# TRANSCRIPT OF ORAL HISTORY RECORDING

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| **Description** | Colin Wellesley Lindeman, 75 Squadron RAAF, interviewed by Ed Stokes for the Keith Murdoch Sound Archive of Australia in the War of 1939–45.<br><br>Discussing pre-war employment; Air Force training; posting as reinforcement to 21 Squadron; Singapore; casualty rates; formation of 76 Squadron; comparison of Zeros and Kittyhawks in combat; posting to Furney Airfield at Milne Bay; food rations; inadequacy of training; death of Commanding Officer of 76 Squadron Peter Turnbull; appointment to 75 Squadron at Goodenough Island and Nadzab; flying conditions; lack of moral fibre; post-war employment. |

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Identification: This is Edward Stokes taping with Colin Lindeman, 75 Squadron, tape 1, side 1.

Colin, could I perhaps just begin by asking you when and where you were born please?

I was born at Strathfield in September 1915.

And where were the family? Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school?

Mmm, the family lived in Strathfield and Homebush. I went to school at Hayfield School at Carlingford when I was pretty young. Then I went onto the Armidale School but I had to leave there in 1929 mainly because of the lack of family money due to the depression and I then went to school at Maitland High, at Maitland and finished my leaving certificate there.

That's interesting. Just turning to some general recollections of the period before the Second World War, was the – the ANZAC tradition that was obviously fairly strong, certainly amongst some people, recollections of what Australian men and men had done in the first war – was that a particularly strong tradition in your family? Was it something that was known about or talked about much?

Not really. My father was the eldest of his family and he was in a reserved occupation. I had an uncle, two uncles, in the First World War. I remember Roy Lindeman coming home from the First World War, he was a Light Horseman, I think I was about four at the time. It was my first real recollection of anything in my life, of him coming home and sitting on his ... on the home front verandah and being welcomed by all the family. But more than that, no, I don't think I was very conscious in those days of the ANZAC tradition.

How about in the years prior to the Second War itself, say from the mid-'30s on when, in retrospect, it was fairly clear what was, or what, for example, Hitler's general plans were. Were you at all conscious of that as a young man or not?

Oh yes, and I think a lot of the young men of my own age, you know we used to sail together and play football together, most of us I think joined the Militia in some form. I was in the ... joined the engineers. I think I was in with the engineers for about two years. Unless one had a degree in engineering you couldn't even reach the rank of sergeant. And then I was always interested in flying but could never afford flying lessons and I resigned from the engineers and joined the ... enlisted in the air force at the ... I probably applied in December of 1939 just after I had received my advice that I had qualified as a chartered accountant.

(5.00) If we could just go back a little bit in the immediate lead up to the war, say in 1938 and 1939, were you particularly aware or not of political events in Europe?

Yes I was because I was living in a boarding house in Sydney. My father had died in 1936, I think, and my mother was living in Newcastle and in the home at Point Piper

at which I was boarding were two Germans. They were quite nice blokes but I do recall that my Militia service was of great interest to them, you know, with the carting round my rifle and things like that. I'm sure that ... [Henrik Hiler?] was his name was a spy. He was in shipping and used to sail in the summer months and he was, in retrospect, asking all sorts of leading questions. He was a nice bloke.

Could I ask: leading questions about what?

Oh, disposition of the shipping in the harbour. What we saw on sailing occasions, particularly if we were outside. What navigation aids we had, if any, and of course we didn't have any. Oh no, in retrospect, I'm sure he was a spy. One night I was studying and – in a sort of common room – he was there and obviously a friend of his came up from Melbourne, stamped into the room, `Heil Hitler' at the top of his voice and this was probably, oh late, middle, late-`39. And, of course Henrik Hiler shut him up immediately.

Mmm, that's fascinating. And did this character who had come up from Melbourne, did you see any more of him or not?

No. No, that was the first and last time. He was, I think, in retrospect, a pretty tall, immaculately dressed bloke – I would think a typical Nazi.

And besides this contact with this fellow in your boarding house, were you conscious of the news that was coming out of Europe yourself or not?

Oh yes, very much so. I'm sure – I mean it's a long time ago to remember – but, oh no, I think we were very conscious of the build-up of hostilities and the threat of war. I would think anything up to twelve months before war was actually declared.

Was it something that was talked about, for example, with other young men or women you were studying with or not?

Mmm, no, I don't think so. I don't think we were saying, `Oh, we'll soon be in it' or anything like that. We were just conscious of making ourselves prepared for what might happen.

And what about the Japanese, of course during the thirties they were rampaging through China, was that at all talked about or thought about that in the end that might in fact prove a quite direct threat to Australia?

No, I don't think so. We were just very disgusted with their conduct of course. Newsreels and news items, they were just, I feel, in retrospect, considered to be complete barbarians.

Yes, that's interesting. Because, I mean, that period of Chinese history has been very much glossed over – I mean, the brutalities that went on. Just going back a little bit, you said a moment ago you'd always wanted to fly, or there was a desire to fly but you couldn't afford lessons, why was that?

Why I couldn't afford it or ...

No, I think that was the depression, that was – but the desire to fly.

Oh, I think Smithie Hinkler, Amy Johnson, all captured our imagination. I do recall when the Ross brothers landed at Mascot in the cow paddock. My father had taken me out there, he and my elder brother, and I saw the Vickers-Vimy for the first time and was really pop-eyed. I think at the back of my mind I was always interested in flying and the feats of those great Australian men.

(10.00) That's most interesting. Just finally, talking about your early background, you completed I think, or you'd already begun studying as an accountant before the war had you?

Yes, straight after leaving school. Jobs were very hard to get. I was lucky, I suppose, in being articled as an article clerk to one of the leading Sydney firms of chartered accountants. The pay as an article clerk was forty pounds for the first year; sixty pounds for the next; eighty pounds for the next; and for the fourth year, 120 pounds for the year. I think then, just before the war when I was qualified, I jumped up to something like 500 pounds a year.

That training that you'd had and certainly finishing school, do you think that had much bearing on your later achievements in the air force and the ... well, your ability to be accepted as a pilot or not?

No, I don't think so. I think I was physically fit playing football every winter and sailing every summer. But, no, I don't think the educational side was given any attention in the recruiting side.

Perhaps if we could just move onto that then. War was declared. You, I think, applied very soon after that and the air force, I think, was your first choice. Could you tell us about the precise events, if you like, that lay behind that decision and the immediate process of recruitment and so on?

No, mmm. What influenced me? I had a cousin of the same age who was learning to fly privately and I did go out to Mascot a few times with him and had a little bit of association with the Royal Aero Club of New South Wales at some of their parties and things like that. I've forgotten the question now.

Well, it was really just to ask about the precise motivation behind enlistment and the next steps that followed, Colin.

Well, I think we were all young and probably silly. I don't know if there was any very strong patriotic feeling. Having sat at a desk as an accountant doing audits and things like that for the best part of six years, I think it sounded like the opportunity to get out into the open air. And, well, a change of life.

Mmm, that's most interesting. And was your enlistment, was that generally supported by your family? I know your father was dead by this stage – your mother and other members of the family or not?

Well, I think it was my decision. `Hello Mum, I've enlisted in the air force', that sort of thing. At that stage my elder brother was in New Zealand and my younger brother was

training with BHP in Newcastle. He later, when he became old enough, joined the air force.

> Well, perhaps if we could move on a little bit, Colin, to the actual ... you've enlisted in the air force. I understand your initial training was at Point Cook.

No. Initial training was at Mascot flying Tiger Moths. That was a period, from memory, four months and then down to Point Cook for another four months.

> So at Mascot you did your initial ...

They call it elementary training and at Point Cook it was service training.

(15.00) > Tell us about flying Tiger Moths? You obviously wanted to fly and everybody I've spoken to has something to say about Tiger Moths, how were they for you?

Oh, well actually I started on a Gypsy Moth which is the forerunner of the Tiger. I think it was delightful once you dodged the abuse of your instructor. I had ... you know there were pretty famous men who were instructors. Brian Monk, or Monkton as he later became, was a pretty well-known private flier. He used to operate the flying boats out at Rose Bay. No, I can't recall all of them but they were household names really in the flying world at Mascot.

> So you would regard your basic flying training as more than good, would you?

Oh yes, I think so. The ... I think it was very sound. The instructors were mostly civilians ... civilian flying instructors and at Mascot – this was just before the Empire Air Scheme started – there were four flying schools. An intake of forty-odd people were spread.

> Perhaps if I could just ask you, leading on from that, Colin, flying was obviously to be an important thing, what's your first memory of flying and perhaps your first memory of solo flight in a Tiger Moth or Gypsy Moth that was obviously a really important experience for most pilots?

Well after probably seven or eight hours of dual instruction, and we are all about the same level, you would wake up in the morning and wondering, if the birds were flying and the sun was shining, whether this might be the morning that your instructor would give you one circuit and landing and then hop out of the aircraft in the middle of the paddock and pick up his joystick and say, `Right, you're on your own'. I might have taken a little bit longer than some of the others but I think the average was about eight or nine hours of dual instruction before you went solo. I think the first solo is always a great thrill.

> Can you remember it in detail?

Mmm. No, I think I remember, Brian Monk was my instructor then, and I think he abused the hell out of me the day before which probably put me on my toes to do a bit better the next day.

Well, moving on a little bit then. You went down to Point Cook where you were doing more complex training, could you tell us about that and perhaps also about general living conditions there and how that whole period of life was at Point Cook?

Well, Point Cook, of course, was the air force Mecca. I think we were all very proud to go down there. At this stage cadets from South Australia and from Queensland joined us so that I think there was something like 100-odd cadets all of the same standard. We had marching drill, not very much, but the accommodation was about a mile from the flying area – from the hangars and the school rooms – we didn't march, we had to run all the time. Whatever you did, you trotted or ran. We had an under officer in charge of our group – gee, this brings back memories – Syd Brasier. We saw quite a lot of one another in our future careers. My recollections are, apart from the running, it was the depth of winter – this was then July/August/September/October. The accommodation was pretty sparse. For heating we had to use brown coal brickettes. And beer, in the mess, we were allowed one bottle a day and it cost eleven pence for a bottle of Abbots, I think.

(20.00) Mmm. That's most interesting. And your actual training, could you elaborate a little bit on that and perhaps on how much of the training was actually in the air and how much was theoretical?

I don't recall what the hours were – can I just look up the logbook?

Yes, sure. We are just continuing.

I think in the eight months of training – elementary at Mascot and service at Point Cook – we would have had about 180-odd flying hours. Over eight months that's not very much of course. There was a lot of theory, a fair amount of physical training, a fair amount of Link trainer instruction. This was the stationary instrument flying machine called the Link trainer. Everyone that flew spent hours on the Link trainer. No, my recollections are ... at that stage, this was at Point Cook, it would have been July/August/September/October, we had quite a few RAF – Royal Air Force – flying instructors and quite a few of them had been in the Cold War in France, quite a few of them were badly damaged.
Things I recollect, we'd had a bad accident one day and one of the cadets had been killed. The next morning one of these RAF instructors, when we were on parade, he took off in a Avro trainer, took off into wind, rolled aircraft onto it back, flew off and did a complete circuit of the aerodrome inverted and about fifty feet from the ground on his final approach he just rolled into a normal position and landed.

That's most interesting. Was that to make the point after the death of this ...

That was to boost our morale, yes. Point Cook was divided into two types of aircraft. There were single engine ... half the course were on single engines which was the Hawker Demon ... right, yes, Hawker Demon, and the other twin-engine section were flying Avro Ansons. I think I'm right there, they might have been ... no, they were Avro Ansons.

And was that division of men, between those two planes, was that really the divide between men who would become ... later become fighter pilots and bomber pilots or not?

Yes, I think this was so. I think they picked the fighter pilots if they had fair hair and blue eyes they might have been fighter material, if they had brown hair and brown eyes they were bombers.

I was going to ask about this because it has been mentioned by a few other people, do you think there was any ... were there any objective criteria used in the selection of bomber and fighter pilots or was it a highly subjective, personal sort of process?

I don't believe so. I don't believe there was any strong psychological examination or assessment of them. I could be wrong. We were just there to learn to fly and learn all that we could and do as we were told.

One other thing, the matter of discipline, of course in the early stages of your training I'm sure there was a lot of parade bashing and so on and you mentioned constantly running and so on. What impact do you think that later had on men's ability to maintain discipline in the air? Was there a direct connection or not?

I think that the discipline was administered by our own members on the course. If one of the cadets appeared to do the wrong thing he was ostracised. I don't think any of our course ... I'm wrong there. In the early stages of elementary training some of the cadets were excluded through inability to coordinate their flying. They were ham-fisted and lacked coordination. So pretty early in the stage an instructor could weed out those who would go on and those who wouldn't, much to the disappointment, of course, to the blokes that proved to be a bit ham-fisted.

(25.00) Mmm. That's most interesting. Of course, you were telling me before, Colin, that you finished your training at Point Cook with an above-average comment on your flying ability and, of course, there you got your wings. I think you were a pilot officer. Could you just tell us about your personal feelings on finally getting through and leaving Point Cook with a good grading?

I should add that my grading was below average for gunnery – air gunnery. I was proud of the above average on the flying side. Oh no, I think we were just all keen to know what our new postings were but unfortunately, at that stage, with the impact of the Empire Air Scheme training coming on-stream, it is hard to remember, very few of our course, say 120 altogether from all over Australia, very few of them got overseas postings. We were mostly all kept here for either flying instructing or going to bombing and gunnery schools. Anyone that got an overseas posting was ... we were all very envious. One bloke I know went as a ... to one of the Australian cruisers to fly the old Seagulls, the spotter aircraft – we all envied him very much, except that he didn't survive.

Yes, that was fairly risky. My father was on the Australia, I remember as a child the photographs of those planes perched on the back of the ships. Just one other thing about your training, you were very highly

> trained of course compared to people in many other branches of the services. Was there a feeling, or not, that people in the air force generally, perhaps pilots in particular, formed some kind of an elite?

Oh, I don't think so. Our training was not all that great. I think that the peacetime training would last for well over a year compared with our eight months. No, I don't think we considered ourselves elite in any way. We were just young and fairly new people to the game. No, I don't think anyone was overconfident at all.

> And were you, during the period of training, conscious of events in Europe and in particular what the air force was doing in Europe or over Britain?

This was the time of the Cold War of course in France and, yes, I think we dwelt upon news, particularly magazines that concerned the Hurricanes in France and the poor blokes on the Fairey Battles. New Zealander, Cobber Caines, was I think our hero. He had shot down a few Germans until he celebrated his going on leave by doing three successive loops over his base in France and hitting the ground rather hard on his third loop – poor fellow – but Cobber Caines was a household name then.

> That's most interesting. We are just about to run out on this side, Colin, I might just turn the tape.

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes talking with Colin Lindeman, 75 Squadron, tape 1, side 2.
>
> Colin, I know after your training at Point Cook you went to bombing and gunnery schools, perhaps we might just skate over that particular episode because there's a lot more to cover, unless there's anything that you feel is particularly significant to record, is there?

Well I think in the year or perhaps a bit more that I was at bombing and gunnery schools, we got a lot of flying experience which proved invaluable of course.

> And were there any particular incidents or difficulties during that time or not?

No, not really. We had a lot ... not a lot, but quite a few subsequently famous men passed through those schools. Swimmers and cricketers and footballers – cricketers particularly – but we never had much time, they didn't have much time in their training because they were putting in four months pretty constant study and training and air training, their bomb aiming and their air-to-ground gunnery but, oh no, they were all chaps just exactly like ourselves, probably a bit younger, some a bit older.

> Perhaps if I could just pick up on a point there, just going back to the question I asked before about members of the air force forming something of an elite, you mentioned then that many of the men there later went on to perform quite significant things, and I assume you meant in post-war years as leading sports people and so on. And

perhaps that isn't quite reflected across the general spectrum of all the services. Do you think it would be true to say or not that the men who managed to get themselves into the air force did possess slightly greater levels of, say, intelligence, initiative, determination perhaps than men in other services or not?

I don't think so. I always had the greatest respect for army and navy people as well. In latter years I think the standard of some of the aircrew people did fall off. I think this was probably a little bit natural with the wastage that took place and – I don't want to be critical of them – but in the latter years some of the materials left a little bit to be desired. I don't want to say anything more on that.

No, no. That's fine. That general point is there.

To you ...

Off tape. Well perhaps if we could just move on from that period. Of course the real focus of this has to be 75 Squadron and perhaps something on 76. But there was this particularly interesting episode when you went to Singapore and, of course, this is shortly before the ... Singapore actually fell to the Japanese. Could you tell us why you were sent there, how you went there and the general outcome of that direction?

(5.00) This was in probably October/November of `41 when we had done some operational training in Australia and I think at that stage there were twelve of us assembled with Squadron Leader Jock Perrin as our OC to give us – he was an ex-3 Squadron fellah – to give us operational instruction and we thought we were going to go to the desert to join 3 Squadron which filled us with high hopes. Then, of course, word came out that the Japs were in it and we were diverted as reinforcements to 21 Squadron in Singapore.

And I understand when you actually arrived there there were twelve of you although there were, in all four squadrons, there were only enough planes for one squadron of pilots and there was the story of drawing straws. Could you tell us about that?

Well, the twelve of us that had travelled up to Singapore together were advised that only five of us were required so we all volunteered naturally and amongst ourselves we sat down and drew straws to see who would be the five to stay. Luckily, or unluckily, I don't know, I was one to stay and had a little bit more experience of the circumstances there than those that didn't stay and eventually we all met up in Batavia again.

And I understand while you were there there was some hostile action against a Japanese dive-bomber?

Abortive, as far as I was concerned. But we were flying Buffaloes, Brewster Buffaloes, delightful show pony but not much good in the air and the poor blokes in those four Buffalo squadrons had a hell of a time. They were just no match for the Japanese Zeros. Of the five of us that stayed behind only three came out. I remember taking my aircraft from Sembawang to Tengah because Sembawang was bombed out

of serviceability. We took off between bomb craters, landed at ... I was in the circuit area at Tengah and I was watching [Jim Haswell?], I think it was, who had landed before me taxiing to the dispersal area with twenty-five pound shells following all along his taxi line until one eventually landed underneath him and blew the aircraft over of course. I was in the middle of my landing approach by that time and I was either so scared or fascinated by what was going on on the ground with all these shells landing that I think I landed my aircraft from about 100 feet up. Fortunately the Buffalo was a sedate show pony and it didn't stall and it just slooshed down onto the ground with a hell of a thump.

> Mmm. That's most interesting. Perhaps if I could just ask you – it is obviously a major factor in any wartime flying, the issue of fear – looking back to that incident or in the previous contact, I think, or close contact perhaps with a Japanese dive-bomber, how real was your fear and how did you overcome it?

Um.

> If there was fear.

I think there's always apprehension but by that time I'd had a fair amount of flying experience, or flying hours, so it wasn't quite the same for me as, say, those Empire Air Scheme blokes that did their forty hours in Australia and forty more hours in Canada and then perhaps another forty hours or twenty hours in an OTU in England or something like that and then with the maximum probably of 100 hours air experience, flying experience, then to go straight into combat – unless they were exceptional – they just lacked the air experience which fortunately, those of us who had stayed behind in Australia had gained. Apprehension, yes. I don't think fear; I don't think fear came into it.

(10.00) If the ... in later stages, if you had to do a thing you did it with as much care as you could I suppose. But I don't remember being ... I don't think I was ... I was never in the desperate situation of being attacked by a dozen other hostile aircraft and I didn't have that experience fortunately. We didn't have a great deal of air combat in New Guinea. Isolated cases, yes, and days when a squadron or a flight might meet up with quite a lot of Jap bombers and fighter escort, but not what they encountered in England, the desert, when one poor bloke might be attacked by a dozen hostile fighter aircraft. I didn't have that fear, fortunately. Had it happened to me, well I think I would have been very much afraid.

> That's interesting, Colin. Perhaps just ending that story – perhaps we need to get on a little bit to New Guinea – but there was quite an interesting story I think of your evacuation from Singapore and later from Batavia. Could you tell us briefly about that?

Well, briefly, from memory, there were only either five or seven Buffaloes left and instruction came through to go to the ... take your aircraft to the civil aerodrome on Singapore and meet up with a Hudson aircraft who would lead us out to Palembang 2 which was in Sumatra and it was supposed to be a secret aerodrome. We didn't have any maps or anything, so we stuck like glue to that Hudson and eventually landed at Palembang. I still, without a map, I still feel we were going the wrong way because Palembang is north of Singapore – or north-west rather, but certainly in a northerly

direction – and I thought, `Heck, we're going the wrong way' and it wasn't till later on when I had a chance to look at a map that I realised that my fear was not founded.

> And then a lot later, having got yourselves down through Sumatra across to Batavia there was a further journey I think in a Chinese river boat?

Yes. We had to wait I think about a week or ten days in Batavia – there were no aircraft of course – and then we got on a, what I called a Chinese river boat, called the Giang Ann and I think it took us about sixteen days to go from Batavia to Perth. I know everyone was pretty apprehensive going through the Sunda Strait, which we did at night. And the only other episode was about halfway to Perth, smoke came up on the western horizon and we thought, `Right, this is it, a Jap cruiser' or something like that but it turned out to be the old Adelaide who then escorted us for a couple of days towards Perth.

> Mmm. That's most interesting. There is something I would just like to ask you, it is roughly in the context I think of the story. It's perhaps a difficult memory but you were saying your brother, I think, was killed about this time in Northern Ireland. How did that affect your feeling about the whole war, if it did?

Yes. I had a cable, or whatever it was in those days, at Batavia from – I forget who it was from, it might have been my brother in New Zealand – to say that young Ross, who was five years younger than me had been killed in his [inaudible]. He was a night fighter pilot based in Northern Ireland. I think my main concern then was ... probably for my mother because she wouldn't have had ... word of where I was.

> Do you want me to turn off?

Just for a minute.

(15.00) Well, going on from ... we are back in Australia now. I know you later, after that, went to 76 Squadron fairly directly. Did you have any choice in where you went in the air force? Did you have any way of influencing the kind of posting you wanted or was it a fairly random process you had no control over.

I don't think we had any control over it. We were posted but it seemed to be a fairly logical course of action to get the most experienced pilots into these two new Kittyhawk squadrons which were forming. Bearing in mind that most of the Empire Air Scheme trainees were still overseas in England or the desert or wherever. So those that went to both 75 and 76 Squadrons all had a fair amount of flying experience – not operational experience except that in 76 Squadron, Peter Turnbull, who had been with 3 Squadron in the desert was our CO initially. Later on, after a few months, Bluey Truscott and Bartie Wawn who had both been in England flying Spitfires, they came to the squadron. But, no, I don't think anyone tried to pull strings to get into any particular squadron or what have you. We just did what we were told.

> Right. Well perhaps moving on from there, you did of course go to Archerfield near Brisbane to form 76 Squadron and later went to Milne Bay. Could you perhaps tell us about your early memories of 76

Squadron, perhaps how the squadron was formed, living there, your own role in the formation of the squadron?

Well I think my first ... my recollection is that the first three pilots to go to 76 Squadron were Peter Ash and Max Bott and myself, all of whom had been in Singapore together and we'd all been on the same training courses, all three of us and on the same bombing and gunnery schools, so that we were the first pilots there – I think we were all flying officers by rank – and gradually flight lieutenants came along, and then squadron leaders and then wing commanders and then a group captain. So instead of being ... having a fair amount to do with the obtaining of aircraft for the squadron we gradually took a back seat. Not that it mattered in any way, we were very happy to see these new experienced blokes come along and 76 was a pretty happy squadron.

You were saying of the period in Singapore, Colin, the Buffaloes were ... well, you described them as show ponies, not the best in the air. The people I have spoken to before have got very fond memories of the Kittyhawk, are yours?

Oh yes. The Kittyhawk was a ... it wasn't a match in air combat with the Zero or the Oscar but it was a very solid, strongly built aircraft, much stronger than the Hurricane or the Spit. It could take a lot of punishment. It was not a difficult aeroplane to fly at all; it had good armament, we had 6.5s – three in each wing – and we could carry up to – gee, I hope I tell the truth – 1,500 or 2,000 pounds of bombs. I may be wrong there, it might have been a 500 pounder under the belly and 250 under each wing. And the Kittyhawk in New Guinea did a lot of bombing and strafing, far more so than aerial combat.

(20.00) Yes, I understand it was basically a plane that was much better at low altitude for that kind of operation rather than actually fighting in the air. Would you agree with that?

Yes, I would, I would. We were always ... well, I think that you mentally steel yourself for what you'd do if you're attacking a bomber and what you'd do if you were attacking or being attacked by a fighter knowing that you couldn't out-manoeuvre a Zero. They had a better rate of climb and they had a better manoeuvrability – turning circle or whatever it is – so the thing was to keep up your speed as much as you could, endeavour to get higher, endeavour to get an advantage but you steel yourself for these types of attacks or manoeuvres but it very rarely happened in actual fact. I only had two aerial combats in all my time.

Mmm. Perhaps we'll talk about those later. Of course, as I understand it, one reason why the Kittyhawk was relatively sluggish, say, compared to a Zero, was its very heavy armour-plating – its general weight. Is that correct, and if so, did pilots prefer the armour-plating despite the trade-off in manoeuvrability and so on?

I don't think that entered our minds but it is interesting that you should say ... describe the heaviness of the aircraft. At one stage we got a shipment of new Kittyhawks from America, called the Kittyhawk N, I think it was, which was designed instrument-wise and armament-wise and to operate in the desert. Now the blind flying instruments

were virtually negligible and to fly these with that handicap in the New Guinea weather was not altogether pleasant. No, it was a strong aeroplane, there is no doubt about that. But I don't think, if we'd stripped the armour-plating from it, it would have made very much difference in combat against the Zeros.

Right. Perhaps just one final question about the Kittyhawk, could you in your imagination picture yourself actually sitting in the cockpit there, perhaps before taking off, could you describe the general layout of the cockpit – I don't mean the actual instruments, I guess they're generally known – but the general layout of the cockpit and things such as visibility compared to other planes?

The layout of the cockpit was very adequate I think from memory; it was comfortable. Visibility for take-off and landing was a little bit blind not being a tricycle undercarriage, you had this big nose in front of you and the technique was to get your tail up as quickly as possible so that you had forward visibility. And the same with landing, once you got your tail wheel down you were a little bit blind immediately ahead. No, I was always very happy in a Kittyhawk I think – I was never frightened of them. I think as far as ... see, there were no two-seated Kittyhawks so that students at their OTU had to do what we called a blind cockpit test. You'd cover up all your instruments – have the student sitting in the seat – cover up all the instruments and then say, `Right, where's your airspeed indicator?' and make him point to where it was and so that he could know and touch every switch as though he was completely blindfolded and this was very essential because in night time, cloud conditions, or on the spur of the moment that you had to arm your bomb quickly, you just had to be able to react instantaneously and this was an important part of the cockpit training for all pilots.

(25.00) That's most interesting, Colin. I've, in fact, never heard anybody mention that before. Just one other issue about ... to do with the formation of the squadron, or rather that period. Of course, during this time I think 75 Squadron was in Port Moresby undergoing a fairly testing time to put it mildly. What news did you have and what was the general feeling within your squadron to events going on in Papua New Guinea?

I don't recall whether we got immediate information concerning their activities and particularly losses. You know, to hear that some of our ... we didn't know all the pilots in 75 at that stage but we knew quite a few of them and one in particular, Barry Cox, was a great personal friend from before the war, we used to sail together and play football together and he was killed in Moresby – shot down. But we don't know exactly what happened but I know that his aircraft went in from a very great height. Just something apropos of the instruments ... I've forgotten what I was going to say.

Right. Okay, well, perhaps just going onto the end of the period of forming 76 Squadron. Do you have any other strong memories of that period before you went to Milne Bay or not?

Was that an important boost to the squadron's morale?

Oh I think so; they were all heroes.

> Perhaps just going on a little bit, perhaps just to get the story to Milne Bay itself. I think it was in late-July `42, 75 and 76 Squadron went to Milne Bay. I think you were both stationed at Gurney airfield, is that correct?

Yes, that's so. We were – they were on ... there was only the single strip there and 75 were on the northern side and 76 on the southern side as far as I remember.

> Well, although this interview obviously is supposed to focus mostly on 75, given that during that period the two squadrons were doing much the same thing I think in the same place, we might just talk about it a little bit. What was your first impression on arriving at Milne Bay? What was the most clear impression of the place, of perhaps what you had to do?

Well, the first new experience was an incomplete landing strip and the strip was being laid with metal interlocking sections and every time your aircraft was on it it would rattle like mad.

> Was that for the entire stretch of the runway?

It was eventually. When the first flight, or half flight of 76 arrived there it was only half finished because they had been taken off from Moresby and gone on a strafing run to Lae and although they didn't lose anyone they got chased like mad by the Zeros and they couldn't get back across the Owen Stanley's to get back to Moresby. They knew that Milne Bay strip was somewhere down there so there they went and landed on a half finished strip. I think there were six of them led by Sam Sullivan.

> The metal stripping that was laid on the runways, was that largely because of the very wet nature of the climate?

Yes, because of the wet conditions. Off the strip everywhere was a quagmire; the rainfall was fantastic treat. We used to have a squadron song, praying to Hughie to send her down and Hughie, of course, was the bloke up above and send her down was to send down the bad weather.

> You don't hear people ... Hughie has rather gone out of the Australian vocabulary. That 's just finishing.

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes with Colin Lindeman, tape 2, side 1 or side 3 of the whole lot – 75 Squadron.
>
> Colin, we were just speaking about landing strips and the need for metal and so on because of the wetness of the climate. I imagine it must have made living fairly difficult. What are your recollections of arriving in Milne Bay and the kind of living conditions you had to face?

Mud, mud, and more mud and dripping coconut palms. The accommodation we were in was pretty rough. I think in sort of bamboo huts. I don't even recall what we slept on. I would like to think palliasses but I'm not too sure. I just don't think we had any beds or sheets or anything like that. The army blokes always thought that the air force

blokes had it easy and came home to a nice comfortable bed every night with clean sheets and WAAAFs to look after them but that never happened in New Guinea. It might have happened in UK.

> What kind of mess facilities did you have and, for example, were supplies fairly easily obtained – reasonable food, perhaps beer occasionally or were they luxuries?

Did you say beer occasionally? Yes, I think at that stage we were rationed to a bottle of beer a day and then later on, of course, General Blamey declared New Guinea dry. The food was, oh, never very good really. If the Japs had happened to kill a couple of zebu cattle with their bombing we occasionally got fresh meat but I seem to recollect dehydrated potatoes and egg powder and tinned bacon. I don't really remember too much except that we didn't get fat on it.

> Yes, that's certainly evident from the photographs. Was there any ... was there much exchange of goods with the local people or not?

Oh no, there were no ... the only local people of course were the natives with whom we had very little contact. Later on there was a bit more contact when 75 Squadron went to Goodenough Island but, by and large, no. No contact with the natives. There was a church mission there with, from memory, two Roman Catholic priests. We went up one day to say `Good day' to them and were treated to tea and fresh sconey things – rock cakes are they called? They had butter because they had a cow there, whereas our butter was ... oh, came out of drums I think. It wasn't butter.

(5.00) > That's most interesting. Perhaps just then, turning onto a different – a related aspect, we were talking about the wetness of the climate. Weather must have been an incredible obstacle, or a danger perhaps, to flying of any sort in New Guinea. Before you left Australia what training had you had, if any, to cope with those conditions?

Not very much really. Sometimes one might illegally tackle clouds and see how you'd go on your blind flying. I did this on a few occasions and surprised myself that I didn't panic. No, there was very little training for single-engined aircraft in cloudy and poor visibility conditions. I'm trying to remember back that far, but I'm sure ... other than night flying, of which there was very little really in training, and our Link training instruction for blind flying, there was no specific intense flying training for single-engined aircraft in non-visibility conditions.

> Having arrived in Milne Bay then, obviously maps were critical for flying, how good were the maps you had?

Oh, pretty good I think. Again, from memory, we all carried a grid map into sections; alphabetical on one side, numerical on the other so that you could just spot that you were at C7, for example, if you had something to report. We all had escape maps, silk maps, with the New Guinean surrounding areas printed on it which we all carried, they made good scarfs. I think my wife later on made scanties or panties out of them.

> That's lovely.

Because they were pure silk.

> Yeah, sure. There was no doubt a scarce commodity. Perhaps just turning back to the weather, how much, or how accurate – if you had any information at all – was the information you received at Milne Bay about the weather? For example, were there spotters in the hills who could provide that information or not?

Um, no, not in New Guinea to any great extent. There were coast watchers further up the ... from Milne Bay, going towards Lae and Madang but they were pretty isolated in there. Because at that stage there was not much – oh, I'll get my facts straight – yes, the Japs were in Lae then, yes, that's right, and the aircraft were coming down to Milne Bay. No, occasionally a Hudson would go out and do a weather reccie for us and come back and report but it was not radio reporting. It was, the Hudsons go out and say, `Oh, yes, you'll get through to Goodenough', or wherever you want to go. But then we would have to wait for them to go and come back before we could get the word to our blokes to go off. No, weather was quite a bit of guess and by God.

> By which time, I would imagine, by which time they'd returned the weather might well have changed.

In those conditions, yes.

> Do you have any particular recollections of actually being caught in a particularly difficult weather situation where flying really became hazardous?

Yes. One particular episode comes to mind when the Jap troops' ships were coming down to land at Milne Bay. I think, from memory, there were four of them escorted by – oh, I don't recollect – perhaps three destroyers and they were steaming down, oh, east of Milne Bay, naturally. Anyway, both squadrons, 75 and 76, went out to bomb and strafe the transports and the weather was not the best and the bombing was bloody awful. I don't think we had any hits at all and a bit a strafing but did very little damage to those four transports. I'm pretty sure it was four but correct me if I'm wrong.
(10.00) Then later on, my flight commander and I think eight of us went out to do a second bombing attack on it and the weather was pretty shocking and it was pretty late – in the approaching dusk – and we didn't find the convoy and the flight leader, heading back for home – he was a bloody awful navigator, he's not alive now but I won't mention names – but instead of heading into the bay itself he lead us on the northern side of the bay, over the water on the northern side. And I realised he was wrong and I called him up on the radio and said, `Hey Jack, you're on the wrong side of the bay. You've got to cross over, do a left and cross over into Milne Bay' and either he didn't hear me or didn't believe me. Anyhow, I knew it was wrong, so I dropped the bombs and the other four of us then skirted across the mountains there, or hills, into Milne Bay and we had to do a night landing. And I think about half an hour later the flight leader turned up with his four. But that was in bad weather and something easily to mistake because Milne Bay had a north island and a south island and he could have easily thought he was heading on the northern side of the south island. Instead of that, he was on the northern side of the north island.

> That's interesting. Just one question following on from that, in that kind of situation where, in this particular instance, you were convinced you

were right, the flight leader was wrong, what was the official ... officially were you right to fly off as you did, or not?

Well, I tried to contact him on the radio and there was no reply. Now, I think I was right. I was leading three other blokes and the leader was leading me. Had I had blind faith in him, I should have stuck I suppose, but I knew he was wrong.

I think, perhaps I didn't phrase that question correctly Colin. I think what I was trying to say was: in those situations where an individual pilot was certain that he was right and another was wrong, then the accepted practice was to follow one's own initiative?

It was the first time it ever happened to me and I ... well, I just don't know whether I was wrong. Maybe if I had turned out to be wrong and I'd lost the three blokes with me I probably should have been court martialled perhaps, but there were no ... oh, well, it was the first time it happened. I don't know what the circumstances would have been. I was only too relieved to ... when I got on the ground and reported to, I don't know whether it was Pete Turnbull or Bluey Truscott CO then, but Jack had gone off on the wrong side of the bay and I'd come back. I wasn't criticised for it.

That's most interesting. Just a minute. This is just testing for some noise from a lawnmower. Right, well, this is just continuing after lunch.

Colin, Peter Turnbull I think had been a member of 75 Squadron, he was now your commanding officer. There was a story of his death, it was obviously rather awful. Could you recall that?

Yes. ... It was during the early stages of the Japanese invasion of Milne Bay and Peter had sighted, from the air, had sighted a Japanese tank moving along the northern shore and he was strafing it and, from my subsequent observations, I think that what happened to Peter is that he pressed his attack a little bit too keenly with the result that he got very, very close to the coconut trees, through which the road ran, and I think he probably had a high speed stall because subsequently, when the army people got in touch with the Squadron to say that they'd found an aircraft crashed in the coconut trees on the north side, we thought it would have to be Peter's aircraft.
(15.00) Our medical officer, Norman Newman, and I went out to find ... to the site and to find and bury Peter, well, we went out along the northern shore by ... I think canoe with one of the army fellahs and landed at a little perimeter held by the army. Incidentally, when I got ashore, the first bloke to welcome us was a school mate who I hadn't seen for probably twenty years – oh, maybe not that long, ten years – Captain Colin Kirk. But we recognised one another straightaway. Anyhow, he lead us to the site of the ... our crashed aircraft and my firm observation and opinion is that Peter must have got into a high speed stall because the aircraft was on its back; there was no evidence of enemy fire, but the whole of the canopy had been ... the airscrew was damaged and the canopy, cockpit-canopy had been sheered off, or shorn off, and Peter, of course, was decapitated. My principal object of going out, of course, was to destroy what we thought secret equipment in the Kittyhawk then the IFF wireless ... That was called IFF – Identification: Friend and Foe. This was something that, when it was switched on, would transmit to radar or stations and pick up ... identify you whether you were a friend or a foe. And so, it was important to destroy this, which I

did. And then we got Peter out of the cockpit and buried him. It was a very sad occasion but also a very sad occasion was that we subsequently learned that that night this little perimeter that was held by Colin Kirk and his platoon was overrun by the Japanese and all of them were killed.

> That's a very sad story, Colin. Could I just ask you more – and this is a difficult question I know – but more generally, not just thinking about Peter there, how people reacted when men they'd known well did suddenly die in that kind of situation; when they were killed in action or however?

Well, I think there was ... natural distress. I recall that immediately after Peter Turnbull's death, Peter Ash who was a pilot in the squadron named his aircraft `Peter's Revenge' which I thought at the time was pretty apt. But, oh no, there was certainly remorse and you always remembered your mates for their best qualities.

> Were there men such as padres who could offer solace in these kinds of situations or not?

No, I don't recall. I don't recall. I think we just all consoled one another. The squadron did have a padre, of course, but I don't know whether that was any great help – personally, not to me anyhow, in my experience.

> Going on perhaps to more general things – I know those are very difficult memories, Colin – while 75 and 76 were at Milne Bay, much of the operation ... much of their duties involved attacking ground forces, ships and so on during the period of the build-up to the invasion or the possible invasion of Milne Bay, do you have any particular recollections of actions during that period, of how you were involved?

(20.00) Well, I think once the Japanese got ashore, our particular task was to bomb and strafe and particularly strafe because with 6.5 aircraft and your wings and a lot of the Japanese snipers would perch themselves on top of the coconut trees and, if we saw them, they were good targets. It was nice to see them fall out of those trees. No, it was army cooperation. If, in the forward position, the army fellahs might send up ... fire a smoke canister to the spot that they wanted us to strafe, so we'd go in and strafe the smoke area and on the enemy side of that.

> When you were in those situations coming into attack positions held by the Japanese was there ever any feelings of the slightest regret about what you were doing or was it simply seen as a job that had to be done?

I don't think any Australian had any regrets for killing Japanese. I think our feelings were, after what they'd done in Malaya and Singapore to our fellahs, what the treachery of Pearl Harbour, the one particular thing that was in our mind was that ... one of the Boston pilots of, I think, 20 Squadron, might be 22 Squadron, Flight Lieutenant Newton – Bill Newton – whose aircraft was hit by enemy fire on one of the beaches north of Milne Bay, he crashed landed in the water and he was taken ashore and beheaded. Bill, of course, won the VC, but I think the very fact that the Japanese would create these atrocities gave us no regrets whatsoever in killing everyone of the buggers we could see.

That's certainly understandable. Just going on a slightly lighter note, I understand while you were there there was an interesting anecdote about beards and the two squadrons. Could you tell us that?

Well, in 76 Squadron – sometimes you get a little bit bored if the weather is right down and you can't fly – so, I think, A flight pilots decided to grow their beards above the mouth and B flight pilots grew their beards below the mouth so that we could easily identify one another in case of any rivalry.

Well, what other outlets were there for men when ... when you weren't involved in operations? Was there any recreational outlets or other outlets, or not?

At Milne Bay, no. I don't think we had any recreation at all, that I recall. The weather was against any cricket, even if we could find a suitable pitch area to play on. I know there was a pretty big poker school running. I've got a photograph of Bluey Truscott and Peter Turnbull and two or three others with literally hundreds and hundreds of pounds on the poker table. I wasn't a participant.

Mmm. After the period at Milne Bay, Colin, I know you returned to Australia and it was during that time you became engaged I think to a lady who was a WAAAF – your wife later – did that act of becoming engaged, did that alter in any way your feelings about the war or not?

Mmm, no, I don't ... I don't think it did.

(25.00) That was just a brief pause there.

No, I don't recall that it would have altered my attitude at all. I know that the squadron, from when we got back to Townsville, the squadron then moved straight up to Darwin where it was found that nearly everyone in the squadron had become infected with malaria through the Anopheles mosquitoes at Milne Bay. I think most of the pilots were sent south to have their blood renewed – get the infected blood out of their system – but for some reason, I didn't ... I wasn't affected. I didn't have malaria. So I took this as a ... the squadron was grounded for another reason too, that all of our wings – our main planes – in which the 6.5s were mounted – the guns – we'd done so much strafing that all the rivets in the wings of the aeroplane had sprung and virtually every wing had to be renewed; reriveted and replaced. So the squadron was unserviceable for quite a few weeks there while the ... (a) the aircraft were rebuilt, and (b) the pilots had their blood renewed. I had some excuse to take an aircraft back to Townsville to see my fiancee.

Was that generally easy for pilots in those kinds of situations to ... in this case, say, to fly from Darwin to Townsville on a personal mission?

It happened.

How did you organise it?

Oh, I think I just did it. I can't recall seeking permission because I was one of the few pilots left in the squadron who hadn't been infected with malaria. I had some excuse that I can't think of what it was now but something to do with getting more aircraft or

serviceability in some spares and things. Anyhow, I did it and got to Townsville and had a few days there and then flew back again.

> Mmm. That's a lovely story. Perhaps if, while we are talking about that, we might just perhaps cover this other story that, again, involves going AWOL. I think you married in May of 1943, before you went to join 75 Squadron. You'd applied to your commanding ... or to air office, I think, or to somebody regarding your marriage and there was a negative reply, could you tell us that story?

Well, this was after I left 76 Squadron and I was posted east to Brisbane to a place called Strathpine to form a new squadron, 83 Squadron, who were to be equipped with Boomerangs, the first squadron to be so equipped – 83 or 82?

> You did say 83 before.

It might have been 82. Anyhow it was the first Boomerang Squadron. I was engaged at that time and my fiancee, Bev, was in the WAAAF and stationed at eastern area ... eastern area headquarters at Point Piper. I thought it was the right thing to do, servicewise, to gain permission from your AOC to get married. So I wrote I think to Air Vice-Marshal Anderson at eastern area headquarters seeking permission to marry and the answer came back, very definitely, no. By that stage, I think, we'd set a date and anyhow I left the squadron for a few days and got married; permission or not.

> Yes, that's an interesting story. While we're talking about Air Vice-Marshal Anderson, there was another story, I think also connected with that same Boomerang Squadron, and there was this problem with aircraft and so on and the story of your visit – hasty visit – to Sydney. Could you recall that for us?

Yes, well, at this stage we ... the Boomerangs hadn't arrived, any of them. So I had, I think, six or eight Bell Airacobras in the squadron ...

> Colin, could we just pause please.

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

> Identification: Colin Lindeman with Edward Stokes, tape 2, side 2 – side four of the whole lot – 75 Squadron.
>
> Yes, going back to that story.

This was the 83 Squadron, Boomerang Squadron. We hadn't received any new Boomerangs so ... but we did have, I think, six or eight Bell Airacobras. I had – just get my sequence right – I had flown down to Bankstown from Strathpine to go out to see the AOC at Eastern Command to try and hasten the arrival of our Boomerangs. But as soon as I got out to eastern area headquarters I was advised that Air Vice-Marshal Anderson was on his way to Strathpine to see Squadron Leader Lindeman of 83 Squadron. So I hastily whipped out to Bankstown, to my Airacobra, to go back to Strathpine but the weather had closed right down and I tried to get off. I had to turn back and hung around the control tower waiting for the weather to clear and after a

few hours they thought the weather might be okay, so I went off again and went out to sea and finally got up to Brisbane, to Strathpine. In the circuit area I saw, I think, three or four staff cars coming up the road and I thought, `God, this is it'. So I did a very quick landing and got on the ground just in time to welcome Air Vice-Marshal Anderson and his entourage. His first comment was, `Lindeman, do you usually fly in your blues?', because I had my blue uniform on. That was rather embarrassing. I had to say, `No, Sir. I'd been down to see you on equipment problems to learn that you were coming up to see me'. So that went off all right. I think he believed me. And then, after some consultation, he wanted to know why I hadn't fitted torpedoes to the Airacobras because of the threat of Japanese submarines and so on off the coast. This took me aback a little bit because it seemed an impossibility to fit a torpedo to a Bell Airacobra, because the nose wheel and the landing wheels retract inwards under the belly and the belly is the only place where a torpedo could be slung. So I suggested that the chief engineer officer at eastern area command might send up the blue prints for adapting Bell Airacobras to carry torpedoes. And we had a look at the aircraft with him and he said, `I can see your problem. Forget about it'.

Was he a bit out of touch generally? Was he known for that or not?

Oh, he was a very distinguished air force officer – had served in the First World War in the Royal Flying Corps.

(5.00) Well, let's move onto 75 Squadron, Colin. I think it was about January 1944 that you joined the squadron, I understand at Goodenough Island, as a squadron leader, supernumerary. Could you recall joining the squadron; could you tell us anything about the morale of the squadron at the time; and also, what your duties were to be as a supernumerary?

Congo Kinninmont was CO of 75 Squadron then: a very fine man. I think morale was very high. There was not a great deal of aerial combat which would be the main thing on Goodenough Island because there weren't any ground targets to attack. We weren't there very, very long but my duties as squadron leader, supernumerary was to fly as much as I possibly could or that's what happened. It was a very good period where my only responsibility was to fly or sometimes lead the squadron but not have any administrative problems at all. It was very enjoyable.
The squadron then, I think, in sequence, moved from Goodenough to Nadzab on the mainland where we were engaged on bombing and strafing and close escort and top escort for American squadrons mostly, some of our own. Escorts for Vultee Vengeance, dive-bombers and for our Liberator squadron – number 24, I think it was. That was a pretty good period as far as I was concerned because I had all the flying I could possibly get without any administrative problems.

Was any or much of that flying at great risk, Colin, or not? Was it common to meet opposition or not?

The air opposition was not very great. In the close escort duties where the fighter squadrons flew as close as possible to the bombers – as the name implies, close escort – so that if any Japanese fighters broke through the top or medium cover then we were there to protect the bombers. But, at that stage, the Lockheed Lightnings and Thunderbolts of the Americans invariably acted as top cover and they took care of most of the air opposition. There was a lot of it, yes. It was quite a sight to see, oh, ten

or a dozen Zeros spirally down on fire and smoking from the top cover engagements by the Lightnings or the Thunderbolts. But, no, our jobs again were bombing and strafing and close escort.

> And in the bombing and strafing was it common to meet significant opposition or not?

Ground fire, yes. But I don't recall too many casualties in the squadron. We had two blokes killed one day when they were attacking barges on an island and, unfortunately, in making their attack they didn't observe one another and they collided and both were killed. They were very fine young men too.

> That must have been ... that kind of collision must have been particularly hard to bear.

It was a bit disheartening, too. We used to listen to Tokyo Rose at night and that incident which took place during the day was on ... was told by Tokyo Rose on the radio. I think she even named the names of the pilots. I could be wrong there but she certainly had pretty instantaneous information.

> Mmm. That's most interesting. Colin, is there any one particular attack, if you like, during this period on ... at these different bases, Goodenough, Nadzab, and so on, a ground attack that comes vividly to mind as a particularly difficult operation or dangerous one and if there is one, could you describe the event as it happened?

I've got to think hard here.

(10.00) > I'm thinking of one that perhaps encapsulates the skills and the difficulties and the dangers of that kind of ground attack.

Well, the danger was from ground fire. I remember one particular episode. We were operating out of Tadji or Aitape – which is the same place – down towards – I forget where the target was – south. One of the last places where the army got the Japanese out of. What was the name of the place? Anyhow it was a pretty strongly held Japanese area and in strafing down there one day we encountered a hut at the foot of the But promontory on which the anti-aircraft gunners were situated. And flying over this hut I could see the Japs tearing out of the hut, going to the base of the hill, and obviously they had ladders and things inside there and going out on top to man their anti-aircraft guns, which were machine guns; not heavy ack-ack. So we came back and we had strafed the hut and strafed the guns position but not very successfully I think because I said to myself, `Well, I'll go down the next morning and do the job properly'. So next morning we went down and sure enough, got the Japs in the hut. Some of them got out and I think that they might have been a little bit prepared for us because as we came back for a second run over the machine gun positions I got hit with a ... just one bullet which entered the cockpit just behind me. It penetrated the self-sealing fuel tank; it severed the hydraulic line which, as you know, would have operated the flaps and the landing gear and so on, and it also severed the rudder pedal. So, I knew I'd been hit from the jar on my feet. It wasn't long before I discovered I didn't have any rudder which was a little bit of a dicey return to Tadji. It wasn't very far away, only about quarter of an hour perhaps. The aircraft flies quite easily without a rudder, with aileron control and rudder trim tab. But the lack of hydraulics was a bit worrying

because it means I had to wind down my landing gear manually and then land without any rudder which was quite an interesting operation.

> Could you remember ... could you recall the actual sequence of coming in for that landing?

Oh, I think it followed the normal pattern. Wheels down, airscrew in fine pitch, and mixture enrich and – it's a long time ago to remember these things – but winding down the undercarriage took quite a while. Then you had to pump the flaps down manually. Then I think I got out of the aircraft fairly quickly and one of the ground staff ... or a fitter came up to me and said, `Gee, Col, you're a bit lucky. Just one little bullet did all that damage'. So I was probably a little bit careless in making the attack in the same pattern for two days in a row. It's the sort of thing I learned not to do any more.

> That's a most interesting story, Colin. Perhaps just going onto something a little different. If you went through the sequence of places, Goodenough, Nadzab, Cape Gloucester, Tadji, Hollandia, Biak, and I think, ...

Noemfoor.

(15.00) Noemfoor. Which of those places stands out in your mind as having either the best or the worst flying conditions, landing strips and so on?

I think Tadji was the worst conditions because we moved the squadron in there only one or two days after the ... our troops had landed there. The American Navy had softened up the area with shelling from their ships but, nevertheless, the Japanese were just outside the perimeter and were sniping quite happily when we were taking off and landing. And the strip was pretty new; again, a metal strip. And it was extremely crowded because Australian Beauforts were there and I think Beaufighters, although I could be incorrect there. Anyhow, the conditions on the little strip were very, very crowded and that made things a little bit dicey, particularly if everyone wanted to come in and land at the same time, the different squadrons coming in.

> And how dangerous was the sniping that was ... from close by the airstrip?

Well, there were quite a few casualties and quite a few of the aircraft on the ground were hit. But, no, it wasn't all that bad. We used to go out and strafe the perimeter on the request of the army people. From memory, I think it was all American army there. I don't think there were any Australian army fellahs there at that stage which, you know, in fact, didn't fill us with the same confidence had they been Australians.

> Mmm. That's interesting. And which of those airstrips would you recall as the best? A place where you felt more secure than anywhere else?

Oh, Nadzab was a huge base really. I don't know how many landing strips were there but it could accommodate the American A-20s and the Bostons and either two or three Kittyhawk squadrons. The strip was very good on the low-lying kunai parts just to the west of Lae. Hollandia was even bigger; our strip wasn't all that hot but there were I think there were three strips there too and there was a fair amount of traffic there too –

air traffic – because that was where General MacArthur had his headquarters at that stage. Generally speaking the strips at, or the one at Noemfoor was built by Australian airfield engineers and it was a beauty. The surface was like glass. Biak was quite good too. But I think as you've said, I think the diceyest one was Tadji because of the smallness of the strip, the proximity of the Japanese snipers and the huge volume of aircraft operating from it.

> That's most interesting. You were telling me before, Colin, the incident when you veered off on take-off. Was that during this period?

No, that was when I was in 76 Squadron.

> At Milne Bay.

At Milne Bay.

> Could you perhaps, although it's out of sequence, could you perhaps just recall that?

Well, it was a very sad occasion. It was ... I was leading the flight off on a pre-dawn strike against the Jap cruiser that was still in the bay. This must have been the day or two after the Japs had successfully landed, well out in the bay. It was pre-dawn. Of course, there were no aerodrome control, there was no navigation or landing lights because we were within shelling range and the official version is that my left oleo leg had collapsed which put the aircraft in an attitude of being very lopsided.
(20.00) I wasn't aware of this until I was well into my take-off run ... and at that time, with the Japs so close, a Hudson aircraft was being moved away from the Japanese threat from the ... say, the northern side of the strip to the southern side and it, unfortunately, taxied across my take-off path and I hit it. The sad part was that one of the aircrew ... one of the ground crew rather – there were no aircrew aboard the Hudson – but one of the ground crew, whether it was the bloke taxiing it or not, I don't know, but unfortunately one of them was killed. My aircraft was a complete write-off of course.

> How lucky were you to escape yourself?

I was very lucky in that I wasn't carrying bombs. Unlucky in a way that as it subsequently turned, it turns out I suffered a whiplash fracture of my neck and also a sort of compression fracture of my spine which has caused me trouble ever since. So, it was ... well, a nasty accident.

> Mmm. Sure. The ... Going back to the period with 75 Squadron, of course, I think it was about April of that year – April `44 – you were made commanding officer of the squadron. Can you recall that, how you felt at the time? What duties devolved on you as a result?

In retrospect I don't think I was ...

> Would you like to pause for a bit? ... Just going on.

In retrospect I don't think I was a very good CO, particularly not following Congo Kinninmont's leadership. Administratively there was not a great deal to do because I had efficient adjutants and so on and we were doing fairly constant new landings on

new areas as the Japs were pushed back and the Allies were leapfrogging them. So, for the most part, the fighter squadrons got in as quickly as we could to give fighter cover to that new area. No, I think things with Congo as CO I'd still ... he allowed me to lead the squadron on quite a few occasions so the leadership was no problem whatsoever. The pilots in the squadron I feel were all pretty competent. We lost some through misadventure. From memory now, I think three blokes just disappeared on fairly long bashes, lost through not keeping in formation in bad weather which was always a problem. But we did pretty long flights in that particular area, moving up the coast, you know, sitting on your bottom in a single-seat aircraft for four hours or more on a very hard seat with a CO2 bottle from your inflatable dinghy rubbing holes in your bottom was physically a hardship and the left cheek of your bottom developed sores through ... No, we'd do ... we'd invariably do in the vicinity of a four-hour flight day after day after day and sometimes, in an emergency, do two in the day. And eight hours in a day in a single-engined aircraft creates a bit of a hardship – physical anyhow.

(25.00) Yes, I'm sure. Was also navigation, as you were moving up through the islands and obviously flying over fairly large expanses of ocean, was navigation ... you were mentioning before three men who'd appeared to disappear. Was the likely cause of that faulty navigation or exhaustion?

It wouldn't be exhaustion because if there was ... as we entered the strike area we had pep pills to take – I don't know what they were but they were supposed to make you a little bit more alert and keep you awake because you can get a little bit drowsy in an aeroplane from the engine noise and so on – no, I think the two cases I recall, it was in bad weather and I know that one of the blokes broke formation and I can only think that he thought he saw a target down below. It was in the water over ... I even forget which bay it was, but somewhere in the extreme western area near the [Bougalcop?] Peninsula of New Guinea. Whether he saw a target or not I don't know, but no-one else went with him. His number 2 didn't go with him. And no radio call; he was certainly not in distress. The weather was a bit dicey. I circled the squadron as best I could in that area to see what he was up to but couldn't locate him through the cloud and he just never did reform with us. We went on to our strike area and came back. You get pretty distressed over these things.

Yes, I'm sure. Just going back to your becoming squadron leader, Colin, what were the main ... or the most important functions of a squadron leader in your mind?

Oh, I think to lead the squadron to the best of your ability. To make sure you reached your target, you did your best offensive work and to bring them home safely. Administratively the CO didn't have a great deal to do; things were more or less automatic. At that stage we were one squadron of three in 78 Wing where we had a senior officer in charge of the whole wing and we had a flying wing leader. Now the wing leader would dictate what the flying was to be for the day, whether it was to be a three squadron attack or three squadrons going to three different targets. So, again, we had people ... there were people above me who told me what to do.
One thing that just comes to mind is that at that stage our RAAF Wing was part of the – General Kennedy's Fifth Air Force in New Guinea and as such we became entitled to a combat ration. This meant, I think, two ounces of bourbon for every strike, per

pilot, for every strike that you made. You appreciate the circumstances, I was probably a bit older than most of the pilots in the squadron and not many of them liked bourbon. However, my adjutant and MO, with whom I shared a tent, liked bourbon and so did I. So, at the end of the day we'd send the doc up to General Kennedy's headquarters to collect the squadron combat ration. A little bit unfair, but as I say, the adjutant was a bit older and the MO was a bit older than the pilots, so no-one was aggrieved by any means. But that combat ration sort of made you look forward to the next bash.

> That's interesting; I can imagine that. Just a moment. We are just having a look through a collection of photographs of 75 Squadron during this time. This one here, Colin, of the pilot ...

The pilot there in that Kittyhawk is Ross Glassop who later became a group captain, I think. At that stage he was a sergeant pilot – no disrespect to Ross – but he stayed on in the air force and did extremely well. He's probably retired now. But I recall that he ...

END OF TAPE 2 – SIDE B

> Identification: This is Edward Stokes, Colin Lindeman, tape 3, side 1 – side 5 – 75 Squadron.
>
> Yes, Colin.

This is a photograph of Ross Glassop in his Kittyhawk when he was with 75 Squadron. I could be wrong, that might be 76, but anyhow Ross subsequently stayed in the air force and did extremely well. He was at one stage CO of Darwin – RAAF Darwin – base when former COs of 75 Squadron were invited to go to Butterworth in Malaya for the presentation to 75 Squadron of the Queen's colours. I was one of the lucky ones to be invited to make that trip which was fairly memorable. At the time it was arranged we were to fly up in a BAC 111 of the VIP flight but John Gorton, who I knew very well, was Prime Minister and he started to economise a bit, withdrew the BAC1-11 from the flight but allowed us to go in an old Hercules. So up we went, I think there were about eight of us altogether, former COs, because 75 Squadron kept going after the war. It was never disbanded I think and Ross Glassop had heard that we were coming in Darwin, so when we landed there he wounded us very severely with his welcome and that sort of set the pattern for a fairly alcoholic trip to Butterworth and back. But it was a very impressive service to have the Queen's colours presented to 75 Squadron. I've subsequently seen the colours in 75 Squadron's operations room at Williamtown. Anyhow, that's Ross whose a pretty fine bloke.

> That's an interesting story. This one here of a vehicle, quite badly bogged, how common was that in ... around the airstrips?

That was an American command car hopelessly bogged, I think at Milne Bay, I'm pretty sure of it but I can't be sure. They look like Milne Bay 76 Squadron photos to me.

> Just looking at some of the photographs of the men and one senses quite a relaxed kind of atmosphere in terms of how men got along with one another and perhaps between non-commissioned officers and other ranks and officers, is that how you remember the times?

Well, aircrew particularly because all aircrew, whether they were commissioned officers or NCOs – sergeant pilots or flight sergeant – all messed together and there was no differentiation with rank there. So aircrew NCOs messed with officers. I think this was very important for fellowship and getting to know one another and rely on one another.

> I was going to ask about that, that's perhaps just an aspect we could follow up. The issue of interrelationships and interdependence in the air, Colin, a fighter pilot in a sense is a very lonely person say compared to the crew of a bomber who have a number of people together. How critical was one's dependence on other pilots in the air?

Normally, in a fighter squadron, you worked in pairs. The CO lead and he had his number 2. Normally you flew in flights of four, so a squadron of twelve would have three flights of four. The CO would have his number 2, and then his number 3 and number 4 on the other side. And the duties of the number 2s was to stick with their leader all the time so that if, for some reason, say the CO's number 3 was ordered to break off and look at a target his number 2 would go with him. So that the number 2s placed great reliance on their number 1s and, of course, that fed right through to everyone placing reliance on the bloke leading the squadron at the time.

> Was it ever an issue that individual pilots felt dubious or perhaps concerned about the abilities of other pilots, perhaps his skills weren't quite as highly refined as they might have been?

Yes, I think this did happen. Unfortunately, I do recall one pilot who, in 75 Squadron, actually he was in training days he was senior to me, but somehow along the line I'd passed him and he unfortunately developed a habit of having engine failure just before take-off on quite a few occasions. We called it lack of morale fibre and it's a bit hard to do to send one of your pilots back home in disgrace. But for the sake of the squadron and the morale of everyone else, you just had to do it.

> How was that particular incident with that man – there's no need to name the person – how was the particular incident resolved?

Oh, I used to get a medical certificate to say that he was no longer medically fit to fly and get him home on sick leave.

> Was this during your period as CO?

Yes, yes. I had two instances of that. But the thing to do was to deal with it very quickly before everyone started to lose confidence. But, oh no, it's a thing you don't look back on with any pride but it was one of those things that just had to be done.

> Sure. And when that happened do you think other pilots – other men in the squadron – were judgmental about it or could they understand that perhaps some people simply could not cope under that stress?

Well, I think that was it, they couldn't cope with the stress. (a) They might have been married men, they might have had families, and, you know, and worried about that. Can you just excuse me? [Pause]

> Just looking at the slightly wider question of discipline – not the LMF issue, Colin – was discipline, either from your perspective as a CO or just in your general recollection, was discipline ever much of a problem, for example, in 75 Squadron, or not?

No, I don't think so. I think it is an altogether different situation between peace and war, of course. In the squadron the discipline amongst the ground staff, whether they be cooks or armourers or whatever happens, they always had an NCO up the line to warrant officer who were responsible for those sections and the discipline in them. In operations and going up through the islands we never had a parade so no-one had to turn out first thing in the morning when everyone was turning out. I can hardly remember a parade as such because we were on the go all the time.
(10.00) Some of the pilots did get home for a rest but not so the ground staff. They served their time. Aircrew served, from memory, the nine months or a certain number of operational hours, whether it was four, five, six hundred. Fighter aircraft, of course, flew a lot shorter hours than bombers. So, we might have the maximum of say four hours whereas a heavy bomber might be for ten hours and a Catalina for twenty-two hours. So that the pilots were mostly serving their nine month's period. I think the discipline, generally speaking, was all very good. The job just had to be done; the armourers had to do their jobs, the fitters had to do their jobs, the engineers had to make sure that the aircraft were serviceable as quickly as possible and everyone hoed in irrespective of times. There was no clock-on at eight o'clock in the morning and knock-off at four. It was daylight to dark and even after dark to keep the aircraft serviceable.

> Ground crews obviously played a critical role in keeping the whole operation going. Do you think overall they've received the credit they deserved, or not?

No. I think that the credit in the way of awards or decorations went to the senior men except in isolated instances of, say, aircraft fire or something like this where whoever was handy hopped in and rescued people, then they would be recognised. But, oh no, by and large the awards and decorations went to the senior people. I don't think there was any discontent amongst the ground staff at all other than for the inevitable hardship conditions of food and living conditions which, by and large, everyone suffered.

> And they were fairly consistent through the whole sequence of different bases that 75 operated from during that time?

Yes, this is so. I think in that time I was with them we did, I think it was seven or eight different bases in nine months which puts you and the whole squadron on the move all the time, so you're no sooner set in at one camp than you were preparing to move again the next time.

> Mmm. Real suitcase living. And during that time was there any – given the speed of the move on and so on – was there ever any opportunity

for recreation? Did you ever, for example, have entertainers visit you or not?

I don't think Australia did. The Americans did; the Americans sent out a lot of entertainers. There were frequently films to view but the entertainers didn't really move up as fast as the squadrons did. See, the fighter squadrons were the next in line to front-line conditions, whereas the bombers were further back. So we didn't see many live entertainers. But films, yes, films were looked forward to until someone heard an aeroplane engine and everything was blacked out of course.

Just going on then, I know we have to wind up, Colin, just towards the very end of your time with 75 Squadron as a CO, what are your last memories of being with the squadron and where were you and how did you feel when you left it?

I think ... I think the squadron was at Noemfoor when my time was up. ... I was a bit shagged out, I suppose – physically tired. A little bit shaky after two and a half tours but, oh no, life just went on. From there on, when I got back to RAAF headquarters in Melbourne, I wasn't all that happy.

(15.00) Right. So, okay, so that's the picture. And you were ... I mean, obviously it must have been very tiring that period. We might just skate over, I think, perhaps the period at RAAF headquarters, except I think it was a rather somewhat frustrating, was it?

Oh it was very negative. I felt I was not contributing anything at all. I'd get word that a fighter squadron was short of aeroplanes like that, so I'd go down and see the supply officer, whom over the years I got to know quite well because he invariably listened to me, or listened to my requests. Oh no, ... At that stage the Kittyhawks were being phased out and the Mustangs were being brought in. I was able to fly the Mustangs a few times and only wished they'd come to us four years earlier.

They were a much better aircraft?

Oh yes, they were superior, superior.

Well, perhaps going on just a little bit, Colin, as, of course, 1945 went on, first of all there was victory in Europe, later in the Pacific. With those events and looking back on that whole period, the large period of anybody's life and all the things that had happened, what were your feelings? How did you feel at the end of it all? Perhaps about ... both about the war generally and your own involvement in it?

Well, I think everyone looked forward to peace. D-Day was a pretty big thing for our friends in England and what was left of Europe. I think Australia had pulled its weight very much, both on the ground and in the air, in the European and African theatres. I think too, when VP came, I think there was just great relief and then everyone started to worry about what they were going to do with themselves in the future; how to build for the future.

Was that easy for you or not?

Well, it was probably easier for me than for a lot of others because I'd had my qualifications as a chartered accountant which was an altogether different life from flying. I was married and had one child on the way by then, I think. So it was a case of rebuilding and settling down and finding somewhere to live. And I practised in Sydney for a little while, I went back to my old firm and I will say this that I think all companies and firms that had employed men and women who had served their country willingly took them back to work even after an almost six-year break. But I found that very hard to settle down to. So much so that I stuck a pin in the map and Mudgee came up – oh, probably about eighteen months after the end of the war – and I bought into a practice there. And by that time our second child had arrived, so we had a home to work for and build and make a new life in Mudgee.

So when these things are happening, I mean, the adventure – there obviously was adventure in the war – that faded fairly quickly?

Yes, yes. Actually, I am not ashamed to admit that the sound of an aeroplane engine upset me, if I was close to it, for a couple of years after the war. And then I took up private flying again.

(20.00) Was that because of the men who ... because of your feeling about flying or the people perhaps who didn't come back or just that you wanted a different life?

I think everything to do with aeroplanes. But it didn't last long, it only lasted about three or four years I suppose and then a friend had an aeroplane in Mudgee and I used to fly with him and then we started an aero club and so one thing led to the other. With my young family I couldn't afford to pay for flying ... for hiring an aeroplane to fly so I had a friend with a charter business. He used to ring up, he knew I liked fine weather, he used to ring up and say, `Col, I've got a charter job. I want to take three people to Coonabarabran', or `I'm doing the paper run, can you pick up the papers at Bathurst and take them to Dubbo then come back to Gulgong and Mudgee. So that didn't cost me anything, and I got my flying very cheaply there.

That must have been lovely.

If the weather was fine and the birds were flying it was lovely.

Colin, perhaps just one final question which I like to put to anybody ... to everybody. Looking back over this whole story, is there anything you feel has not been said that you would like to say, or not?

No, I feel as though I have talked a lot. Oh no, you said the war was an adventure for a lot of young people, I look at it that way too. But it's certainly left its scars and I don't think anyone that saw operational action, whether navy or air force, have been left without scars either physically or mentally; mentally particularly. It took me a long time to settle down and sleep at night, Div would wake me up and say, `You're grinding your teeth' or `You're having a nightmare', or something like that. I had a lot of nightmares of flying incidents and I had a constant one was, and it only happened once. We were on a strafing ... a water search and strafing place over in the western side of New Guinea and there was a mine of some sort there with overhead powerlines and there was room between the train track, or the tram track, and the powerlines for me to fit. I did but it was the most foolhardy thing to do. I was into it and strafing

before I could see a hole at the end of the overhead powerlines and of course I was underneath them. And I had that nightmare, not much now, but for a long time I had it, just being caught under electric powerlines and no escape at the end of it. Fortunately I broke through and got the aircraft singed a bit but no other hurt. But that was my worst nightmare I think.

> That's interesting. Well, I can certainly understand that those memories would really linger on. Well, there really is some wonderful information in that. On behalf of the War Memorial, thank you for making these tapes.

Good. Thank you, Edward, for calling on me and asking me. I feel very honoured to be asked. I think my contribution was very small compared with so many others.

END OF TAPE 3 – SIDE A