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BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE A

Identification: This is an interview with Group Captain Brian 'Black Jack' Walker, on 17 February 1993 at his home at 42 Anzac Avenue, Collaroy.

Group Captain Walker, where did you get your nickname of 'Black Jack'?.

That is a question that I have often had to answer and the answer is very, very simple. Scherger was the Director of Training and I was instructing at Point Cook before the war. It was around about 1937, I think, and I had become associated with Sam Balmer who was a terrific guy and taught me a lot about flying. Scherger was introduced to us in the Mess and he came across and he said, 'Flying Officer Balmer, how many hours did you get last month?'. And Sam said something to the effect of, 'Oh, about seventy-eight, Sir'. And then two or three down the line he came to me and he said, 'Flying Officer Walker' - I think I might have been a flying officer at the time - he said, 'And how many hours did you get?'. I said, 'Eighty-three, I think it was, Sir'. He said, 'You're an hour hog. That's an awful lot of flying. You black-handed so-and-so. You're name is 'Black Jack" and it stuck. That's all there was to it. Scherger gave that name. That was about 1937, I think.

Then it was picked up by all your colleagues and fellow officers started calling you Black Jack from then on.

Oh yes, I mean, the Black Jack eventually came back at all times. After a stint of instructing at Point Cook, at the end of 1938, I think, I was posted to Perth and I was CO [Commanding Officer] of 25 Squadron there. I think I started off as a flying officer but I was fairly quickly promoted to flight lieutenant. The local press .... I was always flying aeroplanes in a manner to which they were not strictly designed and the Perth press, I think, caught onto this Black Jack business but they got it stuffed up and they started calling me the 'Black Angel'. I've got a cartoon somewhere from Perth, amongst the old press cuttings which I don't regard very seriously; they're in there somewhere. It's just of two aeroplanes upside down and a pilot with a perplexed look on his face with one foot on each wing saying, 'I wonder what the Black Angel would do in a case like this'. Anyhow, it came back to Black Jack. In those days I had an unfortunate - to my way of thinking - likeness to a certain film star by the name of David Niven and he appeared in a film in Perth, I think it was early '39, called *The Dawn Patrol* and he was known as 'Scottie'. He was always arriving at parties with an armful of champagne and they said, 'That's you , Walker. Your name is Scottie.' But that didn't last very long' it came back to Black Jack.

You're known and recognised as one of the great characters of the Air Force, with a degree of irreverence to the system which I think has been demonstrated by your reputation. Did you have the same degree of irreverence to the system before you joined the Air Force?

I don't know, I think that that might have been inculcated by a fairly strict family upbringing. My father was a clergyman and mother was very religious and they were strict but very, very fair, I think, in retrospect.

So they gave you a very strict church upbringing.

I think it was a - yes - a pretty strict religious upbringing. You know, I had to go to church every ... and the same happened at school because I went to school in Adelaide at St Peter's College and the Headmaster there had to be a clergyman and he had to be English, in those days. We had a person by the name of the Reverend Kenneth Julian Faithful Bickersteth. Now, what sort of a man do you imagine him to be? I can assure you he was a very High Churchman and he was very strict and again in retrospect, I think I was always - tended to be - a little bit rebellious against this type of upbringing.

So did your parents have a little bit of trouble with you as a young man, did they?

I think they had a little bit of trouble and the Headmaster certainly had a little bit of trouble because, I think, he was at the end of my term at school. I naturally did as little work as possible and I can remember, I was forced to take Latin, for example, as a subject. Not forced, but that was the guidance I was getting from the family, whereas I was mechanically minded. I made a mess of .... Latin was in two papers, both three hours long and I made a mess of Latin I and so in Latin II I didn't even attempt to do the paper but I thought, well, I'd better do something, so I scribbled a note to the examiner. I said, Dear Examiner, Latin is not my best subject and I've made a mess of Latin I, so I won't waste your time by attempting this paper, but nevertheless allow me to wish you and your family a merry Christmas and a happy new year. Of course, the Registrar of Examinations didn't think that was at all funny and he showed it to the Head and the Head didn't think it was at all funny. I think the Head was really thinking of expelling me but anyhow, they demoted me from prefect to one of the hoi polloi and in front of 700 boys in the school memorial hall, as it was then in those days, and I think the boys thought it was a terrific joke because they practically carried me out there, but the Headmaster certainly ranted and raved. He said, 'This wretched boy, he's done this and done that and made a fool of his examiner and his school. He was a prefect but he now isn't.'

Obviously you weren't destined for an academic career, so what attracted you to the Air Force?

Well, it was the Depression when I left school and it was very difficult to get a job and the family were, first of all, pushing me towards the ministry and then to an academic ...

They wanted you to become a minister.

Well, I think ... they didn't try very ... but it was there. The Headmaster, for example, had me serving on altar and all this sort of nonsense and occasionally giving me special breakfast with him which I accepted but this is where, I think, I learnt to be (laughs) a deceiver because I had

no intention of joining the ministry or of .... So I did try, first of all, and of course having fallen out with the Head, I got a lousy reference and of course I couldn't get anywhere with that. So I went back about a year later and I said, 'Look, Sir, you say in this reference that you believe me to be honest and trustworthy. I am at least honest and I may not be entirely trustworthy to your way of thinking but I am basically honest.' So he gave me a better reference and with that I tried to join the New Guinea Service and couldn't get anywhere. And, of course, at this stage I was reading - I could smell that there was a war coming because they were occurring; about nearly every twenty-five years there would be a war. And I thought, having listened to my brother-in-law who was in World War I as an infantryman, there's no way that I'm going to fight this next war when it comes in the infantry. So I turned towards the Air Force and I still remember being interviewed by, I think he was a squadron leader at the time, Stan Goble.

A very well known personality.

He was a well known personality and, of course, I knew enough about flying to know that he'd recently flown a flying boat right round Australia and I was able to tell him that. And then he did fire a very awkward question to me, he said, 'Well, Walker, if you're so keen on flying, why haven't you flown?' and I said, 'Sir, I am the son of a clergyman and a clergyman doesn't get very much money. That's the only reason I haven't flown.' But anyhow, I applied for the Air Force and although I was knocked back the first time because I had a broken bone in my nose and, once again, I was extraordinary lucky. My eldest brother was over in Adelaide and was going back to Melbourne, I think, oh yes, going back to Melbourne where he was stationed at that time - he was permanent Army - and he shared the same compartment with Stan Goble. And Stan Goble said, 'Oh, Walker, that's interesting. I interviewed a young man named Walker.' Jack said, 'Oh, that's my brother, Brian'. He said, 'Yes, well, if the medical people knock him back, and they always do if they can, and it's only something minor, I'll let you know. Tell him to get it fixed.' Sure enough it happened with this broken bone in my nose and I was knocked back and I re-applied and got in. So it was all between the connivance of my brother and Stan Goble.

Predestined for an Air Force career.

It looked a bit that way.

So what year did you enter, Brian?

January 1935. I would have been in '34, it would have been the course before. It was the first big course. They had about twelve every six months up to that stage for the few years previously, then this one we had about thirty started.

So how did you take to Air Force discipline?

I took to it ... I think I took to it very well. I was very disciplined although in my off periods I'd probably rebel. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I think it was good. We had a wonderful, understanding sergeant major in charge of us for drill and his name was Andy Swan. Towards the end of the period of training, which was one year in those days, Andy was posted somewhere - I've forgotten where - and we got a fellow named Champion. He was a 'B...' but anyhow, by that time we knew how to deal with him.

So you survived the discipline. What about flying? Can you remember your first flight in a RAAF aircraft?

I can remember .... My first flight I was assigned to an instructor who obviously had not had much instructing experience, I think, and his name was Norman Tamblyn. He took me up on my first flight and he said, 'I'll now fly you upside down for a short time, Walker', and I know I didn't appreciate that; I was terrified. Eventually, after about twelve hours dual instruction when most of the other fellows or - most of them - had gone solo and I still hadn't, there was obviously something wrong with me. I think it was just that Norman Tamblyn wasn't as good an instructor as he might have been because he said, 'Well, I'm going to send you up with another instructor', and it was Frank Cooper who was a sergeant pilot at that time. Frank Cooper, I think, must have liked the way that I flew the aeroplane in some way because he showed me, took me up and he showed me how to do a slow roll, and this is before I'd gone solo. And then he said, 'Now you do it', and I made a reasonable effort of doing a slow roll, and mark you, this was in an old Gipsy Moth, it wasn't a Tiger Moth even. And I think the Gipsy Moth was a slightly lighter and better aeroplane to fly than the Tiger. And so Frank said, 'Oh, that was a reasonable effort. Now, go on, go down and land it.' And, of course, I landed it and it was a reasonable landing and Frank just got out and said, 'Go on, off you go', and so that was my first solo. I always claim that I am probably the only pilot that ever slow rolled an aeroplane before he went solo. It instilled confidence, I think that's what it did and I think I was lacking confidence because of the minor problem between instructor/pupil.

You were regarded by your contemporaries as an exceptional pilot during your career. Did you have any foretaste of this very early on in your training?

No, but I was absolutely rapt up in flying and really applied myself to it. Up to the time while I was under instruction, I was trying really hard, probably not over hard, but trying really hard and I knew that I was pretty well up on the course until I crashed on a cross-country to Echuca.

Can you describe this crash and how it came about?

The crash came about, it was rather stupid as a matter of fact. What happened was that the Shell refuelling man at Deniliquin it was, took us into town and gave us a lunch of a couple of beers. Now, that is absolutely taboo.

How old were you then?

I'd be twenty-two but, you know, we couldn't take it and, of course, when we left Echuca there were Wapitis doing all sorts of terrible things. I can still remember the flight lieutenant in charge of the Deniliquin end was Eric Douglas, Flight Lieutenant Eric Douglas, and he was racing around firing off red Very lights and Wapitis were screaming down at him and attempting to flatten him. And then we went off towards Echuca and I was following a Wapiti and we were just lifting the aeroplane over trees, running our wheels across paddocks; it was just jolly stupid, and we'd only had a couple of beers. We hadn't had any more, I don't think. Anyhow, I noticed a lot of aeroplanes which were diving on Echuca aerodrome and, of course, Walker had to come along and follow them and he was going to put on the most spectacular and the steepest dive of all and there was nobody there - there were two men and a dog, I think, in the middle of the aerodrome. So I endeavoured to pull the wheels of this Wapiti at its probably somewhere near its terminal velocity through the grass and I made a pilot's error of judgment and I pulled those wheels about three or four feet under the grass and wrapped that Wapiti up into a heap. It bundled across the aerodrome and how I got out of it, I honestly don't know. I can remember my face being dragged along through the dirt at one stage and then the wreckage and the engine came out and bowled ahead of the aeroplane and then it must have dug its nose in and flipped over on its back and threw me out because I must have undone my safety belt at this stage. It was only just a single safety belt; it wasn't a proper Sutton harness. I think this friend of mine who joined the Air Force with me, Brian Waddy, and he's still alive but I don't think he's too well, he noticed me go in over his shoulder and he landed alongside me. I can still remember sitting there on my parachute, one eye closed and trying to hold the other one open and noticing the glint of the sun on the overturned wrecked Wapiti, and saying, Is it badly damaged?'. Of course, the thing was absolute... it was history. At that stage a car came along and they helped me into it and they drove me into the local Echuca hospital. I can still remember the inmates of this ward, as they led me in, or supported me in. I don't know whether they cheered but they clapped or did something like that because they didn't expect anybody to be alive out of that wreckage. Anyhow, I wasn't very seriously hurt. I had a lot of skin taken off my face and I think I've still got a scar down my side there from it, and several teeth were broken and my jaw was broken. I think there was a mild fracture of the skull at the back but the 'doc' said, 'I knew the Air Force didn't like that so I didn't mention that because it was so slight. I didn't think it would affect you, anyhow.' The doctor who looked after me, he was an old ...; he was a 'piss pot'. He used to come along when I was getting a little bit better after two or three days and he used to feed me beer through my wired up jaw, through a straw (laughs). So my sojourn of two or three weeks in hospital in Echuca was ...

Relatively pleasant.

... reasonably pleasant. And in the meantime, of course, all the boys: Wing Commander Hippolyte Ferdinand de la Rue, who was our CO, he really took it out on the others. I think he gated them all and here was Walker resting in hospital up at Echuca. I thought, now, what are they going to do? They're sure to toss me out but there was a wonderful man in charge of cadets named George Banting and he was RAF on exchange and he must have been an understanding man because he said, 'Walker, he was near the top of that course. We can't throw him out. I was going to send him to England.' Oh, thank goodness that didn't happen. Anyhow, I was kept in the Air Force; I was lucky.

It didn't put you off flying, then.

I think it shook my confidence for a while because I went over to Adelaide and I graduated after the rest of the course in March. See, they all graduated at the end of the year and I graduated in March the next year. I graduated only as an average pilot. I think my confidence was shaken but I don't think it took very long to get it back again because I was posted on graduation and it was a very, very low-keyed affair. I was posted to 1 Squadron which had Bulldogs and the Bulldog was a terrific aeroplane.

Yeah, it was supposed to be a little radial-engined fighter. It was very manoeuvrable, wasn't it?

It was manoeuvrable. It was an aeroplane which could bite you like some of those early aeroplanes could. I'm not talking - the Wapiti was a very docile aeroplane. I mean, that crash I had was sheer stupidity. I don't think that alcohol had much to do with it, it was just plain straight out error of judgment. There was a fellow named Sergeant Parker, who was dive-bombing, I think it was on our junior course, and he was getting steeper and steeper and somebody said, 'Well, if he doesn't stop that, he's going to hit the deck', and sure enough, this was no sooner said by some senior instructor, and we were watching, than his aeroplane did hit the deck and it was a foretaste of what happened to me because the aeroplane just went along, across the aerodrome shedding bits of wings and undercarriage and the engine bowled out ahead and everybody said, 'Oh well, that's the poor pilot, he's had it', and some of us started running towards the wreck and someone to the back said, 'No need to run, there won't be anybody get out of that'. And all of a sudden the wreckage gave a heave and a figure got out of it and started running like hell away from it and then it stopped, almost like a Mickey Mouse cartoon, and tore back and helped another figure out the back. It was Parker who was the pilot and Hellwig[?] - we still remember the name - who was the observer, and they both ran like hell because they were dead scared it was going to flame. I believe, rumour has it, that a hare got in the road and Parker kicked it up the bum and said, 'Look out, you furry thing, and let those runners know how' - you don't have to believe that second part of it but I believe it was true.

So you were destined in the early part of your career to fly fighters.

Well, yes. We flew these Bulldogs for a while but they were on their last legs. We only had about seven or eight left and then .... Wait a moment, they did last a little bit longer than that because it was a Bulldog that caught Douglas Bader and he lost his legs. If you roll them, they tended to side-slip as you were going on to your back, so the thing to do with the Bulldog was to definitely make sure you were well and truly going up before you rolled it, that's if you were anywhere near the ground. A young friend of mine, who followed me in the Air Force, Lance Sutherland, was flying a Bulldog at a display in Richmond in 1938 and he made the same mistake as Douglas Bader. In other words, he didn't get the nose up high enough before he started to roll and he went into the deck but Lance was not as lucky; he lost his life, not just his legs. But Bader was a wonderful character. I met him later on, not long before - oh, it was several years before - he died. What he did with those wooden legs was marvellous.

Yes, he was certainly one of the original rebels, wasn't he?

I believe he was a rebel. I don't know - what do you mean (laughs)? Insinuating .... I suppose I was in a way a bit of a rebel but I think it was inculcated by my upbringing.

Were you admonished very often in the early part of your career for your hi jinx out of hours? - or even in hours.

I've often said later that I have spent most of my life getting into the pooh and then getting out of it. Now, does that answer your question?

You've obviously been fairly successful at getting out of it, though.

I found that the best way of ever getting out of anything was to tell the truth - quite truthfully. I mean, if you said, 'Well, yes, I did that'. Most people would say, 'Oh well, at least he's telling the truth' and they'd take a more lenient view, even if the escapade was a little bit stupid.

Can you describe some of the escapades you got up to as a young man flying Bulldogs?

No, I don't think so. It was so long ago. You see, I didn't join the squadron until March and then towards the end of my period with 1 Squadron I had to do an instructor's course and that took about ... because they took it fairly seriously in those days. They tried to make a good instructor of you and I thought, well, if I'm going to be an instructor, at least it's flying, it's better than not flying and becoming administrative, so then I became interested in it and then we were only with the Bulldog, as I say, a short while and then the Demon came along. I think the only thing that I ever did with the Bulldogs was to make sure that if I did ever do any aerobatics for display purposes, that my nose was well and truly pointing up before I rolled it, I can assure you. That is one thing that if you learn .... Well, the whole object of flying is to survive.

Did you enjoy instructing?

Yes, I did enjoy instructing. Even in later life, I enjoyed the form of instruction which you had to do to endorse somebody on a different type of aeroplane as it became ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

Did you enjoy instructing?

Yes, I did enjoy instructing. Even in later life I enjoyed the form of instruction which you had to do to endorse somebody on a different type of aeroplane as it became in civil life. I mean most, even experienced, pilots had to be endorsed on twins, for example, or any type of aeroplane which they hadn't flown. You had to sign a thing to say: This person has been endorsed and he understands the aeroplane and knows all about it and he has demonstrated his ability to fly it. I mean, that was just another form of instruction and I did enjoy instruction.

Identification: Interview with Group Captain Walker, tape 2.

Group Captain, you went from flying Bulldogs at Laverton to instructing in Wapitis at Point Cook. How did you find instructional duties?

I regarded that as - it was another form of flying and I've always been rather interested in helping other people, especially, even in my younger days with regard to flying. I found that the instructional duties were quite interesting. As a matter of fact, two or three people who had problems with flying were assigned to me because they knew that I'd take the care to make sure that they understood what their problem was and would probably be able to thrash it out.

But even at that stage of your career you were recognised as a real aviation buff.

Well, I was really interested in aviation and interested in aeroplanes and, even in the early stages, had made a study of it and tried to understand the aeroplane that I was flying in every aspect - mechanically as well as from the flying point of view.

But you must have been glad when you were posted across to Pearce in Western Australia to fly Demons with 25 Squadron.

25 Squadron was an operational squadron and, of course, it was a Civilian Air Force training squadron as well, so I had several pupils over there. We started off with Demons and it wasn't very long before the squadron was re-equipped with Wirraways. It was a particularly rewarding .... It's a funny thing that from some of these early experiences, you make some good friends. I've always said that the only thing - the decent thing - that happens in a war is that you make one or two good friends. One of the people that I had in that squadron was a person by the name of John Manford, and he and I are still good friends which is rather peculiar. But anyhow, after being in 25 Squadron for a short while I was transferred for about six months or seven or eight months, I think it might have been, to 14 Squadron which was also at Pearce and that was a reconnaissance squadron, as they called it in those days. It had Ansons in the first place and while I was with it, they were re-equipped with Hudsons. I can always remember that the man, the American, who came out to teach us how to fly Hudsons was a fellow by the name of Swede Parker[?]. I remember Swede Parker coming up to me and saying, 'Brian Walker, I've heard abut you. The first thing - the only thing - I want to

inform you is that the Hudson is not an aerobatic aeroplane.' I can assure you it mightn't be aerobatic but it will do things which are very close to being called aerobatics.

What did you do with the Hudson?

You could roll it, very gently (laughs) but, of course, in those early days you had to make sure that nobody was looking. Anyhow, it was quite an effective aeroplane at that stage and it was, of course, one of the first really - well, fairly - high powered performing aeroplanes that I had flown for a while. I can always remember the Hudson actually cruised at something like a couple of hundred miles an hour and that was unheard of in 1940. But 25 Squadron was a very good squadron and I went back to it later on, after a stint of a few months with 14 Squadron, and I kept on getting some pretty good type of young people to train on these Wirraways as we were equipped then. I kept on training these people to the highest standard I possibly could, hoping that the squadron would be taken holus-bolus across overseas but it was not to be.

Your exuberance in the air these days was also extended to your exuberance on the road and I know you recall the tale with your first wife, Maisie, you were pulled up for speeding in a Ford Roadster.

I had a Ford Roadster which I had acquired in Victoria not long before being moved over to Western Australia. It was a fairly .... It was a '36 Ford Roadster and I'd fitted it with a two-speed back axle and with the aid of a few ex-motor mechanic, probably LACs, we'd changed it to hydraulic brakes because the Ford in those days was not a renowned stopper and it was a fairly effective car. I remember that one of the fine people that I had on that squadron was a person named Lou Spence and he got himself married. My first wife and I attended that wedding and we were on our way back to Pearce in the early hours of the morning and I can remember we were dogged by these lights, it only looked like one light, following us and I thought, you know, it's one of the airmen from there trying to get past and so I kept on blocking him. After a short while, I said, 'I think I can hear a siren; that must be a policeman'. I thought, oh God, now I'm in trouble. Anyhow, this policeman drew up alongside in a motorbike and sidecar, so no wonder he had trouble getting past this Ford. I think I eventually finished up getting a 'blister' for it and I've kept that blister for quite a while and it stated: 'You are hereby charged with exceeding the speed limit of thirty miles an hour, to wit: seventy-five to eighty miles an hour.' I think I finished up in front of the court and that policeman - he must have been a nice person because he said there was no traffic and there was nothing and there was no real danger but the speed was high. I think I was fined the terrible sum of something like about thirty pounds.

Which was a very expensive fine in those days.

It was fairly but it could have been a lot worse. Yes, I was very interested in motor-cars in those days and have been right up till very recently. I've never been in a position to buy a slap-up car so I've always preferred to have what I call 'sleepers'. This Ford finished up with a blown engine in it, with its two-speed back axle, and I can assure you it went very fast.

You put a supercharger on a V8.

Oh yes, it had a supercharger on it. It had a Mercury engine in it too, what's more, which was a good bit bigger than the standard engine - well, a little bit bigger than the standard engine - and produced more power. That car could go.

I had another car, I think, which was rather interesting. Was a little ten-horse Austin roadster which had a rather heavy, modified jeep engine in it. I can always remember pulling up at a garage and the garage man opened the bonnet and, of course, whereas the Austin engine had bags of room all around it, this jeep engine completely filled the whole bonnet and he didn't even notice it, the clown. So I thought, well, he must be a dope because I think there were more people in MGs in those days - this was early '50s, I think, somewhere about then - having their MGs checked because they were done over by a little Austin - an Austin ten-horsepower roadster.

Well, you obviously always had a great feeling for machinery but from your time with 25 Squadron, then you were posted to Deniliquin, to the advanced training squadron.

That was another thing. I was one of the first people .... I was posted there to start up the advanced training squadron which is the final phase of training of the Empire Air Scheme. You have Initial and then you have Primary and then you go to Wirraways to learn to fly a heavier aeroplane and then you finished up Advanced, which was rather an interesting form of training insofar as that you taught the person how to use his aeroplane. We taught them bombing and gunnery and all that sort of thing and it was rather rewarding. I can always remember, of course, the Wirraway, it had quite a nasty high speed stall and ...

It flicked.

Well, it could flick, especially when it was badly handled but you could use that flick. I can always remember having one pupil who was so nervous of a Wirraway that he just had no idea of how to handle it. I was getting nowhere with him and I thought, well, I'll have to do something with this person and I know I shouldn't have done it but I thought, now look, these aeroplanes have got a flick but I said, 'Don't worry about it. I'll show you something.' And at 1500 feet I used to flick the thing into a spin. I'd deliberately flick it into the spin and hold it for two and a half turns and then pull it out and you'd start at 1500 feet and you'd pull it out at 500 feet. I think that might have terrified the fellow and he thought, God, he might do that again if I don't fly this thing properly (laughs), so I think he got over his fear of the Wirraway after that. How he performed in it, I'm blowed if I know.

You weren't at Deniliquin for very long. You were only there for about three months, weren't you?

I was only there for three months and then I was shot up to Darwin.

You were approached by Scherger.

I wasn't approached but I just did hear that - he might have told me himself - that he'd asked for me because he was having trouble with 12 Squadron which were there and they had Wirraways. Anyhow, he did say to me, shortly after I got there, he said, 'This place is going to get hit by the 'Nips'. I went there about half-way through December and I think in around about January - they were hit on February 19th, weren't they? - and he came to me around about mid-January and he said, 'Look, this place is going to be hit. Your Wirraways won't be any good against a Zero." - that had been proved even early in the piece. He said, 'The only thing, that if the Nips do land, they might make a good dive bomber. They would be useful then, so disperse them.' So I took the Wirraways down to - well, most of them - down to Batchelor, I think we finished and I left one flight at civil drome which was fairly close to the action because when the Nips did hit a week or two or three later, I can remember hearing all this nonsense that was going on and thinking, here am I not in it, this is no good, I'd better go up and see how the boys are making out in civil aerodrome.

Did you feel prepared? I mean, you had a Wirraway which was a pretty inadequate aeroplane against the Zero.

Well, it was definitely not good enough; we wanted something better than that - even Kittyhawks, but the Kittyhawk was a jolly good aeroplane as a matter of fact, properly used. I can remember even at Batchelor watching Americans who were trying to reinforce, I think it was - not Darwin - they were trying to reinforce the Philippines with Kittys and they were coming through the Darwin area and every time they came through they were inexperienced and hadn't obviously been very well trained. They would leave two or three aeroplanes back at every place they landed just through landing accidents. So, their training system obviously wasn't as good as ours at that stage. I mean, it probably improved a lot later but they had problems getting those aeroplanes there and we wanted .... I said we'd sooner have anything. And on one occasion after Darwin had been hit, I can remember, there were rumours floating about that there was another 'Jap' convoy on the way, and so I can remember the order came out: 'Bomb up your Wirraways' and here we stood, the Terrors of the Timor, I called them, with a 500 pound bomb, I think it was, under each wing. How the hell we would have ever got them off even the Batchelor aerodrome in those days, I'm blowed if I know but we had fairly experienced pilots. But fortunately ...

You'd never had to take off with two 500 pounders on board.

Oh, we had taken off with them but it was a hell of a load and the Wirraway was no great performer anyhow but with a thousand pounds of bombs on it, I can assure you it was very sluggish indeed. Any interception on the part of our enemy then, I can assure you, would have been disastrous for us. Fortunately that convoy didn't materialise.

The Americans brought through some A24 Douglas Dauntlesses and you managed to get hold of one of these aircraft and flew it around the country, virtually [inaudible].

Did you hear about that? That was rather interesting. As a matter of fact this Douglas dive-bomber squadron, they came out of the Philippines and they had been shot about pretty well. Their CO was a person by the name of 'Buck' Rogers. I mean, with a name like Rogers, you'd have to finish up with a nickname of Buck, but he was a terrific guy. They'd only been on Batchelor for a short while when they were moved holus-bolus up to New Guinea, I think it was, yes, where the squadron was decimated. But in the meantime they had left one dive bomber at Batchelor and three American airmen and they were fitting the engine out of a crashed Fortress into this dive bomber. When they left Buck Rogers said, 'Now, listen you fellows' - he was talking to his three enlisted men 'when this aeroplane is finished, we'll come back and collect it but don't let anybody fly it except Black Jack Walker', they even then knew that I was a bit of an aeroplane buff. I always remember these three American privates and they were fine types of people, really. They came along and they said, 'Sir, we have this aeroplane. Will you come and have a look at it and see if it's flyable?' I went there and they'd put in the engine and the engine looked good but they couldn't fit the turbo blower, naturally, but the prop - the prop was obviously heavier and much bigger in diameter than the original because it had very little clearance. As soon as I got into it and started it, I noticed that the tail wanted to lift and I thought, Oh, this is no good. So I shut it down. The other thing I noticed was that the pitch was back to front but that was acceptable as long as you remembered it. The engine was over-revving slightly so we fixed that. I thought, well, now we've got to fix this tail lifting business because you won't be able to get the tail up very high on take-off. Fortunately, of course, the engine had a little bit more power so you could get off the ground all right, especially without a bomb load. So we made some very, very rough calculations in the head and said, well, that prop's so much heavier than the other and we picked it up and actually felt it' said it was about seventy pounds heavier. And then we looked at the aeroplane and said, well, from the prop to the centre of gravity is so far and from the centre of gravity to the rear luggage is so far, so we said, well, it's perhaps 100 pounds of lead of ballast in the rear luggage would probably fix it, and I can assure you it did. That aeroplane flew wonderfully. And then no sooner had we proved that it could fly than these three American enlisted men were posted away, too, and I was left with this Douglas dive bomber, so what would you do about it? I thought, well, the only thing I can do about it is to use it. So with the connivance of the Air Officer Commanding, 'Black Jack' McCauley, he said, 'Well, you better keep it for a while and the Americans might come back and want it'. Shortly after that - I'd been making a lot of noises about eating carrots and things because I'd heard that Beaufighters were coming in and I was posted down to Sale to fly a Beaufort, preparatory to flying a Beaufighter and this was really good. I thought, what do I do with the aeroplane? So I went to my friend, Black Jack McCauley, and I said, 'What do I do with this dive bomber?'. He said, 'You can take it down or take it down as you require but go straight to Melbourne and report to the Americans that you've got it'. So I reported to the Americans that I knew and the Americans, with their normal - or natural - largesse they said, 'Oh, keep it, Black Jack, and when you've finished with it, let us know'. So I had a Douglas dive bomber and it was a lovely aeroplane. It had good range. It had an automatic pilot which worked and I can remember on one occasion that I'd fly it, I landed at Alice Springs and they said - the Americans rushed out to refuel it and they said, 'You're an Australian, what duty are you on?'. I said, 'Special duty, American Forces' and then got over to Sale and then I thought it might be an idea if I've got this aeroplane, I might just as well use it, so I went across to Adelaide from Sale and picked up my first wife, Maisie, and flew her back to Sale.

That was obviously totally illegal.

Oh, it was slightly dislegal but, mark you, I took certain precautions. I issued Maisie with a beret and a set of overalls so that she looked like a WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force], anyhow. We got away with that but I don't think I should tell you too much about that. Anyhow, I kept that aeroplane for quite a while and, in fact, when I did go up to Richmond to form 30 Squadron, and 30 Squadron was ready to move, I still had that Douglas dive bomber and some of the wretches, and I say 'wretches', from Air Force Headquarters had tried to allot it from me because they had their eyes on it but I had a deal with the Americans and I thought, well, the grapevine always let me know when they were coming to collect it. They'd allot the aeroplane from me and by the time they arrived the prop would be off it or it would have a tray underneath it with a lot of oil on it and I would say, 'Well, there it is, it's unserviceable and nothing works; take it if you like'. So anyhow, eventually I realised that we only had so many Beaufighters, so many pilots to fly them and that the aeroplane would have been an encumbrance and so I did ring up my American friends in Melbourne. I said, 'Look, I have finished with this aeroplane'. They said, 'Oh okay, Black Jack, we'll send up somebody to get it', and they sent up a fellow and I briefed him on the aeroplane and I believe it finished up as pristine condition, all the camouflage taken off it, and it finished up as a colonel's hack in Townsville. It was a good aeroplane that. It used to cruise at about close to 200 miles an hour, too.

Very comfortable personal transport.

It was very comfortable and, as I say, it had a map tray underneath the instrument panel which you could pull out and put your maps on, and with automatic pilot flying it, you could even find out where you were; a very good aeroplane.

What was your next posting after you came down to Melbourne?

The next posting was to Sale and to fly the Beaufort and I'll always remember that first flight in a Beaufort. I can tell you about that one because I was given about an hour's dual by no lesser person than Harry Purvis who had a lot of time in heavy aeroplanes. He said, 'It's a waste of time ....' - it's in his book here somewhere - 'It's a waste of time teaching an airman like you how to fly a Beaufort. Take it off solo.' I took it off solo and I'd only got to 900 feet and was about to turn left when there was an almighty explosion and Mrs Walker's little boy, Brian, was scared witless, because I looked out on the left and about ten square feet of my port centre section had disappeared and there was just smoke and flame pouring out. I thought, ah, ah, if you don't get this thing onto the deck very quickly .... It was too low for me to contemplate jumping out with a parachute because by the time you got out of it it would be too late. I thought the only thing to do is to get it onto the deck. So with this thing smelling of fumes and petrol and obviously I thought, well, God, that wing's not going to last very long because it was really well and truly alight. I glided .... You picked out a paddock. I think it was this wonderful training that you had before the war where you trained regardless of time or expense, if you're any good. And I picked out a paddock and I just aimed the aeroplane at it. I couldn't even see my instruments because of the smoke coming into the cockpit. I'd occasionally poke my head out through the little side window and I would keep on rocking the ailerons to make sure that I wasn't stalling; that's just how dicey it was. And how lucky can

you be? I pulled the tailplane of that aeroplane through the fence of the paddock that I'd aimed at and I can assure you it was ....

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

I can assure you it was just sheer tail - sheer arse, if you like to call it. As it skated on its belly, the thing slewed around and finished up 180 degrees, in other words it was facing in the direction from which I'd landed. I can still remember getting out of that aeroplane with it well and truly alight and the ammunition was starting to go off and tanks were even starting to explode, and there were a lot of cows and interested spectacle or people around - they'd obviously seen it coming down. The CO of the station was a friend of mine and Harry Purvis and, of course, it wasn't very far from the aerodrome proper and somebody had seen me go in but he hadn't seen me get out, because I can assure you, once I got out of that aeroplane, I went and I was like Sergeant Parker: a hare got in the road, and I kicked it up the 'bundoon' and said, 'You let those people that run as know how', and you don't have to believe that. Then I kept on shooing all the farmers and people away who were standing, I said, 'Look, this thing's ...'. There were even bullets whizzing around but they probably wouldn't have hurt you much if they did hit you because I went in and ....

Identification: This is interview with Group Captain Walker, tape 3.

Group Captain, we were talking in the previous tape about your incident with the Beaufort which you were very lucky to survive. Can you tell us the reasons for the cause of the incident in the aeroplane?

I think before I should tell you ... there was a suspected reason. There wasn't anything left of the aeroplane but they did conduct an inquiry into it. But before that, when I got back to the aeroplane from shooing all the spectators away because of the danger that the aeroplane may have presented, there was my CO friend, Bob Dalton[?], and Harry Purvis looking at the wreckage at the spot where I should have been, and I actually heard one of them say, 'Poor old Black Jack, what a way to go'. And so I kicked them both up the tail and I didn't mind so much kicking Harry because I was senior to him but Bob Dalton was senior to me. But anyhow I thought, well, he is a good friend and he'll probably take it the right way, so it was quite a pleasant reunion. The funny sequel to that incident is that the CO said, 'Well, you've got to be medically examined', so they medically examined me and found that apart from hanging on to the wheel - or the control column - which was a section of the wheel which had been bent considerably and the laminations had opened up and it had cut my right hand because I was hanging on - I mean, fear does lend you an awful lot of strength. And the CO gave me a shot of brandy and said, 'Well, you're all right, forget it' and the next morning the CO came up to me and said, 'Well, you better go up and shoot the place up in a Beaufort' because the Beaufort was starting to get a bit of a name even then and this was early in the piece. This was around about, it must have been about May 1940, I think' somewhere about there. Anyhow, that night I didn't feel too well so they whacked me into the hospital and I thought I had flu and after a day or two my temperature went down and I recovered and the CO - well, it wasn't the CO - the medical officer was also a friend of mine and he said, 'Don't take any notice of this business about flu; it was just delayed shock'. Well, I'm not surprised

because I was really frightened. But they did conduct some sort of inquiry on it and I think they found or they came to the opinion that it was an early Australian-manufactured Beaufort and that they had neglected to put the drain holes from over-fuelling in the wing and that there was a lot of petrol sloshing about in the wing and that as I was reducing power the engine must have torched and it lit this vapour which was escaping from the wing.

What do you mean by 'torched'?

The exhaust. If you notice those big radial engines, you will notice that as you reduce power or if you reduce power too quickly .... But I was fairly gentle with the throttle but I think as you reduce power, especially from the richer mixture to the leaner mixture the engine torches, in other words, a long flame comes out of the exhaust, that's all it is, and that lit the petrol which was escaping from the wing and blew it up. And that was the only conclusion that they could come to because the aeroplane ... both engines were functioning quite normally, right up to the time that the engines blew up. Of course, as soon as the aeroplane blew up I just closed both throttles. All I wanted to do was to get on to the ground as quickly as I could.

Group Captain, there was another incident in your career where you nearly died when flying a Beaufort.

Oh well, there is an old song about 'Beauforts don't worry me'. No, that's about Wirraways, I think. Anyhow, much later, I think it was '43, it must have been - yes, it was November '43, it was quite a considerable time later, I was in another Beaufort and by this time the Beaufort didn't have a very good name because a lot of them had suddenly - well, they'd disappeared - they'd gone out and hadn't come back and one or two of them had been seen to suddenly just dive into the deck. I was flying this Beaufort from Tocumwal to Sydney and unbeknown to me, somebody had hopped on board at the last moment but that had nothing to do with this problem and I noticed we were flying along at about 8,000 feet and I noticed that the control column started to move backwards and forwards, not very much, but I thought, there's something going on here and I can remember I had a fellow named Jaggs, who'd applied for a flying course with me. I said, 'Jaggs, check the tailplane, there's something happening to this aeroplane', because I can remember looking out and thinking, well, there's not enough turbulence to cause this'. At that moment the control column suddenly jerked violently forward and I thought, ah ah, this is the 'Beaufort bogey' and I thought, right, it's not going to get me. You never think in terms of other than survival, especially at this stage because I'd been on operations and had survived. So I remember, I put my feet up on the dash and I pulled the throttles right off and I hauled that stick back as hard as I could and I must have been really lucky because unbeknown to me - I knew that something had happened to the tail trim - I must have pulled the two ends of the tail trim which had come together - which had come undone - and I must have butted them together and by keeping heavy back pressure, I kept them together and I wasn't going to let go. I can remember thinking, I can hold this aeroplane perhaps for five minutes because it was so nose heavy. I just leant forward and just touched the trim and sure enough it was locked. I touched it very gently because I didn't want to disturb anything. I thought, I've got some measure of control. And then after the panic had subsided I realised that the aeroplane was dual and here was this dual seat alongside me and my tail was just about off the seat through holding that wretched aeroplane. And so I yelled

out, I said, 'Jaggs'. 'Yes Sir.' 'You applied for a flying course.' 'Yes Sir.' I said, 'Right, your flying course is starting right now. Get into that seat and see if you can help me hold this thing.' We were near Crookwell and at about this stage I thought, well, even the pair of us won't be able to hold it for too long. I said, 'Right' - I yelled out to my shoulder to the crew - 'I'm going to fly you clear of the Blue Mountains and then I'm going to bail you out and then I will turn the aeroplane over on its back and with the trim the way it is, it will bunt'. Just shows you I didn't know what was really wrong with it. At that moment my Chief Ground Instructor was with me and he said, 'Sir, we've got somebody here without a parachute'. I said, 'Who's that?'. He said, 'Well, he hopped in just before you moved off. I let him in, Sir.' I turned around and here was this fellow standing on my right shoulder. He couldn't have been any more than about nineteen, fair, slim youth. I mean, it's very well to talk about it now and I can still remember his name, it was Potter. I said, 'Well, Potter, you're going to look very silly when we wave you goodbye, aren't you?'. I think, if I remember correctly, a tear slowly came, and he didn't say anything, but a tear came out from underneath one of his eyes and at that stage my Chief Ground Instructor gave me a long hard look. He said, 'I think you've got it under control, Sir'. I said, 'We have at the moment. We'll give it a go. We'll see if we can get it to Bankstown but if this comes undone, Jaggs, I'll curse you all the way down.' I can remember it. Anyhow, well do I remember that approach on Bankstown. We flew this wretched thing for must have been forty-five, close on fifty minutes, like this and I had to keep on yelling at Jaggs to make him help me hold it because he'd relax occasionally and I'd say, 'Hang on to it' - a lot of other language, too, I think. Anyhow, we had about ten or eleven people on board that aeroplane although there is some doubt as to how many we had now. But I can still remember that from about 800 feet I made that final approach from over Prospect aerodrome towards Bankstown and with the aid of much screaming and yelling at Jaggs and everything, we got it slowly - lost height - down to just over the fence and I wasn't going to put the wheels down or the flaps down or touch anything for the simple reason, it would have made it more nose heavy than it was and we could just hold it, the pair of us, as it was. We were just floating across Bankstown aerodrome and I could feel the props were just about touching and I said, 'Right, let it go'. And we let it go and it slid in on its belly. Both props came off but fortunately neither of them penetrated the fuselage and we came to rest in the middle of Bankstown aerodrome and out we got. I can remember that as we got out I noticed that Potter had a parachute harness on and that this wonderful Chief Ground Instructor of mine didn't have one so it didn't take long to put two and two together. I thought, well, that' man's got a lot of guts. I tore straight round the back and, of course, sure enough here was the tail trim just hanging - disconnected - and that's what happened to the Beauforts, I can assure you. At the same time that this was happening, I believe, I understood from subsequent conversations, that Bill Garing was the OC, Officer Commanding, Sale and they were testing a Beaufort to the point of destruction to find out the same thing and they had come to the same conclusion that it was this tail trim because I remember, I rang up my unit and I said, 'Send me an aeroplane. The one that I've got is broken.' They said, 'We'll send you another Beaufort'. I said, 'No way, send a Beaufighter. It's got a irreversible screw jack.' When I went back to Tocumwal there was the corporal ready to meet me who had signed that aeroplane out that morning and his name was Corporal Blake. He said, 'Sir, I signed that aeroplane out but I want you to come and have a look at this.' And he had the complete tail trim of a Beaufort laid out on the bench. He said, 'Have a look at it. What do you think of it?' So I had a look at it and it looked absolutely secure to me. He went to the fork end - and that went up to the tab itself - and just spun it between the two palms of his hands and the whole lot came undone. They had two rods going into the one ferrule and by some odd chance the thing - they had a tab on each one, on each rod - and it was an adjustment, I believe. It was called the 'briese'

control. I can remember the name of it. I said, 'Well, that's the problem so let's ground them all'. So I rang up Air Board and said ground them and they didn't. They just made it a mandatory inspection the next morning. You know, two months later, Charles Learmonth was flying one in formation and he said, 'I'm having trouble. I'm having trouble holding this.' The chap on his right said, 'I can see. Your elevator trim tab is flapping up and down.' And shortly afterwards, Charles said, 'I can't hold it any longer' and he just went straight in. There's an airfield named after him in Western Australia and it's still there, Learmonth. They tell me that afterwards that there was a signal sent out to all units operating Beauforts and it had been fouled up in the system somewhere and it was actually on Charles's desk later that day.

They thought it was carbon monoxide poisoning at one stage, didn't they?

That was just a heap of crap. That fellow published a couple of - he published an article in some paper. And I can remember, I read it and recognised it as a heap of crap and I published the story as I have told you in reply and we heard no more from that gentleman. I can still remember, I think, his name was Taylor. He was some sort of forensic scientist. Where they got this crap from about carbon monoxide poisoning, I'm buggered if I know.

That must have been one of your more remarkable escapes.

It wasn't remarkable. How the hell I did it, I'm buggered if I know (laughs).

Group Captain, before you took over CO of 30 Squadron and moved up to New Guinea, you were involved in an incident at the Mess at Wagga where you were court martialled.

As a result of this incident I was court martialled but we were en route. I think we were on the way from Laverton back to Richmond in a borrowed Hudson and we were trapped in this Mess because of bad weather. The Mess was full of what we disdainfully called in those days 'shiny bums', in other words administrative officers. But there were a couple of gay sparks who threw in their lot with us. One was Kitch Ellis who was an RAF wing commander, I think he was at the time, on exchange and he was in the ferry flight at Wagga. And another one was a stores officer by the name of Les Holton. Anyhow, what happened was - briefly: Kitch Ellis produced a revolver and shot at the radio because he didn't approve of the program that was on and I think he missed; he was a dreadful shot. And then Les Holton grabbed the gun and he had a shot and I don't think he hit it, I'm not sure, but anyhow what happened was that I believe that one of the bullets went into some WAAAF quarters fairly close by and they could have constituted a bit of a danger but nobody was hit and I actually tried to stop them because I didn't approve - in spite of being a slightly 'hairy' character - I didn't approve of firearms in the Mess. Well may you laugh, but it's true.

One of your troops[?] also lit a paper as well, didn't he?

Anyhow, and another one of these characters - all the 'shiny' people were taking a very, very dim view of this and they were sitting glowering at us over the tops of their newspapers and one of our boys crept up behind one of them and lit his newspaper between his knees which caused further consternation. Anyhow, one of the stores officers, he stormed off - and his name was Stolz, I can remember it, S-T-O-L-Z. He said, 'I'm going to get my CO'. And, of course, I had restored order by the time the CO came in and he was .... I was a squadron leader at the time, that's right - I was a squadron leader. Seekamp, who was the CO of the station came in, and he was a wing commander. I was actually sitting on a table reading the paper and everything was quiet. Seekamp stormed in and he said, 'Walker, you better go to bed'. I can remember looking at Seekamp and said what a funny, stupid order that is, there's no fracas, everything is under control. I said, 'I don't want to go to bed, Sir. That's an unnecessary order.' He said, 'Go to bed, Walker'. I was still demurring and then Les Holton called from the door, he said, 'Come on, Brian, let's go to bed' and that was enough, I left with them and vacated. In other words, I didn't immediately obey that order, I admit and I think I was perfectly justified because I mean I had restored some order to that Mess. Anyhow, the next morning all hell was let loose. I was under close arrest and this little snivelly nosed bastard had me up and he said, 'Next to treason ...' and this and that and the other thing 'You're crime is the next worst'. I said, 'What's that?'. He said, 'You disobeyed me'. I said, 'I did not disobey you. I went to bed.' He said, 'Eventually, but you disobeyed me. I'm having you court martialled.' I said, 'Oh God, here we go again'. We went through this blooming farce of a court martial. Honestly, I've even forgotten who was on it. But they had this court martial. It was convened quickly and it all happened within a week. I thought, Oh God, what happens now? I lose 30 Squadron and I was due to become a wing commander. So anyhow, they had this court martial and they very solemnly reprimanded me, and I thought, well, that's that, I'm going to suffer this, and as I've said in the first place, I've spent an awful lot of my life getting into the pooh and getting out of it. I thought, here we go again. Shortly thereafter when I got back to Richmond, in came my promotion to wing commander. It wasn't post-dated or back-dated or anything, it was just normal, so all I got was reprimand and I thought, well, so much for court martials. Anyhow, that is all that happened on that court martial, I can assure you. That is the truth of what actually happened. I don't think poor Seekamp is still alive, anyhow. I wouldn't recognise him, anyhow. He's a miserable little sod.

Group Captain, that wasn't the last court martial you had in the Air Force, was it?

I think it was the last. There'd been one previously for doing aerobatics in a Wapiti of all things over Laverton.

Can you describe that court martial?

That one's not even .... It's scarcely worth a description, either. There was some signals officer, I've forgotten his name. I think his name was Berry, saw this Wapiti performing all sorts of things that it shouldn't have been performing and I presume that he could never have done it himself and so I was .... I think it was my old friend 'Kanga' de la Rue. He said, 'Jove, we've got Walker this time', so they court martialled me for doing aerobatics in a Wapiti. I can remember the President of that court martial later became Air Vice-Marshal Wrigley. I think what happened in that one was that they solemnly took me off the bottom of the flying

officers' list and solemnly placed me on the top of the pilot officers' list and there they left me in solitary splendour for about three months and then they repromoted me back into the Air Force List, into the place that I'd come out of, so all I did was about three months' pay and the difference in pay between a pilot officer and a flying officer in those days, as I can assure you, was three quarters of five eighths of bugger all, so that was all that happened in that one. I can still remember Wrigley saying, 'Don't you ever get court martialled again.' But sure enough, of course, silly Walker would; he had to.

> We just covered that short court martial but, Group Captain, you then went up to Port Moresby to take over 30 Squadron, flying Beaufighters.

We formed the squadron in Richmond and then we went to Bohle River where we did a sort of 'shake-down' and then we took it up to Moresby once they had prepared a camp there for us. We were on 'Wards Strip', as it was known then which was about four or five miles out from Moresby. We'd only been there for a few days when we were assigned to our first mission, if you call it a mission; yes, I suppose you'd call it a mission, and that was to attack a lot of enemy barges on the other side of the range from Moresby. I can always remember that mission because there was a bit of ack ack but not much and, I think, most of those barges wouldn't have been of much use to the Japanese or to anybody because after being hit by four cannon and six machine-guns they were well and truly riddled. We were briefed pretty thoroughly and thereafter we were employed harassing the Japanese. And don't forget, the Japanese came to within about, I'd say, they came to within thirty miles of Port Moresby. At one stage I know that evacuation of Moresby was considered but, of course, that was stopped by the Coral Sea Battle. The 'Nips' were eventually pushed back from on the Kokoda Trail where they had got to within about thirty miles of Moresby. We were very helpful, I think, in helping push them back.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

And we were very helpful, I think, in helping push them back because we were employed in the strafing role and we often had to strafe their line of communications from Buna to where they were up near Moresby. I can always remember that there was a bridge over a river called the Wairope - and I think it was known as the Wairope Bridge, W-A-I-R-O-P-E - and there was an American squadron of Cobras there and they had been employing them as dive bombers. They'd been trying to get this bridge and, of course, by this time the Americans had recognised that they had an aeroplane buff in me and they used to bring all their aeroplane troubles to me, and I used to fly all their American aeroplanes and say, 'Well, this is the way this should be used and that should be used'. I can still remember the CO of this squadron, which was 30 Squadron and my squadron was 30 Squadron, so we formed an association, and they said, 'You're so smart, you take a flight out'. I never told my own people that I did this but I took three other 30 Squadron Cobras out and we got that bridge because I'd done an awful lot of dive bombing with the Wirraway and all I found was that you had to allow yourself in the Cobra just a lot more room with regard to height because it picked up speed so quickly in the dive and instead of starting to pull out at about 1,500 feet, you had to start

pulling out at about 3,000 feet, so you let your bomb go much sooner. Anyhow, we got that bridge but it was a very, very interesting exercise.

Identification: This is Group Captain Brian Walker, tape 4.

We had one other minor incident, of course. As I say, these Americans soon realised that I was a bit of an aeroplane buff and they said, 'We have some problems dealing with the Zero with these Cobras and we're supposed to be fighters.' I said, 'You've got a problem but ...'. They used to invite me over to fly their Cobra and I'd flown it and I found it was a pretty docile aeroplane but it was a little bit hotter than the average aeroplane of that type and at that time. I mean, this was late '42. I said, 'The thing to do is, you've got speed and you can dive away from them, so you can get away. The thing to do is to stand off and get your height and then go in and attack but don't attempt to turn with them. Don't try and mix it. Just hit them and then scoot off and then come back and hit them again.' The next time they were called upon to scramble they just did that and I've never seen a bunch of 'Yanks' so happy. They said, 'That advice you gave us, Black Jack, it was superb. We think we might have got six and we've only lost one.' (laughs) So actually my standing in the USA Air Force was fairly high right at that time. Anyhow, we had to keep on with our own operations all the time. It got to a stage where as oft as not, if the Americans were going out on a mission where they were likely to meet any ack ack opposition, they used to say, 'Well how about - can we take the Beaufighter boys with us. With that heavy armament of theirs, they've silenced that ack ack.' This was well and truly proven in one battle which, I think, it was one of the really turning points of the New Guinea campaign. We always had a flight, in the early days, at Milne Bay and the Nip was first turned back at Milne Bay and the Beaufighters took a little bit of - well, I wouldn't say kudos - but they were somewhat helped in that insofar as with their heavy armament and they'd strafe anybody attempting a landing and they were certainly a deterrent. And then in this Battle of the Bismarck Sea, people don't realise now but I can assure you that it was known to be coming and there was a convoy going in to reinforce Lae and I think it was one of the last big Japanese pushes in that area. They had missed out on Moresby and so they were determined to try and hold on to Lae. Eventually there came the great day and the battle was on. There was a slight difference of opinion but I always thought we only had eighty-eight aeroplanes but my friend, Air Commodore Garing, tells me we had ninety-one. Anyhow, that be as it may and I think in all there were at least twenty-two ships in this convoy. I think there is a fairly accurate history written about it somewhere but what happened was that on the day and the day following the Beaufighters went in first and they took the ack ack and, of course, the Japanese ships split up as soon as they could see aeroplanes coming in to attack which is what you would normally do; they'd start turning. Of course, we were instructed to hit or to strafe the aeroplane [sic] from stem to stern in which case you would probably get the bridge and if you killed or accounted for one or two people on the bridge, that'd meant the ship would be without proper control and I think that's exactly what happened because came that fateful day and my observer was in no condition to fly and I saw these twelve aeroplanes take off and it was more than I could stand, I admit, and I thought, I can't let those characters go out alone. So I tore around the camp and I found some poor little green observer who had just come up from down south and I don't think he'd ever flown a mission and I said, 'Get into that aeroplane.' and we went over and the only people that I could see that I could join, because my own Beaufighters had gone on ahead, were a bunch of Lightnings, so I joined up with them. As we were getting near the rendezvous point - the Americans were not known for ... they'd never heard of radio silence - and they were

chattering away to themselves and they said (they knew who it was) they said, 'Listen, Black Jack, you better get that Beaufighter out of the way, it will be no bloody good in a dogfight' because I think they could see that there were some Zeros approaching; so I decided it was time to get out, too. Anyhow, the Beaufighters went in and I was observing it from the side and all these ships - honestly, I've never seen anything like it. B25s going in at zero feet. In fact I could see a Beaufighter and a B25 were both going in at the same time and I thought, get out one of you. Anyhow, the B25 bloke saw the Beaufighter going in so he peeled away and turned around and came in again and the Beau went in and that was that. That ship was hit, and I think it must have been an ammunition ship or something like that because a circle appeared above it and then my attention was distracted for a moment and I looked back to where this ship was and it was a complete ship and there was nothing there; it had disappeared. It must have blown up. Twenty-two ships were eventually cleaned up by between eight-eight and ninety-one aeroplanes, so don't tell me that air power is not effective. That attempt by our Japanese friends to reinforce Lae was definitely put on ice; that fixed them.

Air Commodore 'Bull' Garing had quite a lot to do with that planning, didn't he?

Bull Garing was responsible because he had had maritime experience and this was a maritime exercise in some ways and it was he who instructed us how to go in and hit the ships from stem to stern and aim for the bridge and I think that that was partially responsible for the success of that exercise - of that battle - because there was no doubt about its success. I have heard from subsequent reading that I didn't think anybody would have survived from that battle but apparently there were Japanese destroyers standing by overnight and they did rescue an awful lot of the personnel and either got them into Lae where they would not be very effective, I should think, or back to Rabaul from where they had assembled. It was quite a battle and I think the 30 Squadron deserved a lot of kudos for that battle and I think it is now recognised that they were partially responsible because the Americans said, 'We want those Beaufighter boys because they make things easier for us'. I always remember that there was another battle - it wasn't a battle - there was a rumoured convoy of Japanese warships approaching the northern shore of New Guinea. The Americans said, 'Well, we're not going unless you send the Beaufighter boys out with us'. So it was good to have a reputation for being fairly effective but that is - actually, after that the war in New Guinea was definitely starting to go our way and we were operating often in what I'd call a 'mopping up' mode.

There was some criticism at that time about the possibility of Beaufighters strafing people in the water.

Well, it's war and I think war is not finished until your opponent is dead and I don't give a hoot whether they're in the water or whether they're out of the water or in the air or where they are. As far as I'm concerned, from what I've read of what the Japanese did to our fellows during the war, I'm only bloody sorry I didn't get a few hundred more of them.

Group Captain, during more than forty operations in very arduous conditions during the Battle of the Bismarck Sea you were awarded the Distinguished Service Order and some of your crews were also awarded a number of DFCs.

I think the Bismarck Sea Battle was probably the climax of our operations in New Guinea but they did do a good job over a considerable period of time and continued to do it. The fact that they were awarded six DFCs and we were awarded six DFCs and a DSO - it just happened after the Bismarck Sea but I know that my own citation mentioned that I'd led the squadron for over forty operations and had been responsible for its administration as well. But I must admit that as far as administration was concerned I just made sure that I had a person operating with me who was a good administrator. And I think that just speaks volumes for the efficacy of the squadron operations over that period of time.

In fact you only lost one aircraft, didn't you?

We only lost one aeroplane in that actual battle. We did lose a few other crews but not very many and I generally designed our operations in such a way I thought, well, how can we achieve what we have to achieve with the minimum loss, and it's just like a profit and loss account, isn't it? So you do the best you can and expend as little as you possibly can.

How did you regard the Japanese pilots flying off the carriers?

I've got a strong suspicion that the first Japanese pilots that we struck were fairly well-trained but thereafter I think their quality diminished quite dramatically. Mark you, we were not an offensive fighter in the sense of a single-engine fighter. It was a heavy aeroplane - the Beaufighter was a heavy aeroplane - and you couldn't mix it with a single-engine fighter and hope to get away with it. We found, fortunately, that we were a little faster at sea level than the Zero and by the time - even if the Zero had a bit of height on us - if we attacked a target and the object was to attack that target and get out and if we were on our way out, we'd find that if we flattened those Beaufighters, we'd gradually leave the opposition behind. I can't remember losing an aeroplane through enemy air action. We lost them through enemy ground action but I can't remember losing one through enemy air action but, mark you, we were attacking basically ground targets: ack ack, shipping and so forth. That was our role.

Did you develop an affection for the Beaufighter?

Oh, you had to develop an affection for it, for the simple reason, the Beaufighter .... I recognised very early in the piece when we first got them that they could be a bit of a handful because they had an awful lot of power and I was a bit of an aeroplane buff and I recognised that they didn't have a hell of a lot of what we call 'fin' area. In other words, they were rather difficult to hold straight during the take-off operation and unless you pushed one engine open ahead of the other you'd have difficulty holding it straight. In fact quite a few pilots were lost taking off from narrow strips through opening up the throttles too quickly in a Beaufighter in which case the thing just became unmanageable and it would just spear off into .... Well, they speared off into parked aeroplanes, into trees, into everything, and quite a few good pilots were lost as a result of that. So when we first formed up the Beaufighter we got - and I had a lot to do with the crewing of it - I stated and I knew that there were a lot of blast-off flying instructors who had a lot of flying experience who were itching to get into operations, so we

got a whole heap of experienced pilots in. But later on, when we got some less experienced replacements, we had some problems; in fact we lost one or two people.

How did they operate up in the tropics? The Spitfire was often criticised for being a poor performer in the tropics. How did the Beaufighter perform?

The Beaufighter, it was a different kettle of fish. The 'Spit', the early model 'Spit' particularly, was designed for a cool climate and when they tropicalised the first model 'Spit's (I'm talking of the Spitfire, for example) they added things on to it which made its performance less attractive. The Spit 8 was designed more for tropical service. In other words, it didn't have extra radiators or anything added to it; I mean, they were there, and as a result it was a very good performer. But unfortunately it came a little bit late to cope with the Japanese. I'm quite sure the Spit 8 would have seen anything off that the Japanese had, if used properly. You've got to use an aeroplane properly, anyhow. The Spit - I don't think even the 8 - wouldn't have been as manoeuvrable at low speed as a Zero but it was certainly much more manoeuvrable at high speed; so in other words, you don't let your speed decay. After the Battle of the Bismarck Sea there were a group of us sent down to Sydney for interview by, I think it was Cinesound, and I always remember that we went down in this B25. I was the only Australian representing the Beaufighter boys. And the B25s which took a fairly prominent part in that battle as well and we had a B17 pilot because I actually saw a B17 bombing from 8,000 feet and I don't think up to that date a B17 had been seen below about 30,000 feet doing any bombing. We were being interviewed by Cinesound and I always remember, Larner, the CO of this B25 squadron, and I, we got on pretty well together and they asked us some question and I said, 'Oh, it's wonderful to know that you Americans are fairly close behind us'. And I always remember Ed Larner saying, 'With you, Black Jack, with you' (laughs). But that's not quite true because we did go in first. But anyhow, that was a very good thing. There was one other funny thing that shortly after the Bismarck Sea we were on these mopping up operations, basically, as I said, and the Yanks still brought various aeroplanes along. I can remember they brought a P38, photographic ship, and I'd met this fellow at an American party and he said, 'Oh, haven't you flown a P38?'. I said, 'No,'. He said, 'Well, I'll bring one over to you and you can fly it'. I can remember sitting in this P38 until I knew where everything was in that cockpit. And, of course, it was a non-dual aeroplane.

Can you describe the P38?

It was a single seater fighter, twin-engined, and it had twin booms. It was a very fast aeroplane but it was a little bit unmanoeuvrable, but once again it had turbo blowers and it could fly at enormous height although I never actually flew one .... They could fly at 40,000 feet and they could get height and they learnt quickly how to deal with the Nips. They used to get their height and go through them like a packet of salts and then leave them and then turn round and come back and hit them again because they had the performance. Anyhow, they brought along this .... I went across to 30 Squadron to fly the Cobra because they had another minor problem with it and they gave me this silver one and it was unarmed. I was taxiing out in this thing and sure enough an air raid alert was sounded and I looked up and away in the distance I could see this formation of Jap bombers and I said, 'Hot ziggity, here I am, I've got an American fighter and I'll be into it.' When I got down near the end of the strip, intending to

take off, there was a big buck sergeant there standing with his arms up and I thought, oh God, I can't run him down. He gave me the sign to stop the engine. So I stopped the engine and he said, 'You haven't got any ammunition in, Colonel' - they used to call me 'Colonel' - and he said, 'If we don't hop up that hill quickly, we're going to get hit'. I looked up and the bombers were almost overhead and boy, did I take off up that hill after that sergeant. He got to the fox hole before I did but I can assure you I was very close thereafter. And as those bombs dropped across that strip you're dead sure the next one is going to get you and your tail gets tighter and tighter and tighter until, I'm quite sure, you couldn't drive an ice pick up it with a bloody sledge hammer, but that's the sort of feeling you get. Anyhow, it was then, by about that time, that we were just about finished. I know what happened then. I went down to - we were escorting some Kittyhawks - down to Milne Bay and on the way back from Milne Bay on this escort job, just acting as a mother ship, I noticed the oil pressure on one engine had dropped back to zero. I just looked at it and I looked at the engine, the engine was still running perfectly so I tapped the gauge and it didn't show anything. I said, 'Oh, it's just a phoney gauge'. You can make a mistake. The engine had seized thereafter very shortly - very shortly thereafter - and unfortunately it was a Beaufighter which had no-feathering air screws, but anyhow, the engine seized so I wouldn't have been able to feather it, anyhow, because it wouldn't have had any oil pressure. So every time I tried to get back - we didn't have any air traffic control on the strips and there was another alert going on and there were a whole heap of Dakotas taking off. I can remember every time I turned back to that strip to try and get onto it I lost a little bit of height. I could hold height almost just about, as long as I stayed straight and level but if I tried to put on too much power, I wouldn't be able to hold it on the rudder and the moment I turned I lost a little bit of height. So when I reckoned that I had no chance of getting back on to that strip, I thought, well, there's only one thing to do. By this time I was down to about 600 feet and I could see a patch of water straight ahead of me, just off Moresby and I said, 'I'll have to put this damn thing into the water because I'm not going to get back onto that strip'. So I was on one fan and I made for the water and we tightened up all our harness and tightened up everything, and I can assure you that a Beaufighter after it lands on water doesn't stay afloat for very long but Walker had chosen his area. I had chosen an area where it looked a little bit lighter and sure enough there was a reef under that water and I motored it until I made sure I was going to finish up on that reef and the aeroplane sank in very quick time and fortunately one wing stayed out of water and by the time they rescued us, about a quarter of an hour later, we were having a swim. We'd saved the radio but we couldn't save much else out of that poor old Beaufighter. You know, that Beaufighter stayed there .... When I returned to New Guinea after the war on a couple of ferry operations, it was still - there several years later; I don't think it's there now.

You'll have to go up again and see if it is there; it might still be in the water.

No, it's not there now. It looks as if I might have to go up there in the near future because they're holding some sort of celebration for the ...

END TAPE 2, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE A

It looks as if I might have to go up there in the near future because they're holding some sort of celebration for the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of the Bismarck Sea and I've been told that if I don't go that they'll do dreadful things to me.

What was your immediate posting after leaving 30 Squadron in New Guinea?

Shortly after that incident I left 30 Squadron and I was posted to 5 OTU which at that stage was in Wagga and shortly after taking it over I moved it down to Tocumwal and it was just the OTU which was used for training Beaufighter boys. The thing that I well remember about 5 OTU was that, I think, we got the first Mosquitoes that came into the Air Force.

That was one of your favourite aeroplanes, wasn't it?

It was a favourite aeroplane. Yes, I think so. For the particular reason that it was a wooden aeroplane and it was very remarkable for that; for a wooden aeroplane to be so fast. When it was first produced it was as fast as any single-engined fighter that could be matched against it. And what's more, on one engine it was - not quite as manoeuvrable but it was still very manoeuvrable. You could roll it on one engine. You could do all sorts of terrible things with it on one engine, and in fact a little bit later I might tell you.

Identification: This is an interview with Group Captain Brian Walker, tape 5.

Group Captain, you took over No. 1 Fighter Wing in Darwin as a group captain and it was getting towards the end of conflict and obviously things were not that easy trying to keep up morale.

1 Fighter Wing was an English wing and two of the squadrons were staffed with Australian personnel that had ground crew but had English air crew, and the other squadron was 54 Squadron which was a fairly well known RAF squadron which was entirely British air crew. I think they were having trouble with this wing because they were very restive and they knew that I got on fairly well with the Americans and they thought, well, if he gets on fairly well with the Americans, perhaps he can repeat the performance with the English people. So they shot me across to the English wing mainly to try and keep the peace, and I can assure you it was a little bit difficult because one of the squadron commanders was an ex-Battle for Britain boy and he didn't relish the fact that he was posted in a backwater, as Darwin had become at this stage, because the Americans quite rightly in hindsight had decided that the Pacific was their war and they were going to do it their way. We were left in the garrison duty of looking after Darwin because it was still in a war zone and could be attacked. So I was left with the position of keeping these people happy. I always remember, I know it's been mentioned in another book, that David Glaser wrote a blistering letter to Air Board complaining about the deal that they were getting and that he wanted to be in a more active theatre of operations. I remember reading the letter and saying that's very well said and forwarding it on with a covering letter, so what do we do? As a result of that we were given the task of attacking .... We did a couple of operations on Timor, attacking radar stations there. It was quite a

business. I mean, a Spitfire is not renowned for its range and so what we did was that we got a B25 from 14 Squadron, I think it was, and I think there were up to a dozen Spits selected from the squadrons and naturally they weren't going to go without one by the name of Walker and we went over there on low power to stay with the B25 and to conserve fuel on a large ninety-gallon drop tank. And then we dropped the drop tank and attacked this radar station; those Spits had two cannon and four machine-guns, so they were able to do quite a bit of damage and I think we effectively put those radar stations on those two missions out of action for quite some time. And, of course, once the operation was finished we then had to get the aeroplanes back and, if I remember correctly and mark you it's nearly fifty years ago, we flew them back and landed at Bathurst Island - yes, Bathurst Island - which was about fifty or sixty miles short of Darwin just to make sure and topped them up with fuel there and then back to the civil strip at Darwin which was our home base. We were very lucky as a matter of fact because we didn't drop any aeroplanes on either of those missions. We did have a problem with the Spits up in Darwin for one period of time, I've forgotten exactly how long it was, and this was the cause of some concern, too. The coolant pipes rusted out and we had to change all the coolant pipes to a different material. A wing of Spitfires, I think .... At the end of the war, I can always remember the AOC coming up to me and saying, 'Brian Walker, you've got 108 Spitfires there. You've got to move them down to Oakey, and how you get them there is your business but just show me a movement order and that is all.' And so I went across to a friend of mine who had a Ventura squadron, and the Ventura was a big Hudson and it had two 2,000 horsepower engines in it. I knew that they cruised reasonably fast, so I borrowed a Ventura because I could take a good navigator with me. We took these Spits in gaggles of up to eighteen/twenty aeroplanes and ferried them right across Australia to Oakey where we dumped them and we got them all there. I think we might have lost one or two with some engine problems but like an idiot I went back and made sure that those aeroplanes were recovered and brought back and dumped on Oakey air strip. I wished I'd kept one or two of them; I think my financial troubles would be over. They'd be worth a considerable sum now, anyhow. But anyhow, that's what happened to the Spits.

> Group Captain Walker, you finished the war with a very distinguished record. Did you think of staying on as a career officer?

I would have loved to have stayed on. The Air Force was my chosen profession but I seemed to have a disagreement with the Air Board. I don't know why but I can still remember I had this Air Member for Personnel, we were quite reasonably friendly - he called me 'Brian' and I called him 'Sir' - and he said, 'Well, Brian Walker you have flown all your Air Force career and in fact I think you've been a bit of a pain in the bum to some of us but you've now got to learn to fly a desk. You've got to go to Staff College'. I said, 'I don't particularly want to go to Staff College, Sir'. He said, 'Well, I believe that you have been offered a job with de Havillands as their test pilot. My advice to you is to take it.' I thought, well - some pennies didn't take very long to drop. I said, 'Obviously, if I stay in the Air Force, it is a political performance if you want to get on and I'm not a very political man. It would probably be better if I took that job.' I didn't like it very much for a start because I didn't like getting out of the Air Force, I can assure you.

> Aviation has meant a great deal to you and as we look around your den here, it's got your pewter mugs, models of Spitfires and other aircraft, all the books on aviation, and

I think you only stopped flying a few years ago after flying probably more than 130 aircraft; more than any other pilot that I know of.

To my horror, I read a book written by a Commander Brown, I think he was, or somebody, in England, and the dreadful man had flown something like 450 types, and I thought, this can't be so, it must be something like the German aces during the war; I mean, they claimed everything they shot at, I think but I don't know but I've often discussed it with various fighter aces of my time. I wasn't one. I wasn't a fighter pilot, incidentally, I was just a pilot. I was, I did fly a fighter but, I mean, a fighter ace has to be a person who shot down so many aeroplanes and I only think I shot one down and I'm not sure - I can't claim it. Anyhow, as I said, I can't claim it because nobody saw it go in and I certainly didn't. But this fellow in England claimed 450 types and he was a naval test pilot. He certainly must have had an awful lot of types but I flew about 136 that I've got recorded; there might be one or two more that I have forgotten. I think that's probably as many as anybody has ever got in this country because when I was in New Guinea, the Americans used to come along .... The only thing that I didn't fly and didn't want to fly was anything with four engines in it. I always remember regarding four-engined aeroplanes with disdain. I used to call them 'pot gutted, four-engined monstrosities' and I avoided them, but two engines, yes; two engines could be all right. The Mosquito was a very, very manoeuvrable aeroplane.

What do you name among your favourites?

I would say that the favourite from the flying point of view would probably be the Spit 8 and the Mosquito. They were favourites because in their time they were .... The Spit was particularly far advanced as an aeroplane. Do you know that when we were exploring subsonic flight and in 1946 before anybody had gone through Mach 1 I came back from England as a test pilot saying, 'I don't think they'll ever get through Mach 1'. By God, how wrong can you be? Mark you, the first aeroplane that did it was Chuck Yeager in a rocket ship which was, I think, cheating slightly, but he still did go past Mach 1 and it was a pretty rough ride, I believe from what I've read of his book. I did meet that man and he was rather a pleasant person. It's a moot point but Mach 1 is just practically nothing and I can remember I was taken up by the Air Force in a Mirage in Butterworth. I did most of the flying but the young pilot who was Flight Lieutenant Jack Smith - I can still remember his name, too - he's probably not in the Air Force now. But anyhow, he said, 'You do this and do that and do the other thing and I'll handle the throttle' because I think he thought I might be a bit ham-fisted with it. I hadn't flown a jet aeroplane for about twenty years. The thing I can remember about that Mirage was that we took off and he said, 'Well, assume an attitude of thirty degrees' and I can remember we were going up - it was faster than any lift - and one minute and about twenty-five seconds after take-off we were levelling off at 40,000 feet. He said, 'Put your nose down just below the horizon' and he left the after-burner on and he said, 'Have you noticed anything?'. I said, 'No. I notice that we're doing Mach 1.5.' He said, 'Well, if you'd been looking you would have seen that your altimeter would have lost about 500 feet suddenly'. I said, 'Well, I didn't see it'. And honestly, I didn't notice it either. So it just shows how wrong you can be thinking that ... you can never be sure of anything in this world, can you?

Apart from your latter experiences in flying your notoriety continued; you flew under the Harbour Bridge twice, didn't you?

When I went down with the Americans, I mean, that was a foregone conclusion in a way. We were losing height over near the Harbour Bridge and the Yank said, 'Well, it's your turn to fly it because you know Sydney.' And I was flying the aeroplane and they said, 'Well, look, there's the bridge, you've got to go under it because we'll get the blame.' (laughs) I don't know what happened about that. I think they just thought 'crazy Yanks, they're always going under the bridge' so they didn't take any notice of it.

But you also flew later under in a Vampire, didn't you?

In the Vampire, that was a different deal. It was about 1950 and I was testing some special stuff that they had on the windscreen to try and keep it clear in rainy conditions and there was low cloud and rain all over the place. It was only about 9,000 feet over Sydney and I popped out of a cloud and there was the Harbour Bridge in front of me and it was a matter of either going over it or under it or through it, so I decided to go under it. I don't think it was even noticed because the aeroplane was going so fast and I never saw anything in the Press and never heard anything, so I think I got away with that.

Also, during your time at de Havillands you test flew one of the very early G-suits, didn't you - or was that with the Air Force?

Whenever I came down from Darwin - this was while I was up in Darwin and I used to get a bit bored there - I used to come down from Darwin at the drop of a hat and I came down for something, Air Board had summoned me or somebody. I used to go to Aircraft Performance Unit because I always landed at Laverton. The Aircraft Performance Unit had all the latest in aeroplanes that were being tested and gadgets and ideas and the senior pilot there came up to me and he said, 'Oh, we've got something just right for you'. I said, 'What's that?'. He said, 'We've got a bomber here. Will you test it?' and I had a look at this bomber and it was one of dear old Wackett's designs and I didn't like the look of it and I said, 'No'. He said, 'Don't you want to fly our beautiful bomber?'. I said, 'No'. You know, the next time that that thing flew up, it blew up. There was nothing psychic in it, I can assure you, I'm just a realist, but I just didn't like the look of it. They said, 'Why don't you like it?'. I said, 'The engines are too far apart and it hasn't got enough fin area'. I found all sorts of ... but I just didn't .... I have learnt since that it was an absolute bum of an aeroplane. A friend of mine told me who was my senior in the Air Force that later on he had to, unfortunately, say there was no operational requirement for such an aeroplane. The other time was when I went down there and they said, 'We've got another thing, we want you to fly' and they had one of the first G-suits. It had been designed by Professor Cotton. They said, 'Will you take this up and put this suit on' and for those days there was no matter of just hopping into it. You had to connect yourself to various pipes and goodness knows whatnot. But the whole object of it was that as you put on any G the water used to flow down the suit and stop the blood from going down into your lower limbs. You could therefore take a lot more G force than you normally would take. I used to be able to take about five/five and a half, I suppose. Anyhow, Gel Cumming, who was the senior flying man with APU at that stage said, 'Well, don't go over seven and a half but you

know ...' because seven and a half was proof loading for a Spit. I mean, you could go over that and the aeroplane ... but you went over at your own risk; that was normal fighter design. So anyhow, I took it up to about seven and a half G and reefed it out into a tight turn up to about seven and a half - I took it up to about seven and a half G at about 400 knots in a tight turn - and you'd expect the wings to wrinkle and normally when you let the pressure off, the wrinkles all disappear and everything comes natural again. And to my horror, when I released the pressure, the wrinkles all stayed there and I said, 'Oh, this is not good. You'd better get this aeroplane back as quietly and inconspicuously as possible.' So I took the aeroplane back and landed it very gently and taxied it up and I can remember that Gel was standing there waiting for me and he just looked at me and he looked at the aeroplane. He said, 'You are a horrible so-and-so, Sir. You've bent my favourite aeroplane.' It was a pity but it was bent. But I can remember once when I was, many years later, ferrying an Islander that had been bent up in New Guinea. It had been dropped in from a great height and it had horrible wrinkles all over it and with the chief engineer of the firm concerned, he said, 'I think as long as .... Would you fly it down? You've got at least ninety per cent of your structural integrity intact.' I said, 'Oh yes, as long as you don't overload the damn thing.' So they only put about three or four hundred pounds into this old Islander and I flew it down to Brisbane. I can remember they had a look at it and they said, 'Goodness gracious, how did you fly that thing down?'. I said, 'It's all right. It flies all right.' When I trimmed it at Moresby after flying it down from Goroka it flew practically hands off all the way down. So they got into it straight away and they just drilled out a lot of the rivets on the top of that main plane and as soon as they drilled out the rivets, the structure, honestly, nearly went .... It was nowhere nearly as badly damaged as it looked and I hope the Spit was the same. I hope it wasn't as badly damaged as it looked.

> Group Captain Brian Walker, you've been married twice, court martialled twice, crashed an estimated ten aeroplanes, flown about 130 others, you appear to have had a wonderful life. Have you got any regrets?

Yes, I've only got one regret. The regret was that I would have had a much quieter time, if I had followed my father's footsteps and become a clergyman (laughs) which I didn't want to do anyhow. Does that answer your question?

> Great reply.

END OF INTERVIEW