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Full transcript of an interview with

ED H. WILSON

04 April 2007

by Judy Ferrante

for the

**BUREAU OF METEOROLOGY ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

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History Unit

Interview with

Ed Wilson

Interviewer

Judy Ferrante

4 April 2007 at Warradale SA

Interview number: 07015wilson

Interview with Ed Wilson at Warradale on 4 April 2007
Interviewer: Judy Ferrante
Interview 07015wilson

Judy Ferrante This is Judy Ferrante talking to Ed Wilson at Spruce Avenue, Warradale. And over to you, Ed. You were telling me an interesting tale –

Ed Wilson [laughs] I've forgotten what I wanted to say [laughs] –

Coral Wilson When I got my doctor's certificate –

Ed Wilson Oh, yes. I went to the Regional Director at the time and – who I had known, he tutored me when I was in Telecom, when I was a teenager and he'd switched over to the Met. I explained the situation that Coral was expecting at the time, exact time we were supposed to be in Cloncurry. He said, 'Oh, my wife and I were sent up to Darwin during the war and my wife was pregnant'. 'Cause that was her first whereas Coral, she already had two – and, nothing to it. [laughs] So, I wrote a letter and er eventually it was almost definite. We'd put our house on the market and almost overnight they said, there was another letter from Melbourne saying, you're not going to Cloncurry, you're going to Alice Springs. You're not going for a while. So, we had sold our house [laughs] and - everything worked out anyway – It's a long, sad story, but it worked out and we went off to Alice Springs, which was –

Judy Ferrante A lot of sagas aren't there? When did you start – which year was it you began?

Ed Wilson I did the course in '48.

Judy Ferrante In '48. Where did you say you were from originally?

Ed Wilson Er, well, we grew up in Melbourne and that's where I met Coral, in Melbourne. I'm from Sale, originally. I was born in Sale – Coral was born on the Mornington Peninsula. And er I'd been with Telecom for thirteen years. I went

into the air-force during the war, came back and went back to Telecom for a while and –

Judy Ferrante What sort of a job did you have there?

Ed Wilson I was a technician and – I saw this ad in the Gazette about weather officers and people with appropriate qualifications were invited to apply, which I did, and was accepted and started off with about twenty other young fellas on the same course. Er, Neville Morris, I think was on the course before me. So, er we were all pretty wet behind the ears as I've explained in the book that the Bureau seemed to us, on the surface, a real shock. That is, they, when you were posted, everybody wanted to stay in their own state. When everybody was asked to say where they'd like to go, they all wanted to stay in their own state. This particular course we had, there were people from WA, Victoria, NSW, I think and Qld. They all wanted to go to their own state and er, so what did the Weather Bureau do? Nobody got their own state, except one who was a league footballer playing for St Kilda and he got Melbourne.

Judy Ferrante It's a strange business –

Ed Wilson Funny, isn't it? [laughs] So, three of us got, three Victorians got Perth and er – we sort of arrived in a situation where you couldn't possibly find any accommodation. We got there. But...er...we have done things and we have been accommodated, as Coral has already said, that you just wouldn't accept now. When Coral was, she had two kids, and I was sent up to Pt Hedland, relieving, OIC while the current OIC was taking Long Service Leave. I arrived there, there was no accommodation for families, so she had to stay in Perth. Didn't know a soul in Perth. When I got there I found that I was staying at the Esplanade Hotel. I didn't have a room. I slept on the veranda, I had a bed on the veranda which was in full sun during the half the day and temperatures of 40° were pretty normal. So, I used to doss down on the floor in somebody else's room, after a night shift. You see, nowadays they just wouldn't do it!

Judy Ferrante They wouldn't accept it these days – no. Life and expectations have changed. Do you think it has got to do with having been very young when you [unclear]

Ed Wilson Well, post-war period, everybody was trying to get a foot on the ladder, and so, you were prepared to put up with difficulties, if you thought it was going to get you someplace.

Coral Wilson I think we grew up in the Depression, I didn't expect a lot, but our kids grew up with affluence and they're not going to go back to conditions that we did.

Ed Wilson So, - I stuck that for four months and it was good to get home again.
[laughs] Terrible! So, in those days there were only about two hundred people, blacks and whites. And the same number of goats and dogs –

Judy Ferrante Was this in the summer time?

Ed Wilson Yeh, December to the end of March.

Judy Ferrante Was that the monsoon season?

Ed Wilson Well, yeah – that is the monsoon season. It didn't hit Pt Hedland that year.
It's not always they get it every year –

Coral Wilson You've got the sandflies-

Ed Wilson Oh the sandflies! My eyes became infected, I got fly-eye. Just a terrible period in my life –

Judy Ferrante Was that because it was in the tropics or because of the whole situation there?

Ed Wilson Well, I suppose, living conditions and I've described this in the book.
When you are on a day shift, your lunch was brought out to you from hotel we

were staying at on a plate with a towel over it and it was always corned beef and salad. By the time it got to you over the twelve miles in 40°, the meat was like a bit of cardboard and the salad was like compost!

Judy Ferrante That's terrible!

Ed Wilson It was but everybody was doing it so you accepted it.

Judy Ferrante I think, having grown up during the Depression made different people out of you too –

Ed Wilson Oh, quite likely. But, both of us are pretty long-suffering – we accepted the hardships and the [unclear] par for the course –

Judy Ferrante Was this the hardest thing, the hardest time of being in the Met, this going to unexpected and difficult places?

Ed Wilson Not always. It wasn't always hard –going to Alice Springs, I thought we fell on our feet there, that was –

Coral Wilson If the house had been better!

Judy Ferrante Which year was that Ed?

Ed Wilson '55, yeh, '56

Judy Ferrante And, was that a posting from Perth?

Coral Wilson Yep. That was instead of Cloncurry. I arrived there with a new baby.

Ed Wilson But the place hadn't been occupied by the previous occupant for – three months, and had been taken over by cockroaches, red back spiders.

Coral Wilson I killed over three hundred red backs in the house. Behind every fly-net...

Ed Wilson Underneath the chairs, [laughs] –

Coral Wilson You couldn't put your fingers under the table, or put your feet under the – 'cause you'd have a look first and tip a chair up before you picked it up.

Judy Ferrante Was this a Met house?

Ed Wilson Well, it had been built by people living next door to us originally. First it was put up – it was just a square with –

Coral Wilson They built one, large room with a nine-foot veranda around it, a little entrance hall and a little dressing room. By the time they had three children, they needed bedrooms, so they built another big room on the other side and turned the little kitchen room into a dining room and some lean-to with the bathroom, on this nine-foot veranda. So it was really, virtually two rooms - two big rooms, a little dining room, a tiny dressing room which would take one single bed at a pinch – a cot fitted in alright, but, I had two single beds and a cot and if you put the single bed in, you couldn't open the wardrobe door or you couldn't open the –

Ed Wilson But we were fortunate because we had probably one of the few septic tanks in the town. We had an outside toilet with septic tank and that was – something!

Judy Ferrante Mod cons!

Ed Wilson Oh, this was pretty rare!

Coral Wilson We had a hot water – a bath heater, a wooden one –

Judy Ferrante Was this house leased by the Met?

Ed Wilson Northern Territory Administration bought it when the [unclear] built their new house next door and er, this was for transients or –

Judy Ferrante Government employees?

Ed Wilson Yeh.

Coral Wilson And nothing had been done in the house since they took it over from the people who built it –

Judy Ferrante It sounds very raw –

Coral Wilson The little dining room once had a wood stove in it, so they took the stove out and made it into a fireplace. So, they sort of filled in the top part, which was rough cement and left it like that –

Judy Ferrante Very depressing –

Coral Wilson So, I got the Administration to come around and have a look and I said I'd like to have the house finished. The guy came in and looked around and he said, Madam, what do you mean by finished? I said, well, the fireplace really could have a coat of paint over that grey cement. It was all rough. He said, oh you know it was down for painting after the people moved out. But, while they were moving, the painters came and they said, to come after they had finished packing, we're packing – So the painters went, didn't ever get back again. So, when we were leaving, the same thing happened, the painters came in so I let them come in. So, while we were packing, we had the painters in, so, the people who took over after us had a painted house.

Ed Wilson With the red backs and the cockroaches, we got the health inspector down. We said...

Coral Wilson You will never get rid of cockroaches-

Ed Wilson They had them in the pyramids and they were still there when they opened the pyramids.[laughs]

Coral Wilson They lived through the floods and the fires, London fires, you know, you'll never get rid of them! Well, I said, I'll get rid of them!

Judy Ferrante This was the justification –

Coral Wilson That's right. He said, the only way to get rid of them is to kill all the females before they're nine months old. That's when they start breeding. So, I said, right! So, I bought a gallon of DDT and I sprayed inside and out all the time. By the time we left there weren't any in the house.

Ed Wilson The first night, we were there, every bed had a big mosquito net over it. When we got into bed, we found a big red back up inside the – [laughs]

Coral Wilson When we arrived up, of course, all our gear was outside and I set the table in the kitchen and left the kitchen for a few moments, came back and there were cockroaches running over the – [laughs] –

Judy Ferrante What an introduction!

Coral Wilson Well, I packed them up and I said, we'll never eat in the kitchen again [laughs].

Judy Ferrante Well, I think there must be fairly intrepid explorers in the Met? And you stick it out through thick and thin?

Ed Wilson Well, we were a breed, I suppose, we were striving to make something out of the job for our own benefit and so we accepted, we probably accepted more than we needed to –

Judy Ferrante It wasn't an easy job then at all, was it?

Ed Wilson No, it wasn't, no!

Judy Ferrante Was it how you expected it to be? Did you expect it to be difficult?

Ed Wilson Well, I didn't know what to expect, I'd never been on a posting in the interior of Australia. We were happy about Alice because I had read quite a bit about Alice and I'd been in the Scouts when I was a kid and read about John Flynn who started the Flying Doctor Service. I said, Wow! This is really going to be an experience. We didn't know what was there, but we were prepared to accept it when we got there. And we did too. We made a lot of friends there, didn't want to leave, actually –

Judy Ferrante How long were you there for?

Ed Wilson Only two years.

Judy Ferrante Two years –

Coral Wilson He was posted for three years,

Judy Ferrante But then you were posted back to Perth?

Ed Wilson Yeh, I got promoted. No, I was, came down to Adelaide from there-

Judy Ferrante Oh, I see-

Coral Wilson And they said, after you had a tropical service, you got where you wanted – your choice –

Ed Wilson That was a sort of an unwritten rule –

Coral Wilson So we put in for Melbourne, wanted to get home –

Judy Ferrante It was an approximate rule?

Ed Wilson Well, it's not written anywhere. We couldn't find it anywhere, but, that operated only after Darwin, that offer. We had our house down at Glenelg and we hadn't sold it, we leased it while we were away. We were away for going on five years.

Judy Ferrante So, you went to Darwin at some other time-

Ed Wilson I was posted from Adelaide, I'd been there for three years and I was the only Victorian there, all the others were locals.

Judy Ferrante You'd wanted to get back to Victoria after, after Alice?

Ed Wilson Time and again I'd written letters asking for transfer back, but –

Coral Wilson My brother-in-law had been drowned and my sister was on her own and had three young children and –

Ed Wilson We wanted to get back, but, they wouldn't play, so, I s'pose they thought Adelaide was getting a bit closer.

Judy Ferrante And so, you were sent here, from Alice Springs –

Ed Wilson From Alice Springs and after/

Coral Wilson But still nowhere to live!

Ed Wilson No, no, but it was while we were here that we met somebody who built houses and [unclear] and he said, look, I've got a house around the /

Coral Wilson Before that, we had to pay key money! To rent a house-

Ed Wilson Oh, that's right! You couldn't get a place easily.

Judy Ferrante So, there wasn't any allowance for you at all with respect to accommodation?

Coral Wilson No, but we found that after we'd left this house that we'd paid a lot of rent for, we found out that we could have applied for rent assistance, or whatever they call it, but it was too late then. We'd bought a house.

Judy Ferrante They kept it quiet, did they?

Coral Wilson Well, we didn't know about it.

Ed Wilson I don't think they volunteered a lot of information if it was to your benefit. If you found out about it, well and good!

Judy Ferrante So, they sent you to Darwin then?

Ed Wilson No, no. I'd been there for three years, and I was the only Victorian, there was a cadet at the Bureau. This is my summation of it, that they wanted to give this bloke some experience at an airport and so I was transferred to the RAAF Base at Sale, on the understanding that I would be lecturing to certain people and they needed somebody there with a good grasp of meteorology. This is the reason for sending me. So, when I pulled out the book, everybody was just the same as I was. And I went to Sale. We were there for, how long was it? About fifteen months, I guess and this posting to Darwin came up, or, they were calling for applicants. Lo and behold, I was the only person who applied!

Coral Wilson And you only applied because I said, let's go to Darwin! Anything to get out of Sale – I'd heard so many stories about teenagers growing up in Sale –

Judy Ferrante So, you opted for Darwin and of course, you got it –

Ed Wilson Yeh, I got it! That was alright except Coral couldn't take the humidity.

Judy Ferrante How was the office up there? What was the structure of it?

Ed Wilson It was reasonably good. It was an old air-force building, but it was a solid brick and it was beautifully air conditioned to such an extent that I went to work everyday in shorts and every half hour, I'd have to go outside to thaw out. The air conditioning was reasonably –

Judy Ferrante And, what sort of position did you have?

Ed Wilson I was a forecaster. A shift forecaster-

Judy Ferrante And, who else was working up there with you?

Ed Wilson At that time? Ralph Barnes, who was also in Adelaide at one time. He is one of the old identities. He is mentioned quite a bit in the Metarch Papers. He was in the mobile Met during the war. John Nicholas was up there, he was an ex-navigator with the RAAF.

Judy Ferrante He was in Darwin? Dad knew him. I know his name.

Ed Wilson That's right. He came down to Adelaide at one stage. Ivan Bates, he was up there when we first went there, he was from Perth. Who else was there? – Would have been six forecasters on shift, just can't recall who the others were – But, no, that was okay –

Judy Ferrante It was okay, things proceeded smoothly there?

Coral Wilson Darwin was a good place to live, except when you're on shift work, you don't get any long weekends and Public Holidays you're working – so –

Ed Wilson We still did alright –

Coral Wilson We tried to get away as much as we could but,

Ed Wilson Used to take the kids – lot of waterholes up there where you can go for a picnic or –

Coral Wilson But in the wet season you couldn't leave the bitumen-

Ed Wilson And you couldn't go in the sea during the wet season either, because of the Box jellyfish-

Judy Ferrante Did you mix a great deal with the other meteorological families?

Ed Wilson Ahh, we used to go the odd function. With three kids, we couldn't leave them at home, you see we had nobody else.

Judy Ferrante No. It's a very isolating experience not to have any relatives or close friends –

Ed Wilson That's right, but, people like Ivan Bates – we were very friendly with them. And then, you got a job up there –

Judy Ferrante The tropics are quite something different, aren't they?

Coral Wilson So I got a job, which was even worse because I was working in a workshop [unclear]

Judy Ferrante So you had the opposite experience to him.

Coral Wilson You're right. So I was sweltering.

Ed Wilson That's right. So we didn't ever agree on the climate at Darwin.

Judy Ferrante It wasn't an easy life up there by the sound of it at all.

Ed Wilson Tell about your little experience in the supermarket.

Coral Wilson I bought some flour one day. Got it home and opened it and it was full, and when I say full, it was weevils, you know. A few weevils I could cope with, you scoop them out, but this was just beyond anything. So I took it back and the girl on the checkout said "Madam, if you buy flour at this time of the year, you've got to expect weevils". So I said "Well, I'm sorry, I don't!" [laughter]

Ed Wilson And the slime in the lettuce. All the greens were flown up from Melbourne.

Coral Wilson No they weren't, they came up on the train.

Ed Wilson On the train, that's right, and then flown up.

Coral Wilson No.

Ed Wilson They were flown up.

Coral Wilson They came up on the road train.

Judy Ferrante They'd travelled a long way, hadn't they?

Coral Wilson They came on the road trains.

Judy Ferrante They didn't grow things up there. You didn't have fresh produce.

Coral Wilson They couldn't in those days.

Ed Wilson If you went down to about 50 or 60 miles south of Darwin, there were market gardens there.

Coral Wilson But very little. There were too many bugs, I think, that ate things. We tried to plant a garden. The first year we grew fruit, it was beautiful, rock melons. The next year we couldn't get them up. We tried tomatoes [unclear]

Ed Wilson Tomatoes didn't do well in that climate.

Coral Wilson Cut them off at the ground.

Ed Wilson But we did grow our own bananas and grew our own pineapples. And very successfully too.

Judy Ferrante They grow very well, don't they.

Ed Wilson Oh, marvellous.

Judy Ferrante So this was your experience of the Met in the tropics. When did you go - did you go anywhere else in the tropics?

Ed Wilson After Darwin I came back to Adelaide where I stayed for the rest of my career.

Judy Ferrante Were you at the airport?

Ed Wilson I was at the airport until '73 and then they brought in the, what did they call it, a new arrangement, the Regional Forecasting Centre where they issued the forecasts for the radio, television, newspapers, all those forecasting things, storm warnings [unclear word] forecasts and that sort of thing. And we were taken in there and put on shift with meteorologists and we operated an eight-man roster where we worked around the clock. We went into the office on Pirie [?] Street. They leased a building while they were building the new one out at Norwood there.

Judy Ferrante Had you always been in aviation forecasting, Ed?

Ed Wilson Up until that point I had.

Judy Ferrante So you'd always been at an airport. So at Darwin you were at an airport.

Ed Wilson Yep.

Judy Ferrante Then you came here as OiC.

Ed Wilson This was quite - I was quite comfortable there because I'd been in the air force during the war.

Judy Ferrante Tell me about that. You haven't said anything about that. I know it's in your book. I will have to read it now.

Ed Wilson I joined up in '41 initially. It was just at that time the Japs invaded and they put a clamp on communications and said nobody leaves communications because of the emergency. So they wouldn't release me to go into the air force. I had jobs like building in the basement of the Melbourne high school where I went to school as a young lad. I was putting in a PABX for General MacArthur when he came down. That's where he established his headquarters in the basement of the building where he'd be nice and safe.

Judy Ferrante In Melbourne?

Ed Wilson Yep, yeah. The big switchboard in the Spencer street mail exchange that was moved to the basement of the exchange in the city. So that was the sort of thing that I was doing, but I used to make myself a real nuisance. Every Friday I used to go up to head office just to see whether they'd changed their minds. They used to get sick of the sight of me.

Judy Ferrante You were keen!

Ed Wilson Well, I was one of seven boys. I had five brothers in the services. There was one who had bad eyesight. He couldn't go in. I was the only one that wasn't doing anything really. As I saw it at that time. So I used to make bit of a nuisance of myself and eventually, after going on for two years, they finally released me and I went into the air force.

[interjection from **Coral Wilson** leading to discussion of issue not connected with interview topic]

Judy Ferrante So you got to do what you wanted to do, which was join the RAAF.

Ed Wilson Yes. I was sent overseas to the UK.

Judy Ferrante And whereabouts in the UK was that?

Ed Wilson Well, all over the place but I got there just too late. Perhaps I was just late enough. The war petered out before I finished my training.

Judy Ferrante What sort of training were you doing there?

Ed Wilson Very little, actually. Mainly lectures. I did some flying in Scotland to get my hand in and they realised that the war in Germany was petering out and they decided - the main bombing aircraft in England was the Lancaster and this is what everybody wanted to fly. These were the thousand bomber raids and were Lancasters going out.

Judy Ferrante You wanted to fly these too.

Ed Wilson Yeah. Well I did have some hours in Lancasters, but only Australian flights. The rest of the time I was on air traffic control, in the tower.

Judy Ferrante This is what presaged your capabilities for becoming a meteorologist.

Ed Wilson Well, I imagine so that this would have been in my favour.

Judy Ferrante So you really loved aircraft and everything to do with them. So you ended up with a profession that was actually on an airfield but on the ground. How did you feel about that?

Ed Wilson Oh well. I was still very keen to get on to flying and when the German war was petering out they decided to take the Lancasters out to the islands to sea to fight the Japanese and the Lancaster had only one set of controls. There was only one pilot, so if anything happened to the pilot, if he was shot or something like that, it was up to the pilot to [unclear] who could get them back home. So, then they had this brilliant idea that they would, with all these excess pilots they had in the UK, they would train them as engineers, flight engineers. So, they would be there, already capable of flying the aircraft if anything happened to the pilot. I had to do this engineering course in Wales, and we were there for some months, doing this course. Of course, just as that petered out, we finished the course and the war against the Japanese finished too.

Judy Ferrante So that was the end of that.

Ed Wilson That was the end of that.

Judy Ferrante I see, so when you came back to Australia?

Ed Wilson I went back to working for Telecom. To get away from Telecom, in the first instance, I had to pass the examination to get into the clerical part of Telecom, which was a third division job. Do you know third divisions and fourth divisions?

Judy Ferrante I've heard something about that, but I don't know anything about it.

Ed Wilson Third division was sort of semi professional. Fourth division was the blue-collar people, which is the way I started off. To get up to the third division, you had to pass this exam they held every year, around about November. They call it the Commonwealth Clerical Passers Exam. They knew how many they wanted to take, and if you were in that lot, well, then you got taken and this is what I did.

Coral Wilson Thinking it would get him out.

Ed Wilson In the air force, you see. So then they played a dirty trick. I was called up to one of the top engineers and told that, in view of the emergency, I would be

retained as a technician-acting clerk - a clerk acting technician, one or the other. So I did that for about another two years until I could get out.

Judy Ferrante So you had your career in the Met really to thank for the... well this was the outcome of all of these things that...

Ed Wilson Oh yeah.

Judy Ferrante... where you didn't get to actually go where you wanted to go - that was your final destination regardless of what you could do. So let's talk about when you were in Adelaide, this is the latter part of your career.

Ed Wilson Are you doing this in every state or is it just...?

Judy Ferrante No it's just here.

Ed Wilson Just here.

Judy Ferrante Just here, yes.

Coral Wilson Well now when we got transferred to Adelaide first you were in Nissan huts.

Ed Wilson Oh over in the airport here yes the - that building where there's the old building, what we call the old building now, that was just being built when I got there and so we were in a Nissan hut, I don't know if you know a Nissan hut?

Judy Ferrante In a hangar?

Ed Wilson One of these things that shape, yeah.

Judy Ferrante A hangar, yeah, yeah.

Ed Wilson And they were being sort of fitted out inside like offices.

Judy Ferrante So that's where the Met Office was? Is that building still there?

Ed Wilson Yeah, I think so. I think its been taken over by probably mechanical engineering staff.

Judy Ferrante And so when you first came here how many fellows were out there?

Ed Wilson For a while we had four men on shift. Then the staffing was very short for some reason or other I can't remember whether it was somebody - people were dying or they were transferring but then we dropped down to a three man. We had to cover twenty-four hours with three men and still have days off.

Judy Ferrante That's hard.

Ed Wilson So it meant that the officer in charge which at one stage was Con McGrath who's in that picture of yours. He was the officer in charge down there and he had to take – do a shift to give us a day off. That went on for - oh I reckon it must have been a year before we got extra bodies. And then following Con McGrath we had your dad.

Judy Ferrante Who was the OiC out there?

Ed Wilson Yeah, Con McGrath and then your dad.

Judy Ferrante Okay and then dad was that too?

Ed Wilson Yeah and he was followed by Ray White from Perth. He's in one of your pictures too.

Judy Ferrante Yeah, okay so you started in seventy...

Ed Wilson Forty - er '57 I came here.

Judy Ferrante Yeah, yeah. So you've been here for a very long time and you must have seen a lot of the ID's - the identities around in the Bureau that passed through there too?

Ed Wilson Yeah, a lot of the meteorologist used to - well I think they made it a practice to bring the meteorologists out there for aviatonal experience and they'd come out for, oh I don't know, six months at a time.

Judy Ferrante Train them?

Ed Wilson Yeah.

Judy Ferrante Who was the most notorious character out there that you remember from... ?

Ed Wilson I don't think there was anybody really, that was notorious. We did have one - it was while I was there that they brought in Briefing Officers. See, when I first went there we did the forecast, the pilot would come to the counter, we'd take the forecast over and we'd brief him about what he could expect and then they brought in Briefing Officers. I don't - I can't remember at what stage that was, but these were people who had been - some of them had been Observers and some had come from other positions in the public service and they were - they were trained to take over these briefing duties because the aviation - the civil aviation was expanding and we were doing more and more forecasts every day and we really didn't have time to go and chat to the pilots as they came in to the counter.

Judy Ferrante And it wasn't the way it had been before?

Ed Wilson No.

Judy Ferrante You must have known a lot of the pilots very, very well?

Ed Wilson Oh we did, sure, but...

Judy Ferrante So they brought in Briefing Officers and it...

Ed Wilson That's right and I think up until – until I retired they were still Briefing Officers. It's only more recently that I don't know - well I really don't know what they do now. They haven't got any forecasters out at the aerodrome any more. They have personnel there, but what they call them I wouldn't know unless they're Technical Officers.

Judy Ferrante So they don't perform that function any more?

Ed Wilson I don't think so and I don't think – you see we used to - an aircraft wanted to take off somewhere, a civil aircraft, we'd – it'd be an individual forecast for a particular route and we'd hand it to the pilot and brief him on it. Now I believe that the forecasts are put out over – either by computer or by fax and they just tear off the one that they want.

Judy Ferrante And there's no personal interaction?

Ed Wilson I don't - look I - don't quote me on that because I don't know, but it seems to me that it's all pretty...

Judy Ferrante Anonymous.

Ed Wilson Yep.

Judy Ferrante Yeah, that's how things go. So you talked about the Department of Civil Aviation. I guess that's something. Does it still exist today?

Ed Wilson Ooh yeah.

Judy Ferrante But the meteorologists used to belong to – it's DCA isn't it what they called it?

Ed Wilson DCA yeah. Meteorologists it's always been - used to be the Department of the Interior and then what did they call it? Oh, it's had several names as far as I can remember. It was Department of the Interior while I was there.

Judy Ferrante Yeah. Was that during the War as well - was it called that?

Ed Wilson Aah – well there wasn't very much civil aviation during the War so er...

Judy Ferrante That's a very good comment Ed yes. [laughs] I mean that's a perspective that a person of my age wouldn't have any idea about.

Ed Wilson Sure, yeah, that's right.

Judy Ferrante So there wasn't much civil aviation it was all...

Ed Wilson No, civil aviation really only branched out – it started to grow as soon as the War finished and I can clearly remember - and you possibly do too - the number of crashes they had. They were flying these old DC3's around using them as area transports and with very little radio aids and they lost quite a few lives.

Coral Wilson Well when you first flew to Perth from Melbourne...

Ed Wilson Yeah, a DC4.

Judy Ferrante That must've been a very long trip.

Coral Wilson That was about twelve hours wasn't it?

Ed Wilson Oh about eight hours I think.

Coral Wilson It was overnight I think wasn't it? When my mother came over it was overnight.

Ed Wilson Uhm. I can't remember. It was overnight coming back, when I came back for our wedding that was overnight - and they landed at places like – I think there were four stops – Kalgoorlie, Forest, Ceduna, Adelaide, Melbourne. They'd have to do that because they had to refuel.

Judy Ferrante They were very heavy – heavy aircraft too...

Ed Wilson Yeah.

Judy Ferrante... and they couldn't carry a lot of fuel, not as much as they needed

Ed Wilson That's right. Yeah. There was something that you were going to recount. I just can't remember what it was.

Coral Wilson Not about the telephones? That's the one I think is terribly funny.
[laughs]

Ed Wilson Oh yeah. [laughs] They had this beautiful new office that what is the old building now. I was working in this Nissan hut and one day they said 'Would you like to come over?' and they took a group of us over there to be shown over this beautiful new building and we were taken through it and all this - all the modern conveniences we had and then somebody said 'Er where are the telephones?' and he said 'Telephones? Telephones?' There weren't any. They were then for the next few weeks they had the jackhammers going digging up the concrete floor.

Judy Ferrante That's quite an oversight in a profession where you need your communications and if you don't have any you don't have any business do you?

Ed Wilson An architecturally designed building. [laughs]

Judy Ferrante That's very worrying isn't it. That's beautiful. So you've had a very long career spanning different eras.

Ed Wilson Yeah, thirty something years I was in the Met and I - you know, I've got no regrets looking back on it. I reckon our kids I think have had a marvellous life because they've been to places that a lot of kids wouldn't ever have the opportunity to go to - and when we lived in Darwin they thought that was marvellous. They lived in the swimming pool when they weren't at school and...

Coral Wilson They learnt to become very good swimmers.

Ed Wilson They were good swimmers.

Judy Ferrante So you think this was an advantage, that part of it?

Ed Wilson Oh yeah, no doubt about it.

Coral Wilson For them it was. And we always seemed to move in the right direction - for their schooling. You know if we'd moved from Melbourne to Adelaide instead of Adelaide to Melbourne, Alan - what was he in Grade...? He did Grade Six in Melbourne - well then he would have gone to High School the year after but he went to Darwin, which was Grade Seven. Here you go to High School from Grade Seven. In Melbourne you go from Grade Six. But if you go the wrong way you might be in High School and have to go back to Grade Seven, which would be a bit [unclear].

Judy Ferrante Um, it would be very difficult. So you're saying there were a lot of disadvantages and they're quite colourful the ones that you've said, but there are - there were advantages too and you felt your children were fortunate - well they were lucky in some respects with things happening at the right time but they certainly had a different life and experience from other young people.

Coral Wilson Yes, and we drove between postings so much that the children know the whole country. And they can feel at home anywhere can't they.

Judy Ferrante Yes, I understand that.

Coral Wilson Like, we grew up in Melbourne and all we knew was Melbourne. I'd never been away you know.

Ed Wilson But I remember you know – oh just recently Julie Bishop she's the Federal Minister for Education she's brought up this point about the movement of young people from one state to another then different educational standards and she's trying to remove that. Trying to get them onto one set program.

Coral Wilson Yeah, there should be one.

Ed Wilson Well some kids we heard - we had friends who's children suffered as a result of this moving interstate because of the varying standards. Fortunately as Coral said our kids didn't have this problem they seemed to move in the right direction. I know when we went to Sale the first year we were there Alan spent a lot of his time in Primary School mowing the school lawn. He was that far in front of the other kids. I think I might stop the machine now.

End of interview with Ed Wilson on 4 April 2007