Australians at War Film Archive

Thomas Moore (Tom) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:27 **OK Tom as**

00:30 **we discussed before what I'd like to do first with you is to get you to give us an understanding of your life events before the war, during the war and after the war so we can get a picture; then we'll go back later on yourself and Martin and go into more detail about some of those events. So perhaps we could start off by where you were born.**

01:00 Yes well I was born down the country down the Riverina at a small town called Urana or U-R-A-N-A, Urana as some say and I was born out on a sheep property 'bout 7 miles out of town and this property that we had or my father had was a grant after World War I under

01:30 the Returned Soldiers Settlement Scheme at the end of World War I. He was a Light Horseman during World War I and he got this property, it was part of a subdivision of 24,000 acres divided amongst six diggers shall we say. They all got about 4,000 acres each. It was 7 miles out of town, it was I suppose then

02:00 considered very good country because it was actually in a lake bed, Lake Urana, and they got about 4,000 acres each with a bit of high ground. We had low ground that was in the lake bed mind you, and about 50 acres of high ground.

And the high ground was?

Sand hills,

Sand hills

Rabbit infested sand hills.

02:30 **Oh OK.**

The lake, whilst it was called Lake Urana which should have rung a warning bell I suppose but my father built a home in the lake bed. A homestead and we had it fully established with sheds and yards and windmills and fully established. It was one of these lakes that never had water in it.

03:00 But in about 1930 it flooded. And that the water came in slowly. The actual lake, it was a depression. Out in that part of the world or that part of NSW it is very, very flat the country, it's that flat out there you can actually see the curvature of the earth if you're driving along the road but this was just a depression,

03:30 as if the whole 24,000 acres had sunk down. I personally think it was where some meteorite must have hit years ago you know and spewed up sand around the edges. Anyway this water came in in about 1930 and slowly crept right across the whole lake bed up under our house and ended up about a metre in the house I suppose and we were up about

04:00 a metre off the ground too, so we were, we were flooded out and we then moved out of the house into tents living in the sand hills. I should say prior to this flood we were I suppose you could say doing very well on the property. My father

04:30 had a motor car.

Had a motor car?

Yes

And how did you get your education?

Now well education. The first three or four years of my education was done by correspondence course through Blackfriars Correspondence School that was based in Sydney and we actually had a governess,

we employed a full a live-in resident governess at home.

05:00 **Was that unusual?**

Well it was unusual; it cost money to do it. You know when I look back we had a motor car and we had a governess just to teach three of us. My brother, myself, my sister. We had a classroom.

Were you the youngest?

No I'm in the middle of those three and it was well disciplined schooling. The governess made sure we were there sitting at our little desks at 9 o'clock of a morning

05:30 and then 'course that was rosy for a few years but then when it, the water came in and flooded and we lived in tents and that and the governess didn't like that at all and probably we couldn't afford her either, she just disappeared. I don't know what happened to her.

Not sure what happened to the governess.

Then we started going to school by horse and sulky and we used to drive into school

06:00 into Urana.

What happened to the motor car?

Motor car, it was probably sold to pay for expenses you know. We had no income coming in and my father…. see looking back on it that was a dreadful hardship for my parents but for us kids it was a great adventure. There's water in the lake, the lake was then full of wildlife swans and ducks

06:30 and foxes and all that. It was timbered country and as the water started to reduce in height we could go out into the lake, walk out into it for some distance and my brother and I we went out, we used to go fox hunting and we'd go out and the foxes would be in amongst the swans nest you know eating eggs and that and we could run faster than them in this

07:00 shallow water, so we used to chase foxes down hit 'em on the back of the head with a stick

And when did you complete your education in Urana?

I completed when I reached let me think now Year Year 9 at age 14, I finished my education. That was the Intermediate Certificate.

And had you shown any particular talents?

Yes I could say this.

07:30 I had I, ever since I can remember I was keen on drawing. I still am and even in our hardships my grandmother who came to live with us at one stage later on in her life and our stay in Urana, she enrolled me in the Australian School of Sketching and that was run by somebody in Sydney and they used to send lessons to us

08:00 and I had to do, I got some equipment. A drawing board and pen and ink and that and I used to do drawings and send the lessons back to them you know.

And what sort of things did you draw?

Oh my, well the things that I can remember drawing aeroplanes by the way. But I had a…. and I still have got a sketch book and it's got drawings of cowboys and indians

08:30 and horses and that sort of thing. Now I used that book later on in my life to get a job I might add and I might tell you about that later. So at age 14 I left school and then my parents said, "Well you know, you'll have to get a job, go to the city." so I came down to the city and lived at with an aunty.

09:00 **Was that on your mother's side or your father's side?**

She wasn't an aunty at all really. We called her aunty. She her husband, was a war friend, a digger mate with my father's. They were both in the services together. We called her aunty but she was not a relative really.

Was he still alive at this time?

He was, he was in Urana initially. He tossed it in early in the piece and came and lived at

09:30 Engadine. That's well out of the centre of Sydney. I came down and lived with this aunty and then she took me out to Australian Glass Works or what was it called Australian Consolidated Industries out at Waterloo to get a job and I wanted a job in the drawing office drawing, see that's all I could think about and

10:00 I still remember this clearly, I went into for an interview with the Chief Draftsman. I went into this drawing office which had about 30 draftsmen all in white dustcoats, very professional, big drawing boards and the Chief Draftsmen interviewed me and he said to me, "Now have you got any drawings?"

and I'm sure he thought I was going to pull out tech drawings or mechanical drawings or something like that you know 'cause that's all he

10:30 was, that's how his mind worked. I know this because I was in the same position myself you know many years later. I pulled out my book of cowboys and indians you know and he looked at this and I often wonder what he thought you know this little hillbilly coming in for a job. "Have you got a job there?" and I worked there in the drawing office as a blueprint boy, I used to go and get the prints

11:00 for them then I got on the drawing board and started my career as a draftsman.

And did you enjoy being in Sydney?

Oh yes I'd say, I did. I never sort of worried about the fact that I'd left the bush. I think as a youngster of 14 and 15 you're

11:30 very flexible and you don't look back too far, you look forward all the time.

And what were you looking forward to at that age?

Well I suppose at that age I was only interested in having a job you know. I had this job and I took up, I went to Tech [Technical College] and did Mechanical Trades courses as they call it and I got some skill on the drawing board and I, then

12:00 I actually stayed there a couple of years then. I was recruited by one of the managers that worked there and asked me to go over to Phillips Lamps they were called, Phillips Electrical Industries and work there in the drawing office, now you know I was only what would I been then 16 and I went over there and

12:30 I got a job I was working in the drawing office and I loved drawing. I was doing jig and tool design work. That's designing tools that make the components if you can imagine. And I worked there amongst 3 or 4 other draftsmen then when I turned 18 of course the war had started then.

13:00 **What do you remember about that, about the war starting?**

I can remember sitting with my uncle and aunt as I called them in their lounge room and I can remember the announcement being made that Australia was at war. That was I think by Menzies I think made the announcement.

13:30 I should remember that I know. I think it was Menzies. I can remember that and I can remember my uncle of course who I told you was a returned, he was a digger and of course that meant a lot more to him than it did to me then at about age 16 you know.

And what did he say to you about his experiences during the First World War?

Yeah well see there. ... Problem with equipment – PAUSE -

14:03 Phillips was out in Darling St Waterloo and I might have mentioned earlier that I was living at Engadine and just thinking back you know and bearing in mind that I was only at this stage of the game 16 but when I started at the glassworks I was 14, that was just out at Waterloo too, so I had to get from Engadine

14:30 to the factory at Waterloo by I forget what time it was 7:30 in the morning you know and that was walking to the railway station catching a little rail motor from Engadine to Sutherland catching an electric train into Central catching the tram out. I think back on that you know. No motor car or anything like that, long way to go. And getting there bright and early. It was, I had to leave early and I had to get home very late as a kid.

15:00 But then at Phillips I was on the drawing board and I was engaged in a "protected industry" as they called it. I mention that because when I decided to join the air force I had to get a reference from my the people I was working for and a matter of fact I have got a copy of the

15:30 reference and it said that, "Tom Moore is engaged as a Mechanical Draftsman and working in a Protected Industry." and that he was, he is engaged on I think it was design work for transmitters for the American armed forces, Astro compasses for the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] and Naval ordinance work,

16:00 we were working on naval gun sites. Now this reference looking back now and realise then was designed to stop me from going into the air force see but to get out to apply for a job, if you are in a protected industry your application had to go before the Manpower Board and there was somebody, some politician I can't remember his name who had

16:30 this controlling authority of deciding yes he can, we'll let him go or we won't.

Did you actually have to appear before the Manpower Board?

No, not that I can remember. The paperwork went in and he apparently decided to release me shall we say. So I applied just one month after turning 18 and

17:00 then there was a bit of a waiting list to get into air crew.

Was the air force more popular than the other services?

Oh I don't know about that. The air force was of course was all voluntary as distinct from some of the other services were conscripted, the army, branches of the army were conscripted. Air crew

17:30 was a different group again. Like you had to pass a few tests to get into air crew.

What sort of tests were they?

Well you had to be first of all a strict medical examination. That was to check you hearing, your eyesight and your general fitness. Then you had to have a certain IQ shall we say.

18:00 Before actually being taken in we went through a course of 21 lessons where they issued us with a, this I'm not sure whether it was a requirement or whether it was just a fill in gap because they couldn't take us to keep us occupied and keep us interested. They gave us this hard covered manual of 21 lessons and we

18:30 had to do a lesson a week and then send it in and they would mark it.

What sort of lessons were they?

Oh they were general maths, additions, subtractions and that, logic, questions on logic. That's about all I can remember. They weren't difficult you know but they were just trying to assess whether you knew how to add 2 and 2 together and a bit of trigonometry was involved.

19:00 You had to have some basic knowledge of trigonometry because navigation involved a lot of triangular work.

And did you intend to be a navigator?

Well it's strange you ask me that question because I did, yes I did. I just mention about as well as doing the lessons we were asked to go and do Morse code training. We had to go into a room opposite Wynyard station and

19:30 learn the Morse code, learn how to receive it and how to transmit it on a little Morse key and they tried to get us up to 15 words a minute, I think it was receive and send. And that was good basic…. we weren't in the air force, we were just civilians but we were hoping to get into the air force you know subject to how you went on all this preliminary work. Now

20:00 you mentioned about did I intend to be a navigator - I did. I decided when I enrolled although I didn't have to put this down on paper but I would be a navigator because I had good knowledge on drawing straight lines measuring angles and all that and ideally suited for a navigator, I could see that, because I might add my elder brother by this time was in the air force.

20:30 **What was he in the air force?**

He was an air gunner. He was air crew and of course he gave me a lot of hints you know about which branch of the service. So I decided I'd be a navigator, I thought I'm a cinch [a certainty]. So I applied one month after 18 and I was called up on one day after the New Year

21:00 1943. I applied in 1942 and I was called in on the 2nd January 1943. I was in the air force.

And how did you feel about that at the time?

Well oh well, that I suppose you know was the first step into a big adventure you know. I had a bit of knowledge about

21:30 air force life from my brother and from my cousin shall I call him, he wasn't a cousin but the son of my uncle and aunt that I lived with.

Did he also live with them your cousin?

He lived at home, yes so we were all in the one house initially when I was the only one of my family. See my parents were still at some stage still

22:00 down in the country. Anyway this cousin was a, he was a ground staff. He was a mechanical fitter and he went in as a ground staff fitter. But he was in the air force.

Was he about your age?

He was my brothers' age - two years older than me. Doug Buckle his name was. Now I'll just tell you his story.

22:30 He was taken into the air force as a mechanical fitter ground staff. He was then, went overseas and he was on board a boat going from New York to England and he got some form of blood poisoning, just how he got it I don't know and he took seriously ill and

23:00 he was taken off the boat in Iceland and he died in Iceland. He never really you know made it to England. It's just one of those freak things. There is a bit of a sequel to the story because his sister always searched you know trying to get some story about him and in later years we discovered a chap who was on the

23:30 squadron that I was on, who was with him at the time and took him to the hospital at, so he was able to give Elaine Buckle, his sister the story about how he was taken off sick and how he was taken to hospital.

And was the chap in your squadron who knew Doug an Australian?

Yes he was, yes he was an Australian. Matter of fact he's an active

24:00 member of our squadron association.

And which squadron was that?

458 Squadron.

And were you posted directly into 458 Squadron?

No, no nowhere near it. I spent nearly all my air force life training. I ended up on 458 Squadron. To get to a squadron was it, was involved a long path of training see. When I went to when I went into the

24:30 air force as I say just after New Years day I went out to Bradfield Park what there was called 2ITS [Initial Training School]. No airfield or anything like that, just administrative huts and quarters and like that and a big drill square where you marched and. Well we then, we spent about 3 or 4 months there doing classroom lessons.

25:00 We went through a comprehensive range of subjects. We did maths, navigation, aero engines, air-frames, aircraft recognition, meteorology, health, not health hygiene was a something else, hygiene a strange subject.

I was about to ask you

25:30 **about hygiene?**

Yeah and law and administration. Now hygiene you think, now what the heck was all that about, look hygiene was about how to keep the latrines clean and things like that you know how to scrub the floors. It was, I can looking back, I can see a lot of emphasis was placed on keeping everything clean, so that there was no spread of any outbreak you know. And hygiene

26:00 and we were examined on all these subjects. Part of it was and I did very well in hygiene. I got 100% I might add, the only subject I got 100% and I got it because we, part of the exam was that you had to layout a bit of a campsite you know and where you would put the latrines and the washrooms, do little drawings of plans you know. 'Cause you had to make sure

26:30 you didn't have all the drainage running down onto the camp. You had it running away that sort of thing. That was, sounds strange doesn't it for air crew to be studying that sort of subject?

But your drawing came in handy again?

Yeah anyway. We did about three months at. One thing I should try and tell you about is my culture shock when I first got into the air force. First thing you do

27:00 was to, of course you're walking out as a bunch of civvies you know in civilian clothes and so you get out there and there's a corporal who immediately gets you and tries to discipline you, takes you down to the stores to get your uniform your shaving gear, your shoe cleaning gear, hat all those sort of things you know and then you're taken to a hut

27:30 and told, given a bed, a bare bed, two boards that's where you - that's your bed. A hut with about 30 people in it then given, told to get out of your civilians, get into your ill-fitting clothes boiler suit and taken, given a big mattress cover hessian mattress cover, taken to a room about the size of

28:00 two big double garages shall we say full of straw. You fill the mattress with straw to your own liking you know, you can imagine all these, there was about I suppose there might have been 100 in the intake and everybody's there putting straw in their mattress, so you go back and this is your bunk right. So you get, take your mattress back and you've been given your mess gear.

28:30 That's your metal eating pan called a pan 'cause it looks a bit like a frying pan, mug knife and fork, have lunch and first shock - you've got to wash your own mess gear. That really took me back. And for some reason or another I just thought you know I won't, I'll just finish my lunch and walk away.

29:00 Get up wash your own mess gear; take it back you had to. If you lost your mess gear you couldn't eat see. Very, very important. Make sure you look after your own mess gear. Well then just before we leave the bunk I must tell you that the, it was incredible the way they wanted your

29:30 bed left you know. The corporal would come through the room and inspect the beds to make sure everybody had got everything right in its right place. You had your mattress you can imagine like a mattress of straw which you could sort of fold up into three if you can imagine that. Then your blankets I think we had two or three blankets. They had to be folded in a certain fashion and one blanket had to be like made into a

30:00 long strip and wrapped around it if you can imagine like around the other blankets and your pillow on top. Well,

Did you not have any sheets?

I can't recall sheets no. No, no sheets. Well the degree of precision that was required in wrapping these or folding these blankets and wrapping the outer cover around it was incredible. The corporal who

30:30 was called "Squeegee" by the way

Called what sorry?

Squeegee he was, his name was,

Why was he called…?

Well because it was all, got back to the latrines, how he had to get and squeegee the floor and keep them clean and the washrooms and that. I think he had been christened Squeegee well before we got there you know. 'Cause we weren't the first in, there had been courses come through before us. When he used to come through and inspect them, all these in you're hut to make sure that everybody had their kit bag in

31:00 the right place their boots, their mattress folded and when you were going on leave the hut that was the neatest was first on board the bus. So there was some incentive to have it neat. What we spent most of our time in classroom activities.

31:30 Then we went through oh a range of subjects. There was maths similar to I think I did, I don't know whether I told you what we were doing, maths, aircraft recognition, electricity and magnetism I can remember that law and administration I told you hygiene,

32:00 aero-engines airframes. So these were quite comprehensive study lessons in the classroom. We were there for about three months and at the end of three months you were examined on these subjects. As well as this of course we had physical activities. Marching on the drill square. We had to learn how to march instead of walking around like a, you know like you do in

32:30 civilian life. Learn how to march and I just must tell you about something that sticks in my memory about marching. We were issued with these boiler suits, which were all too big for you know and like the crotch would come down around your knees and underpants we got a pair of some underpants given to us. We all had clothing. And these underpants were what we called "Romance Busters", these long, long underpants you know and they had a drawstring around the waist and

33:00 well I can remember being out on the drill square marching away this time and everybody had to march you know straight ahead, eyes up, head back, c'mon pick 'em up. I could feel these underpants slipping and the cord, whatever it was came loose and these things were slipping down and they got down and they were hobbling me around my knees. "C'mon pick 'em up there, what are you doing". Here's me battling on with these confounded underpants

33:30 around my knees. Anyway that was as well as marching of course we had gymnasium exercises and….

And when did you first get to fly?

First get to fly, you're jumping ahead a bit but. When I see, I just, I must just tell you how we finished up at ITS Initial Training School was at the end

34:00 of the course you went before, what was called a Category Selection Board. That consisted of a panel of high ranking air force officers probably a pilot and maybe an air gunner or navigator. And maybe somebody from administration might be somebody from the stores or somebody like that. These three senior squadron leader types. You went in individually before this panel and they

34:30 quizzed you, they had your results of all your exams and that they quizzed you "Now what do you want to be?" And at that point I decided I'd ask for pilot even though I had in the back of my mind navigator.

And what made you ask to be a pilot?

Why? Well because by then I knew how the system worked. That if you missed out on a pilot you became a navigator if you missed out on navigator you became an air gunner

35:00 see, so I thought now I'll go for the top slot. Just about everybody did ask for a pilot. I don't think anybody ever asked for air gunner but so I said, "What do you wanna be?" you know now I said, "Pilot." see. "Right now what makes you think you can fly an aeroplane you know, you can't even drive a motor car?" these sort of questions. And they would quiz you on….

35:30 **And what did you say to them?**

I can't remember exactly what I said. But oh you know I probably said "Well look my brother's in the air force and he's an air gunner." and he said to me, "You know Tom, you try and be a pilot that's the good job you know, go." I probably would've spoken to them like that. Although it was very traumatic you know. They were senior men and we were juniors you know, we were the bottom of the scale.

36:00 **And what was their attitude to you?**

Oh I think you got to remember I'd be one of about 100 they'd be interviewing and so I was just one of the group. They were very courteous people you know, they didn't attempt to try and override you or anything like that. They you know quizzed everybody and then at the end of all that, a day or two later there was a notice that would go up on the board, the postings.

36:30 We were never I should say, never transferred or anything like that. We were posted you know as if we were just a little parcel that you put in a box and you post them. The postings went up and then you would see that your name would be down and you might be amongst the pilots or the navigators, the air gunners and you'd be posted to where ever or where ever so then I was selected to be pilot and I was posted to Temora.

And

37:00 **what was your impression of the other men who didn't make it into the pilot category?**

Well they were disappointed, they'd be disappointed. It was, a lot of it was the luck of the draw too. You didn't, it wasn't, I suppose on the average there would be 20% would be pilots, 20% navigators, 60% wireless operator/air gunners but some intakes or some courses as they were called, we went through in

37:30 courses, I was 36 Course. And some courses for some reason or the other, the requirement might be that they want very few pilots, that they wanted all air gunners say. So the luck of the draw. Some courses didn't have many pilots.

Was this part of the larger scheme of pilot training?

It was. Yeah I should've mentioned that early in the piece. That's all part of the Empire Air Training Scheme.

And

38:00 **what was that about?**

That has been recognised of later years as being the world's greatest training, global training program. It was really I suppose at the beginning of the war England of course who was in the thick of the action realised that it wasn't a suitable training ground in England for air crew. They

38:30 looked for conditions where there was better weather and get the fellows away from, let England concentrate on the conflict and let the training be done somewhere else. So the Dominion forces shall we say or countries. And there was Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Rhodesia and South Africa to the best of my knowledge. The five countries were part of the Empire Air Training Scheme.

I think that might be a good point for us to take a break and we'll swap the tapes over and then Martin will pick up from where we finished.

Tape 2

00:03 I mentioned that all our training for Air Training for air crew was done under the umbrella of the Empire Air Training Scheme. I suppose I should say that the air force was really divided into two groups. There was Ground Staff and Air Crew and each of, each branch went through a totally different form of training. All air crew training whether you be pilot navigator or air gunner

00:30 was done under the Empire Air Training Scheme and there was various Dominion countries taking part in it and as I know it, the program was the same regardless of whether you were being trained in Australia or Canada.

Or New Zealand as well?

Or New Zealand, yes.

Where there because New Zealand was part of the scheme as well, wasn't it?

Yeah now I'm not really sure what training bases there were in New Zealand.

01:00 It's not as if there was bases you know studded all over the place because like a Elementary Flying Training School was quite an establishment. I'll continue on now from leaving Bradfield Park when I

was selected to be pilot training I went with a group to Temora which was what was known as a EFTS that's a

01:30 Elementary Flying Training School, where they had Tiger Moth training air craft.

They're a bi-plane

Yes,

from the First World War?

Well I don't know that they were from the First World War. You could be right but I I think they may have been developed after later than that.

OK.

Yes they were a terrific little aeroplane. They were a bi-plane open cockpit 4-cylinder inverted engine like a

02:00 inline engine. Instead of having the valves and that up top they were down the bottom and that allowed of course the bulk of the engine to be down below instead of sticking up top.

And that a two seater?

Two seater. The instructor sat in the front seat and the pupil sat in the back seat. Now some people say "Oh, it's a bit back to front, I thought it would've been the other way around" but the

02:30 instructor sat in the front seat because he was above the centre of gravity, so if he got out then you didn't have to re-trim the aircraft. In the same manner that the petrol tank was directly above his head the instructor's head, so that as the fuel load reduced it didn't upset the trim of the aircraft. Now at Temora we spent about

03:00 4 months at Temora. We did flying training and classroom activities. Here again we, the classroom activities involved navigation, meteorology, aircraft recognition. Aircraft recognition was a very important subject. We had to be able to recognise all aircraft from just

03:30 not necessarily from the whole, a shot of the whole aircraft, but just features like maybe just a bit of the tail or just a wing tip or certain characteristics of an aeroplane, you had to be able to, they would flash these slides on the screen showing you a shot of a tail of a Spitfire shall we say and one of a Messerschmitt and all that type of thing. You had to be able to answer what they were.

04:00 So,

What were the hardest ones to distinguish?

Well I think the Japanese bombers were a bit difficult to recognise that's was my thoughts. All the American aircraft, they are totally different from one another. Whilst they might look the same you know but they are different and the British aircraft too. But we didn't have any difficultly

04:30 once you know hours and hours of study you soon learnt how to recognise them. Other subjects - what did we do? Air frames of course we had to understand how the theory of flight and all that. We had to have a fair knowledge of the theory of flight. What made an aeroplane fly, had a knowledge of how the engines worked, the Otto cycle as it was called.

05:00 **Sorry what was that?**

Like the 4 stroke cycle I think it was called Otto O-T-T-O after the fellow who probably invented that system to get a good understanding of how all that worked. 'Course you've got to remember we had very little knowledge of engines, none of us had a motor car, I'm sure you can say 'course we were probably too young to start to drive motor cars.'

Old enough to fly planes but not to drive?

Not only that, we couldn't afford a motor car. And we did

05:30 quite a bit of training out on the drill square too. The services always keen to make sure you kept up to scratch with your marching and your presentation on the drill square. Now flying consisted of two pupils. I should say the course that we're on the course you went by courses like a group of people, a group of trainees were a course.

How many were in your?

There could be

06:00 80 in a course approximately shall we say. Eighty in a course and a course, one course there was a course coming through every month. Now the course was divided into Flights. About 4 Flights. I think there might have been 60 in the course in 3 Flights of about 20 each in each flight. And an interesting thing you were divided by, in Flights by height.

06:30 So you had tall, medium and short and actually it was more leg length because they didn't, the aircraft peddle positions had've been adjusted for certain height groups so they didn't have to change the peddle position each time another pupil got in. So each flight had a certain aircraft allocated to them. Temora had about 80 Tiger Moths. That's a lot of aircraft.

07:00 We did, we two pupils were allocated to an instructor. Two pupils from each Flight. Now that instructor might have had two two pupils from 36 Course and he might have had two pupils from 35 Course and so he might have had more than two pupils. But there was two of us allocated to a particular instructor. Flight Sergent Rankin I remember the instructor that I had.

07:30 Well then the first thing he did was make himself known to you and then he would take you up for a flight just so you'd know what it's like to be off the ground you know. First time ever been in an aeroplane, first time ever been in the air. Open cock-pit you know. Big thrill so

Can you remember what you felt that first time?

I suppose I was sort of you know,

08:00 I suppose I would've found it hard to believe that here's me you know now sitting in an aeroplane being flown, going to be a pilot. That was just you know. I would've, years ago I would've thought that was the wildest of dreams. The rush of air and all that doesn't give you much time to think about things, I don't from what I remember. The first flight was just to take you 'round and show you the aerodrome and a bit of the

08:30 countryside and talk to you and you talked through a piece of rubber tubing you know connecting one cock pit to the other went through your helmet. There was no electronics or electric system. Then that lasted about half an hour and you had about 5 to 6 hours of dual instruction. During that dual instruction

09:00 you were taught how to taxi the aircraft out. And taxiing a Tiger Moth was not easy because you couldn't see ahead of you. Like because of the aircraft you know it's a, it's got a tail wheel and it's got a nose up position and you can't see ahead so you got to zigzag for your taxiing to just, you can see clear on the right so you taxi over the right it's clear on the left so you just zigzag like that,

09:30 'til you get out to the edge of the field,

And hope there's nothing on the tarmac?

Well in most cases we didn't have tarmac we were in paddocks, fairly well grassed paddocks. After about 5 hours of dual instruction in which case you learned how to taxi how to take off, how to land, how to recover from a

10:00 spin that's something you might get into through poor flying habit. You learned how to recover from a spin. After that when you were, you went solo the instructor hopped out of the aircraft and took his joystick out and you'd see you were there on your own,

10:30 nobody in the front and he says "Right-o away you go". So you'd take off and do a few take off and landings. I should say that because of the volume of traffic like with 80 or about 80 I think it might have been not quite that many between 70 and 80 aircraft operating from Temora, it was like pretty chaotic you know when people at 7 o'clock

11:00 in the morning or half past 6, so we had satellite airfields. Now they were really paddocks that the farmers, some farmers had allowed the air force to use they were nice flat paddocks. 3 or 4 of them spread out around the district. About probably 10 15 kilometres or maybe 20 kilometres away from Temora's main field. Well then you do your

11:30 flying from out on, out at the satellite. There were no facilities out there other than a fence around it and probably a bit of a makeshift bench for the instructors to sit on while they… You'd go out to the satellite and land there and the instructor might, he might send you up to do some aerobatics you know. And he could sit on the ground and watch you do aerobatics and assess your ability to,

12:00 **What sort of aerobatics? I mean the loop-the-loop, a twist?**

Yeah well, the Tiger Moth was a highly aerobatic air craft. You could do loops comfortably in a Tiger Moth. You could do slow rolls once you'd mastered the technique of doing a slow roll you could do slow rolls. You could do stall turns all those things like. It was a bit of a thrill doing a slow roll for instance because

12:30 in most cases you're sitting in the aircraft and you're sitting down onto the seat your body weight is holding you down. But in a slow roll you're actually throwing yourself out of the seat like you're spinning out of the seat so you're hanging on your harness and you're getting all the dust shall we say from the floor of the Tiger Moth floating down. Calls for a lot of co-ordination doing a slow roll and flying upside

13:00 down is the same thing see.

And you liked doing that, did you?

Oh yeah that was good fun aerobatics. You know you'd be put in a position in the air. The instructor would say "Right you go over there". You'd be over there and somebody else would be over here and you'd be doing loops, pulling out of a loop to do a slow roll and it called

13:30 for concentration and,

Were there any accidents?

Oh yes, oh yeah. We had accidents, we had fatalities too in training. Accidents were one of the big, the difficulties with pilot training or pilots learning to fly was to judge the distance above the ground. That either, that determined

14:00 whether you could be a pilot or not. If you could judge the distance like you'd come into land and you'd be looking you can't look down to the ground, you've got to look well ahead of you and you've got to be able to judge whether you're 2 feet above the ground or 20 feet shall we say. A number of students couldn't do that. They would come in and they would try and land the aircraft up as high as 50 feet you know they'd be making

14:30 a nice landing and they'd be 50 feet up and everything would be just about ready. They'd be waiting for the wheels to touch and next thing the aircraft would stall, it'd come crashing down and they were pretty delicate the Tiger Moths. And you know they'd get wing damage. So there was a lot of wreckage and things like that. There was fatalities and I just can't remember the exact circumstances. I know Temora cemetery has a, got

15:00 a lot of trainee air crew in it.

Right. Did you have any ritual or routine that you would go through when that happened or was it just a matter getting on with things?

Oh yeah that was, you know that was a bad moment in the training program. You mightn't really know the person. Because, see there was about four courses going through and he

15:30 may have been from another Course and so there was I think right throughout the war there was of all the air crew lost, it was about 40% of air crew lost was lost in training. You've got all these recruits that don't know how to fly an aeroplane you know and 'course you're going to have accidents.

Do you think that's just an innate thing about judging the distance or is there a skill you learn? I mean

16:00 **you obviously got through?**

You knew how to do it or you didn't know. One of the tests they gave you back, right back at before you were accepted as air crew it was a machine that you sat on I remember now that it was a case of you looked down and tunnel and there was two white rods sticking up in this tunnel and there was a,

16:30 then an attendant shall we say who used to get these rods and by winding a little hand wheel he could separate the rods so they might be 6 or 2 meters apart if you can imagine. But you're looking down, one is behind the other. You had to look down there and judge how far they were apart. It'd test your ability you might say,

17:00 oh you know they're, you might say they're together where in fact they're 6. It's just a case of whether your eyes were good enough to just pick up. That was one of the tests that you sort of weeded out people who couldn't pass that test to start with. Then judging the height coming into land was-

The training scheme had been in place for a few years before you joined

17:30 **it was obviously a bit of a well oiled machine. Is that the way you felt, it was good training?**

It was air crew training for the Dominion air forces, was excellent. I might just say that my number was, I just jump back a bit. When I first got accepted down at the recruiting station at Rushcutter's Bay I was allocated a number, 432533.

18:00 Now the 43 was an indication of the year I went in. So you could tell by the number of the air crew his number just when he enlisted in air crew it was. We had a special group of numbers all started with 4 air crew numbers and 4-3 means you went in in '43. And the training programme was very, very

18:30 good, it was comprehensive. At the time I went in was sort of midway through the war. Before that there was a lot of chaps went into pilot training who'd had some flying experience you know farmers and things like that. And elderly chaps too that might have had an aeroplane or. So the first group of pilots

19:00 were much senior to those that come on later on.

And there'd been what 20-30,000 of you saying that your number was 2-3?

I'm not sure that I think 2; I might add I think 2 represented the state. I'm not certain of that. Mine was

4-3-2-5-3-3. 5-3-3 was your numerical number. I think the 2 represented the state, I'm not sure of that so the number is not significant in

19:30 that regard. But Temora. OK we did about 4 months at Temora, that's EFTS Elementary Flying Training School at what was known as Harding's Country Club. Harding was the commanding officer, a very, very nice fellow.

Were they all nice fellows your officers or….?

Oh most of them I think. The one's we didn't like were

20:00 what we called the WOD's, the Warrant Officer Disciplinarians who took you out on the drill square to make you march and bring you into shape you know. But no, I think I never struck anybody. I'll just tell you one incident at Temora. One of the things they did you know was get you fit and that was to check your dental, your teeth see.

20:30 And of course you're going back in those years especially coming from out in the bush like I did we never had any fluoridation or anything like that, we just drank tank water and that. And of course my teeth weren't very good. I had some cavities and what have you. We didn't even have a dentist in the town where I came from. And of course I had a bit of dental work to be done. This particular day at Temora I was assigned for a

21:00 dental appointment at a certain time and I was listed for flying at the same time. So I skipped the dental appointment. And I didn't notify 'em you know, it sounds silly I know. But you've got to remember the dental surgery was half a mile down the road and there was no phone or anything and you didn't have time to get up and go down there and get, so I didn't notify them. So

21:30 when I went next appointment he was cranky this dental officer. They were senior fellows; they were all Squadron Leaders dental officers. Never been near an aeroplane but they were ranked Squadron Leader. So he assigned me to tea duties, "Sucker" we called this. Assigned to the kitchen you know you go and work in the kitchen for so many hours or so many days. I went over there and I was given the job of peeling potatoes. The potato peeling machine was like one of those

22:00 little backyard concrete mixers that you see. A drum that's power operated and inside the drum were some serrated surfaces. You toss in a bucket of potatoes and switch it on and you just had to keep your eye on in it, otherwise you'll end up with little marbles. There was one of my, one of the few times I got into trouble. Anyway when you

22:30 completed your flying training at EFTS Elementary Flying Training, I suppose 30% would have been what they called scrubbed, 30% would've been classed as not suitable for pilot training. So they whittled you down.

And did they stay in the air force, did they become engineers?

Yes they would go on to navigator training or wireless operator/air gunner. They'd be air crew,

23:00 they'd stay in air crew. But then at the end of your training at EFTS you were posted once again to either twin engine training or single engine training. Single engine training was preparing you for fighter pilot and twin-engine training was like for bomber pilot shall we say. Well I was selected

23:30 for twin engine training. I went to Point Cook. Now Point Cook was called a SFTS that's Service Flying Training School and there we were flying Air Speed Oxfords twin-engine training air craft. A very nice aeroplane

What is the crew size on an Oxford?

There was really no crew.

24:00 There was only a pilot and an instructor. It was a dual cockpit. You either, you had some instruction from an instructor well then 80 or 90% of your flying on Oxford was done solo. There you learned you were introduced to night flying, I'll just talk about that a bit more in a minute. Formation

24:30 flying, low bombing low level flying. We had the luxury of being able to fly low level legally you know. 'Cause low level flying was always frowned upon you know. But we were, part of our training was low level flying. We used to fly up Werribee Gorge just down skimming the tree tops and we would fly out along the coast down there at that coastline

25:00 which is now the Ocean Road you know that tourist spot around, fly down there along the coast low level. The low level, we did a lot of low level flying training on top of fog. That was, Point Cook was frequently fog bound of a morning. We would take off through the fog and up about 500 feet you'd get this nice level

25:30 blanket you know. Fairly where the fog stops and where the clear air starts is a fairly distinct line you know, it's not sort of a foggy type of line. It's a fairly fog and no fog barrier. So you could fly, skim along the top of fog and that would be particularly if you had an instructor with you, that's where he'd teach you there, how to get down real low.

What about the You-Yangs?

The which?

The You-Yangs?

26:00 **The mountains up near Point Cook?**

Well we knew where the high spots were. We used to do most of our actual flying out from Werribee, it was a field out at Werribee that we would take off from Point Cook which may be fog bound and usually clearer out at Werribee. So it was fairly clear between there and…

26:30 So we spent about, I suppose about 4 months at Point Cook training. After about 3 months you then you graduated, you got your wings.

Tell us about that, was that a big ceremony or?

That was the biggest ceremony in my life. That was the proudest day in my life receiving my wings. You know that we thought we were the ants' pants,

27:00 air crew with wings. Those wings above your pocket that sort of you know puts you in a different group you know and we were sort of kidding ourselves. We were called the Blue Orchids, in the air force you wore a blue uniform you know and they used the service people, used to this is 'cause we always had a hut and a bed to go back to you know the Blue Orchids. The wing ceremony was really

27:30 a very, very proud day you get your wings. Not only that we also then became sergeants. We got a promotion see. I might add after going back to, right back to Bradfield Park when we did our initial training. I should go back a bit further than that. When we first went into the air force we were our rank as AC2 that was Aircraftsmen Second,

28:00 Class 2 shall we say. I think that was the lowest rank. I think ground staff had, they were AC1. I think they were considered a cut above us. A lot of them were tradesmen see. We went in as AC2s. After completion of the initial training school at Bradfield Park we became LAC Leading Aircraftsmen. Probably a little bit extra pay. After

28:30 completion or well through our training at Point Cook we got our wings and we became sergeants. So that gave us the use of the sergeants' mess and that was you know, now you're stepping up in your dining room you get table cloth, you don't have to wash your dishes. So that was really going up the scale.

29:00 **What about outside the base? Did you spend much time going up to Melbourne or something?**

On leave, in amongst all this we got a fortnight, well I don't know whether it was, we got a fortnight leave when we left Point Cook. We would get weekend leave. When we were initially at Bradfield Park yes I think we got home a couple of times. 'Course I didn't, I was in Sydney then living in Sydney. Went to Temora. I can't remember going home from Temora except when the course finished.

29:30 Yes we did get leave and we were getting I'm not really sure how much pay we were getting. I know this much when I finally left the air force I know that I was getting 19 shillings a day pay, that's $1.90 as a direct conversion a day's pay. So I suppose back when I got my wings I would probably been getting about 13 shillings.

30:00 A bit over $1.50 a day.

What would a ground crew person be getting?

'bout the same if he was a Sergeant. There wouldn't be much difference in pay. We did get in amongst the 19 shillings, there was a 15 shillings daily rate and a 4 shillings special loading. Now I'm not sure where special loading was 'cause we were air crew see or whether because we were overseas.

30:30 I know there was this 4 shillings special loading. But on leaving Bradfield Park on leaving Point Cook we did this training on Air Speed Oxfords. We were then becoming competent pilots on instrument flying flying at night. We could do all those things like which a lot of commercial pilots were struggling to do, instrument flying, flying in cloud and

31:00 flying at night and navigation we were well skilled in navigation emergency landing on one engine all that sort of thing. We had accidents at Point Cook too, we have aircraft coming in and landing on top of one another you know. You couldn't see underneath and couldn't see above that sort of thing. Chaps, I know one chap that was

31:30 like, you've got your number 533 and I know what chap I think he was about 529 or something 4-3-2-5-2-9, Johnny Leggo I can remember him. He got involved in an accident and he broke his, broke both legs or something and 'course he was known as "Legs" Leggo. But he must have apparently never advanced any further because

32:00 I lost track of him completely. He went to hospital or something and I only noticed only a month or two,

I noticed his name in one of the reports we get from one of the magazines of ex-servicemen that had died see. I noticed that he had Leggo 4-3-2-, whatever his number was Leggo and he was still an LAC then it had his rank. So he never really advanced along the pilot training.

32:30 Anyway when we left we graduated at Point Cook we did further advanced flying shall we call it. It was mainly formation flying and bombing and that sort of thing with practice bombs then we,

Whereabouts was that, at Point Cook?

At Point Cook yeah. Out on, out around Werribee we used to have bombing ranges and that sort of thing.

33:00 We were posted and I say we. Myself and some of the other pilots from Point Cook were posted on a general recognisance course at Bairnsdale, it's down near Lake's Entrance and that was a course, a pilots course only pilots on it and it was a course specific course for the northern waters of Australia. On aircraft recognition,

33:30 ship recognition learning all the Japanese ships battleships and that. We did night flying out in Bass Strait, quite a lot of night flying out in Bass Strait. It was the only time we ever, I ever got lost. We were all pilots on the course so usually on a flight out into the, at night an exercise there'd be 3 in the aircraft. But at this stage we were on Avro Ansons, another

34:00 twin-engine aircraft. There'd be 3 in the aircraft, one pilot that would be acting as pilot, one would navigator and the other one was second navigator. This particular night I'm talking about we went out into Bass Strait for an exercise of some sort patrol and search you had to do you know. We were out there probably about 3 or 4 hours we were coming back and there'd been bushfires in Gippsland and when we

34:30 got back to the coast there was smoke, all had blown over the area that we were flying into and we the airfield Bairnsdale airfield seemed to be completely smoke bound. We couldn't find it at all.

Do you have any communication any radio?

No radio, no. We didn't have any radio. 'Cause we were only reliant on our direct navigation skills. So

35:00 **And you were flying or navigating?**

No, I was navigator this time. And my best friend Harley Monks was second navigator. He disputes that, he thinks he was navigator but I, my log book shows me as navigator anyway. We were in fog in smoke at least and we weren't very sure whether we were over land or sea because Bairnsdale was close to the

35:30 water, not right on it but you know within 5 kilometres or thereabouts from the edge of the Bass Strait or the water or the ocean. And we're trying to identify whether we were land or sea that would give us a bit of a clue and we were throwing out flame floats, flame floats which would ignite if they landed in water but not if they hit the

36:00 land. So if we could see these flame floats going off, we knew that we were over the water, we could get down a bit lower. But anyway we searched around the area I suppose it must have been for 'bout 20 minutes we were all ready to get out. We thought this,

Running out of fuel?

Running out of fuel and we'd strapped our parachutes on, you wouldn't normally wear a parachute but we strapped the parachutes on, we thought we're going to have to get out if this aircraft

36:30 starts to run out of fuel. Then we saw Sale Airfield which was about oh I don't know 20 miles or 40 kilometres away or something like that from Bairnsdale. We knew that's Sale so we could pin point our position precisely, then we sat on a direct course and we knew exactly if we flew this course for so many minutes that we'd be

37:00 over Bairnsdale airfield. Which we did by precise flying. We landed with just a, there were a few flares still burning on the flare path to let us get down. The only time I ever thought I'd have to jump out. But this particular course I'll just say this it was all designed for the northern waters of Australia.

We might we're just near the end of a tape so we'll-

Tape 3

00:11 **OK, Tom we're at we're in Bairnsdale at the moment.**

Yes, we're at Bairnsdale. Bairnsdale I think I might have mentioned was a GRS. That was a General Recognisance School and this particular course was directed towards training for the northern waters of Australia.

00:30 Great emphasis on Japanese aircraft recognition and shipping recognition and flying out over the ocean patrol and search operations, night flying.

This is early 1944, is that right?

This would be yes; it would be 'bout early 1944. We were led to believe

01:00 at Bairnsdale that we were being trained for Beaufighters flying up Northern Australia.

And that's a fighter plane is it?

A twin-engine like strike aircraft. Anyway we then got posted as usual as you get from these bases, we got posted, we're sent to Melbourne embarkation depot initially. That was the Melbourne Cricket Ground by the way. We spent some time in the Melbourne Cricket Ground then we got sent to,

01:30 back to Bradfield Park where we started off, the other embarkation section they had there then we got a posting to England. We just, some big bureaucratic bungle went on. We never really found out what happened but we have heard numerous stories about somebody got us mixed up somehow and posted us to England.

Whereas you should've been going north?

02:00 Yeah we should've been 'cause we were trained for up there. So we went, we got posted to England.

Can I just ask you about the Empire Training Scheme? You're Australian pilots being trained under this scheme and certainly at the start of the war everyone was going to England, weren't they?

Yeah,

What did you think about where you should be?

Well at that stage we thought it was most unusual to be going to England but.

02:30 For you going back to, my going right back now to my initial application and I've noted this in later years that I'm not an Australian on my application form, I'm a British subject. My parents, their nationality they'd filled in the form, my parents, their nationality British.

They were born in?

Born in Australia.

They were born in Australia?

Yes born in Australia and

03:00 with grandparents born in Australia. But that's how we were then, see. We were British you know, we weren't Australians. Even though we were true blue Aussies born in Australia. And so Mother England like going back to England to, for the war didn't seem that strange I would say to us. It does now. When you think about it I mean the Japanese were on our doorstep and here we were being posted

03:30 to England. It's just so silly. Now that's the way it went.

Your brother was still in the RAAF? Where was he at that stage?

He was up north of Australia. He was with 18 Squadron flying up there. He was with a Dutch squadron. There was a Dutch squadron that was all Dutch pilots and Dutch navigators and Australian air gunners. He was in 18 Squadron, he saw quite a lot of action my brother.

04:00 We got posted to England and of course we didn't like, nowadays you would get aboard a big Hercules or aircraft like that and you would fly and you'd be in England in a matter of hours. But we got aboard a troop ship down at Pyrmont. It was a dreadful little ship only 5,000 tons. Would've been about 300 of us I think. All air crew, all sergeants. I must put this on record.

04:30 My mother said to me, "Tom now you're a pilot you know, you've got a bit of rank too." - I think I might have been a sergeant at least I'm trying to think if I might have been a Flight Sergeant – "You know you'll have a cabin and you'll need something to go to the bathroom in. I'll get you a dressing gown and slippers." I think she'd watched too many movies you know where these pilots had

05:00 a batman you know to wake them up. So she bought me a dressing gown and slippers. I put in my kit bag. Well your conditions on board this boat are absolutely deplorable. But first of all, the first chaps that went down into the hold, we were down in a hold. They refused to go any further 'cause of the smell and it was that, it wasn't clean. I think it had some, been up around the

05:30 Islands and had all sorts of odd, island troops on board and wasn't you know up to our hygiene standards. So they refused to go on board. Then there was an inspection and the authorities disinfected it all and we ultimately got on board. The Cape Flattery it was. Five thousand tons little mass-produced American liberty class ship.

06:00 And we were in this, down in this hold where our sleeping quarters were and I've got to tell you about that. The bunks if you can imagine this area about the size of a maybe 15 metres square I suppose roughly from what I remember that'd be 40 or 50 feet square. Wouldn't be quite that big, wouldn't be that

06:30 and some pipes standing up in a series of pipes and bunks straps. Galvanised framed bunks strapped onto these pipes and a canvas mattress laced on the bunks if you can imagine that. Five bunks high then another row 5 bunks high so a little narrow passage way between about half a metre wide. So you've got 5

07:00 there and 5 up this side. So you've got 10 kit bags and all the gear in the little narrow aisle. Couldn't move you couldn't. It was absolutely deplorable conditions. So as soon as the boat got out into the water we realised we couldn't sleep down here. So quite a few of us slept up on deck you know and got a, we had, each one was issued with a life jacket,

07:30 and that formed a pillow and you slept up on

Lying on the iron.

On the steel deck yeah. I keep telling my wife about it she says "You keep talking about where you sleep", I keep reminding her "I've slept on the steel deck you know". And the meals were 2 meals a day. Conditions were really bad. Walk into this galley or this kitchen

08:00 where they served up these sort of stews in your mess tin. You've got to imagine your mess tin's a bit like a frying pan if you can imagine that. A little square tin with a handle on it. They'd put in your meal into the tin, it might have been a stew or something like that. Then you had to find your way from the servery to the table which might have been 6 or 5, 4 or 5 metres away. Little boat tossing around the

08:30 ocean, steel floor, people spilling stew on the floor, slippery floor, people sliding over and spilling more stew on the floor. Just to navigate your way from the servery if you could call it that to the table you know,

And you weren't wearing your slippers at this stage?

No slippers and dressing gown, never got used all through the war. But,

Did you tell your mother that?

Yes she knows that. She knew that when they

09:00 came back they'd never been used. Anyway conditions were bad but on this particular boat it took us 23 days to get from Sydney to San Francisco. All on the boat, was all on its own, no convoy out in the middle of the ocean and we got. There was a group of us about 5 or 6 got pally with one of the crew members and he told us how to get some food.

09:30 The crews' how to get into the crews' larder pantry [?]. The system was that we had to wait at the end of some galleys that went or isles you might call them that went down through bowels of the ship and at about midnight the cook used to bake the bread. He would bake the bread then when he'd finished baking he would then take an armful of bread down and put it, open

10:00 up the pantry big locked door sliding door, open it up, put the bread in a rack in there, turn his back and walk down again about 20 metres or 15 or 20 metres to the kitchen to get another armful of bread. The group of us who were in on this stealing of food, we would wait behind the blackout curtain near the pantry and as soon as he turned his back sneak in

10:30 into the pantry, grab a tin of something, didn't have time to read it, duck out. Last one in had to get a loaf of bread see. We'd go up into the, amongst the winches up the front of the ship and open up these tins and hope we'd get a tin of cranberry sauce or berries or meat or we'd never know what it was but we supplemented our diet.

11:00 To get your meals down, through the proper down at the servery I might add we had a punch card system. There was a card we were issued with, a card and they'd punch a hole in this card, so you couldn't double-up you know. Sometimes they lost the punch I can recall this. They must've lost the punch and they were pushing a hole through it with a point of a pencil see. I can remember seeing fellows up there ironing it all out,

11:30 flattening it out, go down for another. A thing that I remember about that ship was this dreadful sleeping quarters and the dreadful eating quarters we had down in the bowels, they were in holds like, they weren't proper, it wasn't suitable for really transport of people. But this, these fellows of course everybody smoked then,

12:00 and this eating area was full of smoke and it was a gambling den. Some of the fellows they seem to be, these are some of the air crew chaps they seemed to have like they planned ahead. They knew that the opportunities to gamble and they produced all these gambling boards you know. Black Jack and Roulette and all that sort of things

12:30 were set up and there were fellows down there, money changing hands.

Did you play yourself?

No I didn't bother about gambling I've never been into it. But it took us 23 days to go across to San Francisco and

With the gambling I mean you were all in close quarters. I mean was there any fighting that broke out?

Oh I can't recall anything like that. No I tell you what there was a lot of sickness. There was people seasickness

13:00 and I dunno where they picked up wogs a lot a diarrhoea and that sort of thing. That of course added to the dreadful conditions. You can imagine I, the toilets were not, there was no doors on the toilets. The toilets were in public view of the dining room you know. You wouldn't believe how bad it was and we were senior people air crew, you know pilots. There was no women on board fortunately. And I can

13:30 recall a crossing the line ceremony where "King Neptune" got dressed up and not everybody went through the ceremony, they just picked a sample I think to show you what goes on. I think the Captain he staged the ceremony got somebody down and they got soap water or whatever it was I dunno what they covered him with. But,

Did you undergo that?

No I didn't. We were, I got photographs of the crossing the line ceremony.

14:00 We pulled into San Francisco, we were then taken out to an American base on the northern side of the bay. More or less looking out onto the bay a beautiful set up it was. Lovely ideal perfect conditions. Quarters were first class, food excellent. Ice cream, maple syrup, bacon marvellous you know.

Bit of a relief after the boat?

14:30 Unbelievable from one to the other. I can remember going into San Francisco, walking in to get a beer. The fellow challenged me "You know you're not old enough, we don't serve you at your age". And here I am pilot in the air force, couldn't get a beer. He wouldn't serve me. I think you had to be 20 or 21 or something, I was 19 you know. I don't know what happened I know ultimately I got a beer but I don't know how I can remember being challenged.

15:00 I think we spent about 5 days I suppose at this particular base. I think it was called Fort Slocombe I'm not certain of that. American Army base, it was very very nice. Gave us an opportunity to go into San Francisco, have a look around have a few beers and sort of get the troop ship out of our system. Then we boarded a train.

15:30 Pullman Coaches I can remember those nice train. Well it was by our standards for the trip across America. It took us 6 days to go across by train. Each carriage had a porter allocated to it. They were Afro Negro American blokes, happy fellows. They used to bring in our meals. Don't

16:00 ask me where they got them from. But the meals were our introduction to throwaway plates, I can recall that. Throwaway plates and knives and forks, this was going back 1944.

Plastic/paper what do you mean throwaway?

Plastic, yeah plastic plates. The food seemed to be quite good from what I remember of it, I'm not sure where it came from.

Now a Pullman Coach is what, a few of you in a carriage sleeping?

No, I don't think

16:30 we had sleep, we had lean back seats you know which were. The troop trains took 6 days to go across America and it stopped fairly regularly to, onto sidings to let trains go through and we were notified that we might be half and hour here or an hour and we were notified that we could go get a carton of beer somewhere. So we used to buy a carton of beer and bring it back.

17:00 It was to me, it was really a great trip. The porter I can remember the porter because they were black as the Ace of Spades some of these fellows, we called him "23:59" - see that's a minute to midnight.

Did he get the joke?

Yeah, oh yes. Anyway "23:59" he looked after us. We spent a week going across America stopping. Our first, my first anyway experience of snow

17:30 at Salt Lake City I can remember that.

And was it just your Australian blokes in the….?

Yes all Australian, the contingent from the Cape Flattery I'd say that's all it was about 300 on this train going across. We got to New York and we spent about a week in New York. We got and I say we, there was about 4 or 5 of us got a billet like

18:00 there was a centre in New York and I just can't recall the name of it now although I do have a card for it where you could go and you'd get a billet and we got billeted at a family out at Newark in New Jersey, very nice American couple. I think their name was Dent, Mr. and Mrs. Dent and they had a very nice daughter and they had like a Cadillac

18:30 convertible. They seemed to have money, we thought anyway. They really looked after us, they took us around

There were 5 of you staying with the family?

Yeah, at their home. They drove us around sites and we then had a good look over New York Empire State Building and Stock Exchange and all those up the Statue of Liberty and

19:00 I must tell you this we were in New York on Anzac day. Anzac day 1944 and we as a contingent marched down 5th Avenue on Anzac day. We, to the best of my knowledge, are the only Australian troops to ever march down 5th Avenue on Anzac day.

Tell us a bit about that, was there, was it just you, was the…. you know traffic stopped and was it….

19:30 Yes, the traffic was stopped.

Any Americans marching with you or just your contingent?

No, no Americans. It was just the Australians marching. I'm not sure that they knew what it was about I might add. They knew we were troops going to war, let's put it that way. We were then,

Had any of you been overseas before?

I would say no. I would say there would not, none of us would've been, I'm pretty sure that nobody

20:00 would've been overseas. We were after our march down 5th Avenue we were given a reception at the Waldorf Astoria in the dining in the ballroom you know. Nice tables big round tables and food and drink. The story goes that Kim Beazley, that's Kim Beazley Senior I think at that stage

20:30 was Minister of Defence I think or something like that. Similar position to what Kim Beazley Jnr held. The story goes that he was in New York at the time and he was at the Merril [?] reception that we had in New York. Anyway after our stay in New York you can see that so far it's been a good war for us.

21:00 After our stay in New York we boarded a big troop ship. I think it was the Athlone Castle. It would've been about 32,000 ton troop ship. A large ship probably about 5,000 troops onboard and that was in New York Harbour, we boarded it in New York Harbour. Then when it was fully loaded we went out to sea and we joined

21:30 up in a large convoy. I would hazard to guess that there'd be 60 ships at least in the convoy maybe more and a lot of destroyers escort because there was still submarine activity in the Atlantic, not as bad as it was early in the piece but there was still submarine activity. Early in the piece the losses were you know,

22:00 horrendous with merchant shipping. And this convoy, a large ship you've also got to remember that this was just as a prelude to liberation of Europe.

The Normandy landings?

Yeah, all equipment going across the Atlantic to England and we went across the, went over in this troop ship. Conditions weren't bad but I can remember sleeping on deck.

22:30 We'd gotten used to sleeping on deck and the fresh air and

And you were with American troops as well I imagine?

Yeah, a mixture of everything. I think we had females onboard, then the food

Was there much cultural difference? I mean how did you get on with the Americans?

We didn't have a lot to do with the Americans. They were sort a bit away from us mainly I suppose because they got more money then. We didn't really mix on board the troop ship.

23:00 It was not much mixing at all. The food seemed to be reasonable and accommodation I think wasn't too bad. I can remember sleeping up on the deck and being hosed by the sailors, hosing the decks down you know, early morning. Took us about 5 or 6 days to go across the Atlantic and there was quite a bit of activity on board, on the convoy or in the trip

23:30 with destroyers racing around dropping depth charges and that sort of thing. But we didn't see any sign of any enemy action on the trip across. We landed at Liverpool in England and that was my first inkling I suppose that there was a war on. With the bomb damage around Liverpool and the amount well from-

24:00 we got off the boat at Liverpool and we marched to a holding camp at Padgate which would've been

about I would say 10 kilometres or 15 kilometres from the wharf. So we marched through streets and maybe a couple of fields and that. The amount of military activity there was unbelievable.

24:30 In the way of army vehicles racing around paddocks that had all equipment stored in them. One of the things I can remember clearly was aircraft that would come off some of these ships going across the Atlantic being unloaded and being towed through the streets with no, probably no wings on them like the wings might've been packaged separately

25:00 and towed behind jeeps you know one after the other. These are aeroplanes going through the streets. It was just this of course would've been about one month before the invasion of I shouldn't use the word invasion, liberation I suppose of Europe.

D-Day.

D-Day yeah. So we had a real taste of the fact that there was a war about to or on.

Did you, were you itching to be part of it or were you happy just to

25:30 **wait your turn?**

Oh no, I suppose we were resigned to the fact that we just had to wait and let the system take us along with it. There's nothing we could. you could do to hasten things up or change things. You just had to go with the system and you never really knew what the system was, had in for you you know. It just depended on what the demand was at the moment you know. Whether they wanted pilots see. Early in the war of course the losses were absolutely terrific with air crew.

26:00 **Did you know about those losses when you decided to join up, did you?**

No I didn't know at the time of joining up, I didn't.

It was more the glamour of the wings and all that?

Yeah that's right. It was just, well you know young blokes and everybody else was joining up and my brother was in it and my mates were in it. I thought here's my opportunity, I've got every chance of getting into air crew, why not grab it.

And but by the time you were in England

26:30 **you know a bit more about the reality of**

Yes we knew that there was particularly with the bomb damage around Liverpool. You could see it, that they had suffered there. We were sent to a holding camp at Padgate. I call it a holding camp, it's got some other name but at Padgate where there was all sorts of people there. When I say people all sorts of RAF, Canadians Australians, a mixture. Not necessarily all air crew either,

27:00 a real smorgasbord of air force people. WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] too. About probably our first introduction to see females. We never, all our training in Australia we didn't have a lot to do with WAAAFs [Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force] . We never, the only time we might have experienced a WAAF I suppose was in the parachute packing section at some of these training bases. But in England there seemed to be a lot

27:30 of females in the services. And I can recall first leave that we got at Padgate, it might have only been there a couple of days and we went to, there was a pub just more or less opposite the main gate. We went in to have a beer and it was full of people. I can remember all these WAAFs and females in there and everyone was singing and I got the shock of my life. They were singing

28:00 "Roll me over lay me down and do it again". You know I thought, young innocent 19 year old bloke "What's all this about?" but you know that was just singing, there was no tomfoolery went on,

Well not in the pub anyway.

Yeah the and of course, we all I suppose throughout our training we got used to drinking beer you know. We probably didn't drink much before we

28:30 went into the air force. But we used to drink beer and that and I can remember drinking this beer in England, it was dreadful stuff. Bitter they call it. Which I didn't like.

Bitter warm,

You may have tasted some of it yourself. And Mild which was like treacle. But you know it took us about 48 hours to get used to it I suppose. But we, I, another story I must sort of

29:00 tell about Padgate we did get out for a bit of leave and there was a little, a village not that far away called Leigh and we used to wander over to Leigh or maybe catch a bus over. Wasn't that far away and drink at a pub or something. I remember this particular night Harley Monks my, a chap I stuck with all through the war. Him and I, we were in this pub and I think we'd palled up with a

29:30 couple of girls and we'd walked them home and it must have been about midnight we wandered back

into town, into the centre of the town. It was cold and we couldn't get any transport back to Padgate, so we tried to get a room somewhere, we couldn't get into a hotel or anything. So we decided to sleep on the benches like tables that were in the market square and

30:00 he was on one table and I was on the other. We had our greatcoats as we called them. Big army air force coats, good overcoats over us. After a while Harley might have said to me he says "How are you going? Are you freezing?" I says "Yeah, I can't stand this much longer I just I can't possibly spend the night here", I says "We'll be frozen". So we got up and we wander 'round a bit and we struck a

30:30 policeman and we said to him "Look can you tell us where we can get a room?", we says we said "We're frozen". Oh he says "No, you got no chance of getting a room but I can tell you how to get warm", he says. "You follow me". So he took us up this lane and there was like brick buildings, only a narrow lane with brick buildings either side, now if you lean up against that wall he say behind that was a baker's oven or something and the wall was nice and warm. So we spent the night leaning up

31:00 against the wall. But one of the things that clearly sticks in my memory is that at about 5 in the morning I suppose or half past four when the town started to come to life you could hear people walking about a mile away or it might have been further, I reckon. Two or three miles away they were wearing clogs see. A lot of people couldn't buy shoes and they wore clogs. Those wooden clogs

Did they make them up themselves or something?

Yeah, no they didn't make them themselves

31:30 I don't think. You could buy them fairly cheaply. Wooden clogs and you could hear the noise of people walking for miles you know especially at, when it was night and when it was quiet and you'd hear just one or two to start with and as morning went on then more people walking in clogs. This noise, the noise of these clogs you know walking into town. Anyway we got back to Padgate but

32:00 **Did you get into trouble or?**

No no no. We didn't. I'm not sure how we got back. I do know at Padgate there was a hole under the fence that you could get in and out through that it, they didn't worry too much. Anyway I ultimately, then I got posted to where did I get posted to, I got posted to North of Scotland to Bamff the same spelling as in Canada.

32:30 B-A-M-F-F it's up right up North Scotland, not the very very tip. But on the next ledge coming down Scotland. And it was to an AFU it was called. An Advanced Flying Unit and it was flying Oxfords aircraft that we flew at Point Cook and that was to just to get you to familiarise yourself with the conditions in England,

33:00 and get you back into a flying mode again.

Was it quite different, I mean you hadn't flown for a couple of months?

No, I don't remember having any difficulty with flying but I can remember the difference, the main difference was in the shall we say the climate. This was North of Scotland and this was about D-Day, June, July that'd

33:30 be their mid-summer.

So very light 'til 10 o'clock.

Exactly twilight nearly all night. You could, night flying you could map read from the, see every feature in the ground night flying. So that was, we did all solo flying virtually up there at Banff. After a while we moved to Dalachy, that's I consider to be a

34:00 satellite of Bamff but apparently it was another field altogether. Dalachy, it was only about 15 kilometres away from Bamff. We did the rest of the AFU Advanced Flying unit at Bamff and then I did at Bamff, I did a Beam Approach BATS course, that's a Beam Approach Training School and that was flying.

34:30 You got to remember that this time of history there was no GPS [Global Positioning System] or landing aids, it was all done virtually by the seat of your pants and by direct dead reckoning navigation and that sort of thing. Well the Beam Approach Training was to train you how to make a landing in fog or thick cloud when you couldn't

35:00 see the airfield, how to get yourself down. It was done with a beam system of radio signals through your ear phones that were, it was quite involved but very very interesting and I enjoyed it. Basically it consisted of the air strip having a big transmitter down one end and transmitting signals,

35:30 which was on one side on the field shall we say, if it was divided in two was dots dit dit dit dit and on the other side was dah dah dah dah dashes and dots. And up the centre there was a slight overlap so you got a continuous signal so and that only didn't just go out horizontally it went up vertically. It went up, there was a big hemisphere shall we say around the airstrip. So

36:00 you could come in and intercept this.

Fly with your eyes closed?

You could, we had to do virtually with our eyes closed. We did because of the conditions and the weather we didn't get the opportunity to train shall we say in fog or that we trained probably in broad daylight. When you could say, see everything but then you had a blackout screen put across the face of the cockpit.

36:30 So you couldn't see anything. You had a, an observer beside you who kept an eye out for other aircraft.

When had that been introduced do you know?

Beg yours?

When had they introduced that?

When had they?

Yeah at the start of the war or….?

Oh I think it was probably about the start of the war, yeah. It was a good system. It had as well as these signals the dits on one side and the dashes on the other they had

37:00 markers that came up. If you can imagine a signal coming up like a search light pointing directly up in the air. They had these markers that were in the beam or shall we say under the beam. That one out about 5 miles from the strip, probably that had a high powered signal of dashes and one an outer marker. An inner marker that had a high powered signal of dots.

37:30 So, as you were flying after doing a controlled exercise shall we say across the field and back again until you knew exactly where everything was. Imagine you're in cloud and you couldn't see anything but you had a good mental picture where the airfield was and by these markers you could tell where the, how far out from the airfield. You could get back to the beam come down start to lose height with the controlled method

38:00 get down over the outer marker at 600 feet over the inner marker at 100 feet. You knew that you would be able to see the airfield very, very soon. No fog was that thick that you couldn't see 50 feet shall we say.

OK that's pretty much the end of-

Tape 4

00:13 **OK Tom now you're talking about your time in Scotland and where were you posted after Scotland?**

Well from Bamff I was posted to another embarkation depot in Morecambe, I think that's

00:30 in Lancashire I think. I spent about a week there I guess or thereabouts in staying in one of the tenement type houses. In amongst a group of course. I suppose the authorities had taken streets and streets of houses to put troops awaiting embarkation in and we boarded a boat for the Middle East. I can't remember the name

01:00 of that boat. I've tried to establish the name of it, I can't remember. It was a fairly big troop ship with fairly comfortable conditions. I can remember one thing that we slept in hammocks. They were slung from the ceiling above the tables that we ate at. I can remember we had haddock every morning for breakfast. Well, we sailed down through the Bay of Biscay through the Gibraltar Straits

01:30 to Cairo to Alexandria actually was the port in Egypt. We got off the boat and somehow we got to the railway station. I can't recall how we did it. Got on board a train and went to Cairo. I'm not sure if we went to Cairo station or a railway station in Cairo, then we

02:00 got transported by some means to a camp that I think it was at Almaza, which was tents so we were virtually out in a bit of desert there with tents. But only for a few days because we then got moved again to quarters in the Heliopolis Palace Hotel, which had been taken over by the authorities as a

02:30 base shall we say for accommodation purposes. We stayed probably a week or so at the Heliopolis Palace Hotel, quite nice rooms and that. I can remember getting the number off the door of some of the rooms and I shouldn't say this but I took some nice brass numbers. They were very, very nice numbers and where I lived in Sydney there was still one of the numbers on the front door of

03:00 our house in Sydney.

A souvenir.

Yes.

Did you keep any other souvenirs of that time?

Oh, I tried to save some money of different coins. I found initially you know when you start to get all the different currencies you tend to think oh I must save some of this, save some of that. After you'd been through various countries and you start to get a collection of all these odd coins and that, you start to

03:30 realise that it's a sort of a fruitless exercise. So I stopped collecting that.

And was Egypt your last posting or did you move?

No we're getting near my last posting. But we spent some time in Egypt. We had enough time to visit the pyramids of course and various points of interest around Cairo. A few things I can remember clearly which was of interest too me was in the great Citadel

04:00 in Cairo and all the stone work is dovetailed together in stone you know. I can remember seeing the corner blocks dovetailed in two directions and we used to talk about how could they ever do it in two directions you know. But I worked out later on how they did it.

Did you do any drawings of that time?

No but I did take the opportunity in

04:30 Scotland in buying a book called a Machineries Handbook see. In it every draftsman or engineer has got to have a bible. Machineries Handbook that's the bible you have and in Australia you couldn't buy them during the war, just couldn't buy them. I saw one in a shop in Scotland I thought I'll grab that, I'll buy it and I carried it around with me. It's a big thick book, it's about you know it's about

05:00 75 millimetre thick book.

So were you already planning beyond the war?

To live,

By buying that book you were thinking?

Apparently I thought you know, I'll at least have a Machineries Handbook. I still got it and I use it today. We had the opportunity of looking around and I can also recall in Cairo of going up into the tomb

05:30 in the centre of the great pyramid up through a tunnel with a guide mind you. We'd get up into this tomb the guide and of course they're pitch black and the guide is telling us now for an extra 10 whatever it was or 20 whatever the currency was Piasters or something extra 20 Piasters or whatever, I'll light a magnesium flare. So we had to put in more

06:00 money when we got up there so we could see what was in there.

And what was in there?

Oh I just can't recall now you know. It was just the walls of the tomb. We visited the Sphinx and the museum there and nightclubs we used to go to the nightclubs. And they had these girls hostesses, very nice girls. They used to do some belly dancing you know

06:30 and you could sit down at a table and a drink, of course we'd been having a few beers and these hostesses they called them, they'd come and sit at your table and talk to you. You could buy them a drink but they only had expensive drinks mind you. This is a racket they could pick us. Coming from England they could see if you you're not very suntanned these blokes you know. They're not awake, up,

07:00 we'll… So you'd buy them a bottle of cocktail I just forget how much it cost, I know it was very, very expensive. But I think it was just raspberry water and you know looked like a cocktail and they would drink with you and that's as far as you'd get you know. They'd sit, nice girls and talk to you and

That was what you got for your money?

Yeah, their company. But they were nice, they used to belly dance and that. Anyway we spent,

07:30 what about 10 days I suppose around Cairo waiting around for a posting. At this stage of the game air crew were getting plenty of air crew about and they, losses weren't that bad. So we spent a lot of time waiting around. Then I got a posting to Palestine up to Jerusalem. We spent I think about a week in Jerusalem.

How did you get up there?

By train to the best of my knowledge. No

08:00 see, I don't, some of those things I'm not clear in my memory now. As far as I can remember it was by train and. Got up to Jerusalem and we were staying in huts up there. We had the opportunity there of visiting all the sites of Jerusalem like the Church of Nativity and the Garden of Gethsemane and all those you know

08:30 sites that we learned about in scriptures and that. And Jerusalem was a peaceful place then, you know everybody lived in harmony. There was none of this squabbling between the Jews and the Arabs, they seemed to live in harmony. One shop would have a Jewish shop and Arabs beside it. None of this squabbling that goes on today. We went down the Dead Sea places like that over to Jericho.

09:00 **And I believe your father, you mentioned earlier was a Light Horseman and had served in Palestine. Did that take you back to his experiences?**

Oh one should say yes but I can't really say it did you know. It was one of the unfortunate things about my life I suppose that I never really discussed with my father very much or he never discussed with me

09:30 about his experience in the services.

And did you discuss your experience in the services with your children?

Well it's only just lately that I've started to do that. When I say lately within the last 12 months really I suppose. They seem to take some interest. I've got one grandson that seems quite interested in what I did during the war.

10:00 I am preparing a, what I would say a bit of a history at the moment. Now that I've learned how to use the computer, preparing a bit of a history. So that will no doubt be published I suppose at some time. But getting back to Jerusalem we then got a posting from Jerusalem to 78, I think it was OTU, that's an Operational

10:30 Training Unit. When you get to Operational Training Unit, you getting near to, being going into operations see. Prior to this it's all been training in holding camps and that. And this OTU was in Palestine at a place called El Shallufa, I've tried to find it in atlases of late but

11:00 it's not marked. I think it was one of those towns or that was, probably had a Palestinian name and it's all been deleted and been renamed and that. But there was really no village there. It was an airfield out in country that you wouldn't give thruppence for. Stony country you know. Oh it wasn't a very hospitable place at all I didn't

11:30 think. It was because, it was all work when we got there to the airfield. We were then introduced to Wellington Bombers. This was the biggest aircraft that we'd been, I'd come across and now we were grouped into crews. Up 'til this point of time I just been mainly with a group of pilots that'd been going around and now where it was a

12:00 different story altogether, we were crews.

And how did they put a crew together?

I'm not really sure how that came about how you got into, how you'd be selected. See the Wellington had two pilots. There was a first pilot and a second pilot. I was second pilot for the aircraft. The first pilot usually had had previous experience on the Wellington and so there was the first

12:30 pilot that made the selections. And he selected, how I got selected I don't know but he wouldn't have had a lot of choice, I might add because it's not as if we went there in a big quantity of people you know. I think there was only about 4 or 5 of us pilots that went there, so I doubt if there was that many actually. He didn't have much choice and I was the second pilot then,

13:00 we, a navigator and the 3 wireless operator/air-gunners.

And what nationalities were they?

All Australian.

Was that unusual?

It wasn't unusual for this particular, we were destined here for a particular squadron. At this stage it was sealed and delivered as to what squadron we would go to. And it would be 458

13:30 **RAAF Squadron Royal Australian Air Force. Whereas a lot of squadrons shall we say in England were RAF Squadrons and a lot of RAF Squadrons had Australian crew. So if you could easily be attached to a RAF Squadron and be Australian but you'd be mixed you might be mixed with Canadians RAF**

14:00 **and Australians.**

Did you consider yourself lucky to fly with Australians in 458?

I don't say that that thought crossed my mind really. It wouldn't have worried me whether I'd been with Canadians or English I might add because we were that used to being mixed up shall we say with those other groups. There was some South Africans. I think it might have been a bit different if we'd of had South Africans in

14:30 the crew.

Why would that have been?

Why, well the South Africans appeared to be, we were all air force. The South Africans appeared to be Army yet they were probably just as well trained as we were. Like it was an army air force it appeared to be to me because they had khaki uniforms too. Whereas we had a blue uniform and RAF had a uniform similar to us, New Zealand is similar, Canadians similar. So we all blended in

15:00 **together you know.**

And was it with 458 Squadron you flew your first missions?

Yes we flew, went to, I did the operational training unit at Ironshemire [El Shallufa?] which was comprehensive training and familiarisation with the aircraft, getting working together as a crew. We're destined for night flying.

Can you explain to me the difference between a night bomber and a day

15:30 **bomber - the aircraft?**

Well certain squadrons are sort of appointed to do night work. We were in our case, the aircraft was specially fitted out for night flying and I'll just talk about that in a minute. Now just going back to England for instance where there was

16:00 all the bomber activity over Europe. There was certain aircraft that did night bombing and certain aircraft that did daylight bombing. Now it just so happened that it was more or less elected in England that the Americans did the daylight bombing. Mainly because they had these flying fortresses as they called them that were

16:30 so bristling with guns that they could ward off any attack during the day. The English had the Lancasters which carried a heavy bomb load but weren't anywhere near as heavily armed right. And they did the night flying. But I've always thought there was other reasons for it. The English or the Dominion forces were much more precise in their bombing.

Why was that?

Because of their training I've always put it down

17:00 to. They bombed more precisely than the Americans and you can see a bit of it coming out in some, the Gulf war at the moment. You know dropping bombs in the wrong place. But on the other hand the Americans whilst they did the daylight bombing they had very, very heavy losses because the German anti-aircraft fire and fighter aircraft really took its toll on the Americans.

17:30 And so it did on the British too you know. Those squadrons flying over Europe from Britain. I know of some of the squadrons, one particular squadron had 140 air crew on it right. All up they lost about 300 air crew. In other words they lost the complete compliment of air crew 2 or 3 times over. Your chances of surviving

18:00 were you know about 200% against you.

Did you think about that a lot?

Oh I knew that the losses were pretty heavy with Bomber Command but I suppose I never really thought am I going to be sent on Bomber Command over Europe? I'd never, that never entered my head very much. And that was just sort of the luck of the draw you just had to go where you. But fortunately you know

18:30 I…. the Wellingtons. Getting back to your original question about the night flying and daylight flying. The Wellingtons we were posted to at 458 Squadron were equipped with a big searchlight underneath them. Not underneath them but in the fuselage that was lowered down at night. And we had first class radar for that stage of the war.

19:00 The latest radar which was excellent for night flying and our mission was anti-submarine patrols at night. So we could, our radar could detect objects and we could go down to a low level. We had a special radio compass, which you could

19:30 fly safely shall I say at 50 feet above the water at night. Then lower your searchlight, light up the area in front of you and make more or less a daylight attack over whatever the object might be.

Could you actually see the sub in the water?

Well I hate to say this but I never saw a submarine.

20:00 I did see a submarine I should say but it was only. The only submarine I saw was a day or two after the war finished there was submarines surfacing outside in the Straits of Gibraltar and our crew was assigned to escorting one of them in, U-541, we escorted it into Gibraltar. But I suppose you could say the system

20:30 and the technique was that good that the submarines wouldn't stay under the surface, they'd let us pick them up. They had radar as good as we had and they'd pick us up the same as we could pick them up.

So what sort of things did you see in the water?

See at night we would. The system was that our radar would pick up say a surface submarine out about 50 miles,

21:00 that's if we were at 1,000 feet. We could then hone in on a contact as we would call it. And our radar screen was a bit bigger than say a normal dinner plate and it had the ability of a contact would show up as a if it was a submarine, it would be

21:30 a little line on the screen. You'd know it was a ship then you could direct the aircraft towards it and home in on that ship and as it came into your screen like half way down to 25 miles away you could change the scale on the screen and it would go out, so you got a larger scale and you could keep changing the scale on the screen and when it got to 5 mile, so you'd get a clear

22:00 picture on your radar. Then we would go down to 50 feet lower the searchlight and identify the object. Well usually most of our contacts. I should say that if it was a snorkel of a submarine which is about the size of a big paint tin, we could pick that up at 5 miles or something like that.

22:30 So a lot of contacts were small objects like that that we were not sure whether it was a snorkel and a submarine was up charging the batteries. They wouldn't be up on the surface at the later stage of the war. They didn't have to surface to charge the batteries, they only had to put the snorkel up just out of the water to charge the batteries.

How did that work?

Well it was just like a big tube that allowed them to draw in oxygen and all that

23:00 instead of sort of bringing the whole ship up onto the surface. A snorkel was like a big, I suppose 5 gallon paint tin out of the water. We could clearly pick it up at about 5 miles. We'd home in on that. Now most of those contacts that we picked up

23:30 were drums and junk and what have you thrown out by shipping. There was a lot of that tossed out into the water. Spanish fishing boats used to come out and fish in the Straits of Gibraltar. So we'd pick them up. Our job was just to keep submarines under the surface. They were ineffective if they were under the water.

24:00 **Why was that?**

Well they got to get a periscope up to see their target. They've got to have something up above the surface to pick, see the target. They did then, maybe they've got systems now where they don't have to surface. During the war they had to have periscope up to see their target or a snorkel up to charge the batteries.

And did you fly every night?

No, not

24:30 every night. I was only on the squadron for about 4 months. No, we would not have flown, we certainly didn't fly every night. There was not that much activity and we had probably 15 aircraft operational in the squadron. So there'd probably be about 3

25:00 aircraft out every night from the squadron or 4 maybe.

And where were you posted then or did you stay?

I stayed on Gibraltar for until the war finished in Europe, Victory in Europe. And when the Victory in Europe, the squadron was disbanded,

In Gibraltar?

At Gibraltar, yes. We were

25:30 pulled together as a group and the Commanding Officer said, well the war was over of course. We were at a loose end, we didn't know what was going to happen to us. The Commanding Officer Wing Commander McKay called us together and he said "Right 458 Squadron will no longer exist". So the squadron was disbanded and we were then

26:00 like just all at a loose end I suppose.

But still in Gibraltar?

Yeah we were on Gibraltar. We thought that we would probably be posted to Burma because the war was still going on in the Pacific. But I must tell you a little bit about Gibraltar. Gibraltar is only a very small place you know. I think it's about 5 kilometres long and it wouldn't be anymore than a kilometre wide.

26:30 So that's a little. It's like a big rock you know. And the rock was half cut away to make room to put an airfield in. All the rock that was taken out of it was used as filling for the strip. The airstrip ran out into the water. It was slap bang up against the Spanish boarder. When I say slap bang our hut was no more than 2 metres away from the Spanish boarder fence.

27:00 Then there was about 100 metres of no man's land then there was the little township of La Linea which we could go to. Bullfights, we used to go and watch the bullfights. But all the people that worked in Gibraltar, well not all of them but a lot of the people that worked in Gibraltar in the shops and all that were Spanish people that came across from Spain. Spain was a neutral country then. Well the main road of course from Spain when straight across this

27:30 the airstrip and that was the cause of some excitement at times when the Spanish would be coming across with their little carts and donkeys being pulled by donkeys and what have you and the aircraft would be trying to come in and land and take off and you know they'd be trying. The sirens would be going to try to get them off the runway and lights would be flashing. Well then,

28:00 if anything was too stubborn the jeep used to come out, put a rope on them and pull everything off the runway. Let the aircraft come in.

I think that might be a good place for us to pause, Tom. Thanks very much for that, we'll give you a break now.

Righto Annie.

Tape 5

00:47 **Great, Tom like I said we're a little bit pressed for time today so what I'd like to do is take parts of your story from yesterday which was fantastic and very detailed lots of information**

01:00 **and explore them in a little more deeply and I'd like to start with training. I have pictures in my head of Tiger Moths and they look amazing but very fragile planes. I was wondering what was the attitude of the airmen to a Tiger Moth when they were flying in them for training?**

Well I'd say most of the airmen had never really been close to an aircraft before in their life you know. It would've been the first time they would've touched an aeroplane. I think they were all a little bit

01:30 bewildered you know. We were all young and it was a big adventure and we were probably, weren't prepared for any of the things that were going to happen to us but I think most of them like were excited and sort of entered into the spirit of the whole adventure.

What were they made of Tiger Moths?

Well they timber construction,

02:00 wooden construction fabric covered fabric covered wings. They probably had metal struts between the two wings. Very light, low landing speed. 'Course you'd try and land into a headwind wherever possible and if the headwind was greater than about 30 miles per hour or 30 knots shall we say then it was

02:30 difficulty in holding the aircraft down because the landing speed was only about 35-40 knots. So if you've got a headwind blowing at that speed you're really airborne. The aircraft will just touch the ground, the wheels will bounce and it'll keep bouncing up and down and it was very difficult for the pilot under those circumstances to hold it down on the airfield and make a landing because the aircraft wants to keep flying. Usual

03:00 practice then was for ground staff below us or anybody sitting around on the tarmac to run out and just somebody grab each wing and hold the aircraft down and stabilise it while you taxi it back to a parking lot.

That's incredible that people actually had to stop the planes by hand.

Yeah even flying like. I have seen Tiger Moths flying in the air when they've actually been going backwards because the wind speed has been stronger than their air speed.

03:30 So it takes them instead of going forward they're still going at the same airspeed on their indicators but in fact that big block of air if you like to think of it like that that they are in is moving back faster than they're going forward.

Well they seem to be quite an exciting and perhaps dangerous plane to have flown, can you walk us through that very first morning you went out for your first flight in a Tiger Moth. Into the plane and taking off for us and how you felt?

04:00 Yes, I don't say that I have very vivid memories of it. But I can remember Flight Sergeant Rankin, he was the instructor that I had and I can remember him sort of giving me some comforting remarks you

know that were not going to crash, you're not going to fall out of it, you'll be OK you know, I'll make sure you get back on the ground. I suppose I was that nervous really to remember too much at all.

Can you tell us then what was in the cockpit of a Tiger

04:30 **Moth?**

Yes now you're testing my memory a bit. Well we had a airspeed indicator that gave you your speed through the air, not necessarily your speed over the ground it was a totally different thing altogether. Airspeed indicator, we had a bank indicator for turn and bank. In other words if you had one wing down the other wing up the indicator showed by a series of levels

05:00 in the cockpit that you were banking around. We had a slip indicator, I don't think that's the proper name for it but like a side slip indicator. If you were turning around it's a bit like going around on a velodrome race track I would think. If you're going at the right speed you're sticking to the track if you're going too slow, you're trying to fall down the track and if you're going too fast you're trying to be thrown out of the track. So when you're turning in an aircraft

05:30 at you've got to have your speed and the rate of turn tuned in to the angle that you've got the aircraft at. If all those things are right then your turn, your slip indicator indicates that you're not slipping one way or the other.

Did you ever get any larrikins who thought they knew it all and would try and do fancy tricks in a Tiger Moths?

Oh yes, there was plenty of cowboys that

06:00 assumed they knew how to fly an aeroplane. We even had cases of chaps landing in the paddock beside their girlfriend you know. And then other people instructors flying around seeing an aircraft in the paddock. Well of course that didn't go across very well with the Commanding Officer. Plenty of fellows would try to low fly you know, when they weren't authorised.

06:30 Frighten cattle, frighten the farmer, farmers didn't take to it at all. The farmers tolerated us I'm talking about Temora here. Remember we were out in country where there was farming activity going on as well. And we had this Temora Airfield which was an air base and a lot of hangers and huts and what have you. As I mentioned earlier we had about

07:00 70 aircraft and so it was a lot of air activity. You know we couldn't operate from the main airfield all the time, so we operated from satellites which were out 20 kilometres or so. There was about 3 or 4 satellites. Well these were out in amongst the farming country. The satellite was probably just one of the farmer's suitable paddocks. Nice and flat probably slashed. If he had slashers those days to keep the grass down. And we flew from these

07:30 paddocks. No buildings in the paddock except a seat for the instructors to sit on. The instructors spent just about all their days sitting down there watching us and we would take off and do whatever they asked us to do, come back and land and they would comment on how we went and then we might because there was 2 pupils for each

08:00 instructor, we might hop out and the other pupil might hop in and he goes away and you sit down in the paddock on a bench. Then at the end of the morning we'd take the aircraft back to Temora.

Can you remember the first time you heard or saw one of your co-crew members crash in a Tiger Moth, 'cause that happened a fair bit, didn't it?

We had, I can't recall seeing a fatality while I was

08:30 at Temora although they did have fatalities, there's quite a number of people that are buried in the cemetery. I saw plenty of shall we call them accidents caused by poor landings. That was initially, that sorted out the sheep from the lambs if you'd like to put it that way initially because when you start to go solo first up you

09:00 had to make a landing. That was the thing you had to do - take off and landing. That's all we did initially you know hours and hours of take off and landing. Well if you couldn't land the aircraft on the ground instead of trying to land it up 50 feet in the air then you would usually damage the aircraft. There was plenty of cases of aircraft coming down and with the delicate undercarriage flatten the undercarriage of the aircraft hitting the ground and damaging a propeller or breaking a propeller damaging the wings

09:30 that sort of thing.

The news of those crashes and of the fatalities though must have had quite an affect on a young group of men learning how to fly. Did it put a lot of fear into you or make you full of tension?

I can't recall that having any influence on us you know. I think you've got to remember that whilst we were flying we were also being schooled in the classroom and we were studying the theory of

10:00 flight and there was plenty of instructors telling us that these things'll happen and what to expect and

so,

Did you ever find any fellows who said "I can't go up anymore, I can't do it"? Did that happen much?

No, I can't. Not to me personally but each course had quite a lot of dropouts. Might've been because they didn't want to go ahead with it or it could've been that they weren't suitable.

Now just to go back a bit there, these

10:30 **fellows that were landing in paddocks next to their girlfriends I assume they were wearing the "Romance Busters" which you told us about yesterday which I thought was very funny. You must have had some great nicknames for things and for other soldiers and officers. Can you tell us a little bit about that?**

I, gee I can't remember. I spoke about "Squeegee" yesterday, he was notorious for making sure everything was thoroughly clean in the

11:00 latrines and wash rooms you know. I tell this story to my grandchildren that you know we used to go in the washrooms probably about 60 or 80 of us of a morning, half past 6 of a morning everybody'd be in the washroom having a wash you know and a shave. Well there would probably be one mirror see, so I always tell my grandchildren what fellow in front got the mirror then everybody lined up behind him and just followed his actions. That's how

11:30 we shaved. One of the other chaps that we had a nickname for was the "Screaming Skull". He was our WOD that's our Warrant Officer Disciplinarian trying to transform us from just civilians that loll around you know no discipline, to people of military bearing you know being able to march and walk when you're walking beside your mate,

12:00 you walk in step with him you know, so you're synchronised. I can't remember many, the other real names, I can remember our CO [Commanding Officer] in the squadron was called the "Big Dig". But we did have names for some of the people and on some of my photographs I noticed that we've got names for some of the boys who went through like "Ground Loop" Leggo I think it was. He apparently landed and he couldn't keep the aircraft straight, it used to do

12:30 ground loops. There was Buster so and so, I just can't remember off the top of my head.

You must have got up to a lot of shenanigans then, a bunch of young blokes who are not used to discipline, did you have any, where there practical jokers in the group?

I don't remember too many practical jokes. I know there was a heck of a lot of pillow fights. Pillow fights and that went on in the hut. There was a lot of I suppose you might call it graffiti today that went on the walls of the huts.

13:00 And particularly nude women. Not necessarily nude but voluptuous girls you know. Some chaps whilst they might not be able to draw a straight line had perfected the art of drawing a voluptuous woman. At that stage of the game, there used to be a series of I don't know whether they were in a magazine called "Vargas Girls". They were certainly on playing

13:30 cards. You could get a pack of playing cards that had all these Vargas Girls on them. They were in swimsuits you know very attractive girls. I think they were used as models to decorate the walls. The walls were lined with Masonite, a perfect surface for a chalk drawing so. And then it wasn't frowned upon, it was just accepted to put a bit of artwork around the walls.

As a draftsman were you called on to contribute to that artwork often?

Oh, I suppose I did

14:00 my share but I'd never perfected that art of the human figure.

A tough art to perfect. Excuse me a second Tom; I just want to check my notes. Now while you were in training what did they tell you about the Germans and the Japanese?

Yes well, I don't say they told us much about the actual personnel, they told us about their

14:30 equipment and we were always told that the Germans, I'm talking about aircraft now the German aircraft was nowhere near as good as ours. You know the Messerschmitt fighter didn't hold a candle to say the Spitfire and the bombers when they were good and the same with the Japanese they were inferior aeroplanes to us. And we believed that too.

15:00 So we never feared too much their superiority if you like to think of it like that. But I have in later years I've done a bit of reading about these aircraft and performance figures and I now know that that wasn't right what we were told. The aircraft were equally as good as what we had.

Do you think it was right for them to tell you that at the time though to keep your confidence up?

I suppose it was when you think about it. Yes I suppose it was. You know

15:30 I suppose if you look at the other side of the coin, if we were told that we couldn't stand a chance against these fighters we'd be reluctant.

And they didn't tell you anything similar about the actual personnel 'cause I've heard and I've read that tales were told about the Japanese in particular that they were quite small and they couldn't reach the controls properly and things like that?

No, we weren't, not in the courses I went through, where we were sort of instructed

16:00 about the pilots or. I think we always feared the Japanese would be, do things that we wouldn't do - let's put it that way. A bit of a kamikaze mentality we knew that and if they ran out of ammunition they were likely to just ram into you.

And were you hearing that news from soldiers who'd come back from the front?

No, no that would be just. I don't even say that was official information. That

16:30 would be stories that spread around in amongst the camp fellows, talking amongst themselves and that.

What did you brother tell you about being in the RAAF?

Yes

He was up north, wasn't he?

He was up north and he saw a lot of action. You know it's a bit like my father, we never talked a lot about what we were doing and my brother doesn't even now talk a lot about it. You've got to get him in a situation like this before he'll say much.

17:00 But my brother's story has been written in books. That's where I got most of my information from about how he was involved in a, he was a rear-gunner in a B-25 Mitchell and he was attacked by a Japanese fighter. It was through his gunnery that the Japanese aircraft was damaged and had to

17:30 call off the fight see. That's the fighter zero but in doing so their aircraft was damaged, the Mitchell they were flying to the point where they couldn't make it back to base at Katherine I think, they were at up the Northern Territory, they were forced to land on a beach in Melrose is it,

Melville?

Melrose

18:00 Island up off Darwin. I'm not sure whether I've got the name correct there and the aircraft the B-25 stopped on stayed on the beach for year and years and years after the war. Melville Island.

Yeah, I think that's the one yeah.

My brother has, he was always a bit fascinated about this and he took a few troops back to see that aircraft.

18:30 He actually hired a helicopter from Darwin and they flew out landed and had a look around. It's not there now. It's been taken by some group that's going to try and restore it.

Oh good.

But he hasn't sat down very much like we're talking or we haven't discussed our war activities. He probably doesn't know that much about what I did either.

Do you find that,

19:00 **having been through that experience yourself, having been to war you could understand why your brother and why your father wouldn't have talked about it?**

Well see, of later years I found that you're not because. Although I never flew over Germany and dropped any bombs mind you but if I'd had to I would've done that without even giving it a second thought. But I found that if you, on occasions you'd been a pilot,

19:30 you know and you'd been in England people think "Oh that bloke must've been over there dropping bombs on Dresden and places like that". So there was a bit of a reluctance to say too much. You've got to pick your group you know. If it's at a reunion you can talk but if you had a group of, you might be in amongst your daughters and their kids and that they view things a bit differently they don't.

Did you find much

20:00 **reaction like that where people automatically thought "Oh maybe he was in Dresden" and they judged you on that?**

No, not when we returned. We were welcomed back like with tickertape welcomes through the city. There was never any protests as far as I know anyway about our involvement in the war never.

OK I'll just check my notes one more time Tom. You mentioned in training one of the few

times

20:30 **you actually got to work with or mix with WAAFs was in parachute packing. How was that being stuck in training and then having these WAAFs come in?**

Well, we were taken into the parachute packing shed to see what went on there and shown the amount of work and detail and precision shall we say that goes into packing a parachute. Like a parachute is a

21:00 big piece of material with a lot of cords on it. It's packed extremely neatly and to a definite system, so it will unfold or unfurl, whichever is the word in the proper fashion. And it ends up packed into a little package you know, not much bigger than a briefcase or wouldn't be any bigger than a briefcase tightly packed

21:30 and we were then told and it was very easy - to that parachute you wore that in different manners. In a Tiger Moth you wore it as a harness strapped over you and it hung on your backside. Heavy, cumbersome and you got into the aircraft with that hanging down on your backside and you sat down and that was your seat. So that was in a recessed bucket type seat. The original bucket seat, they were real buckets

22:00 the parachute sat in it. And you had a rip-cord which consisted of like a D-shape thing up on your chest. If you pulled that you undid certain keys that were holding it all together. If you could undo that easily. You could be walking out to the aircraft and it wasn't comfortable all this harness you had on you might start adjusting things and suddenly you'd pulled your rip-cord, not that I ever did it, mind you.

22:30 But that was once you did, that you had an embarrassing problem of trying to pick up this parachute you know, it would sort of explode into like what might happen if your airbag goes off in your motor car. And you've got a couple of clothes baskets full of silk and cords and you got to try and manhandle, take it back into the parachute room and face the girl that packed it. Cost you,

23:00 it usually cost you a box of chocolates I think was the penalty for accidentally you know pulling your rip-cord.

And what was the relationship between the WAAFs and the men in the Army, did you get a chance to mix much or were you just meeting at work?

No, we, well my wife thinks you know that we had all the time in the world to mix with these females but we didn't really.

23:30 We moved you know. The number of bases that I was at during the war just, was amazing, we moved around and you didn't really get time shall we say to set up an acquaintance. As distinct from the ground staff. The ground staff were there permanently and they all became one big family. We didn't, we came in, we were there a couple of months and and that we moved on to another base. But no we didn't get much

24:00 opportunity at all to fraternise with the females, the WAAFs.

What about on the boat over from ship rather from the US to the UK, there were Australian airmen, US airmen and some WAAFs on there?

Some, I don't know that they were WAAFs. There were some probably American nurses but no, we didn't get near them at all.

That was a difficult journey, I believe you had some U-Boats lurking around?

Well see there again

24:30 we didn't, nobody told us whether there was U-Boats there. We could put our own reasons why these destroyers were racing around and dropping depth charges. We knew it was a dangerous trip going across the Atlantic. I don't think it worried us too much. I think we were more concerned going across the Pacific

25:00 because there was Japanese submarines floating around in the Pacific and we were just one solitary little boat going out there and the trip we took from here to San Francisco, we virtually travelled east for about more than half the time, so we went just about right over near South America, then went up north, we didn't cut across straight across the Pacific. That was to avoid any possible

25:30 Japanese activity.

Still though being one little ship by itself it must have been quite at times a potentially very frightening journey you know knowing you had no escort?

Yeah, there was my Harley, Monks has a better memory than I have on some of these things. He reckons he had heard a couple of alerts, he thinks on the Cape Flattery. I can't remember any.

Can you remember any men being particularly upset by these alerts or anybody being particularly

26:00 **upset by the constant tension of being at sea by yourselves on one ship?**

No I can't. I think people were more concerned about seasickness, lack of proper food, appalling conditions you know. On those see we travelled on, I travelled on anyway, I'm trying to think now, four I suppose troop ships.

26:30 The first one was absolutely atrocious I mean the conditions were shocking. And we expected more than that 'cause we were sergeants, we had a bit of rank and we were pilots and we suddenly found ourselves I think I said yesterday that my mother gave me a dressing gown. "Tom you'll need this to go to the cabin." Salt water showers you know. Couldn't get a lather up.

27:00 **I suppose you kept that dressing gown and slippers very well hidden on the ship?**

In the bottom of my kit bag and never got moved.

What else did you take overseas with you that was of a personal nature?

Personal nature I can't remember taking much of a personal nature. Didn't have room really you know to take anything extra. I can remember, I think I mentioned yesterday buying a book that I

27:30 I was obviously looking to the future you know. It had nothing to do with my air force training but I could see in the future I would use it. So I bought a book and carried that around with me for a long while, a long while. As of course the war went on, we had a bit more rank and things became more comfortable and we could branch out. As well as having a kit bag, having a suitcase. So we got a bit more room to put in souvenirs and things like that, that we

28:00 might buy and steal and things like that. I can recall on Gibraltar when the war finished on Gibraltar, we were all went down the street. There was only one little street going down through the township and somehow or the other I ended up with a flag, a British flag. I can't remember how I got it; I know it was, I got this British flag. And that's a bit unusual for me, like to go up and steal a flag.

28:30 I got this flag and I got all signatures on it. The fellows that were on with me on the VE night I think it was called. Victory in Europe.

Can you remember where the flag came from? Was it off an official building?

It was. No it would've come from one of the shops or hanging from an awning or something like that. Because it was a big celebration in a tiny little crammed area.

That must have been

29:00 **such an incredible day, VE Day. Can you remember where you were when you heard the news? Exactly what you were doing?**

VE Day. No I can't remember exactly where I was. I'd probably be in a hut you know. I don't say we had a radio in the hut, we wouldn't have. Somebody would've burst in the door and told us. All our communication was by rumour. You never knew whether it was fair dinkum or not. There was

29:30 that many rumours that used to float around you know, this has happened or that's going to happen and we were sort of, knew the war was going to finish, we knew that everything was slowing down shall we say. Activity on our squadron was slowing down. There was not a lot of enemy activity out in the Atlantic. I can remember. VE Day, of course was a big day in England

30:00 particularly you know. Everybody went mad. Gibraltar, it was a big day but a lot of military blokes in a small space.

So was there, was a big party that night, was there lots of beer on Gibraltar?

Yes, plenty of beer. No, very strong beer. Beer and wine and there was places that you could go to to drink. You'd probably call them a nightclub I suppose under different circumstances but

30:30 the thing. You'd drink, you'd sit at a table not a bar, sit at a table. And they had in Gibraltar; they had a lot of Spanish dancing girls. They were very talented from what I remember. You know they'd dance in these nice red flowing type dresses and with these whatever they put in their fingers, the castanets or whatever it is. They usually had them on a dance floor putting on a show. That went on.

31:00 That was nearly continuous, the Spanish girls dancing.

Did you get to meet any of the Spanish girls?

No, not on Gibraltar. We could go across into LaLinea and meet the Spanish girls, yes. What we did there, we had a day pass into Spain. We couldn't stay overnight. We had to be back across through the border before midnight. But we could go across

31:30 to Spain, oh probably every week if we could afford it and you could meet nice Spanish girls in suitable places. And the usual procedure would be to you'd spend some time with the girls and have a drink at a bar then you'd go to the bullfight, you'd take 'em to a bullfight to keep you company and you'd either have to buy a ticket in the sun

32:00 or a ticket in the shade. The ticket in the shade cost you about five times as much as a ticket in the sun from what I remember. Sometimes you might take a bottle of wine with you. Just about everybody was drinking wine and the girls would accompany you and then you'd watch the bullfight. What a dreadful thing they were, you know. We didn't, I thought they were dreadful. We used to barrack for the bull. But 'cause that was frowned upon

32:30 you know. The bullfighter, he was a hero. But then we'd go back to these hostels I suppose with the girls then we'd have to be back over the borderline by midnight.

Did you have a particular Spanish girlfriend?

No, no I didn't but some fellas did and I can recall that used to have a, create a bit of you know a bit of

33:00 anger in some quarters because some fellas'd come back talking about this Maria that they'd been with and the other fellow who some bloke over here would reckon that Maria was his girlfriend you know. They'd become quite attached to some of them but. No, it wasn't, I didn't go across that frequently.

Can I take you to Liverpool when you disembarked from the boat from America, from the ship from America and you realised

33:30 **that there was quite a large military build up taking place prior to the D-Days landings? What were rumours circulating about that build up?**

Well, the rumours amongst the troops generally then, even it was applying, it'd started right back in America probably back even in Australia that we knew that there was going to be a, we call it an invasion you know the liberation of Europe, we knew that was imminent more or less.

34:00 But nobody knew the exact date when it would be. But we knew by the amount of troop talk in America and activity in amongst all these convoys, we tipped that they had troops on board and war materials but as soon as we got to England you could, it was, you could feel it in the air you know, there was a sense of something is

34:30 about to happen. There was that much military activity unbelievable.

Can you tell us a little more about what sort of activity that would've been?

Well people marching off ships that were docked like in all sorts of uniforms. Americans, Australians, Canadians. Then as I mentioned yesterday aircraft being taken off ships and being towed through the streets with their wings missing. So you're

35:00 marching along the street and you got aeroplanes being pulled along near you. You've got as soon as you get out where there's a bit of an open field. In England whilst these towns were populated they were very densely populated and as soon as you only had to go a mile or 2 and you're out into open fields in England. Well, out in the open fields there was all this war equipment stored military trucks and that.

35:30 So and aircraft flying around suddenly started to get a different colour marking. All the aircraft, both British and American that was involved in the Normandy raids or liberation had a special marking. It had black and white stripes on the wings and the fuselage quite broad black and white stripes, which was most unusual. So suddenly all the aircraft you'd see flying around were,

36:00 had these distinct black and white stripes on them. That was because it was known that there would be a heck of a lot of activity, air activity over the beaches and they'd need a really good means of identifying friend from foe.

Is that for the gunners shooting up to make sure they didn't shoot those planes?

Yes and for other fighter aircraft that were coming in to attack, yes. And for your own friendly fire as they now call it.

36:30 Which we didn't have much of.

I bet you're glad for certain there wasn't much of that around?

No, well I've always thought that the Americans were a bit trigger happy I might add. They were very gung-ho at air shows. We used to go 'cause you know the air show would be put on on these air bases and you'd get plenty of air squadrons around you and they'd come in and

37:00 various fellows'd come in a put on a display. You could usually be sure if the Americans were going to put on a display you'd have a mid-air collision. You know I don't like to say too much about that but. Whereas I always thought that the British and the Australian Canadians were trained on a totally different level altogether to American air crew.

We might just stop there for a moment Tom. I think we're about to run

37:30 **out of tape. We'll pick that up in a couple of minutes. Thank you it's going really well.**

Tape 6

00:31 **Was there much tension Tom between the British and Australian Empire air crews and the US air crews?**

Well, there was no tension I'd say at all between the British air crew and the Australian air crews. Britain was Mother England to the Australians and I think a lot of us probably still look at it that way.

01:00 But we were on a different level altogether to the American air crew. The Americans of course weren't really, they were army air force to start with. I suppose that name put them in the Army category. Army air force and they were so well paid and they had so much in the way of decorations you know. They had all sorts of spaghetti as we called it across their

01:30 pockets of all their proficiency awards and decorations. So they were up there and we were down here with, they had plenty of money and they had very, very nice uniforms so. It didn't, I don't say there was tension but we didn't mix with them that much. I had no ill feelings. I had a lot of respect for Americans because the American people looked

02:00 after me very generously when I was in America. But the service people were different level, different group of people altogether to what we were.

Were there many blues between the Americans and the British?

Yeah I don't know about that. There probably was a few bar fights and that but not many I'd say. When you think of the number of service people that were you'd go into a bar you know there'd be a lot of.

02:30 I'm talking about England now especially around Liverpool 'cause there was a big airfield, American airfield you know just outside Liverpool. But I'd say the Americans would all be sticking together drinking and the Pommies or as we called them they'd drink together too. The Aussies would be together. There wouldn't be. You'd be in your groups. 'Cause the Pommies drank different beer to us and they spoke a different language.

03:00 The Americans we thought were a bit blasé. No, there wasn't many fights. Not a lot of mixing either.

Was there much talk amongst the Australians then sticking together about wishing they could be back home then fighting in the north?

I think no. No I don't say there was much talk about wanting to fight in the north. There was talk about some of them wishing they'd be back home. 'Cause we did have married fellows

03:30 amongst us. No I think as I mentioned yesterday we were British subjects you know. My application form has me down as a British subject even though I's born in Australia, True Blue Aussie and Mother England you know. It seemed to be automatic for us as soon as England become attacked we would try and help. So I don't think anybody really thought that we

04:00 shouldn't be there. There might have been an odd one or two, wasn't a general feeling

Those fellas who were married and who had families and wives I guess back here did they become really homesick?

I don't know, they became homesick, but it was a bit difficult for them to mix in with us you know. Because we were probably a younger group altogether larrikins. They had more responsibility and they probably viewed things a bit differently to us too because they had responsibilities back home.

What did you miss back home? What were the things that made your heartstrings tug?

04:30 What did I miss? Oh gee that's a hard question. I probably missed the fruit for instance, one thing walking around and the food. In England particularly fruit was very, very expensive. Peaches were more or less wrapped in cotton wool in the windows and displayed like you display jewellery and they were

05:00 very expensive, too expensive for us to buy. We ate horse meat. You'd go into a restaurant and you order a piece of steak, it'd be horse steak. Chips were a, fish and chips were the main thing you could buy and Spam. Spam was like sort of a compressed ham. It wasn't bad either. The food was hard to come by

05:30 and if you went to somebody's home they might invite you out you'd feel guilty about eating their food because you know they just saw rations and that. I had an opportunity to pay back some of that when I went to Gibraltar, there was regular training flights that came down from England with Lancasters, used to come down and land at Gibraltar and we had the opportunity of sending back parcels to England and I was friendly

06:00 with a lass in England. Very nice girl, I was quite friendly with her and I used to send back boxes of bananas to them 'cause they couldn't, they didn't know what a banana was and I can recall. She used to hand them out to the kids in the street. I don't know whether you saw that show on the ABC recently Sons and Lovers and it showed a little English street where all the houses, the front doors

06:30 were right on the footpath you know a little row of them and she lived in conditions like that. Well I can

remember going there on leave “Here comes the fruit man” you know. They used to run out and ask if I had anymore bananas.

Is that what they called you, the Fruit Man?

They did there, the kids used to call me the Fruit Man.

What other cultural differences were there between Britain and Australia that struck you?

Oh I found I must

07:00 see, I did get into a private home shall we say. I got into a home of a couple in Birmingham it was I think and they had their name down with one of these clubs where they offered accommodation to servicemen who were on leave. There was about 4 of us went there and Mrs Griffith I think

07:30 I’ve got her name written. Maisie and Joe I think it was and he was a draftsmen I can remember that. Looked like a draftsmen too. Now they took us in just like members of their family. I think back you know, I think that’s amazing how they did that. They just took us in. She had a shed full of bikes and she used to take us out in the countryside riding around and just see the place on pushbikes, have a picnic lunch you know.

08:00 **Just by the way what does a draftsman look like?**

This chap had a nice pair of dark glasses on like I, you know horn-rimmed glasses like I wear.

It must have been so important for a young man so far from home to have a family like that to fit in with?

Yeah it was I guess and she then handed us across to her sister in London and they took us in the same. Connie and Jock. And oh we kept corresponding to

08:30 them for quite a few years. I’ve dropped off unfortunately. I did have an opportunity of going back when I was working for a company in Sydney and they sent me overseas and I spent some time in London and I called out and took Jock out a bottle of whiskey, I can remember that and had an evening meal with them. Nice to see them again.

I’m sure it was. Any great memories come up over that dinner?

Oh,

09:00 no a lot I suppose. We talked about you know wartime conditions and how much different it was then to what it is now. ‘Cause they took us around and showed us all the bomb damage of London too. That was a stark thing for us to see.

Can you walk us through what that might have been like walking around the bomb damage?

Oh well. A lot of it had been cleaned up but we were looking at the damage around St Paul’s Cathedral and other areas that were completely

09:30 obliterated. Oh it gave us an appreciation of you know what they, what the English people went through and at Liverpool of course there was tremendous bomb damage around Liverpool, when we first landed we could immediately see the bomb damage there. Brick saw, brick buildings knocked about with bombs in air-raids.

This is when you arrived there; it was well after the Blitz wasn’t it?

It was after the Blitz but I did experience

10:00 the flying bomb, that was the V1 as they called it and I went to London on leave and I can’t recall when. It must have been after I finished up in Scotland I think and I remember I was there and these flying bombs were coming over and oh I didn’t like that at all. I thought “Now what are you doing here mate? You don’t have to be here.” ‘Cause they were a bit frightening you know. You’d see them coming over and you’d never know when the engine was going to stop on them,

10:30 when they were going to come down. They were quite noisy too so you could see them quite clearly and they came over fairly low. So I got out of London quick smart.

Good move. Can you describe to us how those V2, was it the V2 or the V1s?

The V1s. The V2 you had no warning virtually. The V1 was a flying bomb. It had a German designed engine in it that’s rather unique, I don’t

11:00 remember the principle of it. A jet engine of some sort. It didn’t fly any more than about 400 miles per hour so that’s about a fast aircraft speed at that time. So you could see it travelling through the air and it was about I suppose as long as a motor car shall we say and maybe 3 or 4 hundred millimetres in diameter. It had another

11:30 cylinder up on top of it. It had the engine and the bomb underneath. Well you could see them coming across, they made quite a lot of noise, a real putt-putt-putt noise. Then you just hoped that they didn’t

cut out near you. The V2 which came later was a rocket type engine. It travelled faster than the speed of sound I think. So you didn't, it's a bit like

12:00 lightning you know. You only hear the noise after after it's struck.

And did you see any of these bombs actually strike?

No I didn't. No

Lucky

Yeah

Was it in Britain that you were first introduced to the Wellington bomber?

No it wasn't. No, I didn't see a Wellington bomber at all in Britain. Not that I can recall. I knew of them of course. No it wasn't. I didn't get introduced to the Wellington

12:30 bomber until Palestine.

Can you walk us through a Wellington bomber then? Explain to us what they were like inside when you first saw them?

Yes, well a Wellington bomber is a large aircraft, it's twin engines. Powerful engines, 1700 horse power Bristol Hercules engines. Unique design in as much as they're sleeve valve, which is different altogether to the normal valve. Engines were rather quiet, didn't make a lot of noise.

13:00 It had a unique fuselage construction which was a geodesic construction. That was built by, designed by Barnes Wallis. He was one of the brilliant aircraft designers in England. It had a crew of 6. We had 2 pilots, a navigator and 3. I'm talking about the model that we, on our squadron now.

13:30 We were Mark 14 Wellingtons I'm speaking about. Whereas they went right through the scale virtually from Mark 1 right up and this was the latest model the Mark 14. It had normal undercarriage shall we say. It had a bomb bay that was capable of carrying I think it was 8 depth charges, what we carried only depth charges. It had the

14:00 latest radar in it which was called a PPI. I think that was, we weren't really encouraged to talk about radar. PPI that was a Planned Position Indicator. Very, very good. Circular dial. The aircraft had a chin on it like, just like a normal chin that we have which detracted from its appearance but in the chin it had a scanner that the scanner rotated through 360

14:30 degrees, so you did get a coverage of ahead and behind and all around. As distinct from some of the earlier radar which only looked ahead. Just to give you a simple example. If you were out in the Atlantic flying into Gibraltar you're coming into the Straits of Gibraltar your radar screen showed up the coastline as soon as it came into the scale of about 50

15:00 or 60 miles. It showed up the opening through the straights, it would show up Gibraltar sticking out as a bit of a peninsular. So it gave you a position, a picture on your screen was just like as you see on the map. That was a very, very helpful aid in the aircraft. Now that was used for submarine detection or for detecting

15:30 night-time detection it was. I mean daylight you can see. Our aircraft was fitted out for night flying only. Although we did do day flights. I did go through a bit this yesterday but our procedure was to pick up a contact on the radar. If it was a fully surfaced ship we'd pick it up by about 50 miles but we didn't probably look for that sort of

16:00 thing. We were patrolling out into the Straits of Gibraltar and out into the Atlantic. Doing patrols on a regular pattern. Not a zigzag but a square type up and down moving out up and down pattern. We knew where friendly shipping was and so we were looking at areas where there might have been submarines. If we picked up a contact we were capable of picking up a snorkel of a submarine

16:30 at about 5 miles. That's about the size of a 5 gallon paint tin. We would pick up the contact and it might be 30 degrees to the right shall we say. The radio operator which was one of the wireless operator/air-gunners then asked the pilot to turn right 30 degrees roughly 'til he got that contact running down the centre

17:00 of his screen straight down the centre. Once we got, once we then home in on the contact assuming we were out a bit from it. We'd probably be at 1,000 feet we'd drop down to 50 feet. Not immediately but we'd want to be at 50 feet, at least a mile and a half away from the contact. Then we had the ability with the screen of changing the scale on the screen so as it came half way into the screen,

17:30 that's 25, say 2 or 3 miles we could switch a knob and it'd take it out again so we kept on enlarging the screen. We got more precise readings and measurements. Then at a mile and a half away we'd make sure our height was about 50 feet, we'd then home in on the, then we'd lower our Leigh Light, our big search light. Lower it out of the fuselage. Then it was the second pilot's job to get

18:00 up the front and operate the search light. The pilot would receive instructions that you know one degree to the right, a bit to the left, one mile away then we'd switch the search light on and light up our contact. We'd detect whether it was a fishing boat junk from a ship, if it was a, what we thought was a snorkel, we'd drop a few depth charges.

You were saying excuse me that

18:30 **you weren't allowed to talk about radar. Was that not to anybody or you kept it amongst the RAF?**

Oh no, well it was not you know. You wouldn't sit in a pub and talk about the good radar system you've got in your aeroplane.

So that was real cutting edge technology at that stage?

It was at that stage yeah. I'd just like to talk about the 50 feet level too because I know that probably a lot of pilots might ultimately hear all this and read it and say "That's a bit rich this bloke talking

19:00 'bout flying at 50 feet at night you know". Which it is if you think about it. But we had a radio altimeter which was a marvellous aid. It consisted of three lights about the size I suppose of a 10 cent coin and spaced just like a little set of traffic lights in on the instrument panel and there was red at the bottom if I remember correctly and then there was amber, then there was green. Now we had a control

19:30 and we could set those that altimeter as it was called. As distinct from your conventional altimeter you could set that and we used to set that at 50 feet and that was tuned to operate at 50 plus or minus 5 feet. Soon as we got below 40 feet the red light came on. Soon as we got above 50 feet the amber light came on. So you didn't have to look directly at it. You could see that out of the corner of your eye. You would fly with

20:00 flickering between amber and green, so you'd know that you were just at a safe height. So that allowed us to fly in in the dark 50 feet above the water and feel. It was a hazardous operation but felt reasonably safe that we could control it.

Now the life expectancy speaking of hazardous flying of bomber crews during the war wasn't huge, was it?

No, it wasn't. Oh no,

20:30 it was minus zero. It see, it depends on what theatre you were in and what you were doing you know. I was on Coastal Command, ended up there. In England in the early stages of the war Australian squadrons and British squadrons and American squadrons, the life expectancy was about 200% against you getting through a tour of operations. You had

21:00 a tour of operations consisted of 25 operations over enemy territory. Now losing 10% every day shall we say. So after 25 it means they've lost 250%. So your chances of surviving a tour of operations under those early conditions very, very remote you know. Looking back on it, it was

21:30 just deplorable the way the young fellas were shot out of the sky.

Did you know that when you started flying your missions?

Yeah. Oh we knew that the Bomber Command were taking a lot of punishment yes. And we knew that.

So what was going through your mind when you went on your first mission? Do you have an idea?

Oh well, no I see. I'm one of the lucky ones I suppose. I was out on Coastal Command. There was not the enemy activity out there.

22:00 Our, the only thing we would meet would be a submarine. But we did run the prospect of meeting a submarine on the surface and the submarines. The submarine had the ability to submerge, get out of sight. But that wasn't necessarily, its safest thing to do because we had depth charges we could drop and they could go down and probably damage the submarine. But the submarine had just as good a chance of staying on the surface and shooting us down.

22:30 Like it had a fairly stable platform and we were coming in on a, at a distance and it had the ability to shoot us down so. No it didn't happen to me but I know that it's, a lot of the anti-submarine patrols experienced that. The submarines wouldn't submerge, they'd just as soon as stay there and have a go.

And what stories did you hear from the guys that flew the planes about those incidents?

Well I

23:00 must admit when I got on the squadron we did not have a lot of hostile activity. We knew that could happen so we were briefed on those sort of circumstances.

Did you hear any particular tales of it though? Did anyone tell you that they flew a mission like that?

Well, I probably did but I can't recall that. You know fellows in the bar

23:30 were always talking about what they did and what they didn't do but. I can't recall any specific missions. I do know that myself we were involved in escorting a submarine in. It was just quite friendly I know that. It was just, it was quite pleased to see us and it, we escorted it into Gibraltar. I'm quite sure it was pleased to get in there you now. Because the war had finished see. It was happy to get in and get a nice bed I suppose. Probably came into the bar

24:00 and drank with us.

Were you talking to them over the wireless?

No, we didn't make contact. We made contact I think with an Alders Lamp you know, one of these signal lamps

What did you signal to them?

Oh we probably. I'm not sure what the codebook said. It probably gave us a code. Look up the codebook you know. You are being escorted and whatever it was might've been a QR2 or something.

And did you have a plan as a crew and as individuals if you did get if you did meet a U-Boat and you were

24:30 **shot down and you land in the sea, what happens then?**

Oh yes. Oh we had a, we practiced that regularly. Escaping the aircraft. Ditching the aircraft. We'd practice that right back when we first met the aircraft back at OTU Operational Training Unit. You had to be able to get out of the aircraft in something like 35 seconds I think it was. Yes we had a definite plan. There was the aircraft would had aids

25:00 like dinghies and that in the wings and certain areas. We had to take certain things with us. There was a hatchet here we needed to take and to break into. You know you went out in a certain order and certain people went out through this hatch and yeah. We did that, a lot of practice in getting out of the aircraft in a hurry.

You had a tail gunner in the Wellingtons, didn't you?

Yes

What was he to do if the plane was ditching, 'cause that's not the place you want to be if it's ditching?

No.

25:30 You can swing the tail turret around about 90 degrees I'd say and that offers you a doorway you know to go straight out. If he's still not capable of doing it you know. You get a bit knocked about in ditching. Providing the aircraft had the ability. The Wellington had the ability of floating I think for a couple of minutes I think it was. Depending a bit on the landing. It was only fabric covered, so you can imagine

26:00 most of the fabric would be ripped off. But if it was a reasonably soft landing then you got a chance of it floating long enough for you to all get out, get the dinghies and you'd be right. You had equipment in the dinghy's rations and that.

So these were old fabric covered Wellingtons? It must have been freezing when you were up there?

It was cold, yeah it was cold. We wore a fairly hefty flying suits and gloves

What did you wear from the skin up?

We had

26:30 long johns under clothes and long sleeves. We wore a shirt of some sort. We wore I think we put our overalls under our flying suits. We had a flying suit which was probably ducks' down padding something like that, in it had a nice fleecy-lined collar. We had flying boots. We didn't always wear our flying boots 'cause they were a bit cumbersome but they were fleecy lined.

27:00 Most of us had silk gloves. That's sounds a bit queer for fellows to be wearing silk gloves but they were nice, white, silk gloves to keep our hands warm. We had other gloves too but they got a bit cumbersome at times. Oh no, we were fairly well padded. The aircraft did have some means of heating in it. Some you know inlets coming in from the exhaust system that heated the cockpit heated the fuselage.

27:30 We didn't have any partitions through it to heat up the cockpit. It was all open right through.

Did you have any lucky charms or lucky rituals you were to go through at the start of a flight that you thought kept you safe?

Not that I can recall.

Do you remember any other guys having anything like that?

No, I don't remember that. I think there was certain favourite aircraft. Some aircraft were known to be better than others for some reason you know. They'd,

28:00 they would fly better. You could fly your hands off some others, you had to. It's a bit like a motor car. Some motor cars you got to steer, others you can take your hands off and it'll stay on the road. So some aeroplanes much better than others.

How long would a patrol last in the air?

Could be out for six seven hours or we could stay out about eight hours night time patrol, it was.

So,

28:30 **if you don't mind my asking, how did you answer the call of nature?**

We had a chute. You'd just go up and you'd pee down the chute. You'd want to make sure you didn't want to do anything else onboard the aircraft. If you were sick you could be sick down the chute. Yeah we put a lot of things down that chute.

What else?

Oh I think eventually you know you can throw out flame, flame floats that ignite when they hit the water that

29:00 tells you if you're over water. I'm just trying to think what other things. Any rubbish you know we'd toss down. Yep.

When you when you were on Gibraltar, VE Day, the war was over, did you have to ferry the plane back to the UK?

Yeah, we did actually yeah. I just meant to say something, just getting away from your question about Gibraltar, about what it was like there. It was Gibraltar, the airstrip was built across this

29:30 little narrow neck of land that joined the rock to Spain and of course the huts were right beside the airstrip and boundary of the Spanish boarder was right beside the huts. And it had a fence about 2 metres high which ran out into the beach right about I suppose a hundred feet. Well then Spain being a neutral country it had all sorts of people in there. German agents and what have you. There was a observation tower built just over the border

30:00 which had German agents in it watching the airfield all the time. We could go up into our control tower and with our binoculars look over and see the German agents looking at us you know. I suppose reporting all the activity the aircraft taking off. And then of course there was a certain amount of sabotage at one stage of the game. With agents coming around into the airfield. So to counteract that they built, they put in all this nesting of search lights in the face of the rock and

30:30 they lit up the airfield at night continuously with search lights being played around.

If Spain were neutral and German agents were allowed in their watch towers, were British agents allowed in there too?

Oh I guess so. We were allowed in. We could go in, we'd drink in the bar and you never knew who the chap beside you was. We were schooled about that you know, just be careful what you talk about in there

That would be a place particularly not to talk about radar?

Exactly yeah, just be careful what you're saying in there. 'Course

31:00 we knew that that was. Being so close to the airfield there was probably quite a few agents down there.

And would you be in Spain, in uniform?

No

You weren't allowed to be there in uniform?

No. All civilians. No, there was no uniform. They couldn't identify you, you couldn't identify them.

That must have been exciting and perhaps a little bit scary at times not knowing who you were talking to?

Oh a bit of adventure you know. Yeah bit of adventure.

31:30 There was a certain routine going to Spain. That was to go and have a few beers you know. We probably got away at lunchtime, we had to be back by before midnight. So we had a certain routine. You'd go and have a few beers, you'd go to a bar and meet up with some girls and have a wine or two, go to the bullfight. Maybe take a bottle of wine with you. Watch this gory bullfight. I think they used to like it.

32:00 **Did you ever meet anybody there who you thought might have been a bit odd or potentially a German?**

No, no, no, no.

What about any of the girls?

Well, I guess we were careful in what we talked about there too and. No I suppose there could've, you never know. There could've been agents there but we weren't, we weren't told not to fraternise with them, let's put it that way. Just to get back to your question, did we take the aircraft back? Yes after the war finished in Europe

32:30 the squadron was disbanded. Soon after, when I say within weeks of the war finishing and that meant of course that we were just say loose souls, we weren't tied to a squadron, we were, we didn't have a home if you like to put it. Although we were still at the air force base and being looked after and fed and what have you. There was all the chances that we

33:00 would be sent to India or Burma or something like that. And the Commanding Officer made sure that the aircraft were kept serviced and we were kept active in the sense that he gave us, we were instructed to take flights down to various places like Casablanca and that. And we'd go down and what we'd call swing the compass. That was something that we did regularly. That was to check that the compass reading, the magnetic

33:30 compass reading is reasonably accurate and graduated because the reading is influenced by the structure of the aircraft. It's not always pointing to geomagnetic North and you couldn't do it on Gibraltar because of the influence of the rock. So we used to go to Rabat it was, I think down in French Morocco near Casablanca. Swing the compass that was an activity we had to do just to keep us occupied and we did

34:00 other flights. I remember flying over to Algeria for some reason, I can't remember why. Just to keep the crew you know happy. Then after millions of rumours that floated around that we were going to go to back to Australia, go to Darwin, we go to Burma to China. It was, we were told we were going to take the aircraft back to England. So and the ground staff, I'm not really sure how the ground staff got back but

34:30 I suppose whatever aircraft we had, maybe 20 at the time. If 20 crews flew the aircraft back and we landed at Lyneham.

How did you feel about the squadron being disbanded? Was that a sad time for you?

It was a sad time, yeah it was. Everybody felt though that we'd been cut off from the mainstream. Because the war was still going in Japan and we were one minute an active squadron, the next minute we weren't a squadron

35:00 at all see. It was a sad day. The Commanding Officer, he was very upset about it. Called us all together and told us.

And then to hear that you weren't going to Australia but rather going back to England, was that a frustrating thing as well?

No, no it wasn't at all, it wasn't. No, I was pleased to go back there.

Why was that? What was her name?

Oh I had some friends back there. I was pleased to go back to England and I wasn't the only one you know. Most of us in our stay in England

35:30 had you know made friends and that and. No, we were reasonably pleased although we wanted to get home mind you. But I must tell you about flying, going back to England. Landing at Lyneham this was like, this is just after the war had finished and there was no activity over Europe. Well Lyneham was a big English airfield, like all English airfields where they're grassed like beautifully grassed and that. Well

36:00 in-between the runways and that there was aeroplanes. They were just chock-a-block with aeroplanes. They had cranes there lifting these aircraft up as they came in. Beautiful aeroplanes just dumping them one on top of the other you know like it was. Then it was a scrap heap. All these aircraft being flown in then scrapped and of course there was no room for them, it was just putting them on top of one another.

36:30 **And how did that make you feel?**

Well that made us think that here's a good aeroplane we've been flying, look it's not only scrap metal now we walk out of it and now it's scrap metal.

Did that make you think about yourselves as airmen in a similar way? You think we're being disbanded and …?

Oh not really sure. I suppose the fact that the war was all over and that we were, we didn't. We didn't think very deeply, I don't think.

37:00 **There was no feeling then of yourselves as sort of lost souls like those aircraft? What do we do now?**

Well we always thought that we'd be posted somewhere and of course. They would always post you. You'd go somewhere to a holding camp, next thing you'd get a posting. We thought we'd get posted to Burma or that was the talk. 'Course the war was still raging in the Pacific.

37:30 **What was the feeling like in England? What were the people like when you got back there now that the war was over?**

Oh well, that was you know everybody was still celebrating I think at that stage.

Did you get anymore flags?

No, I didn't. No, we went up to a. We got stationed up at Beckles up in Norfolk which was a holding camp as we called it and we were there a bit loose end. We didn't have a lot of money to spend and we spent the time playing cards I think and playing

38:00 darts and going into Norwich, I think was the town near and having a few beers, catching a truck back. There used to be plenty of trucks going in and out and just waiting to see what was going to happen to us.

Well on that note Tom, I think we're just about at the end of this tape so we'll take another small break. Thank you.