Australians at War Film Archive

William Kiddle (George) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:50 **To begin with, thank you very much Joyce for doing this,**

01:00 **without your help this wouldn't exist. So, from everyone involved we would like to express our gratitude to you for doing this.**

The first thing I would like to talk about is to give ourselves a bit of a summary to start with and to do that I would like to go back, and to tell me where you were born and a little bit about your family?

Well, I was born in Lilydale, an outer suburb of Melbourne. My parents both of whom had come from the United Kingdom, my father before the First World War, and my mother joined him after the First World War, a war bride I

01:30 guess. And they settled out in the bush out east of the Dandenong's, in Melbourne, on what I understand was an orchard of some sort. The first thing that happened, they had a house there, I imagine it was provided by the orchardist. The first thing that happened was that it burnt down, so they lost everything. And after that, or about that time I guess I was born.

02:00 My father had been badly wounded during war, so he didn't really last terribly long out there on that orchard. They moved in towards Melbourne and they had a pretty tough time of it for the first few years. Eventually he joined the post office, probably under some arrangement for First World War veterans. And that's where he worked for the rest of his

02:30 life. In the fullness of time we moved to again, an outer suburb, then, now called Vermont. And that's where I started school, primary school at Vermont. When the – Vermont was just the primary school, which went in those days to the 8th Grade. But after the 6th Grade, if you were going to go on to a high school, that's when you went to the high school. There weren't terribly many

03:00 in those days, but there were schools called Central Schools. Which really only took people up until the end of primary school, but for the last 2 years they did high school subjects. So really it was a place that you got yourself a scholarship, with a bit of luck, either a government scholarship or to a private school and I was fortunate enough to get one to Scotch College in Melbourne. So that's where I finished my

03:30 secondary education. I then joined the Public Service directly and went into the Department of Air, that was in 1938 and in those days the Department of Air was pretty quiet, but it started to warm up because the eminence of war seemed to be pretty obvious. I was in the Overseas Indent

04:00 Section, which was responsible for overseas purchases. There were only 2 people in that, the boss man if we can call him that, and myself. But as the war became closer, we decided that the air force should have some aircraft. We didn't have very many I must say, before the war. And, the branch that I was in, which was then called the Directory of Equipment,

04:30 was split into two, and was called Equipment and Supply, equipment obviously accounted for where all the aircraft and bits and pieces were, and supply was the branch that organised these things. So, I found myself suddenly in charge of this overseas indent section, because the man that was running it before was made the chief clerk of the supply branch, with a nominal supervisory role over

05:00 myself because I was still a junior public servant. That expanded quite rapidly, we got – I can remember, because we got a Sergeant Clark, RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] Clark a number of clerical assistants, and the very first WAAAF [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] that came into that was recruited, they of course had uniforms on and thought they were winning the war. And they found they were in a section where they had a lot of

05:30 card indexes they had to keep on filling in, that is the orders, details of when they arrived and so on and so forth. In fact eventually I became quite friendly with one of these WAAAFs who got herself a commission. But the Air Department was also recruiting directly equipment officers from outside. And

these were basically, in my opinion, just clerks.

06:00 Like myself, with a uniform on. And the war had started naturally by this time, because they had a lot of respect from the public, but really they are only doing what I am doing and they look a lot fitter than I am, in fact one was a motor racing driver. I shouldn't say this, but as an equipment officer, I thought he was a very good motor racing driver.

06:30 I didn't like this very much, so then came Pearl Harbour, and of course this meant we were going to become directly involved in the war in an actual sense, and I got fed up with this and I went and joined up.

Can you take us through where your air force career took you again, in summary form, where did you train and where did you serve?

Well, I started off at the initial training

07:00 school at Somers at the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria, from there I went to an Air Observer's School at Mt Gambier, because I had asked – I wanted to be a navigator, because most people wanted to be pilots. But I perhaps I was an odd one out because I was very interested in mathematics, navigation appealed to me. In fact

07:30 from the initial training school, you had to get a certain level of in the subjects that you studied there, you had to get a certain mark to get accepted either as a pilot or a navigator. But the would-be pilots, in fact everybody, had to do a co-ordination test. And, those that wanted to be pilots were frightened to death of this, because if they failed that, that was the end of them, as

08:00 pilots anyway. So as a consequence being under no stress, I did pretty brilliantly. So when I was interviewed to find out what I wanted to be, I indicated I wanted to be a navigator, the interviewing officer said, "You want to be a navigator?" "Yes sir." "Oh, well if that's what you want but a lot people would give their eye teeth for your co-ordination

08:30 results." So I guess I could have been a pilot but navigation appealed to me. So I went to Mt Gambier, after that Bombing and Gunnery School at Port Pirie in South Australia, Astro Navigation at Nhill in the Wimmera, in Victoria and then by that time I got my brevet, the half wing, and also we had been interviewed

09:00 as to whether we were going to be promoted to sergeants or be commissioned and I was fortunate enough to be commissioned off course. Then back to Melbourne to embarkation depot waiting for what happened next. And eventually to Sydney, just for a couple of nights and then to Brisbane, where we went directly to a ship which was to take us across the Pacific. As we went down the Brisbane River

09:30 we passed the Centaur, the hospital ship which when we were halfway across the Pacific we found it had been sunk by the Japanese. Obviously there were Japanese submarines hanging around outside the Brisbane River, but we had a destroyer escort for about the first 300 miles out to sea, so we had a fairly peaceful crossing of the Pacific. We landed at San

10:00 Francisco, we were supposed to go to Canada because more of the most advanced training often took place in Canada. But they changed their minds and we went straight across America by train to a big military, a US military camp at Boston, a camp called Camp Miles Standish where we waited until there was transport across the Atlantic. Most went across on the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth, but an advanced party of

10:30 us 20 commissioned officers and about 50 sergeants were put on a slow ex banana boat, it was a pretty ropey old boat, in a very slow convoy. And, halfway across the Atlantic, it was a 6 knot convoy, but halfway across the Atlantic we were split into two and the fastest ship went ahead at 8 knots, which we were supposed to be, but we broke down

11:00 halfway across. But fortunately we were escorted by a destroyer and also by a, now what would we call them, converted boats that had been made into aircraft carriers. So we had an aircraft carrier around us as well. So we landed in Scotland at Greenock, then went to Brighton which was the main reception depot

11:30 for RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and New Zealand Air Force. And there they asked what where we wanted to go, which command, and I was a Navigator and I wanted to go into coastal command. I had got that inclination when I was at Mt Gambier because we did do a certain amount of flying out over the sea, but navigation is I consider

12:00 it's a natural home of coastal command, because so much of it is dead reckoning and you don't have so much influence way out to sea which, at that time, could help position you. So from there, the first thing that happened was they sent us to RAF [Royal Air Force] officers course in Sidmouth, in Devon. And it was beautiful because it was summer time, and Devon's a lovely place to see anyway, particularly

12:30 in the summer. So we had 4 weeks there. We used to spend half the day lecturing on RAF administering and the other half of the day exercising with the RAF regiment, which we meant we had to crawl around golf courses trying to disguise ourselves as bushes or something or other, but then shoot that could be shot, like rifles and revolvers and sten guns. Didn't quite see what we were going to

13:00 use those for in the air force. Throwing grenades, which was frightening. But after that we were really in Coastal Command proper. The first training course then was a GR course, a General Reconnaissance course in the north of England, in Lancashire just outside of Blackpool, at a place called Squires Gate. There we did refresher navigation because months had gone by since I had

13:30 last done anything like that in Australia, and intensive ship wrecking missions. It was very intensive, it was quite impressive. I had never had to identify which country the ship belonged to and which class was, battleship cruiser, what class of battle ship, etc. And if any of the say cruisers had any characteristics within that class we had recognise those as

14:00 well. It was quite impressive and we had to liaise with the Royal Navy and they might come up and see what we were doing, and they were very, very impressed with the quality of our ship wrecking mission. That lasted for 5 weeks from there to an operational training unit, which was way up in the north of Scotland above Inverness, on Sunderlands [flying boat] and that's when we first got our operational crew. In

14:30 most OTUs [Operational Training Unit] the method was to try and crew yourself up, try and find people that would be compatible and so on, but not on the Sunderlands, when you got there they whacked you into a crew like that. They said to me, "If you want to go into an Australian crew there aren't any left now, they're filled. So what do you want RAF or RCAF [Royal Canadian Air Force]," and I said, "R.A

15:00 F."

You didn't like Canadians?

Not there. Perhaps I had better not say this. Canadians are fine, but certain parts of Canada, French Canadians were not, frankly. Anyway, so I had a flying officer, skipper, an Englishman, the second pilot was from Jamaica.

15:30 Then the rest we had a Sunderland crew, a basic crew had 10, you had 2 engineers, 2 wireless operator gunners and 3 straight gunners, I think that was it from memory.

Were you sent as a crew to 201 Squadron or was this…?

No, yet we are still, we couldn't go anywhere after that, it was a basic operational

16:00 training unit. I found that although I had already done very well as a Navigator in markings and all the rest of it until this stage, I suddenly found that I was no good at all. I would never finish up where I was supposed to finish up. I thought, what's – why would this be so, I am supposed to be a good navigator.

16:30 I thought now wait a minute, I had better watch these pilots and see how well they fly the aircraft, because DR [Dead Reckoning] depends upon the pilot strictly piloting the course that's been set, the altitude which we know because the altitude affects the air speed and what else, obviously the

17:00 speed. I found the skipper to be alright, he had been a second pilot on the Sunderlands squadron in West Africa, but the Jamaican was hopeless. He couldn't retain the course, the altitude or the speed. So when we - after that exercise, I said to the skipper, I am not going to fly with this crew unless you get rid of that second pilot. And he took that very seriously. So we lost our

17:30 Jamaican. Now he was either a bad pilot or a very shrewd operator, because he didn't want to fly Sunderlands, he wanted to fly Beaufighters. Because Beaufighters [types of aircraft] were part of coastal command, they used to shoot up convoys around the Norwegian and Dutch and German coasts, pretty hair raising existence. Now that's what he wanted. Now, I don't know if he tried to work himself out of Sunderlands or whether he was a bad pilot.

18:00 OTU's [Operational Training Unit] a fairly dangerous place because you have got squadron pilots as it were, fairly ropey aircraft half the time, because all the best ones go naturally to the squadrons. So, the losses on OTUs were fairly horrendous and we lost two Sunderlands in one night. The reason for it was, it was a dead flat calm night and flying boats, it is very

18:30 difficult to learn at night on a flat calm piece of water. Because it is very difficult to judge the altitude. So two of them went in there are a total of 25 people on those 2 aircraft. The only ones that were from the crews that had been formed was the skipper, the engineer and the wireless operator the rest sere instructors, we didn't fly on our aircraft until the

19:00 new skipper had checked out. But one skipper was a flight lieutenant and he died, his second pilot was 1st flight lieutenant also, he was a flight lieutenant because after he had finished his training. He had gone into training command and of course your promotion comes after flight lieutenant just by time. Unless you do something

19:30 stupid of course. And this fellow, we were allocated the flight lieutenant. So we had a flight lieutenant was the senior officer in the crew, but of course that doesn't apply in an air crew. You can have a sergeant pilot and a commissioned navigator, but the sergeant pilot is the skipper. So when we took off with him I watched him very, very closely. And I thought, this guy is a better pilot than the

20:00 skipper. Because 2 years in training command on fairly sensitive aircraft, if I can use that word, made him a very experienced pilot. So I stayed with him for the rest of air force career, as it turned out.

What was his name?

Jack Reid. He was a headmaster of a school, again he was an Englishman.

We'll come back and talk about

20:30 **your crew in more detail, we had better finish this summary. We were getting on to…**

We haven't got very far have we?

Yeah, we'd better go through in a bit less detail till the end. Your roles in coastal command maybe you could give us an overview of those and transport command and the other areas you served, as briefly as you can?

Briefly, from the OTU we were posted to 201 Squadron which is a Sunderland squadron located in Northern

21:00 Ireland, the most westerly RAF station in the British Isles. We weren't there very long because after a while the squadron they had to release a crew for special fearing duties, and we were supposedly the least experienced crew, because we were the newest. And so off we went.

21:30 We didn't' know what we were going to do, but eventually we found we were going to fly Mariners [flying boat]. This was a puzzle because we knew the RAF had got Mariners from the Americans. And formed the Mariners Squadron. Then they disbanded it, the reason they disbanded it was because they were getting Liberators [bombers], which they should have had to start off with frankly. And flying boats are pretty

22:00 expensive to maintain because they land on the sea, and often they just stay parked on the sea. So we were whipped off, and I'll go into that in more detail perhaps a bit later. And we found that we had to fly Mariners to the US [United States]. The routes were quite interesting – perhaps later?

Yep, yep, we'll go through the routes in a bit more detail a bit later, but how many trips did you do on that run?

We did 3 return trips to America flying

22:30 Mariners back to the Americans, who wanted them back. That was to Norfolk, Virginia, and flying Catalinas [flying boats] back to the UK because they were still interested in Catalinas.

How long would a whole trip take on a whole?

It didn't take very long but I think we might leave that till later because the first trip was very interesting.

OK They were interesting trips. Alright, what happened after that…?

We thought we liked transport command, naturally, but we were

23:00 summoned down to – on the last trip back we got a radio message to say that our skipper was going to be popped off to take over a Sunderland crew in coastal command. So therefore we had a headless crew as it were. And we were told we were going back to coastal command and so I was supposed to go back on to Sunderlands

23:30 back up to the north of Scotland again. The second pilot, who had had the flying boats, he was a great operator, he was a, a tremendous operator Yorkshire man, very shrewd and he got himself posted to a Wellington OTU. Wellingtons [bomber] were equipped with Leigh lights [small but powerful searchlight] and I suppose we got to know each other very well and we knew we didn't get lost very often.

24:00 So he rang em up and asked what had happened to him because we were all hanging around at Oban at that time, but he'd got off to this posting to the Wellington OTU. And he rang me up and said he wanted a navigator, would I like to join him and I said, "certainly." I didn't want to go back to the north of Scotland in the middle of winter I might say. So, he organised that

24:30 he – I was actually posted back to the north of Scotland and he organised that, it was scrubbed and I joined him at an OTU at Silloth what was then Cumberland on the Solway Firth. And after I finished that training I was posted to 172

25:00 Squadron, the Leigh light Wellington Squadron and that was where I finished the war.

How long were you with 172 Squadron for?

About 6 months.

When the war finished what happened to you immediately after that, just briefly?

Well we were posted to Beccles on the border of Suffolk and Norfolk. Which was a holding unit whilst

they – these were – the Australians were posted there, the coastal command Australians,

25:30 waiting for a ship to take us back to Australia. And that dragged on, in fact a lot of us got spare time jobs. In fact I got myself a job as a job as an optician's receptionist. But I was married by this time, and at that time a war bride would probably have to wait about another 12 months before she could join

26:00 her husband, and that didn't appeal to me very much. But on one occasion, when I had gone back to Beccles, because I did that every so often, because we used to get a great allocation of food which had been provided for the POWs [Prisoner of War] but they sent a ship load of food over, far too much. So we were given a monthly ration, which was very, very good, because it enabled us to repay hospitality and all the rest of it we had in the

26:30 UK. And there was a notice that said that the newly formed Department of Immigration were looking for permanent public servants that might join that department in London. And I thought eh, this might be interesting. I was in the Air Department before the war and of course there's not going to much use for people in the Air Department after a war. But immigration, that's something I could believe in, because we were all inspired by the thought that

27:00 we had to build up our population in light of what happened during the war. So I went to Australia House and I was accepted and in due course. I started to work there while I was still in the air force, for a couple of months and then I was discharged and joined the Immigration Department and spent the rest of my

27:30 life up until retirement working for the Department of Immigration.

If we've got time at the end of the interview, I would love to talk about a very interesting period immigration history. You mentioned you got married in England. What period in your career did that take place?

That was when – between transport command and going back to coastal command. I met my would be wife very early in the

28:00 peace when I first joined coastal command, when we were stationed in Lancashire.

The history of war brides is another interesting thing for the archives, so we might talk a little bit about that as well.

Mine is a bit different because she came back to me 5 years after the end of the war, so – or came back to Australia rather 5 years after the end of the war, and travelled first class with me as a returning public servant and not like the others

28:30 unfortunates. In fact that was one of the first jobs I had to do in the Department of Immigration, we weren't taking migrants, we were arranging transport back to Australia, because Australia House had had control of all the berths going on British ships to Australia. War brides, Australians that had been stranded throughout the war and fiancés of war brides and that was our first priority.

That's a fantastic

29:00 **detail. We can come to talk about as far as Australians go in war as well. Thank you for that summary, that gives us a lot to go on and I am sure we can probably talk for 3 days about this stuff but we had better go back to the beginning. We'll go back to the very beginning, to your childhood in outer Melbourne and what sort of memories do you have of your early years in the suburbs near the Dandenongs?**

Well, Vermont as I say, was an outer suburb then, but it was still a commuting

29:30 suburb. But essentially we had apple orchards everywhere and bush, although it was semi suburban as well. It was almost like a village, there was one small primary school, one church, one what was a Mechanics Institute, but became a scout hall. And that was it, we had what you could almost

30:00 say was a country existence, but commuting distance to Melbourne, as many people did. So I suppose looking back on that it would have been a fairly reasonably happy childhood. When I went to Mont Albert Central School, I became very sick actually, one year, but I am afraid I didn't like that school terribly much. But I suppose it did a lot for me because I was able to

30:30 get a scholarship to Scotch College. And that was very, very pleasant indeed. But I still lived in Vermont through all of this the first time going Mont Albert Central, and getting on the train naturally going to Scotch College meant the same and working in the Air Department, commuting by train.

How long did that journey take in those days?

31:00 I think from Mitcham into Flinders St was about 36 minutes. Going to Mont Albert Central School involved about 3 or 4 stops and Scotch College about another 5 or 6, I suppose.

The Depression was happening, in the days of your childhood, what images do you have of the Depression in the area where you grew up?

Well, my father as I say worked in the Post Office as a mail sorter.

31:30 And one of the first things they did during the Depression, they thought that one way to pull out of it was to cut everybody's salary. Which of course was disastrous. So frankly my parents had a tough time and I was very, very fortunate that I had a scholarship to a good school. But it was still a great struggle, because whilst my

32:00 education was being paid for I still had to, we had to buy text books and to dress properly in a uniform, and also to commute. So it was a great struggle.

How did your family manage, what sort of deprivations did you suffer as a result?

Well I don't think I suffered very much at all. They were the ones that suffered because they weren't able to

32:30 take holidays for example, they weren't able to afford any luxuries. But my mother made sure that I was always very, very well fed and looked after. So you know it was their sacrifice rather more than mine, although again in those days kids didn't get many toys and the rest of it as they do today. So I was

33:00 probably no worse off than most people in the area. They were all suffering the same thing, many were out of work of course.

What sort of food would have been on your table in your family?

On Sundays we always had a roast, roast beef and apple pie. Otherwise, we had ... there was always meat,

33:30 my mother was a reasonably good cook, and so on. Vegetables. My father, of course we had a reasonable block of land, we had on it ... he grew vegetables. We had a couple of apple trees, a couple of orange trees, and so on. It was good wholesome food, I guess.

What did you think of apples?

I loved them.

34:00 The orchardists ... because I was in the scouts at this time, and Vermont verges on the Dandenong Creek, which in those days was really a nice bush creek. It's certainly not like it today. And we used to go camping down there, and to get to where we camped ... well you could go a long way around, but we were allowed to go through the orchards,

34:30 because this little village as it were, the orchardists were very, very active in the church. My mother sang in the church choir. You could go through the orchards, and you were allowed to pick up any windfalls ... not pick them off the trees ... pick up windfalls, eat as many as you like. And of course, windfalls, straight off an apple tree, still a hell of a lot better than you'd buy in the supermarket in Canberra

35:00 at the present time.

What siblings did you have?

None. I was an only child.

What was your relationship like with your mother and father?

Well ... looking back ... I should have been ... I suppose, much nicer to them. I wasn't unpleasant or anything like that, but, you know

35:30 what it's like ... if you can remember what it's like as a kid. I mean, I've got a grandson who has recently joined the Navy. He went through the Australian Defence Forces Academy, and he is tremendously attached to his mother, but I suppose a lot of this came about, they ... his mother divorced his father, and

36:00 so he had a lot of respect for his mother, and he still has, despite the fact he's now a, now a Sub Lieutenant in the Navy, and I think at the moment, he's gone up to the Solomons on the Minora. But he's very, very closely attached to his mother, far more that I ever was to mine. But this is what you look back on in later life. I don't know,

36:30 for example, how my father met my mother. There are lots of questions I'd ask him now. He was in the first World War, he used to talk to me a lot about it, but I wasn't interested, as a kid. I'd like to ask him a lot more now, because he was badly wounded at Pozieres, and later at Passchendaele, that's when he was discharged because he was repatriated, unfit for further military service. I'd like to ask him a lot of questions. One reason why I've written

37:00 my memoirs, because, I thought, let me get it all down on paper, in case my ... I've got a son and a daughter, and two grandchildren ... in case they're ever interested, as I am now, in what my father did, it'll be all there for them.

How did your father's war service affect him physically?

Badly. He walked

37:30 with a stick for most of the rest of his life. In fact he had a limp, he also had a bad injury to his head as well, didn't mean he was mental at all, he was very, very alert. But he used to get blinding headaches and all the rest of it. It really affected him quite badly.

What sort of celebrations, or commemoration, took place on Anzac

38:00 **Day, in your household?**

Well, my father was a member of the RSL, he was quite active in that. He would always go to the march, and eventually, when I settled in Canberra, and he'd come up here, he'd go to the Anzac Day march every time. I'd never been to one then, I have been since then, But he was very, very active in that. He had some official position

38:30 in the local sub-branch of the RSL.

Taking yourself back as much as you can to your childhood, what did Anzac Day, or that tradition, mean to you, growing up?

Frankly, nothing.

Why do you think that was less important to you then?

Well, I think I was too young really, to be concerned with it. And my father used to go on and on about the first World War, and that

39:00 perhaps didn't encourage me to be active ... to actively participate in it. He might have taken me on one or two of these, 'cause I can remember him saying once that he thought that ... the tradition would continue, and that the sons of the first diggers would be marching and so on. And I thought, I don't know if this will ever happen. But of course the second World War came before that

39:30 became possibly a reality, you see.

We'll just have to stop there ...

39:37 **End of Tape**

Tape 2

00:31 **Did you get up to any adventures when you were a kid?**

No, I was a very placid one, very nervous. Not really, I suppose I did, but I find it hard to think of anything in particular which might come within that category.

Shopping expeditions with your – into town or?

One of the things with my mother I can remember

01:00 happening when I was very, very young, she took me into Melbourne to the pictures. And the picture that I saw was Charlie Chaplin in the Gold Rush. I remember that very well, because as a young kid and all these things on the screen and the exit was on the side, and you could sort peer round and see what was behind the screen. There were all these figures I was seeing on the screen.

01:30 But as you can imagine I was very, very young when that happened. But remember that very, very well.

Can you recall any time when you got lost?

Lost – no I don't think so, despite the fact that we had a reasonable amount of bush around us, it was still very suburban in the sense that it was laid out streets. They might not have been laid, might have been dirt

02:00 and so on. No, I don't think so.

Who encouraged you to pursue academic work?

Nobody really, it was just my inclination, I was always a very good student. Not that I would necessarily retain everything. But I could pass examinations very readily, they never worried me. And,

02:30 I know at this Mont Albert Central School, the idea was to sit for scholarships and naturally you were – well that was a great incentive too, but – no I was just naturally interested in learning.

What inspired your imagination?

To do what?

What did you

03:00 **fantasise about, what were your day dreams?**

Heavens that's very hard for me to recall. I would like to have been a good tennis player, which I wasn't because that was the main sport that I indulged in. No, that's really about all

03:30 I think. I used to have fantastic ideas about train sets and things like that. I would look at a catalogue and see all these magnificent trains that you could buy. Models. But we could never afford to do anything about that, but I would fantasise about that I suppose.

Did you ride around on the trains by yourself when you were growing up?

Yes.

04:00 Well, what age was I when I went to Mont Albert Central School, 11 I suppose. That's when I went on my own, you are getting old by then.

I note you really remembered the number of the stops very well?

Well I did it so often you know. You know I could reel them off now if you wanted me to?

04:30 **What other forms of public transport were there in Melbourne?**

Well, we had from Vermont – the station where the train went through, it was Mitcham and there was a local bus service, or I would walk. In Melbourne – going to Scotch College you would get off at Glenferrie and catch a tram, you would go up Glenferrie Road to

05:00 Scotch College. And similarly, when I worked in the Air Department which was in the Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road, you could either walk along St Kilda Road or take a tram.

Scotch College was a fairly prestigious school. How competitive was the exam to get that scholarship?

Best in the country. Well, there were 5 given,

05:30 and a number of half scholarships. It was only in 2 subjects with were my best subjects, and that was English and maths. So perhaps I was fortunate there. I also sat for – well it was for the matriculation, what do they call it, Scotch College did its own matriculation, it was all internal, it was a much more thorough system than the

06:00 government one. Because it was more intensive, it was throughout the year. The government matriculation examination was one general one. You all went to the Exhibition Building in Melbourne and, but there are quite a number of subjects, and I suppose I didn't – that was also used as the entrance

06:30 into the third division as it was the public service. So I wouldn't say that I performed brilliantly in that examination, but I was much better at Scotch College, because despite the fact I believe it was of a much higher standard, generally, and also more comprehensive you were examined on the whole year all the time, in that last year.

What did you like about

07:00 **English as a subject?**

I don't know, I wasn't keen on poetry I suppose, but I could write essays and so on, it was just that something that came to me. And I feel fairly strongly about it now, in the sense that if anybody reads my memoirs, you will find that it's written very clearly, and very simple English,

07:30 because there is a little bit of terrible lot of gobbledygook that goes on now, which is impenetrable to me actually, so that's it, I just like simple English I guess.

What books were you reading or encouraged to read?

I read all the classics in those days you know, [Charles] Dickens, [Andre] Dumas, let me think of them,

08:00 those sort of things, The Three Musketeers and what not, probably Walter Scott as well. I also read comics.

What aviation heroes, did you have?

Mmmm?

What heroes of aviation did you have?

Well, none in particular, I suppose [Charles] Kingsford-Smith [pioneer aviator]], naturally at that time in the '30s.

08:30 I know that they used to have air pageants in Melbourne, at Laverton, which is now the RAAF Base at Laverton. I used to go to those, but this is getting on a bit in life. I was always very interested in aircraft. I suppose that came from working in the Air Department, that helped a lot. I still am interested in aircraft.

Where, in those days

09:00 **can you trace your interest in navigation to any particular events or themes?**

No, only the fact that involves mathematics and mathematics was always a very good subject for me you see. So just projecting that into something else I suppose appealed to me. And I was always been intensely interested in maps I might say.

You could have gone into artillery for instance just as easily?

That's the army.

09:30 I wasn't interested in the army.

What was it about the air force then?

Working in the Air Department I was more interested in aircraft I suppose and I think that the RAAF being a newer service, is far more relaxed than the army. Particularly the RAF in England, you have never seen a more relaxed service in your life, far more than the RAAF in

10:00 Australia. Because it's newer, it has probably got more ideas. Not so highbrow.

Back at Scotch College, was there a difference between the scholarship boys and the boys that were?

You didn't know one from the other. No one would have known I was a scholarship boy. I wouldn't have known who the others were, no difference.

Were you a day boy or?

Day boy yes.

10:30 **What did you know of the 'old country'.**

Oh, quite a lot really in a sense, we might come to that in a moment too. My mother and father were both from England and I have relatives there obviously, and you know just talking in my – with my mother father, so I knew a

11:00 reasonable amount about England, not Scotland, just England.

At Scotch College was there a tradition of Old Boys who had gone away to serve in the First World War for instance?

Oh yes, of course one of the most significant persons who went to the war First World War was General Monash, he was a Scotch College student, and of course they had a big

11:30 honour role in the main assembly room and so on and so forth.

How much were you groomed to be prepared for the 2nd WW at Scotch College?

Not at all. You could have been, they had a Cadet Corps, I wasn't in that. No, I don't think there was a terrible amount of emphasis put on anything like that. But it's – it has and still has a Cadet Corps and

12:00 of course it had and still has a decent pipe band, and those sort of things.

Was there any particular reason you didn't go into the cadets?

No, I suppose I wasn't terribly attracted to them. It also meant that you were losing a lot of your own time, after all after you finished school, I had to get on a tram, and then get on a train, and

12:30 it was getting reasonably late by the time you got home. There was compulsory sport of course. That was a couple of afternoons a week, so there really didn't seem to be a lot of time for me to involved in that. I was quite active in the, by Scouts, even when I sort of finished with that, I was an Assistant Scout Master, and that took up time as well.

What did you enjoy about the scouts?

13:00 Going camping and so on, I suppose the general companionship and so on.

Did they teach you any navigational skills in the scouts?

Ah, no about the only thing we would do is a paper chase and as I say, there was a lot of bush and stuff around where I was living, and I knew that very well, if that's navigation, if you were a runner,

13:30 dropping the paper. You would try and trick them of course, you would send them on a few false trails

down that way and so on and so forth, I suppose that's navigation of a sense.

What Empire celebrations were you involved with?

Well at school what did we have, yes, we had Empire Day, and

14:00 of course cracker night in Victoria was Guy Fawkes night, if that's celebrating the Empire I suppose it is, but Empire Day used to be celebrated too. Shakespeare Day and St George's in April, vaguely, I am very, very vague about this, they were only a couple of days apart.

14:30 Everybody, not everybody, my parents obviously were very pro the Empire and that rubbed off on me. So perhaps I was more conscious of it than a lot of my fellow kids and so on. But you know it's a – I can't remember taking it very serious

15:00 if you know what I mean.

What was your favourite Shakespearean character?

Oh, probably the Merchant of Venice I think, I think that's what we did mostly.

Were you involved in plays at school?

Oh yes, I can remember taking a very minor part in – again in the Merchant of Venice I think, I remember taking a small part in that one, on one occasion. Don't

15:30 ask me what character I can't remember.

What did you know of the rising hostilities in Europe?

Well, I suppose, when Hitler [Adolph Hitler, Chancellor of Germany] came into power, even though I was only what 13 or something, you were becoming increasingly conscious of it.

16:00 And, a lot of the newspapers were full of what was going on there, and as the '30s rolled by, it seemed to become more inevitable there would be another war which wasn't anything that was very encouraging.

In your

16:30 **position in the supply section of the Air Department, what did you see of Australia gearing up, or any sort of idea that they might have to gear up?**

Well, of course when I joined, it was pathetic, it was pathetic at the start of the war too, very pathetic. We had Bristol Bulldogs, was our

17:00 fighter we had, Wapitis, very, you know lumbering aircraft and Avro Ansons, and Avro Ansons were the most advanced aircraft we had. The first order that came round about the start of the war were for the first time, American Aircraft, the Hudson, the Lockheed Hudson

17:30 and the other one was the Beaufort. That was a fairly early order while most Beauforts that were flown in the RAAF Australia were manufactured here, the first Beauforts came from the UK.

What were you particularly involved with ordering?

When you say I was ordering them, my first boss in the Air Department was a squadron leader. As the – when the war

18:00 started he was promoted fairly rapidly, when I left he was a group captain. And, he was in charge of supply and therefore anything that was being ordered and of course the Air Board itself would be determining what was being bought and what was not. The overseas indent section was really only recording what was being bought and accounting for the bits and pieces that arrived. That was our role.

18:30 Or sending signals, because then everything initially was bought in the UK, we had an air liaison officer at Australia House. And our communications were by signal by the air force transmitter at Victoria barracks in Melbourne straight to London. And despite the fact that I was a 3rd division public servant, I never learnt there to write memoranda.

19:00 We used to send terse signals, "do so and so." We were the air force telling an air force officer to go and sort this out. You see you didn't wrap it up with a lot of words that were unnecessary. It was only when we bought the Lockheed Hudsons from the Americans, and the words in cables, they were like great big letters and so and so forth.

19:30 That's the first time I ever struck any words as it were. But with the UK [United Kingdom] we were just dealing with our own man there. He was a, whatever he was, a flight lieutenant or a squadron leader, actually the squadron leader I worked for originally had been the air liaison officer in London before I joined the Air Department

At the time how aware were you that – as you say were pathetic?

20:00 Well, I think it became pretty well known before the war with [Winston] Churchill [Prime Minister of Britain] carrying on before the war that complaining about the Germans rearming like mad, and belittling his own government for not doing anything and so and so forth.

What about in Australia?

Well, that rubbed off because we obviously had a hell of a lot less than the RAF. Well, I thought it was pretty

20:30 ghastly. We were totally unprepared really we were.

What political views did you have?

Well, my parents were – what were they then, United Australia Party, the fore runner, conservative in a sense, and I suppose mine were basically that.

Where were you and what were you doing when you heard that war broke out?

Well, were

21:00 I was working in the Air Department. Now there were a lot of – in my little area, it was a lot of mixed personnel, you have serving air force clerks and what not, you had public servants, so it was a mixture. Now the serving air force

21:30 people were frantic at what was happening, that they were not standing up to Hitler. We should have been getting stuck into him straight away. That was their view. They used to come in and be complaining like mad about Hitler's done and nobody's done anything to stop him. Perhaps the public servants weren't as frantic as that, but these people were. Because

22:00 what could anybody have done then. Nothing. Britain couldn't have done much. But as it turned out they were better prepared, they had developed Hurricane's and Spitfires as so on, and this is one thing about Chamberlain, he might be condemned, but at least he gave them 12 months to get stuck into things, in fact I understand that Britain, by the time the war

22:30 started was virtually outbuilding Germany in aircraft. And they were of course building good aircraft, Spitfires and Hurricanes was the thing that saved the war. Eventually Germany might have been conquered but it could only have been done by America.

Had you heard of the

23:00 **Spitfire?**

Yes, oh yes.

When?

The Spitfire of course was developed from the super marine what was it, it was a float plane, it won the Schneider Cup in the early '30s, that's how it was developed. So I knew about that. We were also dealing with Vickers, Vickers manufactured the Spitfire, because one of the aircraft

23:30 we did have was the old Seagulls, or Walrus's as they were known in the UK, it was a small float plane. Basically used by the navy, although they were RAAF aircraft. Because we still – that was a fairly early order before I joined the department because the spare parts were rolling on for years afterwards, so I knew all about that particularly

24:00 manufacturer.

Did you have the opportunity at all to go up in an aeroplane at this stage?

No, I never flew in anything until I went to the Air Observer's School at Mt Gambier. I was actually in the air force. Not many people had.

Can you recall the announcement of war?

Yes, very well. I can remember Chamberlain and Bob Menzies of course.

24:30 Saying that Great Britain is now at war and as a consequence Australia is also at war. I think those were his words. I remember that very well, yes.

How did that change things for you personally at that time?

Well, in the sense of my doing

25:00 something about it, not very much. I was working in a service department as it were, and I just went about my normal business of course. I didn't have any thoughts of rushing out and joining up. Some of the people I knew in the Air Department or not the Air Department of course, in those days, now we've got the Department of Defence, in those days you had the Department of Air, Department of the Army and the

25:30 Department of Navy, and the Department of Defence Co-Ordination, all in Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. And a lot of say records, and if you were looking for a file, and you rang the records place, you might get answered by somebody who was working in the Army Department. Now I know that one of those fellas joined up straight away, he joined up and he went to Africa in the 6th

26:00 Division. He became a major eventually. But I don't think many of the others were rushing around to join up then, it wasn't affecting us directly, although as I say there was tremendous concern about it all. I mean one of the things as I said before that persuaded me to join up was the fact that I got sick of all these guys essentially as clerks with uniforms

26:30 on and all the rest of it, and also Pearl Harbour had come. As a matter of fact, how that happened – what was I doing then which might be of interest. Now I think I said that by this time I was in charge of a section, in charge of the Overseas Indent Section. I know that I took life very, very seriously, particularly when the first WAAAFs came

27:00 in. You know they were in uniform and going to win the war and here they were sticking things down on card indexes and so on. But, I was told later that by one, the one I became very friendly with, that the first thing when they were allocated to my section, two of them, as soon as I went out of the room – "How old do you think

27:30 he is?" Somebody said about 26. And one of the female public servants clerical assistants who had been there for a while, "What did you say, 26? He only had his 21st birthday a few months ago." And of course these WAAAFs were all older than I was. And I thought they got to work harder.

28:00 We were serious we used to work 14 days straight, as the war was on and we were starting to rearm, 14 days straight. Then I would get 2 days off, we also had overtime as well. And I suppose because I had taken life so seriously, my immediate boss then, because my squadron leader who was group captain in charge of the area, but my immediate one was a wing

28:30 commander. I must say again, that this is when I had some respect for air force officers. The fellas that I dealt with in the Air Department had all been First World War fliers, they were all pilots. And they were all doing administrative jobs and they were tremendous people to work for they really were, anyway he said to me, "You take next week off, no go on don't

29:00 argue off you go." Just like that you see. This was the first week in December 1941. And I went of to Marysville, up in the mountains. It was very, very hot this first day, I had a game of tennis, had a swim in a swimming pool which was fed by a mountain stream. Very cold. 2 or 3 days later was it was snowing, because that's what it can be like in Melbourne in

29:30 December. We had a tremendous time, some nights we would stay up all night, I almost went back to Melbourne to get a rest. And the first thing as I walked up St Kilda Road and I was walked in to Victoria Barracks and a WAAAF walked up and my heart sank. And I thought no here we go again. But that changed my life, because I realised I was taking it all too seriously. And you don't' get the best out of

30:00 people if you do that. You have got to relax. And I started to relax and everything went much better. So that was a turning point in my life, wing commander saying, "Go and take a week off," and that wing commander was very, very good because when the morning I came back, it was Monday, that was Pearl Harbour day and that of course tipped me over.

30:30 I thought this is serious, this is getting near Australia. So that is why I walked out and they didn't try and stop me at all, they respected this. And I new exactly when I would be called up, because I was working in the Air Department and I knew how the call ups were going you see, because it took some months before I was called up. And during that period the army decided what's

31:00 this all these fit fellas hanging around waiting to be called up for air crew training, we could use them. So they started to call us up and they called me up. I thought this is ridiculous I am not going to wear this, so I told my boss this wing commander, and he said, "Don't you worry George, if they call you up we will immediately put you in uniform, and I will

31:30 guarantee you will be released when your call up comes for air crew training." So with that behind me I fronted up to the army, but I didn't tell that, I just argued with them, I said look, this is ridiculous I am working in the Air Department and I presume I am doing work of national importance. I am waiting to be called up for air crew, now what you are going to do to me is you are going to call me up, you are going to put me in uniform,

32:00 you will put me out to the Caulfield Race Course and I will be marching up and down, drilling doing stupid things, whereas I could be doing something usefully in the Air Department, because you have to release me when my call up comes for the air force. But that was my – it was in the back of my mind that these bludgers might post me off to Central Australia or something and say we

32:30 can't spare him now, and that would be disastrous, and that's why I argued strongly. I didn't tell them that but I said you will have me marching up and down in uniform, it will cost you a lot of money to put me in uniform. I could be doing something useful and you have to release me. Well, apparently that won, because I got a – I still got it, I got a certificate of exemption from military service.

What advice did your dad give you?

None. He didn't –

33:00 he left it to me, I am quite sure he was proud of me because he was a – you know he was in the AIF [Australian Imperial Force] in the First World War, and I suppose he thought people ought to do their duty, but he never put any pressure on me, and say whatever joining up, I just told him.

What about as far as how much did his war service in the AIF determine which part of the military you went into?

33:30 I suppose it had some affect, I never had any desire to go into the army. Of course he had frightful experience, I mean nobody in the Second World War apart from POWs [prisoners of war], suffered like the 1st AIF in the First World War. It might have had something to do with it. I certainly had no wish to go into the jolly army.

34:00 **How much did you know of his war service in some detail at that time?**

Well, he used to talk to me a lot about it. But it went straight through. I knew that he had been wounded at Corsaires, and knew that the final one was at Passendale, which was a really frightful effort. Subsequently, I have got his army records I might say, but I only got

34:30 those well after the time that he died. And so I knew he had suffered a lot and a lot of what he told me did stay with me I suppose, but most of it was, how can I get away from this sort of thing.

Was there a sense – how much of it was a sense of their might be a replay of the First World War?

35:00 Well, it was I think because nothing of course happened apart from Poland finished, and of course we had the stalemate and nothing happened at all, and in the meantime we had the British forces going to France and so on. And then suddenly the Germans attacked

35:30 and that's when you had the expectation, or my father had the expectation, that it would get like the First World War simply that's what happened in the First World War. But the Germans were stopped and then they slugged it out for the next 4 years. Because I can remember him saying when the Germans were making these quick advances, and I can remember him saying, right well now they'll be stopped in a minute.

36:00 And of course they weren't and that's where it was totally different. But at that time there were certainly some expectations that it would develop into something like the First World War.

Before you joined up can you describe any instances of people receiving white feathers?

No. No. Not to my knowledge nothing like that happened. Nobody looked at me as if

36:30 why aren't you in uniform. I hadn't, I mean people I knew, friends, girlfriends, there was no any suggestion of that, and I don't think there was in the 2nd WW quite frankly.

Any particular girlfriends?

Oh yes, several, I mean this WAAAF, you see this WAAAF I became friendly with,

37:00 she became – she was fairly bright, I mean she came in as an aircraft – what did they call them then, probably got to corporal and then she applied for a commission and got one and she became a flight officer. Section officer, flight officer, whatever. So she was commissioned. I joined up I was an AC2 [aircraftsmen second class], which is virtually the lowest form of animal life in the air force, you see.

37:30 But we still used to meet at week ends, because at Somers on the Mornington Peninsula, I was able to get home every week end and virtually do something stupid or rather you mightn't have. Your hut might have, so the whole lot were dobbed in you see. But, by this time I am an AC2 and she's a commissioned officer, but that didn't make any difference. I can remember that after you finished

38:00 with your initial flying training, you were promoted to Leading Air Craftsman, LOC, and I can remember coming up to Melbourne and I was to meet her at the railway station, Spencer St or Flinders St, or somewhere, and I got a message over the public address system, "AC2 Kiddle report to the somewhere or other,"

38:30 and she had put the message over, and I was highly indignant. I said I am an AC [aircraftsman] now, not an AC2. But she was still a commissioned officer.

What was her name?

Flora Grant.

What was the relationship?

Well, for me it was reasonably serious. She came and saw me off when I took off from Spencer St to go

to Sydney and so and we corresponded for

39:00 a while, but she had had already had a serious boyfriend who had been in the army. But she sort of lost touch with him when she sort of became my girlfriend as it were, but maybe she was fickle I don't know. Maybe she was not going to get serious with anybody that might get themself killed.

Tape 3

00:34 **Let's just move forward a little bit, tell us about your first time up in an aeroplane?**

Up off the ground and where it is this way down below.

Take us through the scene, where you were and what were you doing?

We were at Mt Gambier

01:00 I know we arrived in the dark, and there was lots of aircraft flying around, we wondered what was going on. But the Ansons, even in those days, were being used for coastal surveillance, although they were training aircraft, so that was the first – that only lasted a short time – but that was our first acquaintance with aircraft in our vicinities as it were. I don't know how long it was before

01:30 we went up, probably pretty soon I would think.

What sort of aircraft?

Avro Anson.

Were you immediately attracted to the multi engine aircraft, how did you end up going up the first time in an Avro Anson?

Well, navigators going to be flying in a – not necessarily a multi engine aircraft, but probably in those

02:00 days that was probably all you could be going into because obviously there was going to be at least 2 of you in the aircraft. And I suppose that the first ones of any sort of consequence, where there was just 2 of you, were the Beaufighters. And then Mosquitos [bombers] where you have just got a pilot and

02:30 a navigator/wireless operator. Because they would have to do wireless operating as well, which we didn't do any of that, the only thing we did which was concerned with that was Morse [code, communication system] which was one of the important subjects at the Air Observer's school, in fact that was one of the – I think eventually - whilst we did quite a range of subjects, the important ones were, Morse was one of them

03:00 that you had to check out on. Now that would have started at the initial training school, looking back, because whilst you were in what was called, air crew reserve, waiting to be called up, they encouraged you to go and start learning Morse. And the local post offices were usually involved in this, although because their Morse is the clickety click stuff. Whereas

03:30 ours was the 'dah-de-dit' stuff. That's where we first got ourselves acquainted with Morse, before you even got into the air force itself.

How much had you learnt by the time you were in Mt Gambier in your first flight in an Avro Anson?

Well, I suppose at the initial training school we did about 9 or 10 subjects, which what did they cover, they covered basic navigation I suppose,

04:00 the theory of flight, meteorology all those sort of things. I can't remember them all now.

Was that – what sort of effect did that first flight have on you in terms of what you thought about the air force?

I suppose it was reasonably exciting in its own way, the old Avro Anson was a lumbering old aircraft. It was not exactly an aerobatic

04:30 experience at all. But you know this is OK, this was the sort of reaction I suppose.

Were there any problems with air sickness?

Yes. I could get air sick. I don't think I experienced anything there, it was when we got – I don't think I was air sick in Australia. Sometimes if you did low flying in an

05:00 Anson, it got a bit bumpy, but I felt air sick, it was only when you got to the UK and the weather over there is atrocious for flying, whereas in Australia - it's interesting that probably proportionately there were more Australian navigators in coastal command than any other nationality. Now, I think it's because you could learn

05:30 your art of navigation in reasonably stable conditions and get used to it. You see, the last training in Australia was astro navigation at Nhill in the Wimmera, and it was in the autumn and you used to, because it was night flying. You used to fly every night when the weather permitted, and then if the weather clamped down,

06:00 you would get a night off. But we never had any bad weather. You know the Wimmera in the autumn, it's stable as anything and we flew I think 9 nights in a row, and they had to give us a rest. So everybody piled off to the town to the local pub where 6 o'clock closing didn't mean a damned thing of course. And so you were able to

06:30 learn your craft with a fair amount of ease, in those weather conditions. It was only when you got to the UK that you got really got some weather. In fact, I would say that in my last six months in the air force, were the worst thing you had to face was the lousy weather.

What sort of symptoms would the air sickness

07:00 **bring on?**

Well, it's pretty violent you know it's a – I mean I suppose I got through most of this, I think that generally flying in a Sunderland, when you are operating out over the Atlantic, although the weather

07:30 mightn't be too good. It's a big aircraft and it's a very stable aircraft. It's got a lot of amenities of course, you have got a ward room on the Sunderland, you have got cooking facilities and all the rest of it. You have got bunks. I don't remember being terribly air sick at all there, but I used to get it when we were flying in the Wellingtons,

08:00 probably because the weather was a lot worse. But I know at that time they were developing pills preparatory for D Day [allied invasion of Europe] to make sure everybody got across the channel fit enough to be shot at without being sick. They were starting to – they becoming available and I remember at the OTU at Silloth they made an announcement that if anybody

08:30 did get air sick they had these pills and you could go and get some. Now, the exercise I had to do immediately after I took one of these air sickness pills, it was the very last one at Silloth – what you had to do was take off and fly out to Rockall, which was a rock that sticks up in the Atlantic. I have got pictures in my

09:00 memoirs. Now, the exercise meant that if you found Rockall you immediately got above average for that exercise, whatever you log looked like, you found it you see. And it was a terrible day, it was a 50 knot wind blowing straight at you, it was as rough as anything, and we found it no trouble.

09:30 And I never felt sick, so the pill was very effective.

What symptoms did you suffer?

Well, you just felt sick, going to heave – you haven't been sea sick at all? You are lucky. Have you been on a boat when it's a bit choppy you have never felt queasiness? You are lucky.

Queasiness is one way of putting it, I mean it brings on different effects in different people, that's the only reason I asked.

I see, well normally you are just

10:00 queasy and when it gets bad you vomit. That's it.

What precautions did they have for needing to vomit on an aircraft in the air force?

Only bags, I suppose. You know air sickness bags. If you were seriously air sick you would have to be scrubbed. I knew a fellow at general recognisance school, I mentioned earlier, one of my friends,

10:30 he was posted off to a squadron and they grounded him because he was constantly air sick. But I think that's, on reflection, that only came about as far as I was concerned when you got to the bad weather in the UK. But I don't remember being – I might have been queasy – but I don't remember

11:00 being really air sick much until I got onto Wellingtons and it was probably the combination – they were stable enough, it was just that we suffered in a lot of bad weather. I mean one of the exercises we did, which was not a night one, one of the operational flights on the squadron which virtually all at night,

11:30 because we were looking for submarines in the dark with a search light. But was to patrol around the northern Irish coast, staying 3 miles out to sea theoretically, because there were vague reports that there were some U-boats [Unterseeboot – German submarine] sheltering in some of the wildest parts of the northern Irish coast. Which is of course is neutral

12:00 territory, and we had to pay particular attention to rock swilly goes right inland, quite a way inland, I don't suppose we weren't more than half a mile off the coast when we flew right up rock swilly despite the fact that this was all neutral territory. Well, the wind was again, it was another gale force wind and of course the

12:30 up drafts, and of course you are flying at low altitude in coastal command you got to fly under the clouds always, the up drafts off the cliffs were violent. I was sick for most of that operation. It was – ten hours was the time you spent on an operation in a Wellington

13:00 and there wasn't much navigation required all it meant was just map reading around the coast of Donegal mainly.

Can you tell us a bit about the astro navigation course at Nhill? What did they teach you in astro navigation?

Well, you use a bubble sexton which is you know an instrument –

13:30 first of all you have got to learn which stars are what you can navigate on, you have to do all that, which ones are what. Normally you get a fix on – with astro navigation you have got to take a fix on 3 stars which are sort of separated like that, and from those you can draw position lines which cross

14:00 onto your plotting chart into what they call a cocked hat. You know, like that. Now that is the better is the sighting is and of course you take the mid point as where you are. It sounds simple but, alright you locate the star, you then get the sexton going and you get that star in the bubble of the sexton and the pilot has got to fly absolutely dead level

14:30 and straight and as calmly as possible. And you keep that star in the middle of that bubble and the sexton then starts operating and it takes about 60 shots in about 2 minutes or it might be a minute, 60 shots and that gives you an average reading for that. Then you have got to go to the tables for air

15:00 navigation it's much simpler than for sea navigation. They're very complicated tables this, but even so for air navigation they're complicated enough, it takes a lot of fiddling about before you can draw the line. Then you take 3 of those, or rather 3 shots and that's it, it tells you where you are, or rather where you were when you took the shot. You have moved on of course. It's enough when you are navigating you put it down you

15:30 know where you've gone in that distance, that time and from that you can work out. I mean you have set a course which is what they are steering on the compass, then you find that yours is out here somewhere, well that will give you first of all the ground speed for that time, but also it will tell you what affect the wind is having

16:00 on you, and you can work out from that your wind speed and direction and so on.

What training exercises were set up to teach you this in Nhill?

Just you take off and you would have 3 places you would have to go to, you would have an exercise that might take you to this little town, that little town and back to Nhill.

16:30 That was it. There was a beacon at Nhill which was operating for all the exercises except for the last one and then they cut it off. But there was also a great big POW camp in the vicinity of Nhill, which was brilliantly lit up all night. Of course we never had total black outs in Australia we had brown outs as we called them, so there wasn't very much

17:00 that you could identify normally. Of course in England it was totally different thing, you couldn't see a damned thing because you had total blackouts. That was the sort of exercises you would do.

How would you be assessed and instructed during these exercises?

Oh, well I suppose you were assessed on your log book and they could analyse your log to see if you –

17:30 you might have set a course – you see there's a difference between a course and the track made good. And, so if you are going from here to that lamp over there, say that's 50 miles away or more, when you take off you probably got wind speed and direction from the met officer to start off with. So you

18:00 apply that to your course that you set, your compass course, and you apply the wind speed and direction to get the track. So you might – that's where you are going, but you might be steering that way, and as soon as you get up in the air and so on, you start taking drifts with a drift recording which is merely siting the ground, and you can see how the aircraft is

18:30 drifting in the wind. Well, you start off by doing that but then you work out your own wind speed and direction, which might vary from what you have been given from the met office and you do that by turning – first of all, where are we 120o that way for 2 minutes, then

19:00 back that way for 2 minutes, and then on the course that you set. Theoretically, you lost 2 minutes only, 2 minutes there and 2 minutes here but 2 minutes only that way. So you are taking drifts on each of those different courses by your drift recorder, and you apply that on a little implement which they called computers in those days, a little calculator thing. I have got one in there actually.

19:30 And then you do that on the thing itself, you draw the lines, once again you get the cocked hat in the middle of that and you apply the courses you have set, and you can get from that the wind speed and direction. So you apply that to wherever you are going from that spot to the next one, so you might have

to correct the course you are setting by 5o or something. So that's it, that's

20:00 dead reckoning.

It's a very interesting description. This is quite a lot of work for someone who isn't experienced to be doing inside an aeroplane. What was the set up inside the Avro Anson for the Navigator?

Desk with a plotting chart, and a diff [differential/navigation device] recorder, that's all.

How much room did you have?

Reasonable amount of room in an

20:30 Anson, you'd be surprised to hear this, but it was more comfortable than it was in a Sunderland. Because on the early marks of Sunderlands, you had a great big table plotting chart, that was fine, but you had an astro dome up here, and all that you had to sit on

21:00 was a folding step which was used to get up in to the astro dome. That was all you had, not a proper seat just a folding step, not a like this at all. It was not very comfortable I might say. With the Wellington you had a decent table that was

21:30 alongside the fuselage and a decent seat. Now the only trouble with that was, the heating arrangements, because they come off the engine you see, coming of the fuselage it used to come right underneath where you were sitting. And that was the only one that didn't have anything on it to moderate it, because it was feeding the whole of the rest of the aircraft.

22:00 But where the individual people were sitting, like the radio operator or the radar operator or the pilots. They could control that to some extent, but in the Wellington you were getting the full blast of it all the time.

We'll talk about each of the aircrafts you flew in a lot of detail as we get on to them? Now in the Anson in training period, how did you communicate with the pilot?

Well, you –

22:30 I think you used to go and yell at them, that was all. I know the first one we did in the first flight we did in England at the GR school, months before we had last done a flight. In fact the first exercise is only an hour or two out at sea taking drifts and so on, in daylight. But the first one we did was a night flight and it was a disaster, because we started off

23:00 from Squires Gate, and we had to go to the bottom of the Isle of Man to check a rock as it was called, and find the light house because the light house operators – of course they were meant for ships, but they were also half powered during the war. Finding that you would have to move up to the Mull of Kintyre in Scotland, another lighthouse and then back to Squires Gate. We had no

23:30 intercom, in the aircraft, we had no way of taking a drift, because the only way you can take it at night is to have a tail drift sight, which means you have to throw a flare out and you got a device which can look backwards an optical sort of device, because an ordinary drift recorder is simple. It's just a little thing and you are just looking at what's underneath

24:00 you. Because in the sea you can always see white caps or something, whilst you might think they are moving, they are not really, or features on the land. And it is just a simple thing like that where you just move something and get a couple of parallel lines that are going with whatever is underneath. But the tail drift side is an optical thing. We never had one of those on the Ansons, so you just had to take off using the wind you had got from

24:30 the met office, and consequently hardly anybody ever found chicken rock. Now, then you would be yelling in the ear of the pilot. We couldn't find that damned lighthouse and I said, "We'd better set course for the other place." "No, we have got to find chicken rock." We didn't find chicken rock so he called up for

25:00 a course to steer back to base. You know you put a fix on the aircraft, you send out a steady note and a couple of radio direction places, and fasten on to that and from that they work out where you are and from that and they tell you what you can steer. Now, you get a lot of 3 letter codes in the air force, now the one for that,

25:30 QDM, means steer magnetic so and so, that's just the course you set, that's not necessarily the track you are making good, but it's going to be enough to get you started, QDM. So we got that, but we got back QDR, what in the hell is QDR, so we look it up in the code book, it's still the same thing, but it is a warning that there is a balloon barrage within 40 miles of your track. Now,

26:00 the upper age limit for joining air crew in those days was 31. And some of the people in this course were right on the age group when they joined up, so they were now well over a year beyond that. So you suddenly realise that it is a young man's war. When you are young you are naïve and stupid, and all the rest of it and nothing means anything to you. And one of the fellas that got that

26:30 message QDR, cracked up, they had to ground him. The thought that he was going to get tangled up with a balloon barrage. The balloon barrage was a long way off from where we were going, it would have been at Liverpool. So, that was what happened on that one. We all said, we all kicked up a fuss, we had no instruments to work out a wind speed and direction, we had no intercom, in fact one aircraft crashed up in

27:00 Scotland, nobody was killed fortunately. So we kicked up a fuss and they immediately had an inquiry about this and they sorted things out. But that was not a good introduction to flying in the UK. There was a total blackout, couldn't see a damned thing, no instruments, no intercom. But normally of course you have got intercom all of the time, because I will tell you a good story about intercom in a

27:30 minute.

What happened in that aeroplane when that pilot lost it a little bit you mentioned, were you in was that your?

Oh yes, we didn't find chicken rock, he just instructed the radio operator to get a course to steer for base.

Were you upset or confused at the time?

Well, I didn't like it much, I thought what is this. We're –

28:00 I mean there's no opportunity of taking an astro fix, because we had clouds above us usually. Anyway, there wouldn't have been time, it was a pretty short leg, so you know, it didn't exactly fill you with a lot of confidence. But the subsequent exercises were alright, so back it came.

How did we get onto that, I think it was about communicating with pilots. OK we'll move on to your overseas service,

28:30 **because that's a very interesting thing we want to talk about in detail. Were there any incidence during training in Australia that still stand out in your mind?**

No, everything went very, very smoothly. The only things from Mt Gambier, that were interesting we did a low flying exercise, we flew to Cootamundra and back and you realise how rough it can be when you get the low altitudes.

29:00 But I can't think of anything that happened there, but certainly at the Bombing and Gunnery School there were some nasty incidents, and that comes next. We were flying Fairy Battles [light bomber], single engines, one Merlin engine.

This was at Port Pirie?

Port Pirie, yes. Now, we had – there were a series of bombing targets there, and each of the practice targets, we used practice bombs,

29:30 triangle. But on the last exercise you went up to about 10,000 ft and you were dropping live bombs, they weren't very big ones, but it was live bombs. And it was on a live bomb target which was a circle. And of course, they say now you be very careful you make sure you bomb the right target. And that frightened the life out of me. And you were used to flying in pairs, and the Fairy Battle has the

30:00 pilot in the front, he is completely masked off from you. There's a back compartment, so you can't get to the pilot, I mean you couldn't move into his seat or anything like that, you are in this back place with one sea. And a bomb site is in a – pull back a hatch at the bottom of the aircraft and you push this down on a bracket and you have got to peer out this

30:30 hole. And you see this bomb site and you have got a Merlin engine in front of you which is cooled by glycol and some other valeek and you got a blast of hot air from that and you got odd bits of glycol spitting at you, and it's not very comfortable, it's very difficult to do change the instrument, because you have to find first of all the wind speed and

31:00 direction you see. You have got to set that off so when the target is coming up it's coming up to you and coming along lines like that you see, until you reach the target and you say, bombs away. So off we go on a live bombing one, I bombed first, no doubts which was the target. I mean it was

31:30 clearly identifiable to me. So I dropped my bombs and I go back and the other guy takes over. And he drops his and he came back to me and he says, "I think I bombed the wrong target." Well, I said, "What did it look like?" And he told me and I said, "Well, yeah, you bombed the wrong target, you bombed the practice target." So, we landed, in the meantime, the next lot have gone

32:00 up, and apparently they did the same thing. And apparently there were some guys working on the target and of course they got a bit excited when these live bombs started coming down. And they rushed out with a pistol and put a flair up in the air. So we were all hauled up in front of the wing commander, he was the chief flying instructor, the 4 of us. And he belts hell out of us he goes

32:30 on and on and on. And of course I am protesting, "I bombed the right target, I know I bombed the right

target." The other 3, who obviously didn't, God knows why, they were silent. But he went on and on and on about damage to equipment, what would happen when we are in operations, we'd be damage equipment and so and so forth. It was all about what we were doing to the

33:00 equipment and never once did he mention, and by the way you might have killed somebody down there. And I thought what sort of a peanut is this. He wasn't interested in the human beings down there that might have been hit by a live bomb. So I didn't think much of this guy. But the fascinating thing is, at the end of this course, it there was gunnery in this as well, you then

33:30 attended an interview which decided whether you were going to be made a Sergeant or commissioned. And it was done by the CO [Commanding Officer] of the school, and also the wing commander chief flying instructor, and they would take it in turns to ask the questions. And they used to interview 4 of you and everything was done alphabetically in the air force so you would always be flying with somebody whose name started with

34:00 K or J or something you see. Similarly with the interview, and it so happened that the 4 were the ones being roasted by this wing commander. As luck would have it he was the one asking the questions. When we were interviewed. He looks and he says, "Haven't I seen you 4 fellas somewhere before?" And there's a deathly hush and I don't like deathly hushes, "There's a connection with a

34:30 live bombing of a practice target." "I remember, I remember," and I thought, "Right, well we can forget about our chances of being commissioned." Anyway, the interview went on, and the interesting thing was that from that course which was No. 30 course I might say in the whole of that exercise, the various schools and so on, no. 30 course, 20% were commissioned off course, but 3 out of the

35:00 4 of our fellas were commissioned. So he didn't hold it against it, although I held it against him that he wasn't interested in human life. Now, this was a contrast to the RAF because the first place we went to air crew officers school. And when we got to this place, normally our first billets [housing accomodation] in England were normally

35:30 hotels, lovely this one was in Devon, in its own ground, beautiful place. And we noticed there was a commando course going on in the grounds. And we thought God Almighty, they are not going to put us up with them are we, and somebody said drawing attention tentatively to this commando course, "Are we supposed to go over there?" "Oh, no, no, no, you

36:00 might break a leg or something and you cost too much to train." And I thought this was a good service they are not going to do something stupid until you have got to do it on operations, you are too precious, I thought this was a good service.

Just stop there for a second. How did you respond the discipline of the service, you sound like you had a

36:30 **feisty nature?**

Me, oh I don't know about me, there wasn't that much, alright you had it at the initial training school, and they made sure you were in the air force and you do what you are damned well told. Because the first thing that happened at Somers, you turn up in a bus. There were 3 courses going at one Somers

37:00 and the preceding courses were all lined up at the cook house you see, and as we went by in the bus, the new trainees, there was a universal should, "You'll be sorry." The regimental sergeant major or whatever they call them in the air force was walking by and he says, "Right, you mob all of you, on guard duty on the we."

37:30 Which meant they all they lost their weekend leave. I thought this is great, isn't it. But we used to drill for about 45 minutes each day, and there was also a WAAAF training school at Somers. And those poor women were out there on the parade ground 4 hours every day, rain or snow, not us, if the weather was lousy, no, no you better go and learn something else.

38:00 The poor old WAAAFs really got pushed around.

What trouble did you get into in those days?

We were far too interested to get away from the lousy food and get our weekend leave and go home, or go to Melbourne, we were all very well behaved that's – that was the way they kept you under control, they threatened you with your weekend leave.

38:30 And that was enough, so nobody misbehaved. Or found out anyway. Next at Mt Gambier, it was much more relaxed. But the bombing and gunnery school, you came together with the wireless operators, the people that had been categorised as air gunner/wireless operators. I don't know if they reckoned if they were more trouble than us brilliant people. But that was much stricter.

39:00 At Nhill it was non existent, because it was night flying and it meant that you didn't have to report terribly early in the morning. With the RAF it was as I said, the most – as you can imagine, I guess that was the reason. I don't know what it's like in peace time in the RAF it might be pretty horrible,

39:30 but certainly it was in war time. I can't remember going on a single parade in – all the time I was in England, only at Brighton, we just parade in the morning to be told what you were going to do that day, and we would be paraded right on the sea front, it's just shingles, it's not sand and you couldn't get on that because all the beaches were mined and so on.

Tape 4

00:30 **You were going to tell us a story about Brighton?**

That's Brighton England, of course. Well, I was just saying that that was the only times we paraded was at Brighton, where we were just waiting to be posted somewhere and they would tell us what was happening that day, which was normally nothing. But we were right on the beach, well not right on the beach but the promenade and beach is there, just shingles, or mined. And one morning I suppose

01:00 one of these mines must have got a bit sick of just being there, sitting there doing nothing, and decided to go off and sprayed us with all the shingles and so on. But that's incidental of our parades. I suppose the rest of the time were busy or on operations and what not, we didn't have time for parades.

Back in Australia

01:30 **before your brevet what was the most scary things that happened to during your flying training?**

Well, I can't think of anything that's outstanding, it's only that the bombing and gunnery wasn't – it wasn't very agreeable in a Fairy

02:00 Battle, particularly the bombing part, sticking your head down and you got – looking straight and you got nothing between you and the ground, because it's a big open hatch. But I don't think there was anything – but what used to get you down was, these were the poor old pilots of course and are now having to get up to fly around all day

02:30 with people that are learning how bomb and shoot guns and so on, very boring for them. But once you have finished whatever it was, dropped your bombs or fired of the rounds of ammunition, then they decided to give themselves a little bit of relaxation and they tried to do aerobatics in the Fairy Battle and that used to – right go back and strap yourself in on the seat at the back. Then they

03:00 this was from Port Pirie and he tried to do a loop the loop, and you would see – you couldn't see anything because you have got the hatches above you so you can't see where you are going or what he is doing. And you just see a blur of sea, barren land, the start of the Flinders Ranges and so on,

03:30 and you wondered – of course in those days you got more frightened than ever as you went on because none of these guys were very not very good pilots I must say. In fact one bloke had been busted down from a sergeant to a LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] or something for misdemeanours or something, now that perhaps didn't affect his flying, but it could well have done and these were people that were not necessarily terribly experienced pilots, but you don't realise that

04:00 at the time. It was only as you went on with time that and got more experienced yourself that you realised crikey I was risking my life with one of these not so very competent pilots. Especially when they were trying to do manoeuvres in the Fairy Battle just to brighten up their life a little bit. But I can't remember anything – I mean it was not serious at all, I never felt we were going to crash or anything.

Can you describe the Fairy Battle

04:30 **for us?**

Well, it's like a – well it's a single engined, the engine being a Merlin, so it's a fairly pointy nose. it's shaped vaguely like a Spitfire only of course it's a lot bigger, it was a RAF Bomber, and it was used in France at the start of the

05:00 war and the losses were horrendous. Because it's not, you know it's a pretty old aircraft the fleet air arms used to use them, but it was a later version, what did they call those?

Firefly?

Firefly probably yes. I think. They were the same sort of thing as the Fairy Battle. You can see one at the Air Museum down at Bowral – not Bowral,

05:30 Nowra. But they were – a pilot in front in his own cockpit sort of thing, and then an open compartment at the back with a canopy above it. Not very comfortable.

Did you see the news, I don't know, about

06:00 **6 weeks or so ago about the one that crashed in England?**

No. What was that.

Oh, it was trying to do a stunt display and tried to do a loop and didn't pull out of it?

Oh, that's right was that in America or was it in England?

In England, it was the last one flying.

Oh, it was at Duxford or something. Anyway. it was quite spectacular and tragic results for everyone

06:30 in the plane.

What about the gunnery side of things, how were you coping with that?

I was passed out as an above average navigator, above average bomb aimer, and a below average gunner. I don't like guns at all and I didn't handle them very well indeed. So that's what I think of the gunnery bit.

07:00 **What went wrong with your gunning?**

I don't know, the I – you know all you had was a Vickers – no it was Lewis gun I think, which poked out through this canopy thing in the Fairy Battle and a drogue would come alongside you. And he just had to fire at that thing, and of course you had to allow for

07:30 speed so you would aim a bit ahead and I couldn't shoot straight, it's as simple as that. So I am glad that I never had to use any skills that I might have learnt as a gunner in the actual operations.

How did that concern you the fact that you might not pass out?

08:00 Well, I don't think that would have affected me, I was a – while we were training as a navigator your brevet was air observer. Which means you are supposed to be a navigator basically but you can drop bombs or you can be a gunner. Once you got to England, Coastal Command retained that air observer, you know that was an

08:30 'O', but if you went into bomber command you were either made a navigator 'N' or a bomb aimer 'B' and of course that was another thing we didn't want. We were trained as Air Observers and we guarded that and coastal command fortunately went along with that. But bomber command, you can forget the observer stuff, you were either a navigator or a bomb aimer.

Were there any particular individuals who

09:00 **influenced you at that time?**

In training in Australia?

Yes.

I think I was very compatible with one fellow, I mentioned that before you were called up, you would go to a local post office and start learning Morse. Well, funnily the post office I went to was at Box Hill, the

09:30 fellow that trained me there, joined the air force just after that. And I met up with him at Mt Gambier, and I suppose he remembered me and we got on very well. But, I don't know if he influenced me, he was certainly good to me and encouraged me anyway.

You of course went on to leave Australia,

10:00 **how were you getting on with your relationship with your WAAAF girlfriend at the time?**

She saw me off at Spencer Street Railway Station and we did correspond for a while, then we sort of lost touch.

What commitments were made?

No commitments, none whatever. I was not ready for any commitments and I am sure she wasn't.

Who else saw you of before you left Australia?

My father,

10:30 because he was working just opposite Spencer Street Station, we actually left Melbourne on the then Spirit of Progress. So it was quite comfortable. My mother saw me off that morning from home, because I had been at the embarkation depot in Melbourne, because we actually spent some time waiting to be posted, and I

11:00 was actually home the night before I actually left Melbourne. And she saw me off at the bus stop in Vermont, and I could see that when I had gone and looked back she wasn't a very happy woman.

Sending your only son to war is not something…?

That's right, exactly.

What did she say to you before you left?

11:30 You know nothing much I suppose, good luck and take care, that sort of thing.

What advice did you dad give you?

I don't remember him giving me any advice, he just accepted it that's all. Goodbye and that was it. Or farewell I hope.

Were you able to tell them where you were being posted to?

We had no idea where we were

12:00 going – it was assumed we were going to the UK. At that time of course because we were well into the war at the Pacific at that time, but roughly, one course completed they might be sent to the UK, the next course might go to the islands, so we didn't know. The first

12:30 thing we knew we went to Brisbane and joined the ship we were told we were going to San Francisco and then to Canada. But when we got to San Francisco I said, "No let's change. You are going to get on a train and travel across the US to," – I don't think they told us

13:00 exactly where we were going, except that we were going over to the eastern coast anyway.

Just before that, when you graduated, what particular part about navigation did you like best?

Oh, that's a – I have never thought about that – I suppose the sheer joy of getting where you were supposed to be and knowing where you were. Putting it

13:30 simply.

Can you still look at the night sky and recall a particular stars you can get a shot from?

Some of them yes, but I have forgotten a lot of them, because we were using stars in the northern hemisphere, but no I can know how to find where south is from looking at the Southern Cross and the pointers and so on, Sirius of course I know and Orion, the individual stars in Orion

14:00 Bellatrix, Betelgeuse is one and Rigel I think is the other, across the belt that way. I have got to scratch around and think of them otherwise.

Can you tell us about the departure from Brisbane?

Yes, we were put on this American ship, which was, what was the name of it? Willard,

14:30 Willard Holbrook or something. It was a passenger freighter I suppose, the commissioned ones were put in cabins with 6 berths I think put in the, very small – and the blackout, you couldn't open the port hole, it was just black.

15:00 So it got pretty hot and stuffy crossing the Pacific and of course I got a bit of claustrophobia, because in bunks they were packed into the cabin. And if you were on the lower bunk and you had another one above your head, so I got a bit of claustrophobia. Poor old sergeants were all down n the hold. But we trained with these guys, you know they were our mates, we

15:30 trained with these guys, they were our mates as it were. There was no feeling, 'Oh well, I am an officer and you were another rank.' You would go down and see how they were getting on and so on. And listen to their gripes.

Who else was on there with you on the boat?

There were 400 roughly off this thirty course, and there were a number of, not

16:00 many, naval ratings as well. Didn't quite know what they were up to. Funnily enough in later life, very much in later life, one of those naval ratings came across my tracks again in fact I was, I recruited him in the department of immigration and he had a particular job that. And I didn't find out until later that

16:30 he'd been one of the naval ratings that had been on this naval boat going across the Pacific. He in fact was going to, they went straight to the Brooklyn navy depot and then across to the UK to pick up the Shropshire so he was, he was part of the crew, the Australian crew that flew in to Shropshire but otherwise

17:00 yes. Well I, I knew the fellows whose surname started with K or thereabouts because they were the ones you were close with and all through your training you see. We went across the American in Pullman, the Pullman carriages the Pullman porters, that was a very nice trip, took five days and we finished

17:30 up at this big American base at Taunton Massachusetts, not far from Boston and that was interesting too. That was our first acquaintance of American officers because we were commissioned in the 1/9th, we were invited as a courtesy to one of the officers' clubs and without exception none of us ever

18:00 went back. We still, there were a lot of different things on this camp. It was a huge camp, took about forty thousand and you can imagine the amenities on the American camp and there three great big sergeants, entertainment areas with libraries and dances, you know, the girls would come in for dancing and so on. And

18:30 we'd spend our time there, with our mates as it were, never had anything to do with the American officers. They didn't click. I never liked the American army although you'll find one of the pictures that you might look at is with me with an American major, that was incidental.

Why did you not go back to that officers mess?

Well, we were all fairly young. It was pretty hard liquor that they were drinking in their, in the officers' clubs.

19:00 We were not used to that but we just didn't like their attitude. I've never like the attitude of the, in my experience of the American army officers to their, to their enlisted men as they call them, never liked it. In fact we had nearly a month at, at this camp in Massachusetts. We were given 48 hours leave, not long after we arrived and so we all, half were supposed to go to New

19:30 York, the other half to Boston. We all pushed off to New York and on the train going down my mates were saying they were going to go to the Anzac Club but my particular friend, I said to him, "Do you want to go to the Anzac Club?" And he says, "Well, no I want to see what happens in America." And that's how I felt. I didn't want to, you know, just spend my time with, with the Australians. I wanted to

20:00 spend my time, whatever time I had with seeing what happened in New York and in fact that was fascinating because the first night we, on the train going down there was a couple who had been holidaying or something. And they started to talk to us and said, "What are you going to do when you get to New York?" and we said, "Oh, we don't know. We'll find a hotel or something," and they said, "No, we'll take you to one , we'll take you to one." And they took me to, they took us to the Hotel Commodore which

20:30 I think is on 42nd street. So, we had what two or three nights there and the first night we thought we wanted to see the Rockettes at Radio city music hall. So, off we went but we found that the Radio City music hall has a stage show including the Rockettes or whatever for the first half of the programme. The second half of the programme was the top

21:00 movie that was on at the time. But we got there in the middle. There was only the movie left and we thought, "Hell, we haven't come to New York to go to the movies," so we turned away and standing outside was a fellow and he said, "Hi, I'm Tom Waring, the brother of Fred Waring, the band leader, you know?" Now, I don't know if you've ever heard of Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians but it was a very special band, American band

21:30 before the war and also after the war and they used to have a radio programme here, that was a recorded one which was broadcast every Saturday night you see and we thought, "What!", a young fellow claiming to be the brother of a famous band leader. And we sort of looked at him with suspicion. And he says, "Listen, Fred has a party every Friday night at his studios and we'd like you to come. I'd

22:00 like you to come." And we said, and this will start to amaze you, we said, "Well, as a matter of fact Fritz Kraza [?] was playing at the Carnegie Hall tomorrow night and we were hoping to get tickets for it, so you know we'd rather try and do that." "Oh, too bad, too bad, okay. What are you doing now?" We said, "Well, nothing. We wanted to see the Rockettes but we were late." And he said, "Well, Fred has a, has a show every night, which is

22:30 repeated at the west coast at eleven o clock. So, would you like to see that?" We thought, "Yeah, all right." And we were still walking along with this fellow, still very wary about it you see, until we came to a little theatre which had NBC [National Broadcasting Corporation] on it and he walks in, nods at the guy on the door and we go in and sit in the front row you see and I thought this fellow is Fred's Waring's, Tom Waring the brother of Fred Waring the band leader you see. So, we see this show which

23:00 is a forty five minute show and that was sponsored by Lucky Strike. We'd heard of all the American ads on Lucky Strikes all through it. But then he said to me, he said, "Well, listen fellows. How long are you here for?." And we said, "Well, we'll be here tomorrow and perhaps the following night." He said, "Well, is there any show that you'd like to see because if you do tell me and I'll fix it for you." And you know what we wanted to see the following night after Fritz Kraza?

23:30 Gypsy Rose Lee was, was in a show you see. And so we mention this and he says, "Okay, just go to the box office and say a couple of tickets from Tom Waring and you're in." So, we say Fritz Kraza the first night in the New York Philharmonic. The second night we front up to Gypsy Rose Lee's show which was a variety show of course with not

24:00 just Gypsy Rose Lee as a stripper, a couple of others as well. But you wouldn't believe this. When we got in. We were about, oh I don't know, ten or twelve rows back. Suddenly, in walks the Duke and Duchess of Windsor. I bet they didn't go and see Fritz Kraza night before. And the whole theatre erupted. It was totally embarrassing. You know uproar.

24:30 There were, they sat about six rows from the front, the guys behind or the people in front were staring

straight at them like that you know. The fellow behind had seen a friend in the audience and he started going, “Hey, hey, hey!” It was, we don’t believe it. How can people behave like this and anyway,

25:00 when the show was finishing they left half a minute before it finished and so we were spared all this terrible embarrassment for, they say well you’re not going to meet her, well would have been like with them leaving with the mob. So, that was that. It’s quite a good show I must say. The next week we were back down there again and we caught up with Tom Waring again and he said, “Oh fellows, I’ll

25:30 take you to the Store Club for lunch.” And now the Store Club is where all the celebrities went you see and he seemed to know everybody in New York, this fellow so we get to the Store Club and he says, “Oh, now who’s here? Oh, here’s the comedian who was in that show that you went to last week, I’ll introduce you.” And so we go over and he introduces us to this fellow and I said, “Oh, we saw your show last week.” “Oh, you did? Oh, good. What night?”

26:00 I said, whatever it was and he said, “Did you see the Duke and Duchess of Windsor there?” I thought jeepers creepers and I said, “Yeah, how could we possibly miss them?.” This was my introduction to New York and the rest of the time after these, we went to a few nightclubs and that’s when I first met Duke Wellington. We went to, he was playing at one place, that was fantastic. He even signed an autograph for me on, on the menu and I

26:30 can’t, oh I’ve lost it. The way these autographs on celebrities like that gave these days would be worth quite a lot of money because it said, ‘oh good luck Aussie’ or something on it and with a signature. So, we had a great time in New York. Actually, the second week we went down we were supposed to go to Boston but we went back to New York instead, that was when the Mrs Roosevelt was

27:00 asked to re-dedicate the Anzac memorial gardens which is part of the Rockefeller centre. It’s on the, there was a series of these, there’s the big skyscraper and a couple of smaller buildings and on the roof of one of those there were gardens. The Anzac memorial gardens and they were re-dedicated each year and we were, we were asked that if any Australians that were in New York would like to turn up for this particular

27:30 ceremony so that was quite interesting. And Tom Waring, of course, we suddenly found that America with tea it was hopeless. First there were teabags which I cannot stand. But they’d come along in a lukewarm cup of water you see and we used to, Tom we went out with a couple of times with Tom and I, we’d say, “Now listen, we want two teabags in the cup and pour boiling water on it”, you

28:00 see. And he used to say, used to get, say “Ah, you Aussie jerks,” as he called us. And we said when this, when this ceremony was over and we were all asked to go back to the Anzac Club so we said to Tom, “would you like to come?”, you see. And, “Yeah, yeah.” So, I said, “Well, now we’re going to get you a decent cup of tea, see what it’s about,” and I said, “Now, what do you like? Do you want milk or sugar

28:30 or anything in it?” “No, no as it comes,” and of course that’s a, you know what they would do, they’d exaggerate this and of course it was a very, very strong cup of tea. And he said, “You told me it would be strong but I didn’t except it to leap out of the cup at me.” So, that was Tom Waring and that was our introduction to New York but the other friends on this, that stayed at the Anzac Club, met up with a, with a

29:00 wife of a wealthy publisher, Stevie Heffner and they were in a nightclub with her. And we’d just happened to blow in to this nightclub and saw all these fellows and went and talked to them and were introduced to Stevie you see. And when we got back to the camp they told us that Stevie had, she was really part of the support for the Anzac Club

29:30 but she had an apartment on Park Avenue and she used to entertain Australian servicemen, particularly, not just Australians and they stayed with her. And she’d take them out to a different nightclub every night and pay for it. And, but that comes a little bit later because I met up with her myself in New York the following year. But that was our introduction to America. But then we embarked on

30:00 a…

What became of Tom Waring?

I don’t know. I didn’t hear about him after, after the, after our first time here. I mean Tom was a, a musician in his own right. He played the piano but he wasn’t part of his brother’s band.

Was this a common thing for Australians to be adopted by…?

Oh, yes most hospitable, all over America, because when we come to, to RF [Reserve Forces] transport command then you’ll learn what

30:30 hospitality is all about but the, so we were …

Why was there a difference between the civilian population, the way they treated you and the American…?

The army? Oh, well it was different, I think. The American population treated their own servicemen just the same as anyone else. But we were, we were different

31:00 and there as this thing called the Anzac Club in New York which was organised by a, an expatriate Australian and but she had, and she'd married well or someone. She certainly knew New York very well and they'd got in a lot of these people like Stevie Heffner to help entertain Australian servicemen or any servicemen really but particularly Australian and New Zealand of course.

Can you tell us about the Anzac

31:30 **Club? What it was like and what happened there?**

Well, I didn't go there much well I did actually. We went there on this occasion because, as I said, my friend and I wanted to mix with the Americans, not with Australians. So only the first time I went to the American, to the Anzac Club was with - on this occasion as I've just mentioned and after the dedication or re-dedication of the Anzac memorial gardens. But I do know that

32:00 it's possibly that time, they, one of the American women came around and said look, "We've got to turn on a special meal for somebody, an Australian. Now what's a typical, what's typical Australian?" And she said, "And don't talk about steaks because we don't have any. And don't talk about passionfruit either because we don't know what that is." And there you are because I mean America was

32:30 rationed of course.

Was that Anzac Day in particular?

No, no, no, no. We were, this was, we were there in July I guess.

You set off across the Atlantic in an X-banana boat?

That's right. That was fascinating because we had, we got on board it was, it was, no it wasn't July it was late June. The temperature was about 92

33:00 Fahrenheit and so was the humidity. It was frightful. And as soon as we got on board that thing we stripped off and put on what we called our tropical uniform. It's shorts and open neck shirt and watched the rest of whoever coming on board. Now on this occasion there were 15 officers and 50 sergeants and we were joined by about 4000 American

33:30 GIs [Government Issue- US soldier] with their officers. Fifty American nurses and a number of English girls that had been evacuated to Canada during the war that were now returning home. And so the sergeants had one of the dining rooms, all their bunks were in there. They had

34:00 a like, they could walk outside on to a deck you know, they weren't way down in the, down in the depths of the ship. We were in cabins which had been turned in to ten booth cabins and not really comfortable in fact as soon as the sea got choppy the water came in through the porthole and we had that much water all the way across the Atlantic

34:30 on the deck of our cabin and to get to your, if you were, don't go over there, you had to come in, stand on the step on the door, climb on to a bunk and go across like that but there's an American major who was in charge of this ship. And he had directed that there had to be an Australian officer with the sergeants all of the time. Don't know what we were supposed to do to, lead the panic

35:00 probably but so you know we were rostered to, to just go down there and stay with them you see but when night time came I'd go out on the deck you see and just stand there and just watch the sea or the rest of the convoy. And some of these GIs would start coming along to talk to me you see and they were worried about England, you know. They were obviously going to some uncivilised place

35:30 because Americans are totally ignorant about anything else but America and half of them are ignorant about what goes on in America has been my experience. And they'd come up to me and start, "What's it like in England?" You see and now I'd never been to England naturally but I mean I knew a hell of a lot more than they did and I'd sort of say this and that. Oh, by the way, on the embarkation, when the American nurses came on board, they had grey coats on, tin hats on their head and a

36:00 pack on their back in all this intense heat and humidity of New York. And we looked at this with great astonishment. And of course, they were classified as officers so we mixed with them and of course one of the first things I said to them, we saw you come on board, "What the hell did you have in that pack on your back?" "Oh, that was a tent, a portable tent." And we thought you're going to England, and they were

36:30 going to American hospitals in England. I mean their own individual tents. I thought this is crazy. Anyway, getting back to these GIs that we come upon, they would start talking to me, "What's it like in England", well I've never been there but you know I'd say this that, and all the rest of it, and talk to them. Now, I had on an open neck shirt with an epilate, and a thin pilot officer

37:00 stripe, of course the sergeants had sergeant strips on their, on their sleeves. I was different, I wasn't a sergeant and one day this GI said, said to me, "Say brother, what's your rank?" And I said, "I'm a pilot. Well, it's the equivalent of your second lieutenant." And I've never seen such a horror. "Oh, jeez sir we're terribly sorry. We've been talking to you like this, sir.

37:30 We didn't know you were an officer." And I thought, forget it, you were trying to get information. I was

trying to give it you. “Oh, but we couldn’t talk to our officers like this, sir, no.” And I thought what sort of a flaming outfit is this? This is what I mean. Now, I sort of calmed them all down and said you know, “Oh, I’m happy to talk to you,” and so on. The major had his officers up there, up the top. The nurses who were, who were

38:00 also officers were way down in the bowels of the ship. Well, halfway across the Atlantic he got the impression the morale wasn’t so hot with these GIs and he thought it was a bit rough that the women were down there and the men were up there so they swapped over half way across the Atlantic. But he thought, “Now the thing to do to get some morale going is to send the women around all the men, you see.” So, you can imagine our sergeant said, “Beaut, bring them in.” Do you know what the GIs said? “Oh, we don’t want to

38:30 see them. They’re arses. We can’t talk to them, no we don’t want to see them.” And they never went there. Now, that’s what I mean about the American army. Now, my impression of the army was appalling, you know, we’d also seen an act of total brutality in a Pennsylvanian station where an American officer was beating up a GI in uniform. Beating him up, picking him and chucking him against and iron girder. So, my view

39:00 of the Americans and their damn army was not very, very good because we were in total contrast to them of course. I mean we were Australians which would have been different but also we were in the air force which is even more relaxed. But that was our experience of going across the Atlantic and that took 13 days but so, anyway we landed in Scotland, went overnight to Brighton

39:30 and there we were in England.

What impression did you make on the American girls on the boat?

Oh, we were very friendly with them, the nurses. They were, they were very pleasant people, you know. Some of these English girls too of course were now getting in to their late teens. No, we had a pleasant, that part of was pleasant except I know I sat at the table with a

40:00 major, this major for meals and of course they were Southerners these people. And they were, it was a pioneer battalion or regiment or something so I suppose I can’t complain too much about their ignorance and so on but I didn’t think the major was too bright either frankly but, but especially you know, “Send the women around. Cheer up

40:30 them. Show them a bit of skirt.”

Tape 5

00:33 **Can you tell me about your first impressions of arriving in, you arrived in Scotland. What were your first impressions of the UK?**

Well, the first thing we saw was the, do you know anything about Scotland? For example the history. There’s a big fin that sticks up way down called, Alsa Craig. It’s like a sugar loaf. And

01:00 the first thing I think we saw and we thought, crikey that’s a very unusual formation and then of course we went further up the coast and finished up at Ardnamurchan which is near Glenelg and I suppose we went by train to Glasgow. And I suppose we were a bit surprised at the smallness of the carriages, you know,

01:30 compared with what we’d seen out here. I think we had, no I was trying to remember. We must have travelled overnight, that’s right, because I think in Glasgow, the streets of Glasgow was a pretty rough tough time in those days. There seemed to be drugs everywhere, not that we saw them but you could hear them, hear them in the streets and crashes and so on and so on and you thought, this is a pretty tough place,

02:00 this is, as it was. I gather it’s very civilised now. No? Alright. Anyway, we, we piled in to the train and we travelled overnight but I seem to remember and I don’t quite understand how this came about but it might have been on a subsequent train journey. I know we went through Wigan and you could see, this is the industrial North of England and seeing all the terraced houses

02:30 and so on which looked totally uninviting of course. And which were and still are, if any of them are left. But of course when you get out in to the countryside it was lovely.

What was the wartime atmosphere like in England?

Well, the trains were terrible of course and always totally overcrowded and always

03:00 very, very late. They were never on schedule. And the railway stations were the combination of smoke, of course because they were all steam trains and fish, you know you had that, that smell of, of fish which is, plus the smoke. So, I’ll never forget that sort of a smell. But we travelled overnight

03:30 to Euston and of course we didn't know Euston or Waterloo or any of the other terminals. As far as we were concerned it was London you see. So, we arrived in at Euston and we, and we've stopped and we peer out of the window and say, "Is this London?" "Yeah, London, Euston." So, we all had breakfast in some RAF place near Euston station and then we were piled in to a

04:00 bus and that was interesting because you went past a lot of places that you'd heard of, Baker street to start off with, Piccadilly. We got past Buckingham Palace and so on and so forth until we arrived at Victoria and then we, well we went in to a train there and we were a bit surprised that it was electric from then on to Brighton. That didn't take very long. You, had to go

04:30 in another bus and we passed the Brighton pavilion, are you familiar with Brighton at all? You know it was a very oriental structure which was constructed by the Prince Regent you know and you'd say, "What on earth is that?" Well, then the sergeants were put in to the Metropole Hotel and the officers in to the Royal Albion which is, both of them are on the front.

05:00 And that was, that was all very pleasant.

How much evidence of the war was in these places you saw in London and Brighton?

Not much in Brighton. There was, there was damage there alright but not a great deal. In London, what we saw was not much in evidence, that and I saw later when I went up there because the East end that got thumped

05:30 mostly of course and most of the damage that you'd see was in the city end of the, of London. Although it was everywhere else but it wasn't terribly apparent because I had an uncle and aunty in London on Wimbledon, that was there, they were there throughout the war but, and I took a fairly early

06:00 opportunity to go up and visit them but well, Brighton was very pleasant naturally. And all we were doing there is, well we were being kitted out if we wanted new uniforms and that was a good racket you know because our uniforms were made in I suppose Commonwealth clothing factories and you wouldn't say they were the greatest piece of tailoring. And I wasn't

06:30 bright enough or green enough to push for this because you know, fellows would put their jackets on and, no that's too small. So, they'd get one specially made and the RAAF tailors in London were in Saville Row, Carson and Waugh and they did get a nice uniform out of this and the, of course we had fairly dark [UNCLEAR]. What they were using at Carselle and

07:00 Waugh, I suppose was but a lot of a was a whip cord kind of material and slightly lighter, very attractive actually. So, we were doing that and, and more or less becoming acquainted with what was required of the RAF and so on. But then they asked us if we had any particular choices as to what command we would go in to. Well, as I indicated before, I was always interested in coastal command and I

07:30 was fortunate enough that they accepted that.

What were the preferences? What did the majority of people in that course want to do?

Well, I don't think they'd had much choice actually. Some of them might have wanted to go on to a fighter, fighter squadron but I don't know. I mean my friends who were all navigators of course had opted for

08:00 coastal command. So, what happened to the others I don't know but I know there were a lot that came across on the, with me, most of them went in to bomber command. In fact I was looking at, when I was looking at those pictures earlier on to see what might be of interest, some of them I hadn't realised I had and there's, I think it was taken at Nhill of our course. And I looked through that and I saw one guy who particularly had been a friend of

08:30 mine. He went in to bomber command. I lost touch with him until I looked at the war memorial and found that he was killed in action and probably, I was reflecting at that time, how many in that photograph ever came back to Australia. And if they'd gone in to bomber command a lot of them certainly wouldn't have.

How much did the respective losses in each of the different commands influence people's decision or your own decision to join coastal command?

09:00 Well, it could have influenced people I suppose, because I suppose everybody knew that bomber command losses were very heavy. But mind you some areas of coastal command, the attrition rate was just as high. These Beaufighters that were shooting up on convoys or dropping torpedos on them and so on, some of that, the attrition rate was very, very heavy. Perhaps a dozen aircraft would go out and five would be shot down

09:30 which is a pretty high attrition rate. It probably was, certainly not as high as that in bomber command but more were going out and of course there were more in the aircraft that were shot down.

It's fair to say that these days coastal command is lesser well known than bomber command. How much did you know about the activities of coastal command before you opted to join it?

Well, I knew that their ambition in life was the hunt for U-boats of course and I think that,

10:00 that was very, very important, particularly in the early stages of the war and that's why I said earlier on that when the RAF were getting Liberators. They went first of all to bomber command and I think that, that was wrong because the Liberators had the best range of any aircraft apart from Catalinas in the RAF. But of course a Liberator was able to carry a much heavier bomb load or depth charge low actually

10:30 and I think that they should have had them much earlier because it was far more important to make sure that the convoys got across to the UK than it was to blast the hell out of the German cities at that time. Of course, bomber command was really the only allied force that was inflicting any damage at all on Germany for a long, long time. It was the only area where we were really retaliating. The

11:00 most of the rest of it was defensive particularly in the western desert to start off with although eventually of course we went, North Africa was taken by the allies but bomber command was inflicting real damage on Germany. And it was trying to attack obviously the industrial areas of Germany, although later on it got a little bit more widespread than that. But I

11:30 don't think there, I couldn't, I can't imagine a lot of enthusiasm for people to go in to bomber command, after all when you, when you're hearing as you're hearing in the reports that Düsseldorf was attacked by five hundred aircraft. There are 15 missing or something like that you start thinking, "Mmm, this is not very good

12:00 is it?" You see when we say missing that means that they didn't know what happened to them. A lot of them staggered back and crashed on landing and killed people. That doesn't, that didn't come out in the statistics about how many of that aircraft are missing. So, frankly it wasn't a very attractive scenario. It might have been lovely to think right we're hitting Germany now. We're belting the hell out of them and so on and I'm part of it but there's a hell of a risk in

12:30 it as well so I'm being perfectly honest about this. Coastal command had losses of course, particularly Sunderlands flying in the Bay of Biscay because they were JU 88s [German bombers] stationed at Brest and their mission in life was to knock out these Frame Boats [boats under construction], mind you the Sunderland could give a good account of itself although they only had .303 calibre machine guns. They

13:00 had a hell of a lot of them on board in turrets and sticking out of side windows and everything else. I think at one time they were known as the flying porcupine and they were able to, I mean there's the famous attack of 8 JU 88s on one Sunderland. And it was alleged anyway that the Sunderland shot down five of them and managed to stagger back, not quite intact, but stagger home.

Where were you when you first

13:30 **laid eyes on the Sunderland?**

Up in the north of Scotland at the operational training unit at a place called Alness which is near Invergordon and 35 miles on the north of Inverness.

What did you think of the plane the first time you got in to…?

Pretty big. Huge in fact. Two decks and so on and so forth.

Can you describe a little bit about what

14:00 **the set up of the Sunderland was? How the Sunderland was laid out for us?**

Well, down below on the lower level there was a, where we had a, that's where you got in to the fort turret but you had a what they called the ward room with bunks in it and cooking facilities and so on and then. And there's a lot of open space on

14:30 the half part of the hull, you crawled up a ladder and you were on the flight deck and you had the two pilots in the front, you had a navigator coming back on the side of the long table up against the fuselage, they were the radio operators. Oh, and the engineers, the two engineers watching the instruments and the radio operator and the

15:00 radio operator and then you had gunners in the various turrets. But it was a big aircraft. It made a noise when it was flying too, I might say.

What did you particularly like or dislike about the Sunderland?

Well, we disliked the way you had to get on boards the things, particularly at Alness. Now, you'd go down, first of all you'd be briefed about what you, the

15:30 exercise was and you had to carry all of the equipment on board. You had to carry aerial cameras which are very heavy, all of my instruments that were portable you had to carry. You'd go up to a jetty and you'd get on a pinnace which would take you way down the lock and to a little, sort of a little barge or a landing area. So you'd get off that and then get in to a dingy,

16:00 a motorised dingy and then drive out to the aircraft. You'd get, you'd stay, you'd get on the aircraft and the engineers would start looking at everything, making sure that you know everything was going to work and they'd find something wrong with it, declare it unserviceable and you'd do that in reverse and this is winter time. Where did I get to, Alness? In December. My first December, my

16:30 the last station that I was on in, virtually the second last station I was on in Australia was Port Pirie in January and February when the temperature used to be, we're talking Fahrenheit, that's what it was then. It was 120 each day. We even clocked the temperature in a Fairy Battle. It was sitting on the tarmac one day, 168 degrees. Very, very hot. You flew in a pair of overalls and nothing

17:00 else. It was very hot indeed. So, when I found that I was posted to Alness for my first winter and I thought, but at least it was, had a white Anzac Daytmas, like hell we had a white Christmas. The temperature on Christmas day at Alness was fifty five degrees Fahrenheit but we did have another period. I mean the maximum temperature for a week was twenty seven degrees Fahrenheit, that's five below. I can remember going

17:30 down in to Inverness and they had emergency water tanks you know, for fire fighting and all the rest of it, wouldn't have done anybody much good. They were solid blocks of ice. It was very attractive, frost in all the trees and moonlight and so on and clear skies. It looked very attractive but brother was it cold.

How was the OT [Operational Training] set up at Alness?

Well, there was a big house where the

18:00 permanent staff were located, where the Nissen facilities [Nissen huts - tunnel shaped huts of corrugated iron with cement floor] were. But this was my first experience of Nissen huts in England. Now I'd been on three places before, Brighton, Sidmouth for the RAF officers school, Squires Gate near Blackpool and each of those, on each of those occasions and this was a hotel. So suddenly I'm in the north of Scotland

18:30 in a Nissan hut with a ablution block separate all galvanised iron and the showers were very, very rudimentary and they were all controlled from one thermostat, in one area. So you'd get in the shower and say, "Do I have to go," and you're standing out in front of the thermostat trying to turn it or warm it up or turn it down whichever it was in the freezing cold in the nude.

19:00 So, that was not very, very good. That was, that was the worst, the worst station from the point of view of facilities and so on that I was on. I mean it's all right in this big house where our mess facilities were, that was good.

Where were the flying boats stationed in relation to that house?

A damned long way away. You had to get on a bus to go to the end of

19:30 this jetty and they were all parked in the, in the loch which was heading down towards Invergordon which was a naval base actually, a long way away. But that was really the worst part of flying boats either, particularly on an OTU but even an operational base. They were usually parked out in the sea. It was usually lousy weather and so on and that was not

20:00 very good.

What other things didn't you particularly like about the flying boat, the Sunderland?

Well, everything else was reasonable enough. They were a fairly docile sort of an aircraft, you know they were fairly stable. There was plenty of room on them. The noise of the engines got you down occasionally, particularly when they were perhaps unsynchronised and you'd get a, you know, a pretty loud noise which was a bit irritating.

20:30 The fact that I only had a step to sit on which was really the way up in to the Astrodome that wasn't very comfortable. The Mark 5 Sunderlands which I talked about which had the twin wasp later they'd rearranged the navigation part of it and the navigator had a decent seat on those but I never saw one of those.

Can you talk about the astrodome and how you used that?

Well, that was just for taking astros, astro

21:00 shots or to get up on the main frame.

What did it look like and how did you…?

Looked like this, you know, a plastic dome and that was the escape hatch actually. Supposing you crashed in to the sea or something well then you'd have to clamour up through that using my step and probably my table. And then up through that and that was one of the exercises we had to do was how quickly could you get up through those, the

21:30 whole crew.

How long did it take to get the crew out in an emergency?

Not very long but of course we were doing this in a training capacity and we were doing it on the ground. We never had to do it fortunately at sea where anything could have happened.

What other exercises did they put you through in the OTU at Alness?

Oh, well first of all the new skipper who'd been a second dicky on the

22:00 squadron before that had to do these circuits and bumps and checkout on the Sunderland. And most of the rest of the crew like the navigator for example and the gunners and the way the operators and the engineers together, I'm talking about, never flew it, never flew in that phase of training there would be a radio operator and

22:30 an engineer would probably get up too for training purposes. So, that would last for a while but when they started to fly the things then we had an assortment of things to do. First of all, it would be navigation exercises, there'd be firing exercises and more particularly dropping depth charges. Now, in coastal command you'd have a stick of depth charges

23:00 and the theory was you had come down to 50 feet and go under the submarine and drop the, the depth charges. Now, I guess there were two reasons for coming down to that level because it was not done by any bomb site it was done by the pilot just judgement. And he had the bomb tilt on his control column so he did all of that.

23:30 First of all, obviously there was a likelihood that you'd straddle with the submarine at that height but also if you were much higher up, the explosion of the depth charge if you, the explosion would be going like that and you mightn't have got through it you see and it could have destabilised you completely. So, we had a lot of that of course of practising

24:00 dropping or we were dropping, all they did was to drop two practice bombs at the extreme limits of the stick of depth charges. So, we had a lot of that. But for fires, I was concerned, of course, most of the things really, the exercises we had to do we practised doing as particular sorts of search patrols like, and the main one was what they call a

24:30 cross over patrol. You'd go off to a certain point that you'd go up like that, like that, like that, like that and so on. Another thing was a square search where you start at one point and wind it all of the time. That was a fairly, difficult one because each, you'd go round like this you see, getting further and further out. Then on each heading you had to find out what the wind speed and direction was because if you were trying to do it accurately it had to

25:00 be very, you know, mathematical as it were. And then there was just the exercise of going and finding something.

What special challenges did it hold for a navigator this flying boat?

Well, my challenge was I could never finish up the way I should have and I think the reason for that was the second pilot you see, but we got rid of him and …

How, how

25:30 **long did it take you to sort out the problem you were having with that second pilot? And how did you do it?**

It took a while actually. I was a bit slow off the mark you know. First of all I thought that I might be at fault. Now one thing which I suppose really put me on the right track was our group headquarters, this was a training group

26:00 but the headquarters was down in, where was it, in Inverness and we'd go, we might go down there just to see what they were up, just as an expedition as it were. And when I talked to them about the fact that I wasn't, didn't seem to be finishing up where I should be they said, "Well, look next time you go out on an exercise let us know in advance and we'll track you by radar and we'll give you a,

26:30 a print out of where you actually went." And it was a cross over patrol that never even looked like a cross over patrol. It was hopeless and you know I studied it with a great deal of interest but then I thought well you know I'm supposed to be a good navigator and that's when I, belatedly, started watching the pilots and seeing if they could do what they should do. That is keep a steady course, a steady altitude and a steady speed

27:00 because if you can't, if they don't do that, no use trying to navigate.

How did you, having to keep an eye on the pilot effect the relations between the crew in that training period?

Oh, don't think it worried them. It was, you know, in retrospect the skipper should have been watching him, you know, not just me. He should have been watching me. But you see this is, you get more experience the longer you fly.

27:30 Now he'd had six months I think on, on the squadron as the second dicky and he wouldn't have to do much. He'd just fly it in the air. He never even landed it, the second dickies wouldn't and he'd just be snoozing around and they might be on autopilot a lot of that time as well. And I suppose that he had a, on whatever crew he was on he had a competent navigator and nothing ever seemed to go wrong so he didn't have to worry and I suppose to some

28:00 extent the skipper was like that because everybody else was working properly maybe. So, when he was a skipper I believed, when I thought about this in later life, he should have been watching too. See I had, the navigator has got a repeat of the compass and a repeat of the air speed indicator so I mean he can, he can what's going on, don't think we had an

28:30 alter meter, that was, I wouldn't perhaps have known the, the altitude. Mind you, I had to know it to work out the true, true ground speed because the higher up you go, if you're, say you're used to a crew that's a 125 knots, say that's at ground level. By the time you get up to an altitude it increases because the air is thinner. Don't know how, if you know how that altimeter

29:00 works on those aircrafts? It worked by torpedo heads sticking out in front, one's closed, one's open and the difference in the pressure translated to an ibson that gives you your air speed. I hope it's a lot more sophisticated these days.

How did you eventually confront the second pilot?

I didn't confront him at all. When we landed I said to Dennis, who

29:30 was the skipper, I said, "Dennis I've been, I've been worried about my navigation and I've decided to watch the second pilot." I didn't accuse him of not being able to fly, I watched him too I might say but, and I said, "Look he's totally hopeless. He can't maintain altitude. His air speed fluctuates by about

30:00 15 to 20 knots. He wanders off course, starboard and port. I am not going to fly with this crew if you keep that second pilot and it was up to him. So, he went and, to I suppose the chief flying instructor or something or other and told him that and they accepted it without any argument. I think. I don't know. All I knew was that he'd gone

30:30 and we got a new one who was a flight lieutenant this time.

This was Jackie Reed?

That's right.

Can you tell us a bit about the members of the crew that were formed when the final crew that was formed after this bloke left?

Yes, we had, let me see if I can get it in perspective. Okay, the skipper was an Englishman, the second pilot was from Jamaica, the navigator was Australia, then we

31:00 had a, the rest were of. We had a Newfoundland gunner, that's right. But the rest were from various parts of the British Isles, a couple of Londoners in fact most of them were come to think of it. Because this is my first crew you see. We had a different crew in the Wellington. I can tell you that in more detail. No, it was a variety of, from around the British isles with different accents and so on.

How did you get on with

31:30 **the various different types of background within that crew?**

Oh, very well. Yeah, very well. We were, you know, a crew is a crew and you, you if you don't get on well with them you're not going to get very far. Oh, no they were decent blokes. I mean the Jamaican was all right, the only trouble is he couldn't fly an aircraft. Well, I didn't think he could.

What was the relationship like between the Englishman, the colonial in the RAF in those days?

32:00 Oh, very, very good. I mean, you find a lot of criticism of the Empire Air Training Scheme which, of course I was part of but when they went to Britain there were Australians crews and squadrons so called. But none of those were totally Australians because for one thing we weren't training flight engineers in Australia so you're likely to get a flight engineer

32:30 from somewhere else. Not, there's another complaint that's been made by people who've written about it that the, that the RAAF didn't have too much authority from the point of view. They didn't get very senior positions and so on, well a lot did actually but, and I suppose the fact that it was RAF, it wasn't, you weren't, you were in a sense

33:00 losing your identity but I never lost my identity and no one else that was in the RAAF lost their identity. They were Australians and I don't think you'll find too many if you're involved in any of this where they would say, "Oh, god I couldn't stand being in the RAAF, it was a terrible outfit." I found it a very, very rewarding experience. I found the attitude of the RAF was very good and

33:30 also it was a great joy to mix with all these other people because the first time I flew an operation in a Sunderland, the navigator was screened for the first two or three trips to gain experience. Now, this is the sort of crew that we had on that Sunderland. We had, with the, normally there was only one navigator on the Sunderland but of course they'll be two this time. We had an Englishman

34:00 who was the skipper. We had a New Zealand second pilot. We had a American, third pilot who was in US army air force uniform, we had, what else did we have? Where did the engineers come from? They were English, I think. We had a New Zealand gunner, that's right. And the rest were from various parts of

the, of the British

34:30 Isles. Now, just skipping right ahead just to, as we're on this subject, to the Wellington crew which was only six. We had an Englishman, a Yorkshire man skipper. We had a New Zealand 2nd skipper, an Australian navigator and then we had a Welshman, a Jordie and a guy from Liverpool and that was an interesting combination. But you see the, the great range of people that you meet.

35:00 The, the American second pilot or third pilot actually. I mean there were four people flying that aircraft. There were 3 pilots and George. So, and one navigator normally because all coastal command navigators, sorry all coastal command pilots are doing this sort of

35:30 exercise or operation had to go through the GR course and for pilots that was extended by four weeks and that was to give them intense navigational training so theoretically a Sunderland pilot or skipper would be able to navigate that air craft. Now most, most navigators of course wouldn't trust the pilot. But I know the first one that I flew on, the first

36:00 Sunderland which was not our crew. He was a very conscientious one and of course he was used to only having one navigator so he'd always come down and see what was going on and check the log or the plotting chart or whatever, and also relieve the navigator who'd have half an hour downstairs in the ward room having a hot meal you see. So, it wasn't as if

36:30 but mostly you've got one navigator doing all the work. Now I was, when I went out with these, or this crew for the first exercise of operation he did all the work and I watched until he went down for his, his food and I'd take over for half an hour and then the second time it was reversed. I'd do al the work and he'd watch me and relieve

37:00 me when I wanted something to eat. And I'd have to say that well from those, from those operations than anywhere else, any time else because I was very fortunate. He was a meticulous navigator, for example, I think I've said earlier how you find the wind speed and direction. You do this cot hat thing and you just add on two minutes. He didn't, and you just did your ordinary

37:30 plotting line with adding two minutes but that's, as I found, a fairly sloppy way of doing it because two minutes this way and that way with different air speeds and directions can effect your track. And he'd plotted everything and so, it was a very, very sensible way to get you in to operations.

What was the purpose of those operations, apart

38:00 **from training you, where were you going and what were you doing?**

Well, the first one was convoy escort. We had to fly out in to the Atlantic and fly a convoy and then you'd, the first thing you'd do was to signal them by signal lamp or Aldis lamp [used for Morse Code] and ask where the senior naval officer was, which ship he was in. So, you'd find him and then you'd ask what he'd want you to do

38:30 particularly. And, of course naval signallers with Aldis lamps are very fast whereas air force, well we're not trained on Aldis lamp. We're only trained on, you know, what mors signal. So, everybody would get up the front and the navy would of course accommodate us by doing it fairly slowly and we'd all sit out there trying to work out what the devil they wanted us to do. It might be say, well

39:00 there was a suspicious activity, so many miles out to starboard or something would you go and investigate that? Or it might be just circle the convoy until you had to go back to base. The next one was just a, well just a flying out and looking for submarines, not escorting a convoy but just doing it, a special, searching a particular area.

In

39:30 **communicating with an Aldis lamp was that in Morse code?**

Yes, yes. No, there was none of this business that you see in movies where they call up on the, the Americans might but RAF didn't.

Did you come in to contact with a submarine during that time?

No, as you'll see in that book. There was a photograph of a submarines at Londonderry. They're the only submarines I ever saw it says in that. That's why

40:00 there's nothing terribly exciting that I can tell you operationally in this account.

Tape 6

00:33 **Yes, could you talk us through the navigation drill, you know from the, perhaps on that first mission, takes us through what your role is and how, your briefing and walk us through that first patrol.**

Well, first of all the navigator would have to try and adhere to the navigation drill that had been laid down by this professor and simply it was

01:00 that you had to take four drifts an hour depending you know they just worked out how far you might be going off from the course you set, find one wing an hour, wind speed and direction, and get a fix, a positive fix at least once an hour. Now that was pretty impossible to get a positive fix. There was nothing, we were out at sea. You could get a

01:30 long range radio fix and I suppose the stations were at the extreme ends of the United Kingdom but that meant that you had to transmit a steady note and the further out you get in to the Atlantic, the less accurate it is because you know because the lines are going further, further and further out at the more acute angle. So,

02:00 that, that was not a very easy thing to do to get that extra fix. Later on when they had long range G, I don't know if you know what a G is but very accurate G is but it's short range but the longer version of G is Laran which is, gives you a much greater range of, not necessarily madly accurate the further out

02:30 it got. But mainly you had to rely on dead reckoning which was finding the wind speed and direction all of the time, employing that carefully on your plotting chart.

You said there were some training accidents before you got up there, can you talk about how that effected you and what happened in those instances?

Well, the training accidents at the OTU was that we, two Sunderland

03:00 crashed in one night in night flying, mainly because there was a dead, flat calm and it's very difficult to, on a flying boat to exactly decide your height as you're coming in to land and that's quite horrific, two Sunderlands going in at once. We were, oh still too young and all the rest of it and I don't think, it didn't effect me at all, you

03:30 know it was just nasty that there'd been all these crashes but you didn't think it would happen to you, you know but that was sort of the attitude of so many people, it won't happen to me and it didn't actually. But that's how a lot of people felt. You know, you thought it was pretty rough though. Two Sunderlands going in one night and twenty and fifteen, or twelve or fifteen people losing their lives.

Just a bit back while we're on the Sunderland, what was the endurance of the Sunderland?

04:00 Well, most of our patrols were about 12, to 12 and a half hours.

And during your navigation exercises how did, what did the navigation training consist of?

Oh, well by this time I was supposed to be fully trained, all I was doing was gaining experience by watching a more experienced navigator.

Can you take us

04:30 **through that first operation you went on?**

Well, I can't only tell you what my impressions were when we got to the convoy because it was fascinating to see from the air at great spread of ships in front of you with destroyers and so on at the side. It was quite a fascinating experience that was. The sight of the first convoy and also trying to make

05:00 the, find out what they wanted us to do of course.

Before you went on that mission or operation, in your briefing, how does the navigation briefing work for you before you depart?

Well, I suppose you know what the mission is and where you've got to go and you've then, part of

05:30 the briefing of course is the main officer who will tell you generally what the conditions are going to be like or what they're forecast to be like and give you a wind speed and direction where you start off from. And that's really the, from the navigator's point of view the most important thing. There might be other particular instructions about what to do

06:00 with a particular convoy but that's really the skipper's business to worry about - the navigator is just there to get him there, get the, the aircraft there.

What contingency did the navigator have if things went wrong?

In the sense that, you mean?

Well, perhaps an airport you're coming back to is got bad weather or fog, you might have to go somewhere else, or what alternates did you have?

Well, there might be an alternative, there'd be some alternative

06:30 base somewhere but let me see, where would you, we were flying out of Northern Ireland. Well, there was various Lochs there, I suppose the nearest one that I can think of off hand, of course Ireland's not

that big would be Lough Neagh which is near Belfast. We were on the other, on the western side. In fact we had to fly out to get,

07:00 get in to the Atlantic, we had to fly over neutral territory because there's a narrow strip of Southern Irish territory just, between where we were which was on Loch Irvin at the Northern Ireland and the Bay of Donegore which is, comes in like that from, oh that doesn't help much, oh yes it does, like that from the,

07:30 an indent in to the island of Ireland as it were. And there was about ten miles I suppose, strip which was Donegore but you had to fly over that. The, right at the extreme limit of the Northern Ireland at a place called Belleek there was a big, radio range station which was directed straight out in to Atlantic. A very powerful one.

08:00 So you could always get somewhere near that and get on and get a direct home from that.

Was there any particular concern of flying over the neutral territory of Ireland?

No idea. No idea. I mentioned that base and we're going to do another, do it anywhere else. I don't know. Don't know what they - I think that it, it probably wouldn't have been, wouldn't have been a great deal made of it,

08:30 because it was interesting because we were so close to the southern island. In fact, the nearest township of any consequence was called Pedigo and on your, when you had a day off, you'd get in to civvies and head for Pedigo. And there was a river that, you know, goes through Pedigo which is the

09:00 actual boundary. In fact it was featured Pedigo many years ago in a series that was, that was run on frontiers and Pedigo was mentioned. Now the first thing you'd do when you got to Pedigo was you'd go to the pub and the pub had all sorts of access to black market goods. I mean things were just as short in Southern Ireland as they were in the North, in many ways shorter I suppose. But they had things

09:30 like silk stockings they wore then, silk stockings and various other things which might be of interest, not to wear but and so you could go in and buy all of those and then you'd say, "Well now," and also of course it was a pub remember, then they'd say, "Now, how about eating?" "Oh, well there's an old lady over there that likes to feed the air crew,

10:00 go over there." So, we went over there, they have what we call tea you see and tea comprised three poached eggs to start with. Now, we were very, the RAF of course was rationed by stations but each mess that you paid money in to the mess fund and they could go and buy on the outside market anything that

10:30 was obviously not on rations to supplement the food that you got on in the mess. Well, 201s got in and had done a little bit more than they should have with their outside purchases. Because Northern Ireland was, it was a much easier place to live in than it was in the mainland of England on the - although they were both rationed the same way but here we are in a very rural area of Ireland so there's much more availability of things.

11:00 And they went a bit too far and so the RAF administration slapped down on them and we had to stick to our pretty basic rations which was powdered egg and all this sort of stuff. So, when you got over to Pedigo, three fried eggs or poached eggs to start with for tea, so alright we got through that you go back to the pub and they say, "Well," or she would have said, "Now, do you want supper?" "Yeah, alright we'll have supper."

11:30 So, go back to the pub and then a couple of hours only later, you can go back to this old dear and she'd say, "What would you like?" I said, "Well, a fried egg, a steak and fried eggs." "Uh?", she didn't quite get this fried egg stuff on steak and I explained, "Yeah, yeah." She said, "You mean you'd like me to do some steaks and some eggs separately." "No, no, you put it on the steak."

12:00 "Oh, all right." So, what turns up, a plate that size which you couldn't see it because there's a steak that size covering it and on top of that steak were four fried eggs, so going from powdered eggs to seven eggs within two or three hours, we did, we stuck to our task manfully. We got through it all right. But then of course you could not take a single thing out of Southern

12:30 Ireland. And they were desperately short themselves you see so with these people sneaking down from the north, if they'd bought things that they mightn't have been able to get in Northern Ireland because of rationing and so on. Well, obviously the customs people didn't like that and they would not let you take a thing out. In fact later on, when I was married and at another station in Northern Ireland. We went

13:00 over the border, my wife and I one day, and we bought a packet of jelly crisps which cost ten pence us or something and we had a hell of an argument to get those back in to. I think Northern Ireland with the customs fellow. Alright, Pedigo, this is, being Ireland, everything's arranged very neatly. There were two bridges over the river which was the border, only one was ever manned by a custom's official. So, your crew,

13:30 you'd send a member of your crew over the first bridge with nothing of course and if there was no

custom's official there he's say, "phwt." If there was he'd go to the other one. So, it was very well, very well organised. It was quite a treat to Pedigo I might say.

Any spies in the Irish republic that were possibly watching the operations?

Well,…

Or were you briefed on the

14:00 **possibility of security problems?**

No. No, no never. But later on, later, when I was on the next squadron which was also based in Northern Ireland. When I had leave, my wife and I went down to Dublin and well, the first thing you notice, not the first thing, one of the things you notice, there was a German embassy in Dublin with a Nazi swastikas [symbol of the Nazi party] and all the rest of it, it was plastered all over it. So, there could have been

14:30 something there but I don't think it was ever very, very serious. I mean alright, Southern Ireland wasn't in the war and my god they had a lot their inhabitants of were in the war, enormous number of Irishman joined the British army. In fact proportionally probably more so than the Northern Ireland which was part of the United Kingdom where there was no conscription, there was no conscription in Northern Ireland. You've got understand

15:00 perhaps why because of all the, you know, the horrible divisions that there are up there and if they'd started to conscript a lot of those that were sympathisers with Southern Ireland or even the more aggressive ones that you know, were, you know, they were hardy as the day. There would have been all hell to pay so there was no conscription in Northern Ireland but I mean we had, we met a lot of people in Southern Ireland and, you know, they couldn't have been

15:30 pleasanter. But that was later.

Your RAAF, in an RAF squadron how are you getting on with your counterparts from Britain?

Oh, very well, very well. I mean I was with an RAF crew and I was the only Australian in it and oh no that was, they were great.

What were the differences between the RAAF and the RAF at that time for you?

Well, I was only, my only

16:00 experience in the RAAF in Australia was training and I suppose there was a little more bullshit or that going on. There wasn't any of that in the RAF but you see, as I said, they were much closer to the war and all of that, you know, the nonsense that goes on in there through life which maybe worth something but which may not be. They didn't' have any time for that. No, I liked the RAF very

16:30 much.

What were the nicknames the RAAF called it? Or the RAF called Australians?

Oh, probably only Aussies, I think, you know. That's all. I don't think anything else, just Aussies. We had Australian of course on our, our shoulders. Don't know if there was any of this stuff about pommies or Aussies or anything else, you know, to me we were just mates together. But it's a different situation in a war, isn't it?

17:00 When you're, when you're in a crew where you've all got to cooperate and work together.

What was, what was the nickname of your pilot?

Dennis, he didn't have a nickname, no, no. No, just Dennis.

When you call instructions to him what did you call him?

Oh, you'd probably, navigator or skipper you might say that. Yes, I mean after all we were a

17:30 mixed crew you see. There were three officers in it. There was two pilots and myself. The rest were other ranks.

What was your nickname?

Nothing. Don't recall one at all. No, no. George.

George the auto pilot?

Yeah, that's right, getting confused with that.

When you were going on these operations and you talked of

18:00 **the difficulties of finding convoys, were there any occasions when you couldn't successfully complete, get back to the places that you had to get back to?**

No, I have to say I was not on very many operations for the simple reason as we will come to that, they had to find, this sea command was told to find a flying boat's crew to take part in special faring duties.

Before we come

18:30 **to that, how many operations were you able to go in?**

Only a couple, only a couple. We were not there very long.

And these ones that you did go on, did you ever engage the enemy at any time?

No, no, no, no. Didn't see anything, only ships. Ours.

What specifically was the role of the Sunderland in supporting the convoys?

Well, the Sunderland was if it located a, a submarine or dropped depth charges on us,

19:00 and certainly let the convoy know. There was a summary around and the stores would be racing up to the [UNCLEAR] and all the rest of it to drop depth charges on it as well. I'd hate to have been in a submarine.

From a navigation point of view, can you talk about the Atlantic gap?

Ah, well yes the, that's why I think the liberators should have gone in to Sunderland, into coastal command

19:30 earlier because they were operating from Canada, from the UK afterwards and from Iceland and they almost closed the gap but not completely. It wasn't closed completely until they had aircraft carriers of one sort or another accompanying convoys.

How far could you go out?

Well, we cruised at a 125 knots of course a knot is a nautical

20:00 mile per hour because all navigation is done in nautical miles and speeds in knots. Our, our, we were out twelve to twelve and a half hours, so let's say six months by 125 knots or a 125 nautical miles per hour, what's that make? 750 is it? About 750

20:30 miles out from Northern Ireland. That's about all.

How are you liaising with the engineers and the pilot regarding fuel consumption?

Well, that would come in to it I suppose somewhat because the engineers were watching the fuel gauges and the navigation role would be when

21:00 they were say, half way through the fuel, but could they afford to be half way through the fuel because getting back might take longer than coming out you see, depending on which way the wind was blowing. So, that was, our navigator would certainly be involved in that sort of a calculation.

What could you see out the window of your desk or office?

I couldn't see anything. I could see up a, I'm standing on the step and look

21:30 through the astrodome and as a matter of fact the navigator, another role of the navigator was that if he, if the aircraft was attacked he had to stand up and direct the pilot what to do. You know where's the, where's the enemy aircraft, what to do and then issue instructions about the manoeuvre, to, to avoid it. What it really meant was that you would, if you were attacked

22:00 when the, the enemy was within range you'd direct the pilot to corkscrew on the port or starboard and you'd get in ready for this and then say, "Go!" And then he'd go, phwt and start corkscrewing like this you see. So, that was another role of the navigator and then we had to do it only in exercises.

How manoeuvrable was the Sunderland?

Oh, quite manoeuvrable for a big wafty old thing. No, it's a good

22:30 aircraft, the Sunderland.

It was a big plane, can you describe the inside of it to us?

Oh, just huge, that's all. Well, I mean two decks with decent facilities on the lower deck and all the rest of it and a lot of empty space out there you see, but towards the rear of it. I can't really remember how they, how the gunners got to their posts you know. That I don't remember very well. I can tell you about a Mariner very,

23:00 very well. More so than even a Catalina but you know not so much the Sunderland.

You also had search and rescue duties, is that correct? Along the coastal command?

Oh, yes they were I suppose but…

But were you involved in any way with those?

No, no.

What, how did the Sunderland take part in those if you were to go and look for someone, what was the drill?

Well, I suppose you would drop them lifeboats you

23:30 see if you found them, and when I say not lifeboats but life rafts, you know, inflatable things which is what we would be using if we had to come down on the sea. Because a flying boat, you know it always sounds as if it's, well a flying boats all right, it can land on the sea. Well, it jolly well can't because you're likely to get, if it's a rough sea, then you landed on it, one of the floats is likely to be just written off and you turned,

24:00 turned total. In some respects it's safer to flop a land plane in to the sea rather than a flying boat because you've got these floats as I say, hanging down. Knock one off and poof.

What was your drill for landing out on the ocean if you had to be forced down?

Well, you'd try and, I think, I don't

24:30 know. I can't tell you that actually. You'll have to ask a pilot that. If you can find one that was flying in coastal command. I know if you landed that you had to all escape up through the astrodome and it automatically, the inflatable rafts and what not came in to operation and so on.

You didn't stay too long on Sunderlands. Can you tell us about the,

25:00 **your transfer to the transport command and…?**

Yes, because this is, this is where the war gets fascinating I think, for me. We were told that we would have to go to Alban which is on the west coast of Scotland, half way up, to take part in special ferry duties, that was all. So, we set off and when we got to Belfast on our way, we were diverted to Wig

25:30 Bay and told to pick up a Sunderland and fly it to Avon. So we immediately assumed that we're going to be ferrying Sunderlands somewhere and the likely and the likely place was West Africa where the Sunderland squadron based or India so that was what was going through our minds. So, we went to this Wig Bay which is in the south of Scotland near, not far from Stranraer which was a flying boat maintenance

26:00 base and one of the most lackadaisical stations you'll ever find in your life. We used to knock off every Tuesday afternoon and when their first sight of it, it wasn't their fault but they were a lot of Sunderlands. They'd have been brought ashore but they were lying over on, on the mainframe like that simply because a gale had hit them and when they were ashore and blown some of them over. That

26:30 didn't look terribly impressive. Anyway, they gave us a Sunderland direct to give an air test to and it was a beaut new Sunderland, seen it and we thought, "This is good if we can fly this somewhere we'll like this," so they said right, "Now tomorrow go to Avon." And I say as s a navigator, "Ah, well good, okay then where's a map?" "The map? We haven't got any maps." And I say, "Well, how the hell can I fly to Avon without a map?" And,

27:00 "Oh, oh wait a minute there's another one going up there tomorrow. You can take off about the same time and fuel mate on it." And here was I, naïve and inexperienced and so on and says, "Oh, well that's all right." So, off we set and we, we catch up with the Sunderland and we're flying up the West coast of Scotland together and it's a very rugged coast I might say and a navigator, particularly me,

27:30 won't stay where he is all the time. I do it still. And I thought, you know, then I suddenly thought, now wait a minute. I've got a plotting chart in my luggage, of the whole of the British isles. Now plotting chart is, only got rudimentary features on it. It's not good for map reading. It's not intended for that. It's for drawing lines on and so on. But it's better than nothing

28:00 and on that plotting chart when I've been on this squadron, I've plotted every lighthouse, every radio beacon, every radar beacon in the British Isles but I was only thinking of looking at the sea where if I could identify where we were off this Scottish coast. So I got it, I opened it out and I found there was a radar station at Oban and I said, "Switch on the radar." So, they switched on the radar and picked up the beacon, and I said,

28:30 "Home on to that, forget about the other Sunderland," I said, "Home on to that." So, we turned off, the other one followed us. It might have been that we were turning at the critical point and he had a map or he mightn't have had a map and he were following us. So, so we landed but he came in and he landed, we got to Obern and just circled around the sea. We were at looking at

29:00 it and seeing where we were going to land. He came straight in and landed. In addition, let's assume he didn't have a map, because the odds were that he didn't. But he'd probably done this before anyway because he was the squadron leader, Canadian squadron leader. But he'd taken off that day. Now, I've said, the air speed is determined by two tubes sticking out, torpedo heads, one's open, one's closed. Well, naturally when the aircraft is,

29:30 is on the sea, you put a cover over that closed bit. He took off with the cover still on. So, he had no air speed either. But he was an experienced pilot and he knew what he was doing I suppose and he landed. When we got in to the mess, he, we suddenly realised he might have something to do with what we were going to do, because he said, “Right, now you, you people, you’ve got report the Prestwick tomorrow and convert to

30:00 Mariners.” Now, this is the first thing we heard about it. Now, Prestwick is about 30, 39 miles south of Glasgow. It was the main trans-Atlantic base for ferrying aircraft or people, particularly VIPs [Very Important Person] across the Atlantic. Compared with an RAF station it was actually run by a civilian organisation called Scottish Aviation and it was very, very comfortable indeed. I had a single centrally heated room, about four hundred

30:30 yards away from the main area. And if I wanted to go to my room, I’d got to the desk and ask for transport and along would come a smartly dressed female in Scottish aviation uniform with a station wagon and drive me that distance. The food was so much superior to when I was in the RAF station and all of this came because VIPs were going through, through here you see. Now, of course our first reaction was, knowing

31:00 what Prestwick was, how the hell can we convert to Mariners at Prestwick? It’s a great big airdrome as it were. The landing, landing strips and so on. So, we were still puzzled by this. We didn’t have enough time to talk with this fellow. We just shot off to Prestwick and when we got to Prestwick we were told to report to a particular room the next morning. Now this is the first inclination we had of what we were going to do.

31:30 The Mariners, again were based down at Wig Bay so we, that’s where we converted to them. It was a fair way down the coast but nevertheless that was it. But all he said to us, this Canadian squadron leader was, he said, “Right, your destination is Norfolk Virginia and this is the route you’ll take.” He said, “Gibraltar, Bathurst in West Africa, the Gambia, Natale,

32:00 Brazil, Belem Brazil, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, Norfolk.” And our mouths dropped open. He said, “Now, your mission is to deliver a Mariner to the Americans. You’re to take no risks. You’ve got to get that there safely. No risks. If you’re tired, after a leg, you tell them you’re tired and take a day off.” Now can you imagine somebody saying that to you in the

32:30 middle of a war. We thought, you know, how could we have landed a job like this? But I mean as I said before, if you’re in the air force or the army or whatever you do what you’re told. That’s it. But we couldn’t believe it. And then we found out that the Americans had sent 18 Mariners to England under lease lend for the RAF to form a Mariner squadron. So, they formed the squadron but by

33:00 this time they were starting to get Liberators and they didn’t, they had, had flying boats because of the maintenance of them and all of this. So, they decided to disband the squadron and the Americans said well, if you’re going to use those Mariners, would you fly them back to us? So, they took five crews that had been in the Mariners’ squadron but they needed a sixth crew. So, we

33:30 were the ones that were picked. So there were 18 Mariners to be flown back to America by 6 crews which meant three trips. But why did we have to go that convoluted way, right down to the South Atlantic to get to America? Well, the Mariner wouldn’t fly directly across the Atlantic. It didn’t have the range, even with all these fuel tanks and so on. Anyway, it’s more difficult to fly east to west than west to east because of the

34:00 prevailing winds. So, normally the route would be to Reykjavik, Newfoundland, Norfolk. But this was late winter and there was lots of ice floating around in the harbour up at Reykjavik which wouldn’t have done the hull of the flying boat much good, that’s why we had to go this convoluted way. So, the first leg was to Gibraltar, now that meant flying over the Bay of Biscay.

Can you describe to us the Mariner?

Yes, the Mariner is a,

34:30 it’s a gull winged aircraft with two engines, very comfortable. The flight deck was very comfortable indeed. It was sound proofed like an ordinary civilian aircraft, unlike the other ones we were flying. Though, on the first one I flew over the Atlantic, my flight, my table was on the flight deck with the pilots and the other people. But because the Americans were not

35:00 noted terribly much for navigation or worrying about navigators, all my instruments and so on were at the back of the aircraft. My, particularly the drift recorder which was very important, but all the other instruments, you know. My repeater air speed and compass and what not. So, if I had to do any work I had to go down to the back of the aircraft, squeezing past these fuel tanks to

35:30 do it and whilst I was very comfortable up there on the flight deck, it wasn’t so hot going all the way back down the, down the art of the aircraft to do my real work. Now, the subsequent Mariners we flew back, you, I was not up on the flight deck. I was down the back with a, with a plotting table there and all the instruments. So, that was much better from the point of view of navigation. But wasn’t as

36:00 comfortable as up the front because the back wasn’t sound proofed you see. So, it was a flying boat, a

much smaller than the Sunderland in volume and made a hell of a lot more smaller than that with all these, these fuel tanks of course. Up the back there was also a beautiful electric stove, range so you could cook food and so on and other stuff like signal pistols and what not. It was a,

36:30 it was comfortable flying in the air but a very, very tricky aircraft to land or take off. Nothing like as docile as the Sunderland. In fact it was very critical. You had to, to take off you had to disperse the crew along the aircraft for stability. But you had to start off with a basic number. You had a, what they call a computer which was a little calculator. You

37:00 had to set that on at the start with and then work out the rest of it, how many people here there and everywhere by this little calculator. The only trouble was we didn't know, everyone had a different basic weight number to put on their calculator. The only trouble is they'd lost ours so we had to take what was the average for the, for the Mariner you see. So, we found that particularly taking off

37:30 from Gibraltar was a bit hair raising because Gibraltar, it's fairly rough. It had been open in Gibraltar and we were skipping across rays like this, bouncing up and down before we got in the air. And the other problem with the, with us flying a Mariner, we're not terribly of course acquainted with it and we really didn't, we had to roll up on the attitude to fly that for the maximum

38:00 cruising speed. So, we were very, very slow. We were flying at less than a hundred knots most of the time. But in the air it was good but landing and taking off wasn't so good. Not a very good, not a very good aircraft, I don't think. But so on the first leg we're on a night flight and we're also going…

Tape 7

00:35 **Just before this journey we're about to talk about, you describe the Mariner in a bit of detail about where your own position within the, within the plane, can you describe where all the other crew members were inside a Mariner?**

Yeah, well the two pilots were up the front, the engineer, see we had a Sunderland crew of ten but for this particular exercise we had to, to drop three of them, drop the

01:00 three straight air gunners because they weren't required. But all the rest of them were, were up the front on the flight deck. I mean they'd come down the back to do cooking and so on and so forth but everybody else was up there. The navigator was on his lonesome down the back of the aircraft, that is on the second and third ones. But also to do his work you were down the back but there's usually,

01:30 I mean, two radio operators and two engineers, well they're not doing anything either of them most of the time so they'd come back and have a chat or do something. Or I'd go up the front because you know we're doing straight, straight legs without too much messing about required.

What problems did being up the back cause for you? Sorry, what problems did being up the back

02:00 **of…?**

Well, except our separated from the rest of the crew. I mean we were connected with intercom of course but it's, you know, it was an unsatisfactory layout that was, that was all I can say about it. But, as you'll find out later, the Americans weren't too hot on training navigators because you've probably heard hair

02:30 raising stories about them formatting on each other and getting lost and all this sort of stuff. But, once again, it was the US navy air force that people on assignment like we were in flying boats. The jolly pilots would be trained navigators too but never, you know, it's a, if somebody's specialising in something or other, like flying an aircraft it doesn't necessarily mean that he's going to be a good navigator

03:00 or vice versa.

Was there any chance of being able to do something else in the spare time you weren't working on board flight?

Oh yeah, read a book or write an aerogramme. You know what an aerogramme. You write this on a form and then it would be microfilmed and flown to Australia and re-printed the other end. That was the main way that we communicated during the war.

03:30 Because I could remember before I started on this, on this first flight I, I got engaged to be married you see and on the way to Gibraltar I had some of these aerogramme forms. And I wrote one out to tell my parents about it and just handed it in at Gibraltar and it was, eventually got to Australia. So, you'd do something like that.

04:00 **Just before we do the journey story, where, where and when did you get engaged? What was the courtship like in the wartime England?**

Well, being based in the United Kingdom had a lot of advantages of course because you were really

living in close proximity to a civilian population. So, you had plenty of opportunities to mix with the

04:30 locals and get to know people and so on and so forth. And I suppose I met my wife on this first training place at the GR course and that came about because the other fellows one night went to a dance and I couldn't go because I had a shocking cold and so on and so forth and I couldn't go.

05:00 But I used to on a Friday night, I used to go generally on my own to Blackpool itself which wasn't far away and go to the theatre. There was a good theatre there, there was lots of stuff at Blackpool but particularly there was a good theatre where they would be showing either pre-West End productions, you know trying them out or doing post West End productions when they were on tour so I

05:30 was able to see. I was very interested in the theatre, plays and so on, so I used to go in there. Now, one thing I used to do also at weekends was to get in to civilian clothes and one Sunday all the other fellows in the mess were busy swatting like mad because we had exams in this place and I was always a good

06:00 student and could get whatever I wanted usually the night before in to my mind but they're all busy working away and I thought, "Oh God Almighty. I want to go for a walk," and I said, "Hey, won't somebody go for a walk with me?" So, one chef said, "Yeah, all right, okay." So, he'd been to this dance you see and he'd become very friendly with a VAD [Volunteer Aid Detachment] from the local convalescent hospital you see

06:30 and so we get outside and I said, "Where do you, where will we go Perc?" And he said, "Well, look I'd like to go to Lavern hall." That's where the hospital was. "But I'd only seen it at night. I'd just like to have a look at it if I may." And I said, "Fine, let's go." Now that was a place called Lavern, you've heard of Royal Lytham and St Anne's golf course, of course, well this was at Lytham and the shortest

07:00 way to get to it from where we was stationed. Incidentally we used to have to commute from that hotel to the aerodrome by train, we had a seasoned ticket when we were on this, on this station. It was only two or three stops. But the shortest way was to walk across a golf course because there's Woollard's and St Anne's at one end and a series of golf courses along the coast. They're all typical links golf courses where they play the

07:30 British Open because Royal Lytham St Anne's course is one of those where they do play it. And when we crossed this golf course we found two of these VADs walking towards us and I could see that they were eyeing off Perc because he had his uniform on and Australian uniforms were not terribly common around, around this place and they had their eye fastened on Perc, you see. We cross,

08:00 we all turn around to look at each other. They've still got their eyes fastened on Perc, ignored me completely. And I said, "That's the last time I'm going to start walking around there in civvies [civilian clothes] again." Well, anyway Perc had become friendly with one of these VADs, well he was married at the time but she came out to Australia eventually and his wife died

08:30 and eventually they married. So, she's out here now. She's a widow but that's incidental. But Perc said to me, "I'd like to go with you one night to the theatre that you go to." And I said, "Oh, fine." And he said, "I'll take Muriel there." And I said, "Oh, well ask her if

09:00 she's got a friend." Well, her friend was, I don't know if she's arrived back yet and Rona was one of those two VADs that we crossed on the golf course. Now, of course they saw this Australian coming and they were fascinated by Muriel having a boyfriend because she's a very, very quiet person that, her mother lived nearby and she seemed to be very much more

09:30 attached to her mother than anything else. And they were, "Oh, Muriel Spencer, must be his, you know, boyfriend you see." That's why they were staring at him so closely. So, that's how it started you see and…

How much chance did you get to see each other after that?

Well, oh, a reasonable, oh not much. I mean at the end of that posting which was fairly close to the end. I went down, I had a bit of

10:00 leave and I went and stayed with my aunt in Wimbledon and Rona came down to London and spent a couple of days there. Well, then I was posted to, from then I was posted to Scotland and I was up there for about 9 weeks or something on leave and then I caught up with her again and we went to Bournemouth for about 4 days. Well, then

10:30 what happened? Well, then I was posted to Northern Ireland and then back to England, to Prestwick and while we were waiting for a Mariner to fly back to America, we had a reasonable amount of time off and I can visit her, and actually she came up, we'd arranged to go to the Lake District for a couple of nights when I got a telegram saying

11:00 report back to Prestwick because there was a Mariner waiting. So, she actually came up before I went to America so then I was away, as you'll find out, for some considerable time. So, that was like that you know, it was not continuous naturally.

Can you take us through this first trip to America from the beginning. Your first port of call

was Gibraltar.

Yes, well the first…

Let's

11:30 **start from the beginning, what happened?**

Well, because of the JU88s off Brest I thought, well I'm going to get half way across the Atlantic before, exaggerating it, before we turn south you see. Keep us as far away from Brest as possible. Now, this was astro-navigation. It was a night flight, night flying and I hadn't done much astro and it took me some time to sort myself out I suppose so

12:00 when, when daylight was coming I thought, well we must be, you know, we're a fair way down now but I wasn't exactly sure where I was and I said, "Well, let's just steer due east and hit the Portuguese coast and we'll know where we are." Well, actually we hit Cape St. Vincent which is right on the very bottom of Portugal, a very famous place because that was where Nelson had one of his battles, at Cape St. Vincent.

12:30 Well, there from there it was just a short hop across the sea, the Gibraltar. Now that took, that took 15 hours ten minutes which was the longest flight that I'd had to that date. At Gibraltar we had, naturally we were flaked out. We had to have a day off at least. So, we had a day off staying at Gibraltar. Then we took off Bathurst in West Africa

13:00 and we still didn't know how to fly this Mariners very well at a decent cruising speed and it was a bit rough taking off and we sort of took off somehow or other it seemed to me in the wrong direction you see. Well, we steered around a bit until I realised where we were and then got back on track which was really only crawling down the coast of, of Africa. Now, the, the skipper who

13:30 had six months as a second dickie on a Sunderland squadron, that squadron was based at Bathurst in West Africa but they used to, the Sunderlands there used to operate often from six hundred miles up the coast to a little place called Port Etienne. And as we were going down there we had to, the coastal, sorry in transport command, we had to, if we followed a flight plan we had to make sure that we had at

14:00 least a twenty 25% safety margin of fuel. Well, we were eating it up because not cruising at the most economical cruising speed and there was a likelihood that we wouldn't reach Bathurst with a 25% safety fuel margin, but also of course, Dennis who had been operating there and from Port Etienne would have liked to have had a look at that

14:30 you see. So, we figured out we couldn't arrive at Bathurst with this safety margin of fuel so we decided to come down at Port Etienne, now Port Etienne there is nothing there at all. There was one hut and sand as far as you could see, probably as far as Egypt almost apart from the Atlas Mountains or whatever in the way. And the Sunderland crews used to live on the aircraft when they were operating from there because there's plenty of

15:00 space on a Sunderland, bunks and what not and it was an idyllic sort of an existence because you'd wake up in the morning and just dive overboard in to this lovely warm tropical sea. And you had your own cooking facilities but of course there was, there was this hut which had a sort of a mess. The mess was, if you wanted a drink it wasn't a question of measuring it, you know, a bottle, a bit of that and so on and so forth. We even, they even had a

15:30 movie on the night we were there. It was out in the open of course but I remembered distinctly what it was, it was film called Hills Of Popping which was a, a scatty comedy show. Now, so that was very pleasant. So, then we took off the next morning for Bathurst and at Bathurst we had about 2 or 3 days because we had to, it was time to for the

16:00 engines to have a minor service or overhaul which our engineers had to do or with help from the station. At Bathurst which at that time was a shocking place, a real shanty town. It's on a river. It's in a place called Gambia, that's the country. It was a British colony naturally and it's a very narrow strip of land on either side of this river. It goes in to the inland.

16:30 The, and a tin shanty town. The RAF station was a fairly rudimentary one. But I had, they allocated a boy, a black boy to look after me, what he had to do, to do all my washing, I mean for 2 or 3 days I had to find things for him to do. He had to fix up my mosquito [insect] net at night because you

17:00 know there were a lot of horrible mosquitos around there, come in, in the morning and take it off and give me a cup of tea and so on. So, and the rest of the time we just sort of wandered around the town, there's some pictures there, particularly of the native policemen that were very smartly dressed and so on and more so the others, others playing soccer all in bare feet and so on. And otherwise, I think there were, you could

17:30 buy silver filigree work but otherwise there was nothing much at Bathurst. So, then we take off for the Atlantic crossing, the Brazil to a place called Natale and I thought now the only Natale I'd ever heard of was in South Africa, but there's one on the little bump of Brazil, bump of Africa, bump of Brazil, shortest passage across the Atlantic. Now, this was another night flight

18:00 but the Mariner had very, very good radar on. Much better radar than we'd ever seen before. It was sensitive enough to sense tropical storms and so on and you could fly around those and so on and we got to Natale. That took 15 and a quarter hours. When we landed at Natale we were on American bases, although there were

18:30 RAF liaison officers on these stations because this particular exercise and this is where our first, almost diaster hit because they were American ground crew and what they had to do, they came out in a dingy as we landed and would fix us up to a buoy. And our skipper misunderstood their instructions you see which were

19:00 of course done with the hands and he thought the instruction was cut engines. So, he cut the engines but we weren't moored to that buoy and we started to drift with the current and right in front of us was BAC [British Aerospace Corporation] as it was then, flying boat. And we were drifting straight into it and very fortunately the crew of that flying boat went on board the aircraft and they saw what was happening and they immediately got

19:30 up on their, the mainframe with their feet and were able to fend us off otherwise that would have been the end of everything to, to Norfolk. So, alright, well I guess we learned something from that. We also probably just touched a mud bank or something, weren't conscious of it at the time. Anyway, out comes

20:00 a quarantine officer, Brazilian quarantine officer and starts this, gets on board the aircraft and sprays the whole aircraft and then he went around the meticulously examining everything with a little matchbox putting bits of dirt and bits of dead insects and whatever in this matchbox because it - they didn't want any of those horrible wogs, African wogs coming in to Brazil you see which was understandable. We then found and

20:30 nobody had told us this before that for a flying boat to come in before it had been inspected you were allowed to open one window only. If you opened more than that you were fined a hundred dollars. That's what they told us afterwards. Fortunately, we'd only opened one window in all of this hassle that was going on. So, we had a couple of days in Natale because we were pretty tired after all this, you know. And after all, apart from the

21:00 fact that it was a long flight, it was a night flight as well. So, we then take off for Bullen which is on the, really on the estuary of the Amazon.

Just a question about these remote bases like Bathurst and Natale how geared up for the war effort were they? What was their role?

Oh, well Bathurst was a coastal command base for just searching for U-boats in that part of the Atlantic.

21:30 **And Natale?**

Well, Natale was an American base and it would have been the same sort of thing, they would have had, they would be searching for U-boats and some. I don't think there'd be anything else that they'd need to do there. But they then asked us to, a couple of fellows were, there must have been a reasonable RAF part of this base,

22:00 more or less liaisons but they said well two or three fellows wanted to go on a bit of leave and they wanted to go to Belem and we thought, "Oh well," as we turned out when we saw the Belem we didn't understand why they'd want to do that but of course you couldn't understand why they'd have liked Natale anyway. So, that was all right. So, they went down the back you see and I was up the front because at that time that's where my

22:30 table was but I had to go back occasionally, as I say, to check things and I found that these bludgers had found our signal pistol and our signal flares. And they're flying across Brazilian jungle and every so often we'd come to a native village and these fellows were just, for a bit of fun, they were just firing these signal pistols in to the village you see. So, we weren't terribly impressed by the, by our passengers so naturally, you know, we got stuck in to them for

23:00 this. First of all using up our signal flares and secondly you know they're frightening the hell out of the poor old natives down there. Anyway, we got to Belem, now in Belem which is, as I say, on the mouth of the Amazon, it used to rain every day about 2 o clock and we landed at about five to two and the RAF liaison officer was coming out

23:30 to us. And of course it comes down like hell and he couldn't have got wetter if he'd swam out I suppose. And he was a very heavy man. He says, "Are you guys ready to take off tomorrow for Tunean?" We said, "To hell, no we're tired." And so there was an argument with him and we had one day and I, my impression of Belem is that you go, and say to a, a café or hotel and have a

24:00 drink or cup of coffee or something and the waiter would come and serve you and so on and soon as he had, he'd take a step back and he'd fish out of his pockets Swiss watches and come back and try and flog you a Swiss watch you see. Now, Switzerland was isolated during the war and anything that came out of Switzerland could only have come out with the connivance of the Germans. But these were genuine Swiss watches because I bought one and it lasted

24:30 me for a long time. But that was my impression of Belem, the waiter would flog you a Swiss watch. So,

then we take off for Trinidad and it's a question of climbing, crawling up the coast again. It took us an hour and a half to cross the Amazon estuary if you can call it that. And it was, it was Amazon water because as far out as you could see in to the ocean it was all muddy water and you realised. I mean, that's where the gulf

25:00 stream originates and you can understand that with the sheer volume of water coming out. So, that was quite interesting but as you get further up you come to French Guiana and off French Guiana is Devil's Island, you know, the old penal settlement which had a horrible reputation. So, we thought wow this is good. We better have a look at this. So we circled around Devil's Island and had a good look. There's a picture in my album of that,

25:30 and off we went to Trinidad. When we got to Trinidad we found that we'd sprung a leak in the hull. We were on an American base again. Now, this was one of the bases which the British had negotiated that the Americans could use in exchange for their clapped out destroyers. You know, they got 50 clapped out destroyers early in the war from America in exchange for British, for British bases. So, they had a very good one

26:00 at, at in Trinidad at Porpoise Bay. Well, they had to beach that Mariner and it took them 5 days to fix it up so we were stranded in Trinidad for 5 days. Oh, terrible, this is very irksome. You could walk in to Porpoise Bay and this is when you realised how, why the West Indies were very good cricketers because every little kid was playing some form of cricket all the way in using all sorts of implements for bats for balls

26:30 for wickets and so on and so forth. It was quite fascinating to see this, all of them at it. And then the Americans had a beautiful officers' club on a little secluded bay, beautiful Caribbean little bay with a diving platform out in the middle of it, that you could swim out and of course a nice club there. So, that was pretty, very hard going, 5 days in Trinidad. Very

27:00 hard.

How obvious was the war in Trinidad?

Well, only for the fact there was an American base, that was the only evidence of it I suppose. Yeah, life was going on as presumably as it always does or had.

Were you following news from elsewhere during this trip?

Oh, well yes we were getting, we were getting news because all of these stations had, had their access to

27:30 news I suppose. We weren't madly worried about it of course as you can understand. Anyway, the next, the next place we had to go to was Puerto Rico, San Juan in Puerto Rico, now that's the Caribbean, there's a great string of islands like that on the eastern side of the Caribbean which are called the Lesser Antilles. So, and of course, going from Trinidad to Puerto Rico you'd go straight across the Caribbean but also you could follow

28:00 all these islands around if you wanted to, take a lot longer. We thought, oh well we ought to have a look at this, you see. So, we took off and, and flew past 3 or 4 of them, Barbados I remember, Marlineek [?]. And then we thought, "Oh God, they all look the same." So we decided to cut it short and do the rest of it by flying straight across the rest of the Caribbean. When we got to San Juan, again of course an American base, also an American position this

28:30 time. They said, "Right you've got take this to Norfolk, Virginia." "Yes." Again, you can do it one of two ways. You can fly direct to Norfolk or you could fly via Florida. And we thought, "Well, we ought to see what Florida looks like, I suppose." So, we took that option you see. Now that was a US naval air base, training station and they were training their

29:00 first straight navigators. That was a navigational training run, their first straight navigators in the US navy air force. So, that's, you know, that's some reflection of why they weren't terribly good on making provision for navigators and so on. Now, the nearest place to Banana River was a little township called Melbourne, population 2000.

29:30 Banana River so far as I can see on the map is now Cape Canaveral and Melbourne would be a lot bigger than 2000 now. But that's it, as far as I can see that base became the start of the Cape Canaveral. Things were crook there because the weather closed in and we were delayed there for 3 days. So, off we staggered to Norfolk and handed this thing over to the American navy.

30:00 Now you asked me how long it takes to fly the Atlantic, didn't you earlier on?

For that trip, how long?

Twenty days. But as it turned out we needn't have hurried because we had to wait for a Catalina to fly back to the United Kingdom and we were, we had to wait 29 days for that. Now the first thing we did, the skipper and I, we thought oh well,

30:30 we were entitled to 4 days leave when we'd delivered an aircraft. So, where will we go? Now, I read in the National Geographic magazine before the war about colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, was the

colonial capital and if you saw a program on the ABC which has been running about the American revolution. They were featuring Williamsburg. But Williamsburg, I knew had been completely reconstructed

31:00 by Rockefeller actually, as it was in colonial days and I had a great interest in seeing this. It sounded fascinating to me. So we go out along the road to hitchhike and along comes a fellow in a car and says, “Where do you want to go fellows?” And we said, “Williamsburg.” He said, “Williamsburg! Why do you want to go to Williamsburg? There ain’t nothing happening in Williamsburg. Go to Richmond. That’s where I’m going.” We said, I said, “No, but I want to see Williamsburg.” “No,

31:30 no, forget it. Forget it. There’s more ghosts in Richmond and I’m going there.” So, of course he talked us in to going to Richmond. So, we get out, we check in to a hotel and we walk out of the hotel and we walk down the street and we haven’t gone very far and a girl stops us and says, “Hi, British huh? How about coming home for dinner?” And I noticed she had a Royal Naval air arm badge, on

32:00 her, on her jumper. So, we thought, “Oh, well we’ll go for home to dinner with her.” So, she’s quite excited and she takes us home to dinner, not to dinner because she was with her mother and she rings up her friends and they decide no, no, no we’ll take them out to a restaurant. So, they cart us off to a restaurant and they said, there’s 3 of them, this girl and her two friends and said, “Where are you staying?” And we

32:30 said oh, whatever the hotel was. “Oh well, we’ll check you out of there and we’ll book you in to the officer’s club and we’ll pay.” We said, “No, you won’t.” “Yes, we will. We insist. We’ll pay.” So, they checked us in to the officer’s club. And then they said, “Now we’d like you to come along tomorrow morning and see what we’re doing here. This is where you go.” So, we went along the next morning and do you know what they were doing? They were preparing bundles

33:00 for Britain. They were busy working, working packing all sorts of things, bundles for Britain. The man that was running this, their patron, I suppose, invited us out for lunch at the Richmond country club which is very, very luxurious. Then we found that this fellow was a, was a pretty wealthy individual. He was in steel and he had

33:30 already donated two spitfires to England which he could do for the cost of 10,000 pounds sterling, during the war. Then we found the other activities of this little group were to help the royal naval ships that went in to Norfolk for re-fitting and they were always fights going on down there between the Brits and the Americans particularly disparity of pay as, among other things. And this mob, when they found out there was a British

34:00 ship being re-fuelled would try and get as many of that crew up to Richmond, get them away from all the hassle of Norfolk and look after them. Now, this is what I mean by hospitality. And then they said, “You fellows are on leave aren’t you?” And we said, “Oh, well yeah, I guess so.” And they said, “Well, you’re entitled to four gallons of gas a day if you’re a serviceman on leave.” Of course America was heavily rationed in petrol as everything else. “You go and get that.

34:30 You go and get that and we’ll drive you around Virginia.” So, they carted us off to Williamsburg. So, I saw Williamsburg, but then after we’d done Williamsburg they said, “We’ll take you somewhere else now.” And they took us to York Town which was the original settlement and where the British surrendered eventually in the American war of Independence. And I’ve got a picture of the memorial there, plus the

35:00 plaque which says how many Frenchmen were involved in that because without the French they wouldn’t have won, I don’t think. So, that was Richmond.

Just going back a little bit, what were the bundles for Britain?

Well, they were clothing. They were food, you know although again, the food was rationed was in America. It was rationed on a point system. You worked out what you wanted, you’d get tinned fruit or meat or whatever, you know you could do it, work it out yourself. It wasn’t a specific thing for each, each

35:30 business but it was still rationed. Wasn’t as bad, it was, wasn’t as bad as England or even here but it was rationed. But that was what it was, particularly clothing and probably canned stuff but they couldn’t, you know, that wasn’t too much of that necessarily available but that was thing that was happening in America all the time, bundles for Britain.

You had been able to have an almost fantastic holiday throughout,

36:00 **in the middle of the war.**

Well, you haven’t heard the end of this yet because we go back to, to Elizabeth city in North Carolina was where we were now based which isn’t terribly far from Norfolk but there was an RAF station there. That’s where the Catalinas would come in for us to take off. Well, the next thing was, no sign of that, oh we’d go off again. So, we went to Washington and in Washington

36:30 I knew that there was an equipment officer that I’d known in the air department before I joined up and he was a good, a very competent one, had a lot of time for him and he was a flying officer when I last saw him. So, we go to Washington, the three of this time, the two pilots and me and I call on him. RAAF

overseas officers, Washington and I found that he was sharing an office

37:00 with two other Australians and he was a squadron leader. And I said when I saw him, I said, “What’s with this squadron leader stuff?” And he said, “Oh, well nobody in America will take any notice of you at least you’re a commander.” Of course a squadron is a lieutenant commander and then I saw, now this is getting, this later started off latish winter, by this time it was getting quite warm in Washington there’s

37:30 a pretty insufferable climate, you might say. And I found that on top of the filing cabinet they had their cap very stiff with wire in the top and gloves for God’s sake which of course are really part of an officer’s uniform but I never saw anybody in England wear gloves unless it was cold. That was the idea of gloves. And they had these leather gloves sticking in their hands and I said, “What this

38:00 about gloves? You’re not wearing those are you?” “Dickie, likes us.” Dickie, is air marshal Sir Richard Williams, the father of the RAAF and I said. “Dickie makes you wear these this in this climate?” “Yes, and don’t let Dickie see you around here with that cap on.” Because I had a typical air crew cap you see. So, I thought well, blow this, I’m not going to hang around here

38:30 and actually they invited us to a party that night where they said, “They’ll be some RAF officers there, they’ll be all right for your crew members.” Well, our crew members weren’t interested in RAF officers, they were interested in these guys’ girlfriends, you see, Americans. So, I had to sort of look after one of the RAF officers but that was quite, that was quite a pleasant time, in fact this RAF officer showed me around Washington and so on and so forth.

39:00 Then we went back to Elizabeth city and so sign of this aircraft so we then took off for New York and we checked in to the Anzac Club this time because, there weren’t too many Australians and we knew it would be, you know, good, cheap accommodation. And then we got in to the Anzac Club and our room I said, “Gee, I remember I know somebody in New York.” This was old Stevie

39:30 Heffman that I’d met with the other Australians a year or so before this and I said, “I’ll give her a ring.” So, I rang her up again and said, “I met you last year,” or whatever. She said, “Well, where are you staying?” and I said, “The Anzac Club.” “No, come and stay up here, come and stay with me.” And I said, “I’ve got two fellows with me.” “Never mind, bring them.” And I said, “They’re not Australians, they’re RAF, Englishmen.” “Never mind, bring them.”

40:00 So, off we, check out and go and stay with Stevie for 2 or 3 nights. Now, Stevie knew every head waiter in New York and she’d say, “Right, fellows, where do you want to go tonight?” And we’d pick out some nightclub where there’s a nice band playing so she’d ring up and say, “Stevie here, I’d like a table on the floor for four.” Like that. And she paid. Now, the year before she was unlimited

40:30 but her husband had got a bit sick of this and he’d put her a limit each night, $26 each night. Now that doesn’t sound much but it was a lot of money back in 1944, this was, $26 a night. So, alright that was the first night. The second night she says, “Where to tonight fellows?” and we said, “Well, we’d like to go to so and so but only if we pay.” “Ha! Deal’s

41:00 off.” So we said, “Alright, deal’s off, we won’t go.” But then she relented and booked, booked us. So off we go to this place and of course when the time comes for the bill, she tries to get it. You see so there’s three of us, so stop her and we paid it and she got, she started to sulk, and we were like that and she said,

41:30 “Listen, we’ve got just time to catch the show at the café society, uptown. How would you like that?” Well, naturally we’d like it, “Yeah.” “But I’ll pay, she says.” So, we went and saw Teddy Wilson, if you know Teddy Wilson, used to be a pianist with a little group. He played with Benny Goodman for a while and so on and that was a very, that was a great night too.

Tape 8

00:30 **You still hadn’t picked up this Catalina?**

No, no but we got a view to ourselves so we just listened to this radio station and we thought well we might go and call on this radio station. We eventually found it was only a shack out, way out of town so we go out there and beat on the door and a female says, “Hang on, hang on minute.” And then she opens the door and says, “You, what I can do for you?.” And we found she was the sole announcer, operator and all the rest of it for this

01:00 radio station and we said, “Oh, well we’ve been listening to you and just wanted to have a look.” “Oh, come in, come in.” And we said, “Well, what requests have you got today?” “Oh, didn’t have time to go to the office, I’ll just play a few records and say they’ve been requested.” And we said, “We’ll pick them for you.” So, we picked the whole programme for her, you see. Well, about this time they found a Catalina in the forest. So, we took off and we took off for

01:30 Montreal. Now, we had to go to Montreal to swing the compass. I don’t know if you understand swinging a compass do you?

I do yeah.

Right, good well we won't go in to that detail, so that was the main purpose of going to Montreal. So we had a…

So was there anything specific to the Catalina swinging a compass that is particularly…?

Well, you see what you're doing in swinging the compass is finding a deviation. You've got two comparables, variation which is

02:00 magnetic and treatable. Deviation is the influence of apparatus, metal and so on each individual aircraft so it differs from aircraft to aircraft so you've got to swing it on eight different headings and check it with an astro compass which gives you due north you see, allow for variation and what not. And then you've got, it's not very much. It might be three degrees or four degrees or something, you know. Not much.

02:30 But it's very important of course.

I do understand it.

So, that's what you do there.

It's quite interesting phenomenon isn't it?

Anyway, the next port of call is Gander in Newfoundland now Gander is the other end of the trans-Atlantic trips. They had a huge great big airstrip there and a lake beside it and so we, fly in to

03:00 Gander and we call up for permission to pancake, that's land. Yes, we got that back, land on runway so and so between the trees. They had a great crop of trees all the way up the side of this very wide, long runway and the skipper acknowledging that said, "Thank you very much but do you mind if we use the lake? This is a flying boat." So, we used the lake. We got, when we, outcomes a fellow in a dingy and says, "Will you hang on a

03:30 moment? The Greek captain's coming out." The Greek captain was the CO of Gander and he came out and he said, "Are you fellows in a hurry to take off the for UK?" Well, we didn't say, "No, no we'll stay here as long as we like." We had to be circumspect and say begrudgingly, "Well, no, no not really. Why?" sort of thing. He said, "Well, I'd like you to fly me to Bottwood." Now, Bottwood was BAC

04:00 flying boat base on the north of Newfoundland, Gander is on the Eastern side more or less. It's not very far. So, you don't argue with a group captain anyway and he said, "And by the way, I want you to take a pig with you." You wouldn't believe this. On this dingy, on the open river there's a pig. It's dead thank god. But a pig is

04:30 heavy and the only way in to a Catalina is through the side blisters, can you imagine us struggling to get this pig on board this Catalina? We found they had a nice thing going for them at Gander. They had a pig farm and a sausage factory. Now, he was taking this pig up to one of his mates at Bottwood, you see. So, I look at the map and I find there's a railway line linking us and I thought, "Oh well, I've only got to follow that." And the Greek captain says to the

05:00 skipper, "Do you mind if I fly this?" And of course the skipper can't say, "No, get lost. I'm the boss here." He said, "Mmm, okay." So, he starts to fly it and coming over the intercom is Dennis's voice saying, "You silly old bastard. You don't know how to fly this aircraft. You're not as good as I am." And of course we say, "What's the matter with him? Has he gone mad?" until we realise that the stupid group captain didn't have his intercom on you see.

05:30 But, it was the worst landing I've ever had on a flying boat when we got to Bottwood. A flying boat, if it bounces instead of it bounces, it subsiding as they do on a normal landing strip, they can get higher and higher and if they don't know what they're doing, if they get a high bounce it'll stall and go woo straight in to the water and the way to correct that. And fortunately this bloke knew it is you open up the throttles

06:00 and plough the thing straight in to water you see and he did that but it was a horrifying landing I must say. But he said, "Oh, thank you very much. Do you mind flying back here tomorrow morning and picking me up?" you see. And so when we got back to Gander, I said to the pilots, I said, "You don't need a navigator. I just followed the railway line. You can do that. I don't need to come do

06:30 I?" And I thought I don't want to risk my life with a stupid group captain. We had enough dangers around there without what might happen with him. So, I stayed behind and they followed the railway line and brought him back safely. So, then we took off for the, no, no we found, of course the Catalina would fly direct across the Atlantic but surprisingly enough the Catalinas we were flying didn't have the same enormous

07:00 range that a lot did. It was a very hot cat. It cruised at a 110 knots which is quite fast for a Catalina and we couldn't find a safety tab that gave us the 25% fuel margin, safety. So we had to via Reykjavik. So, we went to Reykjavik. In Reykjavik, one fellow that we met, when the RAF in the early war wanted plane delivered they

07:30 formed RAF ferry command which was civilian, all their civilian pilots around the place flew and of course they were given a pretty hefty pay for this because they, you know they had to get the aircraft, money didn't mean anything. And of course as the, more and more air crews became available, RAF transport used to do all of the, its own work but they were, we were on ordinary rates of pay and one

08:00 fellow that we met there was captain PG Taylor. You know the famous, the navigator who used to fly the Pacific in a Catalina, the frigate bird. We met him there, that was interesting. So, had a day or two in Reykjavik and then we took off for the last leg and that was Lays on the Firth of Clyde.

Did you have a look at Iceland from the air?

Yes, yes.

What was it like?

Barren. Funnily enough we had a

08:30 postcard only yesterday from Iceland and that came from our chemist up there who's always going on overseas holidays and this last time she went to Iceland and Greenland, god knows why. But I did, I did see her and she said that, "Oh, so barren, just lava everywhere." And then she said, "I've sent you a postcard." But of course the postage was so,

09:00 so much she'd bundled up a lot of them and sent them out by bulk to, I think Australia because they had an Australian postage stamp on them. And we got it but it was very thoughtful of her because it reminded me of Reykjavik. And then Reykjavik was interesting because the Icelandic people of course are very nice people but they were absolutely frigid and cold towards us because we had invaded the place. The Brits had gone in there

09:30 first using the same excuse that the Japs had forced on the Germans who'd gone in to Norway you see. And of course Iceland was going to be vital because it was one of the, you know I was telling you about Liberators closing the gap but it was a very, very important base Reykjavik. We were invaders. Mind you, by this time the Americans had come in and the Icelandic people were doing very, very well indeed with great fancy American cars and god knows what.

10:00 They were doing out of it but they still got very, very cold towards us. If you went in to a shop and tried to chat them up, no way. They'd serve you politely and that was that. Very, very memorable impression I have of that, of us being invaders but they were being looked after a lot better than the people of Norway were, I can tell you that

10:30 but…

What's it like flying across the Atlantic and know that many hours and hours going by?

Oh, boring of course but oh, well you get used to it. Because that was, that didn't take so long because on subsequent trips we weren't going to elicit any detail but the one I think is memorable, I should mention. The next trip

11:00 actually, we flew via Reykjavik with the Mariner and halfway between Reykjavik and Gander we lost an engine, lost it only in the sense that the oil pressure and the temperature was going up and up and up and they had to feather the prop, shut it down. Now, a Mariner will not stay up on one engine. We were gradually coming down like this

11:30 and you could see below us nothing but blocks of ice and ice flows and all the icebergs and all this. So, we started to chuck anything that weighed anything overboard starting with the point five brownies which were not in place. They were just packed in the aircraft. We chucked all of those overboard and in doing that a beat block fell out of one of them and hit the bottom of the hull, put a little hole in the

12:00 bottom. We sent our normal 3 letter code that I mentioned before which would indicate loss of engine and it would indicate which engine. We sent that to Gander, had it repeated to Prestwick and thought, right well they know all about this but god know what would have happened if we'd gone down. We were able to re-start that engine about five minutes in every half hour and

12:30 pick up a bit of height until the oil pressure again reduced and the temperature was going up to, towards setting the damn engine on fire. So, we staggered halfway across the Atlantic in that way and I thought, how the devil can I navigate this? Different altitudes, swinging this way, that way, fluctuating air speeds. Then the oil must have cancelled out each other because we made a good land fall as it turned out and

13:00 we, when we got near to Gander we told them that we had a hole in the hull and they'd have to beach the aircraft you see. So, we land and when we get a shore, there's an irate group captain. The guy that we'd flown to Bottwood. And he says, "What's all this about having to land at Beachamound [?]? We've got no equipment to do that." Wah, wah, wah, wah he went on and on. In the meantime we cut up a part of my rubber,

13:30 eraser and chewing gum and stuck it in the hull and watched it very closely when we landed and no water was coming in you see. So, we said, "Oh, well we think we've fixed that up. We've fixed the leak." But then he said, "And what was that damned fool message you were sending?" And we said, "What?"

"You know you were sending, kept on sending a message." And we thought, I can't believe it. This is the RAF. This is

14:00 code, not just the RAF, this is what we used in Australia too, the RAAF, these three letter codes and we thought, I don't believe it. An RAF transport commander, RAF. And, I mean I checked up later to make sure that I hadn't got it wrong, other command by bomber command. Same things. Not RAF, not in Gander anyway, they were too busy probably breeding pigs and what not and so we said, "What! You don't know, we have flown half way across the

14:30 Atlantic on the one engine and we've had to, we've had to lighten the load, we've chucked all the guns overboard." "What! You've thrown, you've thrown the guns overboard! What are the Americans going to say when they get the aircraft back without their guns on?" I mean this is how stupid he was and I got fed up by this time and I said, "Sir, the Americans might be very happy to get an aircraft back." So, he shut up fortunately after that. So, we took off as quickly as we could for Norfolk

15:00 and of course when we handed over to the American, what was their commander or something and explained what had happened. He said, "Oh, forget it. Forget it. Thank you very much for bringing the aircraft back again." And he gets some bloke and he says, "Now look at engine and if there's anything wrong with it, junk it," just like that. The difference.

How did you take off out of Gander?

By that time fortunately as we were coming in to

15:30 Gander that blockage in the air supplies started to clear. I mean, still took a big risk of course because I mean anybody else in their right mind wouldn't have let us off until that engine had been closely examined. Because I mean anything could have happened but they'd had seemed to clear in the last half hour or so of the flight because we had no more trouble. We landed safely, we fixed up the leak

16:00 and we took off the next morning and we had no trouble whatever on the way to Norfolk.

What was going through your mind as you were heading, sinking down in the Atlantic on one engine?

It wasn't very good, it wasn't very good but you didn't really have time to think about it. You were busy getting all these guns and opening the back hatch and chucking them overboard and then looking at the hole you'd made in the hull but we didn't like throwing the luggage overboard I might say. That was the last straw

16:30 but we did and a point five Browning is very, very heavy. Any machine gun is but a point five Browning is very, very heavy so that was our experience with the good captain that Gander. Now, the other incidents were not, on the, the last flight, as we got to Gander it was closed

17:00 down. There was cloud and fog all over it so they diverted us to Stevensville which is on the west coast of Newfoundland and that was another American base so, so that's where we spent a night at Stevensville but then we had instructions to go to Montreal. I mean the short, the shortest way to Norfolk is down that way and Montreal is like that you see. So, why do we have to go there? Because they had a garden party on. A garden

17:30 party meeting that RAF transport commander and we were in 45 Atlantic Transport Group RAF headquarters Duvel, Montreal. And they wanted to show off all the different sorts of aircraft that they were, that were being flown in transport command. So, we get to Montreal and we hang around and get there early and we were there for a few days but another Mariner, they found another Mariner so they sent us on our

18:00 way to, to Norfolk and that was interesting because we were given a choice to fly over the sea as we normally do or going via land and we thought, well this could be interesting. And they said if you go by land you've got to, you've got fly on the beam and you've got to follow instructions every, every station on the beam, you had to call up and say what's the altitude you were at and so on because they directed you on altitude, you know. Odds and evens, which,

18:30 which way were you going, north or south. And we were flying and we were told we were going via Washington and we had to make sure we went nowhere near the White House so we, we were stooging along and we got in to clouds so the skipper says, "Oh, well we'll go up a couple of thousand feet", you see. So, up we go, we get to the next point and they wanted to check our altitude and all the rest of it. So, they immediately instructed us to come down to

19:00 six thousand feet and we said, "No, no it's cloudy down there." "Six thousand feet." So, down we go. We get to Washington and turn down towards Norfolk and we had a, of course we had a chart, you know how a radio range works? With two sectors. A, A and N, the Da and Da-dip and when the two of them merge you get a steady note. So, the theory is if you lose that steady

19:30 note and you get in to say a A sector which is this way, you come back, you correct it, you see. Anyway, we set off from Washington and we're flying down on the beam and we lost it. So, we, and we knowing the sector we, as it was on our chart we reacted accordingly or the pilot did and we figured we were on the port side, sorry starboard side.

20:00 So we move towards port, can't get it, can't get it, keep on going. We lost it completely. And the next control point which was halfway between Washington and Norfolk they're frantically calling us, "Where are you?" And all this sort of stuff and they obviously couldn't hear us. So, eventually we thought well this is ridiculous. We've obviously we've strayed off to port too far so we better come down and see where we are,

20:30 and we came down over Chesapeake Bay which is well to the port side of where we should be. So, we then just flew down Chesapeake bay and Norfolk is down the bottom of it and then of course they said, "Well, the devil have you been?" And we said what had happened. And they said, "Let's have a look at the chart you've got." And you know this is, my first boss in the department of immigration when we used to have a

21:00 foul up would say, "George, we still won the war. The other mob couldn't have been too hot could they?" Because what had happened they'd changed the chart, they'd switched the sectors. Now can you imagine anybody doing that? Why would you do that? But they had, we had a whole chart and it showed the A sector where the ends were and so on now. That's where we'd lost it you see. So, there you are. Things like that

21:30 happen don't they? So, and then on the last trip back we always used to fly over Montreal but this time they said, no you've going to go via Bermuda and we weren't interested because we got to know people in Montreal and we'd seen lots of places by then. Bermuda didn't appeal to us and they said, "And by the way they're a couple of fellows that are on leave." One was in the Royal navy and the other was in the RAAF and they were both based at

22:00 Philadelphia. Funnily enough that RAAF fellow used to work in the air department when I did and I used to talk to him on the telephone and he was going with his friend who lived in Bermuda, had a friend in Bermuda and so oh, yeah well, we were happy to do that but the next morning they said, "Well, no bad luck. We've got six postings. You've got to fly to Bermuda. So we won't be able to take these two fellows." And we thought,

22:30 well this poor fellow lived in Bermuda, had a family there, hadn't been there for a couple of years and we thought this is a bit rough and so the skipper said we'll take some fuel off so that we can fly them there. So, we did that and naturally they were very grateful for this and when we came, landed, the chap that lived there said, "How long are you, what are you going to do now? When will you be free?" And we said, "Oh, as soon as get

23:00 ashore, don't have to do anything." "I want you to come and stay with us, you've been so good," and so on. So, we said, "Oh, that's very kind of you but you know you've just come home to see your family for the first time." "No, no, no, no. I insist." So, the three of us, the two pilots and ourselves we were to stay with him. But as it turned out he had a brother on Bermuda who was in the

23:30 local home guard. Now, there were no vehicles on Bermuda at all, no cars anything but because he was in the home guard or whatever it was, he had a jeep and they said, now you can go and stay with, stay with him. Now, I got the impression in Bermuda that they sat around all day drinking rum and not eating much and that's what happened with us. You saw the picture of us on the beach in Bermuda. So, we stayed with him

24:00 and that was very idyllic of course and that's where we had to swim the compass. But when we headed for Gander again up that way and over that way, we were about 70 miles off course when we hit Newfoundland. Now we were there and Gander's here and I couldn't believe this. What the hell had gone wrong?

24:30 And I thought, "I don't know. We must have mucked up swinging the compass." So, fortunately, when we took off for the UK the sun was shining brightly and I was able to use the astro compass to check our, to check the course and I must have applied the deviation, instead of three degrees starboard, three degrees port or something like that. It was about a 7

25:00 degree angle and that made a difference and if we'd flown the Atlantic like that we could have hit Brest instead of Scotland. But fortunately we were able to correct it and the only other point I'd make about, about flying Catalinas across the Atlantic is the last few times we flew direct, to show you how much difference there is between in flying the identical aircraft on the identical journey. The

25:30 first one we must have got across the Atlantic in absolute record time. In fact when you get near Ireland you try to pick up this very powerful radio range at Belleek and I said, "Righto, it's about time we want to be able to hear that by now, switch on the radio and pick it up." And we heard it, we were right smack in the middle of it, we were very fortunate and it was as loud as anything and suddenly there's a deathly silence, then it picks up again. Because as you fly

26:00 over station there's a cone of silence above the beam and I thought, "It can't be!" Put on the radar. And we found we were right over Ireland and we were about two hours ahead of ETA [Estimated Time of Arrival]. We eventually took 12 and a half hours to cross the Atlantic and land in Scotland. The next time it took us 14 hours, 15 hours and twenty five minutes, almost three hours difference that just

26:30 shows you the effect of wind speed and direction on a very slow aircraft, you know a 110 knots is nothing very much and if you got 40 knots say, coming at you, you're actual speed, made good, reduces

by 40 knots. That brings you down to 70 or if it's the other way, puts you up to 150. So, there you are, three hours difference, same aircraft, same flight. Not the same

27:00 aircraft but same, same model. And that was the end of us in transport command because we got a signal halfway across the Atlantic on the last trip to say the skipper had been posted to take, to take a Sunderland crew that was now without a skipper. So, we were, the crew was now broken up.

Was there any particular superstitions associated with flying on the transport?

Superstitions?

27:30 No, we didn't have the, we didn't have the rabbit's foot, feet or anything. The only thing that we'd do on a, in transport command was we'd buy a bunch of bananas and hang them up in the cabin. Now, bananas were completely unknown in England during the war and the gimmicks of one of the radio operators was as soon as we landed he'd pluck a banana, by this time they're getting ripe. He'd pluck a

28:00 banana. When he got ashore he'd find the nearest kid and give them a banana and he'd never seen it, he didn't know what the hell it was. And he'd say, knowing that the mother would probably say, "Don't take anything from strangers," or something, he'd say, "Take that home and show your mother." Now, that was one thing we did.

Any other things you'd carry back to England?

Oh, yes lots of things we brought in America,

28:30 you know clothing wasn't rationed there so you'd bring back lots of underwear and so on, female. And I brought luggage. I also brought a naval officer's raincoat which is roughly the same colour as ours because, the RAAF uniforms are a grey coat and the McIntosh [coat] sort of thing is

29:00 not uniform, you wouldn't be using that if you were on a parade. But you'd wear it because it's raining you see, or it might rain.

What contraband or things that you'd bring back, anything like that?

Well, no I brought back tobacco which they'd hit you on if they found that out in England because we had to go through customs. I did bring back a lot of records because in the, the first time I was in New York

29:30 saw a number of shows, and the hotel we were staying at, they had a bureau and if there were tickets available for anything you could get them. Now, Oklahoma was in its first run in New York when we got there and of course it was booked out for years ahead and, but we got tickets for that standing room only. Because

30:00 it was a very, the theatre that it was played at was fairly wide but not very shallow in depth so you weren't terribly far away on the stage and you had something to lean on. I can tell you it was so fascinating that you didn't notice that you were standing up. Now, the music for, in these musicals was never allowed to be played in England until they actually, the show itself got there, because Oklahoma didn't get to England until after the war. But people

30:30 like us, or people in the navy, you'd go back and rave about this new show and people would listen politely, "Oh, yes." So, I picked up a set of records of the whole score of Oklahoma and the music and took that back. That was one of the things I took back.

After the transport?

Well, after that it was back to Oban, awaiting posting. So, I was posted to

31:00 Orness again to back to Sunderlands. The second pilot who had flying boats by this time and was real operator. He'd wrangled himself a posting to a Wellington OTU as the skipper and he, he rang me up and said, "Now", then he told us what he'd done and he

31:30 said, "Would you like to join me as a navigator?" I said, "Sure." Because I knew he was a pilot and also I wasn't very keen on Sunderlands and wet, wintry weather in the north of Scotland on the open sea and so he wrangled that. My posting to Orness was cancelled and I was posted to Silloth which is where the Wellington OTU was. So, that was the nucleus of the crew. There we

32:00 were able to form our own crew by, you know, just getting to know people. So, we had on our crew, we had an Englishman as the skipper, a New Zealand second pilot, an Australian navigator, a Jordie, a Taff and a Liverpudlian. So, that was a nice, a nice sort of combination. And after that, that training I was

32:30 posted to 172 Squadron in Limavady in Northern Ireland again which is near Londonderry and our main patrols from that or night patrols of the Leigh light are mainly in the Irish Sea. Because for the first time in the war, U-boats [German submarines] had started to operate in the Irish Sea because the snorkel you see, they'd developed snorkel and we were used to go stooging around the Irish Sea looking for these

33:00 great snorkel with a radar at night. And you can imagine our fishing boats and god knows what in the

Irish sea so that was a bit weird and I suppose the only incident of any particular note in those six months was when we - and there was usually a 50 knot winds blowing. I might say so you take off from Limavady you go, go out to the North mile

33:30 and cross like that down in to the Irish sea. And we would always be briefed if there was anything we might encounter on the way such as a thing like the Queen Mary. We would be told that be in the vicinity. But on this particular occasion, no we weren't told anything and with this huge wind blowing of 50 knots with radar. You know you get a lot of what they call, sea returns, a lot of mush in the middle and it's pretty hard to

34:00 see anything in all that mush so we're belting along with 50 knots behind us. Wellington cruises at 150 knots so we're doing 200 knots that way and we get this blip, a very faint blip in the middle of all this muck and we say, "Oh, we'd better go back and investigate that." So, we turn around and head back and it took us god knows how long to reach it and we flew down.

34:30 It was a murky, murky night but you didn't go and light up anything with a Leigh light unless you were pretty certain it was a U-boat. So we came down over the top of this thing and there was just the fish and sort of fluorescent light or something, couldn't work out what it was. It was the Queen Mary and it was heading west at 30 knots so, okay we're coming back at 100 knots, 150 minus 50, pursuing something at 30 knots

35:00 so we're making a good 70 knots. Now, the parting rate was 230 knots that's the difference that you get with, with wings so that's why it took us so long to get back there but we didn't drop any depth charges on her. Got off quickly. But we weren't warned. We should have been told you see. We should have been told look out for the Queen Mary.

How did the lead light work on a Wellington?

A lead

35:30 light was the, you tracked it in to the fuselage proper from the under belly which is about half way along the fuselage. So when you want to operate it you lower it and you can control the beam that way or that way where the front turret would be with handlebars like a turret really. And you could move that around, get it in, and

36:00 change the angle and all the rest of it and then theoretically you would locate a submarine and you'd come down, you've got to come down with, as I say, the 50 feet to drop your depth charges. And when you got a mile or something away from it you'd put on the search light and that's the theory of it and drop your depth charges. It's one weapon that helped to win the war because the

36:30 U-boats before advent of lead light operating from France could cross the Bay of Biscay at night you see, they could be surfaced. They could be using their diesels and making great, much more speed than if they were submerged and of course if you're submerged you're relying totally on batteries which have got to be re-charged every so often. So they've got to come to the surface but with a snorkel which was a breathing thing sticking up they didn't have to

37:00 surface. But you see until, until the Lead light they were quite safe in crossing the Bay of Biscay at night but the Lead light kept them down.

Can you tell us about where you were sitting in the Wellington and what the Wellington was like as a plane to navigate from?

Well, the Wellington was a very, it was a pre-war plane of course. It was a twin engine

37:30 aircraft designed by Barnes Wallis who also designed the skipping bomb that demolished dams and what not. And it was, they'd build a whole lot of them I think, something like 11 thousand of them were built altogether and they were the first serious bomber aircraft to hit Germany. They have area planes. I think Whittles were used too

38:00 but of course they were phased out of bomber command when they started getting Halifaxes and more particularly, Lancasters. And so they were then used by coastal command but a later mark. The original Wellingtons had two Pegasus engines. The later ones had two Hercules, and almost double the horse power of them so it was a, you

38:30 know a very, very safe aircraft from the point of view of engine capacity. There's no trouble in staying up on one engine on the Wellington but of course it was an early model and of course they kept on developing things that had to be put on board the thing. In the case of a coastal command Wellington, all right, you'd have the radio, well that was on originally, but then the radar came along so you'd have to, to fit the

39:00 radar and the coastal command Wellingtons. The normal ones in a sort of just shaped like that you know but the Wellington has a chin on it like that, that sticks down below and that's where the radar is. The thing that revolves and so alright, they had the big provisions for the radar set and for somebody to sit in front of

39:30 that and watch it. You can only watch it for half an hour, you always rotate it around. The radio

operators used the, they would be half an hour on the radar, perhaps half an hour on the radio and then half an or something on the rear turret. So you'd, they'd be rotating round, so you, you'd have the pilots, then you'd the radio, then you had the

40:00 radar, and then you had the navigator who had the decent sort of table which was alongside the fuselage, held up against the fuselage so you were sitting looking, if you could see through it, you were looking out the side and you know, a reasonably comfortable seat. Then you'd come to the Lead light which was a, a search light with a great big steel skeleton up the top of it.

40:30 And when it was raised in to the fuselage the poor old tail gunner had to have to climb through all of this steel scaffolding to get down to the turret wall to come out of his turret and then you had the turret and so it was pretty cluttered and it did. I think I did say to somebody, I've forgotten if I told you people that the impression you got was they had a great heap of

41:00 equipment and they'd said, "Right, now you have to fit all that in there." So, they'd just pick it up, chuck it in and where it landed that's where it stayed. That's the impression I had of it. It was cluttered but it was comfortable all the same. It was a good aircraft.

Was it heated?

Oh, yes. That was one of the troubles. The heating comes from the engine of course and the intake from the engine of the hot air came under the navigator's table

41:30 and there was no way you could cut that off at all. Because that was then circulated to various points around the aircraft and they would be individually controlled but not for the navigator. He had to take the full brass of the hot air on his legs underneath it.

Tape 9

00:30 **You mentioned that heating was a problem for you on a Wellington were there any other problems for you or the crew in that aeroplane?**

No, no the only incident that we had was on one exercise we lost our hydraulics which meant we had no breaks or anything and we went perilously close to tipping over at the end of the runway. And the only other problem that we had was nothing

01:00 to do with a Wellington but Linevardy was one of four airfields spread out around the shore of the Loch Foil. Loch foil comes to a narrow neck as it goes in to the sea and both sides of that there are mountains or high hills so it's a bit dodgy with four, four airfields, one of them was a Liberator, RAF Liberator squadron, Belly Kelly and the other two were

01:30 RAF, were Royal Naval fleet air arm bases. So it could be quite congested coming in and out of there and one night we were, we were coming back and the New Zealander Second pilot was a very taciturn individual but he was a very good bloke really as it turned out. He was a warrant officer. I suddenly heard him say, "Dive Jackie," Jackie being the

02:00 pilot and Jack didn't react straight away, he said, "What?." And I thought what's he talking about, there are mountains down there. But suddenly, and I guess it was hairy, the New Zealander whacked the control column down like that, 'phwt' and straight over the top of us flew a Liberator and the fellow in the rear turret went right over the top of him and he let out a, you know, a great yell. Now,

02:30 it was, normally if you're coming towards each other like that you'd dive right, he told me you'd dive right. But there was no time for that and he just whacked the control column and thank god the other Liberator didn't do the same. Would have been a complete head on collision. We were like that. He went right, just right over the top of us. But they were merely following the Wellington. It was just the fact that it was a very congested area. I can imagine the bomber come home. It must have been a horrible flying hundreds of Lancasters and bombing

03:00 up Berlin or something all within half an hour. I don't envy collisions, mid air collisions there must have been. But that was quite, quite frightening really.

Were there any other operations that stay in your mind from 172 squadron?

Well, on one occasion because we, the Irish sea is very congested and you couldn't afford to, because you'd

03:30 picked up something that lighted up with a search light, you had to make sure what it was and we came along something one night. It was a fairly small sort of a thing whatever it was so we started flying around trying to make out what it possibly could be. Now there was a provision in the United Kingdom, if you got lost you'd fly around in a circle and the nearest search light

04:00 battery would light up, put its beam up in the air and go like that and that would be pointing you to the nearest aerodrome. We were circling around looking at this. We were quite close to the Northern Irish

coast and blow me down, they started search light homing procedures. Oh, and then pointing us which way to go which was rather odd because

04:30 the navigation in the RFC [Royal Flying Corps] was very, very good and very easy and pinpoint because we were on G which is good for about 200 metres you know, when you were here, exact spot so we had both G, we had radar and of course the RFC's fairly congested. You've got the Isle of Man sitting up in the middle of it which gets pretty high but you've got radar you know exactly where you are really. But

05:00 must say that amused us that they were giving us search light homing procedure and we were over the Irish sea. And the other interesting thing, exercise I suppose, was when we were told we had to crawl around the Irish coast because they had some intonation there might be a U-boat lurking in one of the bays or something or other and that was, well it wasn't pleasant, it was too rough and that's where I did get air sick but you

05:30 know it was. If you could forget that it was quite pleasant wandering around the, the Irish coastline which is pretty rugged near Donegal.

Can you explain a bit about how G was used?

Well, G you've got, now how does it work? You've got, if I've got this right. You've got two slow stations and the main one which sends out an

06:00 electronic signal which is repeated by the stations and you've got an electronic thing which shows the two blips which represent the signal you're getting. So it's based on the time it takes for that to hit the aircraft and you note those two numbers and you've got a chart and you can, and

06:30 you can, you pick the line on the chart which corresponds to those blips, where they cross is where you are.

It was pinpoint accurate?

Pinpoint. Pinpoint accurate, yes. Trouble was it had a limited range. I mean it was used in bomber command, most of these things were used in bomber command, radar for example. But it couldn't get too far

07:00 across in to Europe so they had to, you know, develop other, other means, all sorts of weird names they used to give them, Hobbo was one name which again is the same sort of thing with the two radio beams and where they cross is over Berlin or something. You know until they were jammed by the Germans when they found out these things.

By the end of 1944 the

07:30 **momentum had swung very much in favour of the allies.**

Oh, very much.

How did that effect coastal command's job?

Well, I mean there was still U-boats operating of course but they, they'd been beaten by this time anyway but they still had the patrol and we had, and then snorkel came along which was kind of a menace towards the end of the war because they could operate close in to the British Isles with that.

08:00 And I imagine the other parts of coastal command, the ones that flew Bow fighters and shooting up convoys, they may still be working for you pretty well but on, the whole time that I was on 172 Squadron. I don't think we located a submarine and they were certainly weren't, we didn't lose an aircraft. And the only time that they ever

08:30 saw U-boats were, the odd one that a Wellington would pick up that was surrendering and they were ushered in to Londonderry.

Tell us about the day the war ended in Europe from your perspective.

Well, of course we were still operational and I was in Limavady and they had decorations and all the rest of it in the streets. But Leovardi was a

09:00 pretty quiet town. There wasn't any mad excitement and I suppose there was just other relief, it's all over. It wasn't for us, we still went on operations for, but you know they were only, there's no danger going to be unless we had a rogue U-boat that wasn't going to surrender and decided to shoot you up that didn't happen.

What was the purpose of operations after the end of the war?

Just to, just to round up surrendering U-boats.

09:30 And I suppose giving you something to do because otherwise what do you do?

What did you do after your last couple of operations had

Oh, well then we were posted to, the Australians were all posted to Beccles in coastal command which

was a holding unit on the boarders of Norfolk and Suffolk,

10:00 a part of England I hadn't previously seen, East Anglia. And well you just waited there until they could re-patriot you back to Australia, although in my case that didn't happen. But they mainly just sent you off as long as they knew where you were and could send you a telegram, went off and you were left to your own devices. You'd, as I say, many of us got jobs. I got a job as

10:30 an optician's receptionist actually which didn't last very long. You'd periodically go back to Beccles to pick up rations actually because they, the Australian government had sent over a whole boat load of food for prisoners of war that were being released but it was far, far too much.

11:00 And so they rationed it out to the air force because in so far as Australians and the United Kingdom they were practically all RAAF because they weren't, wouldn't be too many army types there or naval types. So we got a decent ration every month of things which were, well we got tinned butter, tinned cream, biscuits, cordials, sugar. All those sorts of things.

11:30 So, you'd go and pick that up, go back again to wherever you were.

You had been married by this stage. Can you tell us about your wartime wedding?

Well, that was a, and I suppose that's still an interesting story because alright that was all, I was in Oban at that time and it took place in Blackpool South Shore

12:00 where my in-laws lived and so I went to. I went and applied for leave you see and we had booked to have our honeymoon in Scotland at a place called Crianlarrich which is way up the top of Loch Leyland on the way to Oban on the railway line and so they gave me 10 days which you

12:30 know is pretty good. But you know, not being satisfied with anything like that I said, "Well, look I'm going to, my honeymoon's the Crianlarrich, it's only an hour or so away by rail, why don't you leave me there and if you want me I'll be back here in no-time." The CO said, "You can have 14 days and that's it. You'll be back here at the end of 14 days." And I thought, "Well crikey, who can complain about 14 days in the middle

13:00 of the war you see." So, off I went on leave and I suppose we were 10 days in to my honeymoon and I got a telegram and I thought, "Oh brother I'm being recalled." It extended by leave by 4 days and I thought, I can't believe it. He told me I had to be back definitely and don't argue, at the end of 14 days. So, when I went back, now air

13:30 crew are what, they're mustering is general duties whatever you are navigator, pilot or whatever, general duties. And general duties you can be made to do anything. You can, alright, you want an armaments officer, fine, get one of these general duties fellows. You want an orderly officer, general duties, you want an adjutant general duties. Now, at Oban there was an adjutant and an assistant

14:00 adjutant. The assistant adjutant was on leave and the adjutant was posted. So, what do they do? They grab a, an air crew type hanging around, happened to be a Mariner, one of the Mariner skippers and he was an interesting fellow in his own way because in the middle of all this I'm posted to Orness, back to Sunderlands. He gets the telegram and he says, "God, he can't go. He's on his

14:30 honeymoon." So, he rung up the station at Orness and said, "Do you want Flying Officer Kiddle?" No, flight lieutenant I was by that time, "Do you mind flight lieutenant urgently?" "No, no, no, no, no. There's no panic." So, he said, "Right well we'll give him another 4 days" and so he just whacked off the telegram then we had an extra four days leave. The other chap I'd met before when I first went in to coastal command before I'd even been on a coastal command

15:00 station. I went on a few days leave and I was with relatives that were the only, in Dorset in Pool, in Dorset you know. Pool's got a great big harbour and it also had an operational coastal command flying boat squadron based there. Being a very keen type I thought well I'm going to go along there and ask them if I can look around you see, seeing as I'm being posted in to coastal command. Of course they thought I was an idiot

15:30 and I was on leave, what the hell did I want to waste my time doing this for? But you know they indulged me and while they were waiting for somebody to show me around there was a bunch of them and they were all busy in conferring and, and you know a lot of activity going on and I said to one of them, "What's going on? What are you doing?" And one fellow said, "Your name a flight lieutenant Wilson sir. Oh,

16:00 well we're flying a Catalina down to Gibraltar to pick up a crew and on our way back we were shot at by Spanish fishing vessel, so we shot her up." And naturally, being neutral they were having a court of enquiry about this you see and they were conferring to get their stories straight you see, that was all that this was about. Now the guy that was

16:30 in that was flight lieutenant Wilson, a great big chubby fellow with a deep rumbling belly laugh and he was later posted to the Spartus squad and as a skipper and there's a fellow that was acting as adjutant so he was two strikes on Flight Lieutenant Wilson. After the war when I was working in Australia House, one of the local engaged staff had been,

17:00 what was he, an engineer or something during the war and he'd been shot down and he was, you know. He had some injuries and he was having to go up to the air ministry every so often to be medically examined and so on, while they were working out a pension I suppose. And he said to me one day, "Look, I've got to go up to the air ministry tomorrow, can I go?" You see, and I said, "Oh, of course you can."

17:30 So, the next, the following day I said to him, "How did you get on with your, did they treat you well?" "Oh, marvellous", he said, "Yes, marvellous. The fellow that interviewed me, he's a fellow called Flight lieutenant Wilson." And I said, "Is he a chubby fellow with a deep rumbling belly laugh?" "That's the fellow." And I thought well, here we are, Flight lieutenant Wilson and he's still a Flight lieutenant and he probably won't get no further than

18:00 that but he's bringing sweetness and light to everybody that he has any contact with. I don't say it was the same fellow because I didn't see him, but it clearly was.

At the end of the war you chose to stay on in England for a while, you had an English bride, you'd been there for a long time. How did you feel about getting home to Australia?

Well, I was more interested in my wife of course and at that time when you

18:30 eventually was repatriated you had to, your bride would have to wait at least 12 months or more before they could arrange a passage for her and on one of my visits to Beccles to pick up my ration there was a…I noticed on the noticeboard there was another calling for anybody who was a permanent public servant who might be

19:00 interested in joining the newly formed Department Of Immigration in London and I thought, "Well, I'm interested in this because I was working in the Air Department before the war and there wasn't going to be much future in that." Immigration was, I thought, very important so I duly called at Australia House and eventually

19:30 they took me on, with another one, one other fellow who was in bomber command. He's in Pathfinders actually. Only two of us, both in the same boat. He was also married to an English girl and so I started working in Australia House. And of course the first year or two we were not doing any immigration work, we were involved in the repatriation brides or

20:00 Australians that had been stranded throughout the war. And that was our job because Australia House controlled all the berths on ships going to Australia.

We haven't got much time to talk about that but that first year or so what was the situation re: Australians in England and the need for repatriation?

Well, they'd been stranded there throughout the war and they were desperately keen to get back home and they had to wait and you know it was a lot of

20:30 hassles about that because, you know, naturally everyone wanted to go as soon as possible but there had to be a big queue. And my first job was on the enquiry counter at Australia House still in uniform, it was before I was discharged and of course people always believe what they want to hear and they manage discard anything that's not very favourable and that's unfortunately

21:00 human nature. And they used to, somebody would come in one day and say, "I was told by a flight lieutenant," and so they identified me straight away. So and so, you see which always would be half the story.

What was the situation to do with war brides?

Well, the same thing with them. In fact we used to look after them very well and I suppose that's what is now Vet's Affairs, in a sense.

21:30 They used to come from all over England of course and we would provide them with a rail line to get to London where they probably were going to embark from Tilbury at that time and arrange for accommodation overnight. If they had to stay overnight and further more, they were all allocated to some, a particular train and of course there were a number of termini in London

22:00 like Paddington, Kings Cross, Waterloo and so on and so forth. And we would meet them when they arrived and the whole office would do this because we only had a, two or three Australian based officers at that time but with also locally engaged staff as typists and so on. So, we'd all be, we'd all be allocated a station with a list of the brides that were due and to meet them and

22:30 then put them on their way, either to a ship or to overnight accommodation. And that used to be, that was always, that was very good because you were all working as one happy family, when it got bigger and bigger of course, that didn't happen.

What was the attitude of those brides you came in to contact with about going to Australia?

Oh, well I suppose they wanted to see, they wanted to see their husbands again. I suppose some of them had

23:00 trepidations as to what it was going to be like going out there to Australia but by and large they were all pretty enthusiastic because a number of them had babies and so on by this time.

What was the atmosphere like in England in that immediate post war period?

The rationing got worse after the war than it ever was during the war in England and it stayed that way. I came back in 1951,

23:30 the beginning of ’51 and the meat rationing in 1950 was a lot less than it was at any time during the war. It came down to ten pence worth of meat a week including two penny worth of bully beef or you know, Spam or whatever, no canned bully beef sort of thing. It was dreadful. It got worse and worse. They really suffered and I think, you know. I look back on that

24:00 and it was the government in power at that time, you had a fellow called Stafford Cripps who was running all of this and I reckon that busted the morale of England frankly. I really do because on the continent and places like Belgium they let it rip. Now, it was pretty tough on people that couldn’t afford the prices and all the rest of it, they had something to strive for. But England after the war was a grey,

24:30 depressing place, heavy rations and not much hope. I mean they were doing all sorts of things. They were bringing in their welfare state but they brought it in far too rapidly, I think because that was very, very costly and of course they’d lost so much of their overseas investment. They’d had to sell up, particularly in America they had a lot of investment there but they had to…the Brits had to sell

25:00 up despite the fact they got all this stuff from Leestlin [?] that had bankrupted the country. No question about it and I don’t think they had anything to look forward to. No incentive. Now, it might, it can be pretty rough of course if you just let it go like they did on the continent but you could get things on the continent, food and so on that you wouldn’t be able to get in England and

25:30 I think that it was, and frankly it was a wrong policy. They should have done it more gradually but it was a, it was quite depressing and especially in places like London. You see, when I was married I did live out for a while on the operational station in Northern Ireland, now Northern Ireland was rationed like it was in England but it was far easier to get stuff over there. And further more, a lot of the locals in Northern Ireland couldn’t

26:00 even afford the meat ration so the butcher usually had surplus meat around. So, we could even get legs of lamb which were completely unheard of in England unless you had a big family with a lot of ration books.

You came back to Australia in 1947?

’51.

’51, sorry yeah.

26:30 I went to Germany in ’47.

What were you doing in Germany?

Well, of course the immigration programme started in the United Kingdom that’s where all the first migrants came. In fact we’d been inundated with letters towards the end of the war and after the war from would be migrants. A lot of them escaping this greyness that I was just talking about and I at one time we estimated that we had

27:00 what would have happened, they’d get an answer, a standard answer about how we were going to have a big immigration program later on, fill in this enquiry form. And we filled, we estimated that at one time we had enquiry forms which would have covered about six hundred and fifty thousand people wanted to make, had indicated that they wanted to migrate to Australia. So, when the scheme was eventually announced of course we had great

27:30 queues right down the street in to Fleet Street. People wanting to know all about it but that was only a preliminary one but when eventually it got underway and we started issuing application forms and announced that, more great big queues down the street but of course ships were very scarce and despite the fact there was an enormous number of people that could have, could have been

28:00 accepted and sent to Australia. They couldn’t get there because we had, there weren’t enough ships. In the meantime, Arthur Cole who was the Minister came across to Europe, do a round trip around the place to see what the prospects were and so on. And he went to Berlin where the Australian military mission was operating and also they had set up an organisation which was called eventually the International Refugee Organisation.

28:30 They had two million displaced persons around Europe that didn’t want to go back to where they’d come from because they didn’t want to go anywhere near the Russians or any, place occupied by the Russians and they were in camps all over Germany. Now, they’d started a program and initially they were going to the United States and Canada, but when Arthur Coral, they put the hard word on him you see to

29:00 take, to take displaced persons and he signed the agreement to take ten thousand in the first instance.

And then they had to get staff over there to sort it out. Well, the only staff readily available were Australian based officers in London so I was the one that went over because I had been doing some of the, some of my work in Australia House was repatriating alleged Australians in

29:30 Germany. Those were Germans who had come to Australia before the war and had become naturalised, gone back to Germany for one reason or another before the war and were stranded there. Some because they were called back by Hitler and others just to visit I suppose. And they were repatriated through London and I was doing part of the work in London, liaising with, with

30:00 Berlin you see. So, I suppose that was one reason why I was selected to go over and I went over with the chief migration officer and the chief medical officer from London who only went over to see what was what but I stayed on.

What was your title?

I was a selection officer.

What specifically did that involve on a day to day basis?

Selecting migrants, you know, in England they all were interviewed you see.

In Germany?

Oh, yes

30:30 everyone was seen in Germany. That was very important, very important to make sure we didn't get anybody that was in the SS, that had snuck in to one of these displaced person's camps because the SS weren't just Germans you know.

How many people did you interview in your time in Germany?

Well, we had six weeks starting from scratch working out how we were going to operate, writing up leaflets and so on which we were required

31:00 to show the obligations were going to be on these people that were brought to Australia. The main obligation is to work as directed for two years and what benefits they'd get in the way of you know unemployment benefits or whatever else. Also, work out a way to how we go about this, what sort of forms we might need as application forms. Six weeks from starting at that to the first ship

31:30 going and the first ship had on it 844 and we had to, and they were spread out all over Germany three camps in the British zone and one in the American zone. So we had to travel all around the place and interview the lot of them, have them medically examined.

How sure can you be that no war criminals took advantage of that scheme?

I can be very sure. This is one of the things I'm being interviewed on SBS [Australian television channel] about. Now, what we were looking for

32:00 were people that had been in the SS [German Schutzstaffel – security squad]. Now, the SS of course were, apart from very nasty individuals but they were also concentration camp guards. Now, you can imagine we were getting Jewish refugees before the war and also after that, although they weren't going through England. You can imagine what would have happened if a shipment of displaced persons arrived and they're Jews that had been through a concentration camp and got out of it and

32:30 saw somebody coming down the gangway that had been a concentration camp guard, SS, as I say. They were not Germans, they were Latvians particularly and so on and so forth. And we had to make very sure of it, we didn't get any of those. Now, the way we could do it was, all people in the SS had their, one group mark tattooed under their arm so naturally that was a giveaway so they didn't leave it there. They had it removed but it would leave a scar.

33:00 So, we, and they were a particular type. I know it's incredible to say it but you could sense there could be, and when we interviewed them we'd say, "Have you got a blood group mark or scar under your arm?" "No." "Take your shirt off." You know, we could be quite ruthless. I wanted, there were 2 million of them, we could be highly selective and anybody that tells you that they were given the wrong information

33:30 they don't, again it's selective hearing. They were brutally told they were going out to work as labourers, farm labourers, or domestics in the case of women. It didn't matter what their qualifications were, they would not be recognised. Because they wouldn't be then, professional qualifications wouldn't be recognised. So, we'd say, "Take your shirt off." And if there's any sort of a mark there and maybe sometimes it wouldn't have been because of that. "Out now."

34:00 **How often did you come across people like that?**

Well, we told the doctors to be very, very careful when they're examining them, to make sure they looked under the arm. We, I can't remember how many they picked up. Not many, but in the final staging, staging camp we recruited a lot of staff to help us who were actually displaced persons in camps that were English speakers.

34:30 And on the last staging camp, before we were taking them to the ship, one of these girls said, “I know somebody that was in the SS that’s got through your, your screening.” “Who?” So, she told us his name and we summoned that bloke and said, “Strip.” Scar under his arm. Now, he must have substituted somebody else in the medical examination. So, we thought

35:00 crikey one’s got through, so finally when we were handing out their documents to embark, every male had to strip in front of us and we would carefully look at the photograph that had been provided of him and check that it was him. As far as you can check a passport type photograph, and suddenly we saw another guy up the back sneaking out.

35:30 So, we said, “Shwt. He had one under his arm too.” I can tell you that nobody that got on that ship had an SS blood group or a scar under his arm. Now, I can’t tell you what happened subsequently but that was one of the, how I was, interviewed for SS on that particular thing and it’s in my memoirs actually.

What was the, from your point of view, the purpose of that policy to allow ten thousand people to come to

36:00 **Australia at that time?**

Well, the purpose of it? Well, it was I suppose two things, first of all we wanted migrants and secondly we were under international pressure to take them because we became members of the international refugee organisation which eventually became the intergovernmental committee for European migration. And is now the International Committee for Migration, ICM, they move

36:30 refugees and so on which are selected overseas or humanitarian cases which are selected, particularly in Africa at the present time.

We’re getting towards the end of the tape. George I might have to sweep you through a couple of general questions. I’m sure we could talk about this for quite a while but in ’51 when you got back to Australia, how had the country changed in your memory?

It was a shock because there was no such thing as unemployment,

37:00 the wharf labourers were appalling. Now, I brought a car back from England and I was told by, it was a Ford car and they told me in England it would take 24 hours to clear it in Australia. When I went to whoever was handling it in Australia, they said, “Oh, rubbish. You won’t get it under a fortnight.” And I had a hell of a battle with him. I got it in 10 days and they said, “What,

37:30 how was it?” And I said, “Well, the coil was taken.” “Oh, you’re lucky.” Those damn wharf labourers pilfered everything and when I saw them in operation at station period Port Melbourne, the leisurely way they were going about handling the luggage. In fact it was like, it was removed on great big slings in those days. They’d overload the slings and I saw to my horror a bag on one sling was topping over and went

38:00 crash on to the deck which was mine. And these fellows, and I knew what they’d been like during the war. They’d go on strike for God’s sake. And service personnel would have to do things and that was my first impression, absolute horror. And the next thing was, if you went to get something to eat a quarter of the tables would be, were being looked after and great queues outside. Now,

38:30 well that was bad in England but they’d let you in. You might have to wait because they were just as short of staff there, you might have to wait but at least you were sitting at a table. So, I was not terribly impressed at all with what it was like in Australia at that time.

How had you changed? How had the war changed you?

Oh, just made me more, bit more mature I think. Family responsibilities and so on. Oh, well

39:00 maturity I think. You start off as a young eager beaver fellow, naïve and all the rest of it. You lose that.

Looking back on your experience of the war, how do you feel about it now?

Well, you mean how should I have been in it or should I, do I believe that I should have been in it? Yes. I do. Did I believe in the menace of Hitler,

39:30 very much so. I think it was a, well it was something that had to be fought. It’s a pity we haven’t strengthened ourselves, particularly Britain before the war and it never would have come to it.

There was a major war fought over here while you were away. How did you feel about missing out on that?

Well, you see we didn’t know a lot about that of course because we were relying upon news in England. I mean, alright you

40:00 got it in general terms, you see one of the things that the British press was criticised for was that one of its own forces, the 14th Army in Burma didn’t get much publicity in England.

We’re nearly at the end of the tape. I’m just rushing you through the last couple of questions. I just wanted to know your response but George, how do you feel about the

40:30 **future of Australia now? Based on your experience going through the second war up to now?**

Well, I think, I've got now doubt we've got a great future. There are a lot of hiccups and so on along the way that you might be a bit unhappy about at the present time but I don't doubt that.

Very briefly how do you feel about the current immigration policy compared to the…?

Well, of course I'm, I'm a bit equivocal about this. I

41:00 do not believe in, in people just trying to crash through the place. We are taking a lot of refugees, genuine refugees and more particularly humanitarian sufferers and a hell of a lot of those are in Africa like Somalia and places like that. No money whatever, I mean these guys had to have a lot of money to get to bribe these blokes to get out here and they are not,

41:30 and don't let anybody kid you, that are most of them are genuine refugees. They're coming here because obviously they'll get a better life here than they'll get back there. And that's very, very unfortunate for them but it's not our fault.

INTERVIEW ENDS