

Joop Van Doorn by Sue Summers for MERC, Curtin University

18th Squadron Veterans; Gold Coast 22 July 2005

DOB 1919. In the NEI in 1938 and again in 1947. He arrived in Australia in 1954 permanently. Came from the area of NL called Nymegen

Sue: When I was looking at the website, and I read the words from the memorial, it said this memorial recognises those men and women from the Netherlands and the Netherlands East Indies who joined the people of Australia in the defence of their country in the years 1941 – 1945.

Sue: This is not something that is widely recognised is it?

Joop: No it is definitely not.

Sue: What was your contribution to the war effort.

Joop: The story starts in 1939 when I became a wireless operator for the Dutch airforce. Then I flew on Grand Martin B10 Light Bombers until 1940. Then I was transferred to a transport squadron which flew Lockheed Lodestars and we had the job at that time to evacuate as many personnel from Java to Australia and to India.

Sue: When you evacuated them to Australia, where did you take them? What were the procedures?

Joop: No answer.

Sue: What years was this? [Joop: 1942.] There were about ten thousand at that time who came from the NEI?

Joop: No answer.

Sue: You've got your flight book here? [Copy of some pages on CD]

Joop: That was the name of my pilot [Lieutenant Mulder] ...

Sue: so this shows the date, the hour, the aircraft,

Joop: Yes, the number of minutes the flight took.

Sue: So that would be from 0750 to 1150, so that would be 3 and a 1/2 hours there. But this one was only forty minutes, which suggests that you had many different destinations.

Joop: Yes, I ... the first evacuees we had, we took them right down to Sydney. And they, he was only a major, that was the only one, and his family.

Sue: So you had one aircraft for a major and his family and nobody else came with them on that particular flight?

Joop: Yes, but this major was a member of the purchasing division of the airforce as well as army, as well as government as well. He was a big shot. And then we went back to Java and we did some flying backwards and forwards to Borneo and Celebes still evacuating people.

Sue: What was the mood of the people at the time? What do you remember? [Japanese had just invaded.]

Joop: They were glad to see us [mild laughter.]

Sue: Was there panic?

Joop: No, not amongst military personnel. And there was not much panic amongst civilians either.

Sue: They hadn't learned to fear the Japanese at that point?

Joop: I don't know.

Sue: So you were evacuating both military and civilians. [Yes.] did you fly any flights into Broome? [Yes.] The Japanese did invade Broome at a later point.

Joop: yes, they attacked it. And Gus, he lost his plane there. He lost his plane at Broome, and I flew in there the next day. I can give you the date. [couldn't find it.]

Sue: So you flew in the day after the Japanese strike on Broome [yes], and what aircraft did you come in on?

Joop: I came in on a Lockheed Lodestar, a transport plane.

Sue: And your mission the day after was?

Joop: Um, 10th February 1942. And from then on we flew to Daly Waters, Klonderry {sp?}, Klonderry Charleville, Brisbane.

And you brought people down there through to Brisbane?

Joop: Yes. And then down to Sydney.

Sue: When you arrived the day after the strike, you were bringing in evacuees still? [Yes.] And the day after the strike, what is the story that was told to you. What do you recall of ...

Joop: Actually, we tried to stop as shortly as possible in Broome. Because they were expecting another strike, so. [He can't remember any detail.]

Sue: How many people would you be taking on those flights?

Joop: About 18. And then we flew back from Broome straight to Surabaya (170 minutes) and then from Surabaya back to Andea which was the airport of Bandoon [sp?], my home base.

He then goes back to his flight book. Surabaya-Broome flight taking 395 minutes.

Sue: what is the strongest memory you have of that time? What stands out for you?

Joop: [silence] That's hard to say. Mainly to get your job you're doing, to get that over as quickly and as good as you could.

Sue: How many people do you think you got out of Java during that time? You personally.

Joop: We had one full aircraft to India, that was all military personnel [retreating to his flightbook].

Sue: At the time of the Japanese invasion it was your job to get people out of Java as well as you could. ...

Joop: ... and as fast as we could.

Sue: Were you flying around the clock?

Joop: Many times we flew at night. On the last trip my commanding officer, we came in from India, and that same night, we landed early in the morning, and he was there, and he said tonight at half past 11, you're going to be here, and take a few suitcases with as little as you can probably take with you, and be here at half past 11, you're not coming back. With your wife. And I had just been married. I was only married 2 month [laughter], and I had flown all night. I flew from Locknea (that's the northern tip of Sumatra) and it took me:

Sue: Let's leave the flight details for now, as we only have a certain amount of time, and I don't want you feeling later that there were certain things you wanted to get across, but you didn't have the time. So you had been flying all night, you were told to pick up your wife, suitcases, and were never coming back. Now what years was this?

Joop: This was on the 5th of March, 1942. ... we landed in Port Hedland ... she [wife] was just as glad to get out. It didn't matter, just getting out was the main thing.

Sue: so when you got to Port Hedland what did you do then? Was there anyone there to receive you?

Joop: No, we refuelled and flew onto Geraldton ... at Geraldton we refuelled again, and then we flew to Perth where our plane needed maintenance. And then we had orders there to go back to Java. ... the Dutch Navy was in charge there and they ordered us back. And so we went back, and there was a message in Geraldton that we didn't have to go any more to Java because it had fallen.

Sue: [Trying to get him away from his logbook]. When Java had fallen was it a shock?

Joop: It was a shock to everyone. In my plane we had 5 families - all families of - the commander of the transport squadron, he was in it, and some other pilots, and, well, we were all shocked. More or less. We didn't expect that, although if you have had a little common sense you could have predicted it, you know. ... My orders were to go back to perth. And in Perth we sort of waited for orders, and then we were ordered to fly through to Melbourne, the whole lot, all the families, and in Melbourne we were billeted in a hotel, Victoria Palace. And then we stopped there for about 3 weeks, and the high brass got everything organised and then we travelled to Canberra where we started the 18th squadron. ... First of all that the Australian population did not have a *clue* what was happening and in what kind of danger they were. All their troops were sitting in the Middle East fighting for England and *nothing* for themselves here. If the Japanese had continued the way they were, they could have walked in without firing a shot. And we knew, but the Australian people, they just didn't, they just didn't understand. And they also didn't understand the delay we caused the Japanese in Indonesia. It was only 3 months, but that 3 months was critical to the protection of Australia. And that is what the Australian people absolutely didn't understand at all. ... The most important part was that from Canberra we patrolled the sea routes on the east coast of Australia, and after being trained on that new aircraft, we were stationed in Darwin, and we attacked shipping and every what we could see. If they became aware, they couldn't believe it. It was hard to believe for them.

Sue: there were quite a few Japanese attacks on Australia, but I don't think the Australian people knew all of it, that it was censored as well. Is that correct? ...Here Gus Winkel, he sank a submarine, near Sydney.

Sue: Do you feel there has been adequate recognition of the Dutch role in the defence of Australia.

Joop: I don't think so ... still to this day

Sue: Joop was awarded a Dutch Flying Course - it's the equivalent to the British DFC [should be a copy on disk.]

End of interview.

