

18<sup>th</sup> Squadron Veteran: interview Gold Coast, July 2005  
Interview for MERC, Curtin University  
WILLEM FREDERIK AUGUST {GUS} WINCKEL

Has photo of Anzac Day March signed by Prince Bernard  
Also has a video of Broome.

He had shown me a letter from the Minister for Defence Industry Science and Personnel dated 27<sup>th</sup> August 1996 signed by Bronwyn Bishop, saying, in part, that “the Department has advised me Mr Winckel’s exploits during his service in Australia with the Dutch Military Forces were very impressive and I am sure they earned him due recognition from his own country. Mr Winckel appears to have been an outstanding ambassador and representative of the Netherlands while on duty in Australia during the war”. That’s quite a letter.

Gus: Quite something isn’t it?

Sue: It is quite something and you didn’t get that recognition during the war, did you?

Gus: No, no. No, I’m a forgotten child.

Sue: Tell me in the short time we have together what are the most important points that you want to transmit, that you want us to know about. You’re a member of the 18<sup>th</sup> Squadron ...

Gus: yes, I’ve been that from the beginning through to the end. The beginning was on the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1942 in Canberra and we assembled all the pilots that were there, and the ground crew, to form a new squadron, the 18<sup>th</sup> Squadron. We were part of the RAAF. It was 18<sup>th</sup> Squadron NEI, Netherlands East Indies, des RAAF.

Sue: It was a joint force?

Gus: Yes, that’s it. And when we came north we were first directed to Pine Creek [N.T.}. There was no water. All that we got was 2 gallons a day a person for everything, and the water was, um, stink. And so after 3 months they directed us to Bachelor. And that was a lot, lot better. And we stayed there for the rest of the war. And in Bachelor – 80 kms south of Darwin. And the trouble with Pine Creek was that we always had to land in Darwin to re-fuell, because that was quite a bit of fuel consumption as we had to go for 3 hours to do our raids on the islands. And that’s why Bachelor was such a good thing for us. And it was quite nice.

Sue: I believe that you sunk a submarine.

Gus: Yes, that’s quite right. A little one. Not a big one. ... in 1942 in June there was a force of about 2 or 3 Japanese submarines and one of them was towing three little ones. And they were supposed to go into the Harbour and destroy as much as they could

because one of the big warships of the Americans was laying there too. Two came through the netting, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> one came through too, And two I destroyed, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> one got away. We were doing submarine patrols and I was just lucky and I was flying at about a 1000 feet and we saw a periscope. And the navigator [ Russ ??? - gave name but could not understand it], said look at that, there is something there. So we went there, and indeed it was. But Russ had a party the night before and was and so the first attack failed. But luckily I was able to turn quick, at 30 degrees, and make a second attack, and the bombs really fell beautiful, just on the 30 degree over the submarine, and it destroyed it completely. Part of it came back up, and the oil slick was proof of the pudding. And quite a few other flights were there the next day and saw that big oil slick there. And so that's how it was.

Sue: Were you a hero?

Gus: Ooah! A little bit. A little bit. And then so everybody was very, very happy. Sydney was very happy. And the Australian government was very happy. They called me in their big conference room, and the whole cabinet was there, and Prime Minister Curtin promised me, Gus, I'll see to it that you'll get the DFC for this. ... And I didn't get it because our Commanding General Van Straaten said no, we're going to decorate them ourselves. And so they made me a first lieutenant, 3 months before my time, that was what I got out of it. Not much.

Sue: Tell me some of the other stories in your defence of Australia.

Gus: Well, see we were stationed in Bachelor; here, it says 41 missions here. But this one was a nasty one, this one:

Sue: [reading from paper] "In April 1945, Gus commenced a second tour with 18<sup>th</sup> Squadron at Bachelor flying the B25 Strafer version against targets in the NEI. Several barges were destroyed by the crew and a number of armed reconnaissance missions flown prior to war's end. Gus Winkel recalls proudly that he failed to carry out only 1 mission with 18<sup>th</sup> Squadron. A kangaroo ran into his right engine during a night take off. Quote: 'The right engine became really rough. I had to carefully drop the bombs into the sea and slowly did a left-hand circuit to land again. The prop was badly bent' Unquote". Now tell me in your own words about that.

Gus: Well I was nearly at take-off speed at 100 miles when that flaming big kangaroo came over and into my lights and he hit the right engine. And mind you we were full of petrol and full of bombs. It was at the end nearly of the runway so I couldn't do anything but put my wheels up. I didn't know what to do, so I thought, Oh well, I'd better go through. So I luckily mae it and very very slowly was able to drop the bombs into the sea, and made it a bit light, and made a left turn, and I landed. But I couldn't do that mission because the propellor was badly bent. So I had to go back. That was nasty, because at that moment I didn't know what to do. It was full of petrol and what do you do? Pull your wheels up or go through? And make a crash landing.

Sue: So the enemy was the Japanese but it was the kangaroo that got you.

Gus: This time, yes, it got me.

Sue: But you were more wiley. Tell me some other anecdotes as we don't have time for the whole story.

Gus: Well, we were attached to the 79 Wing, Northern Territory. And the Commander was Moth Eaton. His name was Eaton/Eton [?] but his face was badly marked, so they called him Moth Eaton. Very nice man. And he said, Oh Gus, you've done a very good job here. And I've got the proof for that here. [Need to check that we have a photocopy of that letter sent to us.] But I tell you something, when we got orders to go to the Northern Territory, we knew that the cars were difficult to get there. So 4 of us decided to get little motor bikes, little two-strokes, about a 100cc, 120cc, so we did. But the commanding officer, Major Fiddleley [sp?], he said, ah, ah, ah, you cannot have any private vehicles in a military base. So we had better not use it. But, we had to be very clever sometimes too. And so one of the boys, he was head of the photographic department, he had 3 motor bikes in a big case, transported by road to our base. They did arrive there. But the first one, that was Lukie Jansen [sp?], and Lukie Jansen had the little motor bike hanging up into the bomb bay of the B25. And of all the luck he had the commanding officer as his second pilot. Good old Luckie was not too good in his navigation and he lost the way. All the big bores, artesian bores in the Northern territory have numbers, and they're on the map, and if you can see the number you know where you are. And so that is what happened. He saw one there and decided to land. And he made a good landing but now the trouble was that he had to go there and it was quite some distance away from the bore. And he said no trouble, and so he opened the bomb bays, and he dropped the little motor bike and put a little bit of oil in it. Went to the tank and got a bit of petrol out of it and filled it up. And off he went to look at the artesian bore, the number. And he got the number and said, now I know where I am. And he went back and put the motor bike in the bomb bay again and landed in Pine Creek. But the commanding officer had seen that and he got a big order the next day that we had to deliver all the 4 carburetors of the motor bikes to the office. So here we are, stuck! The next plane that went back to Melbourne; we came back with four newcarburetors. [laughter]. After we assembled everything, we drove in formation around the tent of the commanding officer. And he came out and he said, 'you buggers, you won'. So there we are, we were allowed to use them then. They were a great help there.

Sue: You needed them, it's a far far greater area than the Netherlands.

Gus: By golly, it's big alright. Another thing. When we came back from an air raid and we came back over Melville Island, and Bachelor, we came home on the radio compass. And that was quite good until we were about 20 miles from Bachelor. And suddenly that radio compass went wild; started to slowly turn, and suddenly very fast turns around and around, and then steadied itself again. So we all knew there was some magnet force, or something, there. Ah but we said, who cares? You had enough troubles of your own there. And to think of it, that we could have bought that land for six pence a square mile!

In 1947m 3 years later, they made the biggest uranium strike in Australia. Rum Jungle. And I said, oh yes, that's where it was! [laughter].

Sue: The opportunities missed! ... did you contribute to the evacuations on Java?

Gus: Oh yes, yes, yes. During the war, the most experienced pilots were put onto the Lockheed Lodestar Transport, the C60, and we had to fly all those big distances mostly at night, no radio, no nothing. [Sue: so the Japanese couldn't detect you?] that's right. Those 3 months I flew a staggering amount of 603 hours. That's a hell of a lot. I was busy every day, every day. [Sue: How many people do you think you got out?] Well, during the war, the three months, we had to go to all of the places in the archipeligo. We had to bring ammunition and weapons, bring food, bring wounded people out back to Java and so we were constant busy you know because there was no other transport. And we had to do that at night, mostly at night. And then the evacuation came at the beginning of March. Oh yeah, the first thing is that we had to bring some crews to Australia to collect some B25s. They should have been there for us in Canberra because the Indonesian government ordered and paid for 169 B25s. And when we brought the crews there, they were not there because the Americans took them for New Guinea. Instead of that, they sent us some 820s, beautiful planes, but the range was not good enough, so they colonel said no, we wont have them. Take them back and so at last we got 5 of them and with those 5 we got flying training and we got that little submarine too.

Sue: Did you take people to Broome?

Gus: Oh, yeah, yeah.

Sue: When the Japanese struck Broome, were you nearby?

Gus: Oh yes, all of it. ... After a flight of 7 1/2 hours from Bandung to Broome, I arrived there early in the morning, and while I was standing in the door, stretching myself after 7 1/2 hours sitting, you know, and I saw some little specks on the horizon and I said to the attendant who was filling petrol, I said, 'hey, listen are the RAAF flying today?' And he said no. I said, well, you sound the alarm, the Japs are coming And he laughed and said, they can't come that far. And they were too. There were 9 of them. And luckily for me they went to the harbour first, because there were a lot of marine airoplanes there. Short [?] Sutherlands, because everything was laying there to be re-filled. The nasty thing about it is that the tide in Broome is very very high. It runs from zero to 10 metres sometimes at a king tide. Otherwise it's only to 8 metres. And so the little boat that was going to re-fill [?] was stuck onto the mudflat, and they had to wait until the water came and they could go out and fill the plane. And so they were all sitting ducks! And so they came there and they straffed them and did a hell of a damage and they sunk all of them. I was at the aerodrome; that was in the harbour. But we saw it, when they were busy there .... Look I've seen it before. Luckily in that time, when they were busy there I was able to get a submachine gun out of the plane and the last two weeks we were armed with a machine gun at the rear little windows. I was able with my

mechanic to get out and assemble everything and I was waiting for things to come and indeed, they started to aim at our plane. And that was lucky. One came a little bit too close to me, and he was a sitting duck, and I shot him to pieces. And another one had to ditch near Pulloo Rotti [spelling?], a little island. And he was rescued by a fisherman. But he had to ditch there because I shot his tanks and see he had no more petrol. I shot a few other ones too. All the ones except the 7s that came back, only one did not have the bullet in them. So I shot quite a few of them. [Sue: You were a good shot.] Yes, I was a good shot. I was what you call a natural. Yah, that's true. I was a sharp shooter in the navy, a sharp shooter on the pistol, and I was a sharp shooter in strafing too. Nobody was - I won't make myself sound too good.

Sue : What was the story in Broome after the event.

Gus: Well, that was – the passengers I had, luckily there was some big culvert [sp?] pipes there, and I said for heavens sake quick, go in those pipes, so you have a bit of protection. So they did. But of course, they shot my plane up to bits, you know.

Sue: So you were in the pipes ....

Gus: No, no, no. no. I was standing on the sides, about 10 metres on the side waiting for things to come.

Sue: so your plane was being shot to bits but you were just ten metres away from it ....

Gus: ... with the machine gun on my shoulder.

Sue: Were you frightened, or did that come later?

Gus: No, those moments you don't think of that. I was only angry at them. So in reality I was the only one who was fighting the Japanese with one machine gun. The others were all in the pipes; they couldn't do anything. They had to wait there of course.

Sue: How many people were killed?

Gus: Oh, about 120 altogether. Mostly people that came from overseas [that were being evacuated from Indonesia]. But luckily my number 2 plane [gives man's name but can't understand it; sounds like Krannenber], he had a bit of trouble taking off and he had to change the spark plugs, so he came 1/2 an hour later. And with that plane, he came there, but everything was finished. And so I said alright I will take that plane, and while my hand was burned, I said I will take my old passengers and I will bring them to Port Hedland. And then I'll come back and I'll pick you up and I fly to Perth. But the Lodestar is a very, very very sensitive aircraft. You had to load with the computer [??? Doesn't sound right]; there was three very y big accidents because they didn't do that. So I added some ballast to nose but nobody had anything. So instead of putting big stones in the nose for the ballast, I said to a few people, I said come on y sit in the nose because I need ballast and I'll bring you to Port Hedland. And one of them did tat, and the other

said, no I won't do that. I won't go in that black hole and sit there for two hours. Nothing doing he said. So he didn't want to go. So I got somebody else and I took off and landed in Port Hedland. Came back again and brought my own crew back to Perth. And so about a year ago was a big party, and somebody came to me and said, Gus do you remember me and I said no. And he said do you remember the fellow who didn't want to go in that black hole in the nose of your plane? I know that one. Well that was me. And I said, how long did it take you before you got to Port Hedland? Three weeks. And I said service you bloody well right, because I did it in 2 hours.

End of Interview

---