the people on board. And they - then the next course they cut it out, while they examined the - you know, the possibility of removing it from the course, or whether it was advisable, and then they went back onto it again in the training program.

And ours was the first course that flew it again. And the way they used to do that, they'd send one crew, and about three spare skippers. So it meant, if you were that crew, you did four rough water landings, as against one, if you were - well, if you were lucky you'd think you could get away with one, well - with your own skipper. But when you had to do another three with strange skippers that mightn't have been as good, or might have been better, but you had more confidence in your own skipper.

(25.00) And then we did air-to-air gunnery. Another Catalina towing a drogue, and you fly up alongside it, and pound some rounds into the drogue, which is a sleeve, a long sleeve. And all the various stations have got, the ammunition has got red paint tips on the - say, for me, and blue for somebody else, and green for another one, so's that they can count the different colours, as they go through the sleeve. If they go through the sleeve.

And it's amazing really. I got 1100 rounds fired on my gunnery course, which is not many if you put it into seconds, I suppose it's three or four seconds at the most, I'd say. And that's two different, it's air-to-air, and air-to-ground. And I got one per cent hits. And that's what you go away up north with as a gunner.

Well what would be regarded as a satisfactory rate?

I wouldn't have a clue. The main thing that they wanted was you to be able to say that you'd fired 1100 rounds through the gun. And the armament instructors, that was their mains complaint. `Get the rounds through it, get the rounds through it'.

And we had a system of stops on the machine-gun position to stop you bringing it round. You fired your rounds from the blister compartment, and the aircraft would fly up alongside the other one, and they had it so that you couldn't bring the gun too far forward.

And shoot down the ... (Laughs).

Not so much shoot down the other aircraft, but so as you didn't shoot pieces off your own, off the main plane, or the float. And if they weren't coordinating too good they certainly wouldn't let you shoot while it was there to beam off you.

But once they got up - the other - the towing aircraft got up a bit far ahead of you, and you'd get round, and your gun'd ben on the stop. And you could see that it wasn't going to hit the sleeve, but that didn't matter, you had to get those rounds through, and we had to be back at base. And I'm afraid that a lot of people did worse than I did. But ....

So when you finally ...?

It wasn't anything that you had to get five per cent or anything to pass, you just had to fire 1100 rounds in my case, through the gun, and you passed on all the other subjects perhaps, or perhaps one per cent was enough.

And, as you headed up north, did it leave you feeling a little bit unprepared?

Well you never ever considered that you had much chance, really, against a fighter. Your only defence was to dive down, this was in daylight - dive down to the water, and stay down

as low as you could on the water. Then a fighter would have to approach, and it would have to start lining the aircraft up with its preliminary shots, and you'd see them in the water. That's if he wasn't right on target to start with.

And the skipper would be taking control, he'd be flying the aircraft, and getting instruction from the second pilot, who'd probably be standing up, with his head out = the top of the pilot's compartment, watching where the splash was in the water, and telling him to veer away from that.

And you'd have the navigator probably down in the blister compartment standing up doing a similar thing, to tell which gunner to open fire. And the tailgunner, which had the gun facing down, well he wouldn't be any good, because they couldn't get down - if you were lucky they couldn't get down below the aircraft to fire up like that.

But several times they had aircraft attack them, with the - different people, and if they made a run one from the front, and one from the side, or something like that, it was inevitable that you'd be very lucky to get out of it.

While we were on course one of the sergeant armourers on course was the - he actually - the armament in the aircraft first were first world war Lewis guns, aircraft-type, but they were basically those, and he shot down a Zero, with a first world war Lewis gun. And he didn't get any decorations for it, but he's listed in the book. And then others just got shot down, and that was all about it. I don't think anybody else ever shot one down from a Catalina.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A.

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

> Identification: This is side two of tape two of an interview recorded on 9th November with Allan Lancaster about Catalinas.
>
> Once you began on these operational flights, what did you actually do in the aircraft? What sort of things would occupy you?

Well the flight engineer was crew chief, and you were responsible to see that all the provisions, that's meals, and everything pertaining to that, and to the rest of the crew, everything was right on board. The other crew members were a sergeant airframe fitter who was responsible for controls, and various other features in the aircraft, and the armourer who was responsible that the armament was serviceable, and that the ammunition was stowed correctly.

The watertanks had to be filled, and you were preparing to be away fr twenty-odd hours, at least, in the air. And in that time you had to cook at least two meals. Ten members of the crew. It took a fair amount of time, it was a small two hotplate electric stove that operated while you were in the air with the engines going. And the engineer overseed most of that.

He also had - in action stations one engineer would be up at the panel, which was a position in the aircraft that controlled lots of actions pertaining to the running of the engines. Cowl gills to keep the cylinder heads cool, oil pressure gauges, oil contents gauges, fuel gauges,

rates of flow of the fuel, so as you can work out, fairly closely too, quite accurately, the range of the aircraft at various engine commitments such as revs, boosts, control, airspeed worked in with propellor pitches. Lots of stuff like that, you carried scales to give you the correct combination for various speeds and various endurances, so you had to work all this out from your fuel gauges, and your rate of flow.

On those longer sort of flights, were you occupied most of the time, or about what percentage of the time were you doing these sort of things?

The flight engineer used to do two hours at a time at the panel, and then he'd be spared by the second engineer who would go up and so the same thing. We kept a log that was entered every twenty minutes, all the time, completely, with similar things that I've said. The rate of usage of petrol, and the condition of the aircraft, the angle that it's flying at. A lot of stuff that went in, airspeeds, air temperatures, and how each engine was functioning. Quite a complicated thing that kept you fairly busy, as I say, writing it in every twenty minutes.

Were you cooking as well?

Well one of you usually cooked, assisted by one of the other crew.

What were you like as a cook?

I wasn't bad with steak, and stuff, but I didn't get round to anything very fancy, and we had our first contact with pressurecookers in those days. The aircraft came out from America complete with two pressurecookers. And nobody, nobody that I knew, knew anything about them.

And I had the engineers' compartment once when I was on station up there, and the other flight engineer was making some soup, or heating up some soup, and he didn't take any notice of the indicator, which we found out later of course. And the jiggler valve, he took that off, when it was - would have been diplomatic to just remove the lot off the stove, and let it cool down. And the pressure that had built up in it squirted hot soup up into the engineers' compartment. And fortunately it was in a fairly fine spray.

(5.00) We used to make custard, and have stewed apple, and stuff like that. But you couldn't get really adventuresome on food, with ten people to feed. And it was - some aircraft you got onto, didn't have enough knives and forks, and some didn't have enough plates.

We got onto one on one trip and we had no plates, no knives and forks. The crew hat had been flying it reckoned that it was their aircraft, so they took all that stuff off. And they apparently had had their own style. But we finished up eating off the tin lids of flying rations and things like that, with a knives clasp which was issued to you, and which you usually took with you on operations, was - as you would take your .38 revolver, and stuff like that, in case you had to take to the air, or were forced down or something.

One might suppose you wouldn't be on particularly friendly terms with that other crew when you met them again?

No, well it was your own 2A that you weren't on real good terms with, because it was up to him to see that that sort of stuff was right before you took off. And, although we nearly all used to doublecheck one another, but on this particular trip perhaps we didn't.

> Given that different sorts of aircraft can have different capabilities and reputations, how long was it before you felt assured that this really was a good reliable aircraft, and it was a good thing to be in?

Well the main problem that we used to find wasn't so much the reliability of, say, engines, it was the different attitude that the aircraft used to fly in that made it use a lot less fuel. And I can name one particular trip that we took, say, twenty hours to do in one aircraft, that meant we had to stop, and we had to refuel at a refuelling area. But we did it only some two days later in another aircraft, and we did it complete, nonstop, without any concern, in four hours less. And that was enough to make you want to be able to fly permanently in these sort of aircraft.

But there was no - you couldn't find any reason for it. If one crew said that they did it in such a time, well you could say, `Oh yes, but you might have been using different combinations of boost and throttle position, and pitch control.' But if you've flown them yourself, within a day or two, and you've got your logbook with the times in it, there was no argument. One aircraft flew beautifully, compared with the other one, which sort of squashed along, staggered along almost.

Because that was another instrument that you had in the engineers' compartment, to enable you to work out the amount of fuel you had, was an inclinometer, which just showed you the altitude of the aircraft in a horizontal position. And they flew perfectly at about a three and a half degree. Whereas, when they were fully fuelled up, and bombed up, they might fly at seven degrees. And it's a feeling that you can - they talk about flying by the seat of your pants. Well in this instance you could - sitting in an aircraft you could even tell. Without an inclinometer you could tell that it wasn't at three and a half, or it was at seven, or worse, you know.

> Do you recall your first flight, where you were going off with the possibility that you might get shot down, or something might happen, you were going to be over Japanese territory?

Well that was a bombing run. Convoys and that sort of thing, which they break you in on for the first couple of operational trips, are just boring, except that you've got a terrific amount of water to fly over, to find them, and stay with them, and fly back.

> Would you be concerned though about the possibility of attack by Japanese aircraft?

Not in the situation where we were, from, say, Cairns to New Guinea. It never entered - the sort of aircraft that you might find would probably only be a similar sort of aircraft, one of their flying boats or something, and you'd reckon that that would be fair enough. But on a bombing run you get a lot of satisfaction out of it, because you ...

> tell us about your first one though, where ...

Well the first ...

... where it's an unknown quantity, and this is it, would be the feeling?

Well it's - it was at Kavieng, which was a place, a port, on the - on New Britain. New Ireland, sorry. And we were to fly up there, and we were bombed up in the river at Cairns. Fully refuelled.

Were you excited?

(10.00)Well that was - it was not so much excited as, `Well now, it's - this is what we came for, this is what we imagined.' You were optimistic about the result, for sure. And you felt as though, `Right, this is - the ultimate, this is what we've been trained for', and you know from other people that you've talked to, that have been there and done it, and you talk to them, and you find out, `We - oh yes, you know, we've been there, we were there last week', or something, `and it wasn't bad', or it was this or that, and where there's a problem. So if you get a reasonably good weather run, and your aircraft is right, you've tested it anyway the day before probably, particularly if it's had any service done on it.

And you take a personal message with you, you take some thirty-pound incendiaries which are not included in the bomb load, they're put down in the blister compartment for the three people down in that end to throw their own ones out. Sometimes they're anti-personnel, sometimes they're incendiaries. And this was nearly always done.

So you find the place. And we never flew in any sort of formation, or any groups, or anything of that. The Catalinas were always solitary jobs. There might be five of you go on the trip, but there's no time over the target that you've got to be there.

I think the aforementioned bit about the - one aircraft being slower than the other used to take care of that almost. It was nowhere near as accurately laid out for you as a mining run was. Although a mining run was done at a lot lower. We never ever bombed any higher than 6000 feet, around midnight. And we never had the problems of big formations or anything like that, and we always tried to - the aircraft itself was happier in the night-time. It had more chance of success.

And our first run, we went up, looked forward to it. Did the run, got bounced about a bit with anti-aircraft fire.

Tell us - what about that first occasion then, when you found yourself in an air where there was anti-aircraft fire, was that frightening?

It started you thinking, why you didn't stay at your peaceful - in charge of workshops at Canberra. And instead of that you were up there, and they were really firing at you. And some of them were close, some of them were a long way away.

But it was only an instant, and you were more interested in the - looking to see where the guns were situated, because I was almost always on the tunnelgun, over the target, and part of the job was to look, and see if you could log just where the batteries were. And then you'd

check it out with the navigator later on, on the way back, to see if you'd seen any new ones on the intelligence that they had, or previous form.

And I used to - before we got to the target I used to get a sheet of paper, and I'd draw the target area roughly, from the navigator's chart, and mark in where they were - there were batteries. And then I'd sort of turn it round to the appropriate angle, and have it with me when I - you lay down in the back - in the tunnel gun situation.

How long might you be lying down?

Oh you'd only be - you'd get there, say, a quarter of an hour before the target, perhaps twenty minutes, but quarter of an hour probably.

Was it an uncomfortable position?

Well not particularly. You were laying down on your stomach, and you had a pad to lay on, and you had a strap to hook onto the back of your parachute harness, which you wore on bombing raids. On mining raids you only put your Mae West, your life jacket, on. Because you - at 300 feet, on the mining run, you wouldn't have time to use a parachute anyway.

Would you have a feeling that, lying down like that, if something came up through the aircraft, that it ....? (Laughs).

No, you never thought of it that way. I used to occupy myself in the run up to the target by trying to anticipate it, by edging some of me out, out, and look along the keel, look forward, to see how much longer it was going to be.

Because the only thing you might hear over the target was the navigator telling the skipper that the indicated airspeed over the target will be ninety-three knots. And the old aircraft is making its way gently along. And you're interested in how long it's going to take you to get over the target, and then get away from the target.

But you'd see another aircraft - as you were running up to the target, you might see another one ahead of you, say ten minutes ahead of you, and you'd note the anti-aircraft fire coming up to that. And then you'd compare that with the amount that came up to you. And when you got back, the next day up in the mess, you'd be - you'd talk to the - you'd find out which aircraft it was that went in, and you'd note the time, and you'd say, you know, `How did you find it?', and they said, `Oh, you know, we're right, we watched you, and you were getting a lot of anti-aircraft fire', you know. And we were in the opposite seat, we were thinking, well, you know, `You didn't do too good either.'

(15.00)Was it a disadvantage to be coming in later, in one of the slower planes?

I don't think it made much difference. They - they were all pretty slow, you know, it wasn't a matter of - I think perhaps the first aircraft in might have had a bit of an advantage in that it didn't wake them all up, or they weren't alert. But I think by the time the last one came in they probably had a lot better idea of how quick both aircraft were going. And how high they were, and stuff like this, they had a lot more time to work it out.

> Anyway you were saying that you were lying there, and you would use this outline to try and note any new batteries?

Yes, and roughly mark on it where you thought they were.

> Well on that first run then, when you let go of the load, were you on target, do you know?

Well you couldn't really work it out, not from the sort of situation you were in. Some places you might be over an airstrip, and they were always pretty heavily defended. And you might see bombs in the camp area, or the - where they know that the personnel are, or you might see it to one side, or you might even see it on the strip. Then you'd probably only see an explosion. Some of the other places you'd start a fire. And when you were coming up to the target, perhaps just before the navigator's ready to let go, he might say, `Okay in the tunnel', or `You can let go your incendiaries', and they'd go down, and you might see those go first. And they might start a fire in the huts, or something.

But mining was more dangerous in lots of ways, because you had to put your mines exactly where they were supposed to be.

> So on this occasion, when you first actually dropped bombs, was there a sense, now you'd finally actually struck a blow at the enemy?

Yes, it was - it seemed one-sided up until then. Having been hurried out of Singapore and through the islands home. And putting in a spell, if you like, for about ten or eleven months in workshops at Canberra, RAAF Station, Canberra. And, getting onto operations finally, there certainly was a lot of satisfaction in completing your operational training course, and being posted to an operational squadron in Cairns. And after two or three convoy jobs, which sort of accustomed us to the area, we went on our first mining run, which was not as satisfactory as a bombing strike, because you didn't see anything except a splash in the water. So, I suppose, although the mining jobs were probably operationally more valuable, you didn't get quite as much satisfaction. Although, when you looked at the distances that you travelled, it was something to be proud of I think, because there were 1000 miles of water between where we operated from and where we planted our mines.

> Was there a sense that it was a much more dangerous sort of operation, because of the length of the flight, and that you had to come in relatively low to lay them?

Yes, it was a different type of operation right from the word go. We had to operate at a much lower altitude to get up to the areas that we were going to mine, because we had to set off from Darwin in daylight, and get up into - amongst the islands, say Sumba and along the chain of islands up to Java actually, to Surabaya, which was our first mining port.

And that had to be - you had to be arriving there round about eleven, twelve o'clock at night. Because you then descended to about three hundred, four hundred feet, at the maximum. Find the datum point to make your mining run on, and unload your mines there. And quite often you were under light anti-aircraft fire, or even rifle fire.

In Surabaya there was an army camp camped along between the island of Java, and Madurah, which is only, oh, ten or twelve miles I suppose, at the most. And you'd get, sometimes from both sides, light anti-aircraft fire would be the best you could call it.

But then you had to contend with if you were coming into the mining area there was quite often a navy, or several navy units, anchored in the area, and the navy gunners were usually alert, and were a lot better shots than the other people. So that was the area of danger really. Finding yourself making a mining run over a destroyer or some such ship.

(20.00) We did it one night on a second trip up there, and it was a very bad night, inasmuch as heavy cloud was very low down. Strong winds, you could see lots of white caps on the water. And our first run took us directly along the length of what appeared to be a Japanese destroyer. At the altitude we were at it was pretty plain for me to see, because I had the best view of the lot, I was laying down, and looking out the tunnel hatch.

And for what was probably two seconds at the most - it seemed like five minutes - before we cleared it, and nobody did anything. One, we didn't open fire on it, which would have been silly anyway, but they kept quiet too. I would imagine that they may have thought we were on a bombing mission, or even perhaps a torpedo mission, which - the Catalinas did a couple of torpedo missions. And we were happy to not disturb them, as I think they were quite pleased that we didn't have anything to do with them.

> Well was there a build up of tension, as you got to an area where you knew you were likely to encounter anti-aircraft or ground fire? Would you actually almost jump when the first sight of it came close?

You wouldn't bother about - you never went to what you would call action stations unless you were within, say, twenty or thirty minutes from the target, and that was - you were usually pretty well prepared before that. Everybody, I think, myself included, had a good look at the target area on the navigator's chart, and what were likely to be the disposition of offensive fire. So it wasn't really a surprise, and you approached that slowly, you had plenty of time to get yourself in the mood to be prepared for some.

> What was the mood? What do you mean `in the mood', what was the mood?

Well we were all at our action stations by this time, and had been there probably for twenty minutes. And well it was a matter of you'd come ten or twelve hours or something, perhaps ten hours in the air before you got there, and there wasn't any great exultation, or satisfaction, except that you'd got there. And your main problem most of the way was duration of the aircraft, keeping fuel down to what had to be controlled, so that you had enough to get back, and the possibility, which was fairly remote, of night-fighters.

I used to think the biggest danger perhaps was running into another Catalina on the same job. Even though we were all operating on different datum points, I think, I was never told much about this. But it used to seem to be a haphazard way of conducting it, with the fact that you could almost take off whenever you were ready to take off, and some aircraft were quite a lot faster than the others, specially in the air with a full load, coming back it wasn't quite so bad.

We had an aircraft that used to use a lot more fuel than some of the other. And we proved it on a couple of trips, that - one trip to Kavieng we could do a complete trip from Cairns to Kavieng and back to Cairns without refuelling, and on another we used to have to refuel at either Moresby on the way up, or at Milne Bay, or somewhere in that area coming back.

So this used to provide a sort of a net or a ....

> Your flight paths would be criss-crossing at different points then along the line?

Well you're all going to the same place usually, there might be half a dozen aircraft. And I don't know whether I mentioned this before, but on one particular trip to Balikpapan we must have got away fairly early, and we were in an aircraft that was pretty slow, and didn't fly as well as some others, and before it got dark you could see perhaps three other aircraft slowly gaining on you, and it might take - it might have taken from, oh, four o'clock in the afternoon till six o'clock, seven o'clock before anybody came abreast of us. They weren't that much faster, but it was a bit strange to see them creeping up, and then go past, and know that they were all allegedly the same aircraft, but they had such different characteristics, when you - operating them fully laden over a long distance.

> Were there ever any collisions in fact?

Not in that sense of the word. One collision occurred on the water, at Cairns, when an aircraft had just slipped the moorings from the buoy, because of course at Cairns we were in a river. And another aircraft was coming in to land, and they overlapped the wings as they landed, and ripped the float off the taxiing aircraft. So one aircraft finished up with three floats, and the other with only one, on the wings, but nobody was hurt in that.

(25.00) Other collisions that did occur, not with aircraft, the aircraft, quite a few of them ran into hills on various operations. We lost one or two that way. Especially on mining, and/or on supply to coastwatchers, which was another job that these Cats did.

> About how many of these minelaying missions had you run then, before your aircraft was hit?

We did about six or seven, I suppose, mining runs, and we considered ourselves fairly competent at it, and we were quite confident as well. Until we came to this one on Woleai, which was an island north of the Admiralties, where we operated from, from an American Seaplane Tender.

And it was around about six or seven hours north of the Admiralty Islands. And they'd only been taken from the Japanese, say, oh, a week or ten days before we were up there. And this operation on Woleai was to slow down an attempt to reinforce Hollandia in New Guinea where was to be the next landing by the ground troops, and operations by the navy.

Truk was also a little bit east of Woleai, and it was fairly important anyway. We operated from this Japanese - sorry, Japanese nothing, this American ship, the USS *Tangier*. And we'd done - already done two runs up on Woleai on successive nights.

And on the third night there was only about four aircraft required, and we were senior aircraft crew in 20 Squadron at the time, and we naturally had one of these positions. And everything seemed to be satisfactory and we knew where we were going, and what we were going to do. And we took along with us the squadron intelligence officer, who hadn't been on a trip prior to this. And he wanted to have a look in the Woleai harbour, to see what sort of shipping was there.

We approached it at our operational height, which was about 1500 feet, and came down then to about five hundred feet, to be heavily engaged with anti-aircraft fire. We proceeded across the harbour itself to our datum point, made our run, and just dropped the mines, and were circling to come back home, and the squadron intelligence officer said that he'd like to have a look at the area, so would we drop a flare, which we did, which lit prematurely.

By this time we'd climbed to about twelve hundred or fifteen hundred feet. And the flare exploded prematurely, and lit us up, the - 2000 foot was about the ceiling of the cloudcover, so we were projected in with 1,000,000 candlepower or so just below us, and an unbroken screen above us. It was like being projected onto a black and white movie screen.

And they fired lots of calibre of anti-aircraft at us. And one forty millimetre shell entered the blister compartment, from below of course, and exploded immediately, and killed the two blister gunners, and seriously wounded the squadron intelligence officer.

I was on the tunnelgun at the time, which was about, oh, five or six feet away from where the shell entered, and another one had come up, and peeled a piece off the blister compartment on the way through, and hadn't exploded, apparently. But I was of the mind at the time to drop the thirty calibre machine-gun out, and fire back, but realised it was ridiculous, it wouldn't do any good anyway.

So I was a bit concerned, because everything had gone quiet in the aircraft, and I hadn't heard the skipper calling for a report. When I came in from the tunnel compartment one gunner had been carried through to the nav compartment, and laid on the catwalk, and the other gunner was just inside that bulkhead, and was in the bunk compartment, and the skipper had just come down.

And the first gunner died immediately, and the other gunner who we'd taken through, and thought was reasonably - only lightly wounded, he died about four hours later. It took us about six and a half hours or so to come back from target.

Mmm.

After we'd settled down a bit to come back, and I had a look around I realised how extremely lucky I was that the shell went through at the angle that it did, and that I hadn't been wounded. Plus the fact that the aircraft hadn't been more seriously damaged than it appeared to be.

Other shrapnel wounds. I looked after him after - him first of all, made him as reasonably comfortable ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE B.
END OF INTERVIEW.