

Australians at War Film Archive

Ian McLeod - Transcript of interview

Date of interview: 14th May 2003

<http://australiansatwarfilmarchive.unsw.edu.au/archive/105>

Tape 1

00:38 **Ian could you give us a brief summary of your life and career to date?**

Well I was born in 1925 went through depression years which was a hardship of a lifetime. You would never wish that upon anybody again. I was very interested in cricket as a youngster because Don Bradman used to

01:00 **board up at the house a few houses up on Concord Road and I used to play a lot of tennis. Went to High School but after three years, after the Intermediate Certificate, I had to leave because Dad was out of work and his family company had gone broke or closed down**

01:30 **they were leading plastering contractors of Sydney in those days and the whole family worked for their father and Dad had to go out to bush to get work with a Public Works Department and as a result he was paying board where he was and little money came into the home so my elder brother was the brains of the family quite a brilliant fellow in his way and I was**

02:00 **just a plodder along and I left school to go to work to help supplement the income for Mum. Anyway I worked for a chain store that was established in Queensland owned by Burns Philp and then the war came on and my next door neighbour's son was in the air force as a pilot and we**

02:30 **used to play cricket in the back yard with all the kids around the place you know, home made bats and all the tennis balls in the world and then I thought Vic had gone to England to help form 10 Squadron there, I think the Sunderland Flying Boats and I thought I wouldn't mind joining the air force. I knew I was going to be drafted some time or other and I found that**

03:00 **they had a course called the Air Training Corps which was an entry more or less to the air force and they fitted us out with air force uniforms. I was 17 at the time and then on my birthday I had my medical, 30 days later I was in the air force and I didn't have to go for an army medical or anything it was just straight out and I thought I was fortunate that way because**

03:30 **then I enjoyed the life in the air force. I met some wonderful people and but unfortunately you don't stay with them. They disappear into other postings and your friendships are limited to a course. You then meet up with them or you don't and in the majority I'd say of my nav [navigation] course**

04:00 **I'd never met up with another in my original nav at Cootamundra. Then I came back from the end of the war not damaged or anything. I went back to work for the same company who were eventually taken over by G. J. Coles and I worked there for 40 odd years. We then got married in '52, we celebrated our golden wedding last year so**

04:30 **that's about the story I can tell of my early life, a quick resume of my life and I've got two wonderful children. They're both wonderful to the family and they're great mates to each other. One lives in Canberra, one lives in Sydney but you never know what goes on on the phone with them. That's about it.**

Excellent. Well that's a very good summary thank you. That's

05:00 **commendably concise. Could you give us some details on where and when you were born?**

Yep I was born on the 4th of January 1925 at Homebush which is now the, they later changed the address to Concord because it was the last street in Homebush that was next door to Concord. It was

05:30 **on the wrong side of the railway line so they called it that but we were born there. I had an elder brother Don who was born in '22 and a younger brother Bruce in '27. Dad was, as I said, was working for his father. Unfortunately Dad had a liking for the liquor and he made life a bit hard at times but**

Mum was a great woman, a

- 06:00 slave to us and, but it was an era of depression when you had very little, it was all hand me downs. And when my elder brother's trousers were too short for him I copped them and I think my younger brother probably got new stuff but we'd all worn, but life was pretty good. We used, all our neighbours were
- 06:30 very friendly and we were able to play cricket in our back yard and play test matches against each other and have to keep the score and it was a wonderful life as a young child.

Now you mentioned the Don Bradman connection. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Well Don Bradman was living at Bowral at the time and he was brought down to Sydney

- 07:00 on the condition that he stayed or be monitored by a fellow named Pearce who was an insurance agent and Pearce lived about six houses away from us. And we always were on the lookout to see if Don Bradman was there and I can recall as a kid, I think it was in 1932/33 when the South Africans were out here and New South Wales was playing them at the Cricket
- 07:30 Ground and Bradman was in the team and the dear old soul next door to us came in and said, "Bradman's up the road I see his red car's there." So there was a photo of Bradman in that evening's paper so I cut it out and raced up and knocked on Mrs Pearce's door and she said, "I know why you're here Ian." and she called me in and said "Come in and Don'll
- 08:00 sign your autograph for you." and he was very good. His wife was or his fiancé was there at the time and I met her and that was the only time I met him but I got his autograph some years and years ago which I still treasure but he was an idol of everybody.

Do you remember the bodyline test cricket series?

Oh yes, who wouldn't. It was wild. We didn't get out there so much because it,

- 08:30 we didn't have the money to pay to go into the Cricket Ground unless you knew somebody on the turnstiles that'd cheat but we got out to see a few matches and they were great. I enjoyed them thoroughly.

Do you remember any of the bodyline matches?

Yes I remember them well and truly. They were, the feeling of the crowd was unbelievable particularly when they were throwing

- 09:00 that ball at Bradman at but it was unsporting, it wasn't good cricket, I think we acquitted ourselves quite well.

How did the crowd react?

Screaming, yelling, booing not throwing anything onto the ground, they weren't that type. See I don't think in those days they didn't have canned beer it was all bottled beer and you just couldn't take it into the ground. There were bars in there and you got the drink there but you didn't throw anything

- 09:30 onto the ground. You were....it was a bad thing. Nobody ever did things like that. They'd boo and cheer and there was an old fellow named Canker, I think his name was and he was

Yabba?

Yabba, he was the king of the kids and yell and scream and he was a delight to listen to and to sit up on the hill it was unbelievable because nobody assaulted you. There was

- 10:00 no friction amongst people. They just were there for the cricket but Yabba'd yell out and everybody'd yell at Yabba, "You big mouth." and things like this but it was fun, it was great it was and to see your favourite players like McCabe and Oldfield and all those. It was what the kids wanted to see and we'd have, I was privileged to see a few of the matches.

Were you there when any of the English players threw balls directly

- 10:30 **at the Australian players?**

No never saw that. They could have but I didn't see any of that.

Did you listen to the cricket on the radio in those days?

Well yes we did but the radio reception was a bit weak. You know they were big box affairs with little in them and we had one eventually after many years. I know originally we used to go to a neighbour's house. He was still employed as a representative

- 11:00 for a tyre company and he let us come over and we used to listen to the cricket there. They were particularly the matches from England we used to listen to those and they were great fun but

That would have included the synthetic tests?

Yes, oh yes, and then there was Charlie Laurence who was a commentator for Movietone later in the years and he was on I forget what radio station but

- 11:30 he'd get the news but he wouldn't describe ball by ball he'd give you a commentary at the end of the over and "Woodfull's head or fall let's sing to Mrs Woodfull." and this was comedy plus variety the way he did it whereas the ABC was the old synthetic type of calling and it was good.

Well the ABC would have been a bit more

- 12:00 **starchy or formal I suppose?**

Oh yes, yes they were they but they had good commentators and but there it was.

That's interesting about Charlie Laurence because I mean of course he was, he was a comedic narrator for the newsreels. I didn't realise that he carried it through into his....?

Oh yes he had it for this cricket. I forget what station it was on. It was 2UW or something which was yeah now not on the AMP but I'm sure it was 2UW and but it was

- 12:30 light entertainment and it was good whereas the ABC was a bit slower and bing ping you'd hear as the ball was hit or supposed to be hit.

That's right, pencils hitting cups?

Yeah, but no it was great it was good and in latter years I did see Bradman get his 100th century. That was a must brother, and I went out there and oh, it was brilliant cricket.

- 13:00 **When you were growing up, what were your own styles of recreation? I mean obviously cricket was something very important to you?**

Tennis too, I was a good tennis player. I used to play competition tennis. Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning and it was good I enjoyed it. I was left handed tennis player, right hand cricket player but I would never make a good cricket player. I must admit I like the game

- 13:30 and I used to arrange cricket matches with kids at school in the holidays. You know our kids from our area would go and play some mates from school but we always got done like a tack but we enjoyed it was good fun.

Now in the initial summary you said you would never wish the depression era and the experience the depression on anyone else again. What were the toughest aspects of the depression as far as you

- 14:00 **were concerned?**

Lack of food to a certain thing. Lack of entertainment you know you couldn't afford to go to the theatre or the films. You couldn't go to the beaches because you couldn't afford, we lived at Concord and a trip out to Bondi was taking a week's pocket money away. We probably in the end, we probably did one trip a year to Bondi or Bronte

- 14:30 but nowhere else. We never went to Manly. Never, couldn't afford the ferry fare as well as and you always took your own lunch if you had to. You never brought anything. You didn't buy drinks. It and the people that were out of work was just unbelievable. You'd find people coming around peddling trying to make something of a living out of it and it was degrading to

- 15:00 a great degree for people's lives and I think it would never want to be seen again. We had homelessness but we didn't have it like we have today with these kids tossed out of home. There was never any mention of that. There were certainly, there were children's homes that kids were put into like we had a big one up here at Carlingford where the Mormon Church is today. There

- 15:30 was a big Church of England boy's home there and there was the Presbyterian one down at Burnside but everybody seemed to get on alright. You know there was no friction amongst people but none you wouldn't want to see it again really.

Now you mentioned your father had to go into the bush to work. What sort of work did he go out seeking?

He went out

- 16:00 as a Clerk for Works for the in bridge building and mainly for the main Public Works Department on oh he was up at Goondiwindi, not Goondiwindi, Goonoo Goonoo at one time, then Tamworth then next thing he's down at Nimmitabel but he sent a bit of money home but it wasn't that much and it was hard. We hardly saw him. He'd ring in periodically on somebody's neighbour's phone

- 16:30 and we'd have to go racing up and speak to Dad or but no it was a problem for Mum. She was the bearer of the children and she did a marvellous job.

How did she cope?

She was a very strong woman and she knew she had three good kids and the kids would support her and life was hard but she had a sister that lived not far away and they were great friends and

17:00 they, you never heard them cry on each other's shoulder. You never heard any complaints whatever but in those days kids were seen and not heard you know they didn't come into it. If you asked me how my grandmother or grandfather died I wouldn't know because they'd never told you why they were sick or what had happened. That was the era of kids, never knew nothing only what they were taught at school. They knew nothing

17:30 about family life.

You were saying that one of your brothers started to earn a reasonable income for the family? Which brother was this?

That's Don. He went into industrial chemistry and he was a very good student. He went to Fort Street High School which I never got to. I only went to Homebush Junior High but he was a very good student and he did industrial chemistry and he worked for the firm

18:00 which is now called Dulux and he was a paint chemist and he earned some good money and at that time you know even four pound a week was good money so he was up there to supplement the income of the family. I used to supplement it a bit. I used to work on a baker's cart assistant on the weekends and I might get four shillings or 40 cents which'd go into the house but

18:30 that went on for some years for until I went to High School.

Now can you tell us about your schooling?

Yes I went to Homebush Primary School. Homebush Primary School was made up of kids from the Homebush area only whose fathers either worked at the abattoirs or the stock yards, remember the old Flemington Sale Yards shearers's sheds up there? They were a real rough

19:00 element on the face of it but they weren't really, they were good kids and I can't ever remember a fight in the school yard. There was no hatred or anything against kids or each of their mates. I think the only fight I ever saw was two brothers had a go at each other and the Headmaster, old Ford said, "Well, if you want to fight come inside." and he gave them a six on the hand each. He said, "That'll fix your fighting." and we

19:30 never had that. We respected our teachers. They were tough but you knew they were there to teach you and then they were great people. We owe a lot to them. Then I got to Homebush High School which was a new High School that opened in 1936 and I went there '37 and we had all male teachers. Well you didn't argue with a male teacher. They

20:00 were there to do, I remember old Bert Bailey. He was a timid little old fellow but you could go up to Bert in the school yard and ask him to solve a problem for you but these were the teachers of that era. They did their playground duty and they were only too pleased to help a kid and if they said, "I'll see you after school this afternoon as punishment." you were there. There was no two ways about it.

20:30 We we were good at sport, tennis. I think we had New South Wales tennis champions in our school. They were fantastic fellows too. One of them unfortunately was killed in the war. Rugby league they played. They had beaten us, the Sydney Tech [Technical College] for the first time that Sydney Tech had been beaten in 20 years or something and we used to play, the highlight

21:00 of the year was the school kids playing the teachers at their sport. Tennis, football, cricket you name it they loved it and this is how good a school it was and old Bill Roberts the Headmaster, 'cause in that time some of the teachers were joining up, the air force, the services and old Bill Roberts the Headmaster took us for English. I guarantee we learnt more in five minutes with Bill Roberts than anybody.

21:30 Wonderful Headmaster, no it was a great education.

Now you mentioned the Homebush abattoirs and saleyards. Now of course that, that has now been totally obliterated by the Olympics site

Oh yeah, yes.

Can you give us a bit of a description of that place?

Well the saleyards went from Flemington Station across Parramatta Road and they'd be 200 yards north

22:00 of Parramatta Road and there were pens and pens of animals and our playground at the school overlooked the railway line and you'd see these great freight trains of stock coming in and you'd see them all unloaded there and they'd come in daily more or less and be carted off to the sales and

22:30 then the drovers would drive them down to the abattoirs when they were sold which was way down in the back blocks of Homebush Bay which is now the Olympic site was down there. But I never got down there to the abattoirs but you'd smell it at times and there was a big shearing shed, Rooney's shearing sheds next to the sale yards

- 23:00 and there was a horse sales. We used to go up the horse sales periodically on a Saturday to see some of these wild characters trying to sell or buy horses and the highlight of one was one buyer was there one Saturday and he was screaming because he'd brought a horse with a blind eye, so it was you saw these characters. It was an education really.
- Now you did some work in that complex you were saying?**
- No, no
- 23:30 no kids weren't allowed anywhere near the place. It was...
- You said you picked up some additional money yourself doing work around that region? What work was that again?**
- I was working in a grocery shop getting money out of delivering grocery orders via wheelbarrow sort of thing.
- You took the groceries around on a wheelbarrow?**
- Yep, yeah and you know they'd be orders that people had rung in and we'd take them and deliver them.
- 24:00 **How far would you have to walk on average?**
- Oh half a mile. Some were close but half a mile some of them but you know we, it was worthwhile we got some money.
- Must have built up your strength too?**
- Oh it did, oh I was always a skinny character. I never put on much weight over the years until later years in life but no we tried to make every penny for Mum and see what we could help with.
- 24:30 **Now how aware were you in the 1930s and obviously prior to joining up of the legacy of World War I?**
- Well Dad was in the 12th Light Horse and he got shot at in the leg at Beersheba and we didn't know much about it. Cause Dad never told anything. He used to go to his reunions at times
- 25:00 and that but we never knew much. We knew all about Gallipoli and the Western Front. One of our neighbours was gassed in France so we knew that poor old Norm Campbell was coughing his life away with I don't know what type of gas, might have been mustard gas but it eventually killed
- 25:30 him but only those things that we knew of ,but we knew of the battleships and what have you that were around the place but nothing much really.
- So that the people you knew, people that were part of your family circle didn't talk about the war much?**
- No, no, not at all they were very quiet. Dad was in the RSL [Returned and Services League] but I think it was more or less a drinking club in those days than anything else,
- 26:00 not like it is today by any means.
- Do you think his drinking issues had anything to do with his war service?**
- No I don't think so. I think being a plasterer you get a lot of dust and I think they liked to wash it down at the end of the day and I know his elder brother Norman was the same way. He was a drinker; well he was a solid drinker too.
- So your father's, we haven't really touched much on your father's career prior to his going to the country. So he was a plasterer was he?**
- Yeah
- 26:30 he worked as a plasterer for his father but and there was his brother Norman who was eldest and I think he was the eldest and then there was William who went to the Boer War as a drummer boy, that's all we knew about the Boer War and knew about the history of it of course you learnt that at school and there was another one, Eddy. Eddy was more
- 27:00 or less the gentleman who shot through on the firm's money so you know it was a rare mixture of people but they liked their drink except Willie, he was a sober bigot
- Bigoted?**
- And a liar. I shouldn't say that but he was.
- What sort of issues was he bigoted over?**
- Drink and smoking, he fronted the old man

- 27:30 and said he caught his brothers smoking on the job or things like this apparently but no he wasn't bad all the same. I quite liked Uncle Bill but my father didn't get on too well with him but he was a bit of a skite [a show off] he thought he knew and what have you and it used to rattle Dad a bit and he'd say, "Get out of the place." wasn't good. I can always
- 28:00 remember the McLeods weren't very good at that and this goes back, goes on a bit. Bill he had a son, and Bill had joined the air force. He was in the Police Force first then he eventually joined the air force and then one year we were all going to Queensland to see my mother who was living up there and I said to Joy
- 28:30 on the way up, "I've got a cousin that lives in the bush out here he was a copper." I said, "He's got a property now." I said, "According to Uncle Bill he's got a good property." Anyway she said "Where would you find him?" I said, "This is going to be a terrible trip for the kids, let's try." and she said, "Where would you find him?" I said, "We'll go into Tenterfield Police Station and ask." They didn't know him and they said, "Where was he?" He was a mounted trooper, at Drake originally
- 29:00 so they rang Drake and said, "Do you know Bill McLeod?" "Of course we do, he lives out at such and such a place." so I rang, they gave me this phone number and I rang him and said, "Anyway, we could call on you on the way back from Brisbane." and Bill was fearful that I was going to create a quarrelsome meeting and he was quite taken back
- 29:30 that we ended up great friends because there was no fight between us it was just the parents and we became great friends. We used to spend many a holiday together after then but that was Uncle Bill that, but Bill he didn't have a big property, he had nothing. He had a limestone mine and that was about it which was practically non operative but that's the way the family
- 30:00 was.

Family dynamics are incredible at times?

Oh they were shocking but you know with the kids it didn't matter. We didn't hold grudges.

Yeah. What about your notions of Australia and its relationship to the British Empire?

Oh, I'm a very big royalist.

You're a big royalist?

Yeah. I think so. I think we owe a lot to England. England probably owes a lot to us too but I think

- 30:30 it was the English that more or less settled this country and I think I enjoyed it more when I met them in their own country. I thought the loyalty that was shown over there to the Royal Family was just amazing you know, and I remember when the Queen first came out here we camped at
- 31:00 Farm Cove to make sure we saw her come into the country. Joy and a mate of mine and myself went down there and camped there early hours of the morning and saw Queen Elizabeth arrive in Australia and no, I felt that I like the English way of life, their humour, no I'd always be a royalist I would say.

In what ways were these

- 31:30 **views formed as you were growing up?**

Well I think mainly when I went to England they were really formed. I felt that you know the Royal Family kept the country together. I think they were well founded on a real monarchy the people loved them. Not like today where they were

- 32:00 above everything else they're all just wonderful people. Anything happened, the King and Queen was there or one of them and they only had to say the King's coming out and there would be thousands on the street already to watch for them and it just amazed me. I thought this love for the family's just unbelievable and I must admit I didn't have any idea
- 32:30 of the English sense of humour at the time and after a while I found it was amazing. I went to see one film I forget the name of it now but Laurence Olivier was in it and he was building this ice break, he was a Russian come over to build an ice breaker and I thought that's the most boring picture I've ever seen. Saw it about six months later I thought, "Geez this is the funniest one I've ever seen. It was just that I'd learnt their humour. I thought well this is
- 33:00 great I'm really enjoying this plus then on the air waves when we were flying you might get an interruption and you'd hear that ITMA Show, It's That Man Again, with Tommy Hanley and it was, it educated us to a bit because believe you me we're a pretty naive kids at that age. We weren't well, naive'd be the word.

Impressionable?

Yeah probably

- 33:30 were too. It, but it was great. We looked upon the English people as good people and you know they

opened their homes to us too. It was great it was, they didn't have to.

Just moving back to leaving school and your first job once you left school, what did you move into work wise?

This was a buying office for the chain store that operated

34:00 mainly in Queensland. It was called Pennys and they operated mainly in Queensland and northern rivers of New South Wales. Tamworth, Armidale that way, and we were the buying office and I was their shipping clerk to start off with and I was shipping clerk when I left to join the air force. I think I applied for about 20 jobs before I got one, you know things were pretty hard to get, even though everybody had gone into the Services was going into the Services but in

34:30 1940 it was still hard. They were still feeling a bit of the depression because our industries weren't building up at that time.

Now whereabouts were you based when you....?

In Sydney, in Sydney in Chippendale.

And what were your duties as a shipping clerk?

Seeing all the stuff transported to Queensland shipped and taking out their shipping orders and what have you. Visiting all the wharves when stuff came in from overseas,

35:00 seeing ships that had been torpedoed with holes through them and yeah it kept me busy. It was, it was interesting. It was customs, a bit of customs work but.

So seeing ships that had been torpedoed. I mean this is obviously early war years by now?

Yeah, yeah there was one thing called the Hertfordshire and you could have driven a couple of double decker buses through the middle of it. Apparently the torpedoes had leapt up and hit

35:30 it in the middle instead of hitting underneath but it made port eventually and ...

And that was a cargo ship?

Yeah big cargo ship, well in those days probably 10,000 tonner which was fairly big and because all the ships of that time were not containerised they were all manually.

Where the cargo nets would sling the goods below the decks?

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

36:00 Now let me see now, at what stage in your life did you join the Air Training Corps?

When I was 17. I had heard about it and I thought this was the way I'd like to go. I'd like to be in the air force. Vic Hodgkinson, the guy I mentioned that joined 10 Squadron or formed the 10 Squadron,

36:30 he carted us out to Mascot which was then the air force base and I had a look at all these aeroplanes and what have you and I thought this would be the life for me and Vic you know sold it to, wasn't selling it to us but I thought I'd love to be in one of these things and

Was this when you were 17 or even prior?

Yes 17, that was when I was younger about 15 or so and but then

37:00 I thought no I'll go; I want to go into the air force I didn't want to.

So you joined the ATC and where can you tell us a bit about the activities of the Air Training Corps at that time?

Yeah well they educated you in maths, weather, some physical culture, marching, drilling, history of the air force or the

37:30 Royal Flying Corps but was mainly in maths and English that they were coaching us in. I think it was about two nights a week that we'd go to a school. Originally it was at Trinity College at Strathfield and then Burwood High, Burwood Primary School

38:00 but we were well trained, ready to go in so that we knew what we would be going into first up. They gave us a bit of law and order and what have you of the air force regulations and that but which we had to learn later when we were admitted to the air force.

Did you go on any flights at this stage?

No not, not yes, yes sorry, yes I did. One of our outings was to Bankstown Aerodrome

38:30 and there was a Wirraway squadron there which had come down from New Guinea apparently and I had my first flight in a Wirraway with Flight Lieutenant Honey and I thought, oh this is the life for me, I love this flying so it really made an impression on me. I really wanted it. That was the first flight I'd ever

had.

First flight, yeah?

Yeah.

39:00 **And how many people were in your particular group of the ATC?**

Oh there'd be about 150 and yeah be about 150 and the headquarters was at Ashfield under a Squadron Leader Whitehurst whose son was one of my school mates at Homebush and

39:30 we were all examined and medically examined there for fitness for the air force as well. Not as thorough as the air force inspection that was just unbelievable the way they examined you, unbelievable.

Tape 2

00:34 **Ian, where were you when you heard that war had broken out?**

I can't actually recall. I really don't know. I'd heard Menzies I know that. I think I was at home when I heard the Prime Minister broadcast that we were at war and I thought, "Oh this is no good." but

01:00 probably we've got to do something about it. Can't let this ratbag carry on through invading countries, it wasn't good for those people, so I think I must have been at home but.

Did you support the fact that that as Menzies put it we were automatically at war?

Yes, yeah I did. You know, well what else were we to do you know, we,

01:30 we had, no other option I don't think.

And so can you talk about the feeling of the population in that first year or so?

I'd say that most people wanted the war to end quickly. They certainly didn't expect it to go on for the number of years that it did

02:00 but then everybody was keen most of the young fellows were keen to get into the Services, there was no chance of compulsion like Billy Hughes tried in the First World War. There was none of that. A young person went in.... there was opposition,

02:30 there were people that wouldn't go unless they're really called up but there was a lot of people lined up to go in straight away. They wanted to be part of it. They wanted there to be peace in the world and this was the only way to do it.

How soon after the outbreak of war did you join the ATC?

'43 about '41, end of '41, '41, '42, I was in it, yeah about 18 months

03:00 I was in it.

What was it that attracted you to aviation?

I don't know quite frankly. I thought I'd like it, was something new, I don't think I would have been a rifleman under any circumstances. I was not; I don't think I was strong enough. I was a long skinny rake of a kid and I thought well I think I could do better in the air force and this is why I joined the Air Training Corps

03:30 as entry to the air force. I thought the way I spoke you're more or less assured of entry to the air force and that was the main reason I think, see I was just a skinny rake of a kid you probably could have said you look as though I suffered from malnutrition you know, I was long and thin but I was wiry but....

Did you hope to be a pilot?

Yes, oh yes that was

04:00 the thing you know a pilot was everything you know, gunners were nobody and navigators were never heard of so yes I was looking forward to being a pilot.

Now you had a brother who'd enlisted as well didn't you?

No, no he didn't. He was only in the University Regiment which because he was a protected industry and....

What was that protected industry?

That in paint making, paint making and other chemical industries that he was

04:30 in so he was protected. He tried to get in; he joined, ended up joining the Volunteer Naval Patrol which they were on private boats watching over the harbour, Hawkesbury [River] and places like that.

Oh that's right.

Naval Patrol.

Yes, using civilian craft?

Yeah, yeah.

05:00 **Now didn't you have a next door neighbour who was in the air force?**

Yeah, Vic Hodgkinson he was the one who went to England. He was permanent air force and he went to England I'd say shortly after war was declared to help form the Australian, he went over there as a civilian he must be because they didn't know if they went in uniform they'd be interned in any country where the plane stopped at

05:30 because they were old planes that took three or four days to get to England in those days so they went in mufti [civilian clothes] I believe and Vic had a good career in the air force and he came back here, eventually was flying Catalinas up on the New Guinea but he had, there was mentioned over in England as taking on a Dornier bomber with his

06:00 wonderful Sunderland Flying Boat or one attacked the other, I don't know the full story now but he got mentioned as an Australian at war but early in the piece.

Now the fact that he'd joined the RAAF and the fact that he went to England was that in any way inspirational for you?

I'd say so yeah, I liked Vic, he was a good guy. He was a thug, he and I would,

06:30 say he was the inspiration and his two brothers ended up roort artists [scheming crooks], the Hodgkinsons, well known roort artists.

Now taking us through to your enlistment can you tell us well you've more or less sort of set the scene with joining the ATC, so I don't have to ask you why you joined but when you did enlist was your first imperative

07:00 **really or your first priority to fight for Australia or fight for the Empire?**

Well fight for the Empire I'd say that was the main thing because it was the Empire Training Scheme so it had to be Empire.

But when you're actual projecting yourself forward and your reasons for actually joining?

Oh it was for Australia really.

Was for the defence of Australia?

Yeah.

So

07:30 **tell us about your enlistment?**

Well on the 3rd, 4th of January '43 was my birthday and I spent it down at Woolloomooloo at Plunkett Street Recruitment Centre for my medical examination and that took all day. The rigours of that was unbelievable. They put you through every hoop imaginable. One thing that I can always remember was

08:00 having a tube of mercury and I had to blow into this tube and raise the mercury and hold it up to a certain position for a full minute and I thought gee I'm going well, I looked at his watch and it was one of these timed watches went 30 seconds on the round not a minute, so I had to belt it up further but no I passed that with "Fit for all flying duties", so I went was, I was very happy about

08:30 that, then on the 30th of January I was in the air force. We called down to Plunkett Street again and then bussed out to Bradfield Park where we did our initial training.

So let's talk a bit about that training. What did it consist of?

About 10, oh eight subjects including maths, map reading, map making,

09:00 law and order, King's regulations, magnetism, physical culture, drill, no firearms that was excluded and that's about it. And there were about

09:30 40 of us, oh no about 20 of us in a hut and one of those fellows I went more or less through into the Squadron with the original eventually. He'd be the only one.

What was his name?

Jack Craddock. He was in our flight at Bradfield. He then went off to a flying school at Temora, I went to

Narromine and we eventually caught up in a navigating

10:00 course at Evans Head and then we went right through the war together.

Now of course this is 1943 and I just wanted to backtrack a little bit to look at the events of 1941-42 when the Japanese entered the war. Can you talk a bit about the impact of such events as the bombing of Darwin and the submarine raid on Sydney Harbour on the Australian population?

10:30 Well for the Japanese to bomb Darwin as they did was a frightful experience to the nation I'd say. They didn't think it would, it could ever happen. Was like the fall of Singapore could never happen. But the bombing of Darwin was just unbelievable that we were caught well and truly unaware of what was going to happen. Plus we didn't have the aircraft to counter any air raid into Darwin. Our

11:00 aircraft were the fighting force, were the old Wirraways and they were not, they were only a training aircraft in the main. A few Spitfires survived eventually but Darwin was unprotected you could say right from the word go because look at the damage they did to the shipping up there. I know one of Burns Philp's ships was, our employer, was the Neptuna was blown up in Darwin

11:30 Harbour and then when they came to New Guinea the Macdhui, another Burns Philp's ship was blown up and the Wirraways were the only thing we had to fight them. Eventually we got supplies from America, received them and there were Thunderbirds and other Tommyhawks which were had, the fellows had to be trained to fly but they did a remarkable job

12:00 but it was a hell of a shock that Darwin and that west coast was going to be bombed and then the submarine coming into Sydney Harbour that was incredible but they knew they had the boom set up, so they were well aware what could happen and was just, it went underneath a ferry and came in very smartly but anyway didn't do much

12:30 damage. They were after the Chicago I think was in port at the time but it got out into the harbour, it wasn't touched. They only hit the [HMAS] Kuttubul or some ferry which was, a few people navy people were on.

What made more of an impact on you: Darwin or the sub raid on Sydney?

Darwin I'd say. There was a lot of damage, it wasn't good at all, lot of lives lost.

So through Darwin you had a

13:00 **a sense of Australia suddenly facing up to the harsh realities of war.**

Yeah, yeah.

You were still in the ATC at this point. Were you really itching to join the air force?

Yeah, yes really yeah. Thought I could do my bit. I was hoping to anyway. I was hoping I could do something before the war ended and I did, I was lucky that way.

Because of course a lot of people who enlisted in 1939 were doing their bit for the Empire and they were going

13:30 **overseas but obviously by 1943 you saw the defence of Australia as being a priority?**

Yeah, see you never knew where you were going to end up. You could have ended up in New Guinea as a pilot or a navigator or air gunner there was no guarantee where you would go to even though you were in the Empire Training Scheme. It was the lap of the

14:00 Gods that decided where you were going.

Now can you tell us about the Empire Air Training Scheme because a lot of people today don't know about that scheme at all?

Well it was established to train all Australians that wanted to be in aircrew. You could either travel, be trained in Australia, a lot went to Canada after their initial training and my neighbour

14:30 next to another neighbour of mine, John Tibbitts, he went to Canada and he was killed over there in an aircraft accident, so that didn't spread the news around home too well you know, I think anyway you could go either place Canada or do it in Australia. You had no option, it was just we do it here. Anyway I did it

15:00 all here and it was one way of spreading the learning processes. Those that went to Canada had a good idea of what was like to fly in winter. We knew what it was like to fly in summer but it made no difference you learnt the hard way.

You've spoken about your preliminary training at Bradfield Park. What happened after that in terms of your training?

15:30 Well I was posted as a pilot trainee and I went out to Narromine in probably in May in '43 and I did,

what about four of us were old friends by this time. One fellow he got sick every time he flew, I don't know what ever happened to Bruce.

- 16:00 The Tiger Moths were the plane. I had an instructor Pilot Officer Keith Shaw. He was only a rookie pilot, he'd only just graduated more or less and I had done with him, he was my instructor and we used to fly all around Narrmone and land on the main air field. You'd
- 16:30 do circuits and bumps as they call it, take off and then landings then I did, he decided I should then be tested for solo after about 12 or 10 hours or something and I'll never forget that I had to be tested by Flight Sergeant Parsons. Now Flight Sergeant Parsons had paid to learn to fly years ago and he resented people learning to
- 17:00 fly for nothing. He's a little man and anyway I went up with Flight Sergeant Parsons and landed and he pulled the joy stick out said and he said, "Now go and kill yourself." That was his attitude to the trainees which I didn't do but I must admit I wasn't positively confident of flying an aircraft. I could
- 17:30 fly, I got 12 hours solo up but as for doing slow rolls and spins. Anyway they decided I was progressing alright and then it was time to go up before the Flight Commander so he took me up and if you know a Tiger Moth all you got is a mouth piece and a pipe and you yelled into this pipe
- 18:00 instructions and this fellow would yell out and I'd hear you know, had earphones on and I thought he said, "Spin in off a gliding turn." and I repeated you know you always repeated, "Sir, spinning off a gliding turn." and next thing he says, "What, are you trying to kill me?" He meant he didn't,
- 18:30 I said, "I repeated what I thought you said." and he said, "Oh take it down." and next thing he says, "Land straight in front of us." and I said, "What and wipe out those 10 aircraft too?" and he took objection to that and so anyway he said, "Oh, you can see the Chief Flying Instructor.", so this fellow took me up and I did a perfect job with him but anyway he said, "You're discontinued flying."
- 19:00 so I was quite happy because I knew I would never make a pilot. I'd never driven a car. I just never had that confidence. It was just something but anyway after that I went to the Chief Ground Instructor Squadron Leader Bowden Fletcher and he was an old Royal Flying Corps man and he suggested I go into navigation. He said, "You've got the, you'd
- 19:30 be a good navigator." not that he'd know anyway but he sold me the job. He said, "You don't want to be an air gunner do you?" I said, "Not likely." so anyway I was then posted about a month later to Cootamundra.

Now before we move to Cootamundra I just want to pick up on whether you felt that you'd been given a raw deal during this instruction?

No, no not at all not really.

It sounds like you'd been bullied into possibly believing that you couldn't fly?

No,

- 20:00 no, no it was, I was pleased that I wasn't. I felt in my own heart that I would not be a good pilot.

Can you be a bit more specific about Parson pulling out the joystick?

Oh well that's where, see that's part of the act, that there was a joystick for him and one for me and he'd pull his one out and say, "Well go on, you're solo now." There's nothing there to

- 20:30 help you.

And how did you, how did you.....?

Oh good I was happy about that you know, I took that as a confidence builder if anything. Oh no, he was, he was a good pilot, a good fellow but that was just his little sense of humour. He said it to everybody it was not just me alone, so it was, oh no it was no personal touch about it because that was the first time I'd seen him.

- 21:00 **So why weren't you confident as a pilot? Apart from the fact that you hadn't driven a car what was the?**

I don't know, I thought the speed that would come later was frightening, that was the main thing. I could handle things at sixty and five knots or something but when you're getting up to 100 it was just not on for me. I just felt I

- 21:30 was incapable of handling it.

So at that point you realised you'd be far happier being crew?

Yeah, yeah.

Being a crew member other than a pilot?

Yes.

Yeah, yeah. So bringing us to Cootamundra, what did you then study at Cootamundra?

Map making, map reading, weather mainly all that, no law and order then any more

22:00 but it was and mainly flying.

So what was actually at Cootamundra?

There was a air observer's school as they called it and we used to fly in Avro Ansons which were a twin engine plane and they weren't the best plane to fly in because the poor old navigator had to wind up the under carriage 185 turns of a wheel to bring the under carriage

22:30 up and it was a trial to do that then sit down and catch your breath and tell him where to fly to, it was but it was good. I enjoyed that. I thought that was good and one of the big things you flew around, oh photography you did a lot of photography too and radio bearers you'd ask the wireless operator you had with you

23:00 at times to get you a radio fix and....

Can you explain what you mean by photography?

You always had a camera there to take a photo of solos to prove that you've actually navigated to that silo and I think every silo within a hundred mile radius of Cootamundra had been photographed at some time or other and it was

23:30 one aspect of the thing it was quite interesting because you saw the proof of what you'd done.

Now what is astro navigation?

Travelling flying by the stars using a sextant to fly by the stars. That came later at Evans Head; it wasn't done in the initial bearer observers' course.

Just while we're on that subject can you talk about how

24:00 **you learnt to navigate by the stars?**

Yes, you learnt what the stars were. Which ones were worth Canopus, Sirius, Achernar, Betelgeuse, Rigel Kent and you knew which ones to pick up and you got the siting from them and you had a, if I remember rightly so many years ago you had tables that you could

24:30 consult and they gave you, you worked out your actual location. You'd get a fix from two of them. You take one at one angle and one at another angle and you got a fix from both of them and you plot your position to where you were.

25:00 **Aerial photography, this was done with a camera mounted on the base of the aircraft?**

Yes, yeah, yeah.

And so you would be in charge of that camera?

Yep.

That was part of your responsibilities yeah. Now I think

Half of 'em never worked.

Didn't they?

No.

In the camera?

Yeah, they forgot to put the film in them most times.

What sort of film?

I don't know what it was, we had nothing to do with, they said "There's a camera in there."

When you say half the time you mean

25:30 **this was during the training only?**

Yeah, training only.

Wasn't it at Cootamundra where you met a fellow trainee who was a bit of a snob?

No, oh no not Cootamundra. They were all, they're OK. Cootamundra fellows were OK. The ones I went through Cootamundra with I never saw again. Some of us went to the air, Evans Head but after that

26:00 never saw them again.

So for how long were you at Cootamundra?

Oh, be three months.

So after this Evans Head what did you actually study there?

Bombing and gunnery and astro navigation. We had a range, we had a gunnery - was air to ground and there'd be a sand pit which you would fire in as you flew over it,

26:30 then there was a drogue which was carried by another aircraft and you'd be flying along and passing it and shooting it, shooting the drogue and they were old Fairy Battle aircraft and they weren't an air cool, they were an inline engine and they'd be dependent on glycol for cooling

27:00 and the glycol overheated in these things, oh the smell of it and the fumes you'd get out of it, you laying particularly on a bombing one and you'd be laying in the belly of the aircraft and here's the exhaust underneath you and it's, you're copping the whole smell of it, was just unbelievable but we survived, but it was funny there I'd done my, completed my course there,

27:30 I had this last bombing run to do and I did it and I came back and handed in my report on where the bombs fell according to the target and next thing the instructor said to me, "Do you know anybody out at the bombing range?" I said, "No why?" He said, "You got a perfect bombing record." I said, "Oh rubbish". He said, "I think you'd better do it again, there's somebody playing tricks with you." so

28:00 I did it, another bombing course and of course those navigators that I were training with them they went off and I had to go back a course and do the bombing again.

I'm just a bit lost here. Can you talk me through that sequence of events again? You got a perfect bombing?

I thought, no the ground staff had put me down for a perfect bombing run but you dropped four bombs

28:30 and you plotted them on your chart as to where they'd landed and mine were around the target but they weren't clustered. When I got back here they're clustered and I said, "That's not mine." and he said, "Well there's something's going on out there." and I said, "Oh that's not so." anyway he

29:00 put me on another course.

What was going on?

I don't know. To this day I never knew. I never knew anybody out there and nobody of our group knew anybody on the ground. Was just some idiot out there and hadn't even seen the bombs fall.

That's very eerie?

Yes it was unusual and there unfortunately I didn't witness the whole lot, one of our fellows was killed.

29:30 This pilot did low flying and he flew into a ground station on a bombing run and Lindsay was killed.

Did you hear of other accidents in training?

No, no, not at all.

Although you mentioned one in Canada of course that you knew?

Yeah, yeah that was the other one. But after that when I then found out that one of my school mates was killed on advance flying school, Charlie Taylor,

30:00 and he was killed at the Uranquinty and you know you got this. Then I heard, this is where I was particularly concerned about my mother and what she thought about three fellows from the church were killed, and I thought, "Oh I wonder what mother's going through?" and these hadn't to my knowledge,

30:30 one was in Canada as I mentioned earlier and one was in, I don't know where the other two were, oh I think in England rather, yeah young Geoff Dunbar was in England and Max Ryder was in England too.

When you say three fellows from the church, which church was this?

This was at St Andrew's at Strathfield and...

And you were worried about, why were you worried about your mother?

Oh she, she'd be worried about me so it was,

31:00 so I decided that whatever I did I wouldn't tell Mum what I was doing. She knew I was in learning to be a navigator and I was flying and that was OK no problem at all but when I got to a squadron I never wrote to her and said I was flying, was only a mate of mine that opened his mouth one time at Christmas time and he

31:30 said, "I wonder how Ian's spending Christmas time. Probably over Germany as usual." and Mum, that was the worst thing that ever happened. I used to write to my brother at work and tell him what I was doing in case the news ever came through that I was lost or anything but no Mum, I had a lot of thought for my mother.

How did she react when she heard that you were probably flying over Germany?

I don't know quite frankly. She

32:00 never told me. Actually I think about every month I used to send her a cable. You could get a cable for 10 shillings, I think it was three phrases and fit and "Well love Ian", so no she was, she had to be kept out of it really. I didn't want her worrying.

32:30 **So what effect did these deaths have on you?**

Bit scary at first but then again you realised that was war so you went on with the job, you didn't worry about it. If you worried about it that was the end of you but no.

Just moving back to a technicality, earlier on you mentioned something called a drogue, I don't know what a drogue is?

That's a sleeve which'd be as long as this room

33:00 towed by an aircraft on a wire which is probably 50 yards long and you fired into that drogue with coloured bullets. Now coloured bullets meant you got a magazine of bullets and you painted them. You dipped them so you ended up with all paint on your fingers and you leant out the side of the, there

33:30 was a gas operated Vickers gun and you leant out the side of the aircraft tied on, you made sure you were tied on and you'd lean out and you'd fire at this drogue as you were passing it and then it'd go up and down and then you were more or less, am I using my hands too much?

That's fine.

And then you'd be like this straight first lessons, then he'd be up and down and then you'd have to keep firing and firing then you'd have to

34:00 take that, your machine gun back and clean the darn thing with all the paint on it cause all the tips were coloured. You might be red today or yellow tomorrow but that colour would be in the drogue.

What would happen then after that?

They would count your hits and you might get nine percent or 10 percent or three percent which was

34:30 passable. They knew that was, it was difficult to do and it was, you know they weren't smooth aircraft but anyway we passed that and that was good. That was what a drogue was.

That sounds pretty hairy actually?

Oh it was, there's no two ways about it and then the darn gun would jam so you'd be in there trying to repair the gun, it was a lot of fun.

And so were you given any prior training in those sort of techniques

35:00 **before going aloft?**

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah they gave you a bit on the ground of deflection and what have you. They had camera guns and you could go to the, they'd take you to the range and then you'd use these camera guns and you'd find out if you were shooting it at the right time. These things'd fly along on a wire and you would be trying to shoot them

35:30 and you and knowing what deflection you had to do to hit the drogue or hit the target.

What exactly was a camera gun?

It just took a photograph when you pulled the trigger and it produced a result for you that was all.

So obviously it at the end of that exercise it would, the photograph

36:00 **would be processed and your work evaluated?**

Yeah, yeah.

So you were constantly being evaluated?

Oh yeah they were, yeah they were checking you all the time.

So what were your results like overall?

Oh, not bad, not bad, passed anyway so there was no nothing outstanding you know, there was I think if you got nine percent they're in the log book, you can I can show you later what they look like.

Were other people dropping out as a result of poor results?

Yeah, yeah there was quite

36:30 a failure rate but

What percentage?

Oh probably 10 percent, 12 per, 15 percent fellows that found they couldn't do it or they found they weren't worthy of doing it.

Now were you going through with the same group of guys all the time?

No, no because I was meeting up with different ones at Evans Head, a different group altogether but this is where I caught up with my mate Jack Craddock again and then we

37:00 continued onwards from then on.

So what RAAF facilities were there at Evans Head?

Bombing and gunnery, only bombing and astro navigation, that was all there was there.

And that was obviously an air base as well?

Oh yes, yeah there was a coastal air base right on the, on the beach at Evans Head.

So what was your overall opinion of the training?

Good,

37:30 excellent. I found the instructors were really good. They were out to help you and there was no problems with any of them. They were, none of them were smart aleck's, they were I think some of the pilots were a bit crook that they had to try fly these battles around but they did a good job and they didn't take it out on us. They weren't smart or anything like that. They weren't show offs. It's only the show off pilot that became

38:00 a problem or a trouble in the end.

Were these trainer pilots on average a little older?

Yep, yep, oh yeah, yeah.

So what was the average age group of the trainee?

19, 20, early twenties that's all. You might have got one a bit older that had come in from the army and transferred from the army over but no they were pretty young.

Cause it occurs to me that....?

18, 19.

Yeah.

Well, I was

38:30 18 when I, just 20, eight just 19 when I got my wings, so yeah it was pretty young.

It does occur to me that at that age and stage of course the reflexes are fairly fast.

Oh yes, yeah you're dead right, you're trained that way. You've got not much time to think. You've got to act fairly quickly.

So the training accentuated those reflexes?

I think so

39:00 yep.

But it's also an age thing that at that age and stage probably through to the early 20s reflexes tend to be?

Oh that'd be, you'd be right there. They are much better at that age but no they're pretty good really all of them. They had a few odd characters but most of them were pretty good, you know you never found

39:30 20 fellows living in the hut got on pretty well. There was never any squabbles or anything. If they found an easier way to pass a paper they'd let you know. You know I think our drill instructors, you always had a drill instructor wherever you went and he used to march you to lectures and march you back and what have you and he'd find out what the questions were and he'd pass them down the line. You know they were

40:00 cheating in some ways but they wanted you to be successful but they had to prove it too.

Tape 3

00:32 **So Ian can you tell us about the planes that you were training in Australia?**

For the navigation I was in the Avro Anson. It was a twin engine plane wings that flapped like mad with a mechanical under carriage which had to be wound up. The other plane I flew in was a Fairey Battle,

01:00 which was an English plane brought out here for training in Australia and supposedly to be part of our defence scheme but they were an inline engine and cooled by air glycol and as of reason of the heat they used to overheat and let out this awful fumes that when you were

01:30 bombing you could become affected by the fumes of the exhaust, of the glycol boiling and then you'd probably find that sometimes you would not make the bombing run because the thing had overheated and the pilot had to take it back and then you'd change planes or something. They were two types we flew in out here.

And which one of those

02:00 **two did you prefer at the time?**

Oh the Avro Anson was the one for navigation, yeah it was more comfortable. You couldn't navigate in a Fairey Battle to any great degree, not with maps and what have you. It was difficult.

I've never actually been in an Avro Anson and I'm wondering if you could describe the interior of the plane just talk us through sitting in the cockpit, what it's like?

There were two, it was a Perspex covered plane which would get very hot

02:30 in summer, it was very smelly when it did get hot. There was room for a wireless operator and two, a navigator and a co-pilot so there could be a crew of four in it. That was the usual standard. We normally only went with pilot and navigator and sometimes with a wireless operator

03:00 because most of our navigation was done by dead reckoning. That or map reading I mean map reading for dead reckoning. You'd sit next to the pilot with your map and you'd travel some distance and you'd pick out a town or a railway bend or a road junction and say, "We're over that." so then you'd go back and put it on your map and then you'd find another

03:30 land marker shortly afterwards and that'd tell you if you were on your track or not and you'd be able to assess what the wind was that was blowing, if you were off course and you'd assess what the wind was and you'd make a correction to the direction you were travelling and that was the main thing with the Avro Anson but it was good to do it, sit up the front and see but periodically you'd find that the pilot'd get air sick

04:00 and that would be a bit of a problem but anyway we survived that. I was never air sick, so I was lucky I was one of those lucky ones yeah.

So you mentioned that the Avro Anson was more comfortable than the Fairey?

Oh yes it was, oh the Fairey was like a single aircraft but double seat, not a double seat, a two seater aircraft one behind the other and

04:30 you just, was only fit for gunning and bombing, it wasn't fit for navigation. You couldn't go long distances in it unless you had a map on your lap and the pilot and your pilot was doing the navigation as well. It would be rather difficult I would say. I wouldn't want to have done it.

So did you have breathing apparatus in both of those planes?

Nup, none at all,

05:00 just, no mask or anything, no oxygen, no they didn't fly high enough.

So just getting back to a bit about your mother I was wondering cause you mentioned that you were quite protective of her in terms of telling her where you were and what you were doing, you know as a pilot. I was just wondering what she actually thought of your enlistment?

Oh she knew I had to go

05:30 at some time or other. She knew that the elder brother wouldn't be going, the young brother was too young or he could come in possibly for later on but the war had ended by the time he would have reached. She knew I had to go and she preferred I think that I went to the air force, where I wanted to rather than the army. No she took that in her stride. She

06:00 was a brave mother and she was sorry to see me go, there was two ways she didn't but she was

supportive.

Yeah she sounds like she was a remarkable woman and had a very big influence on your life?

Oh she did, yeah. She was oh well you know I was the last son married and she was wonderful. I couldn't complain about in those years no.

06:30 **So I know that your father was often absent, you know from the family around this time. What did he actually think of your enlistment? Did you ever have a chance to talk to him about it?**

No not at all. Though Dad came back and he obtained a job with the air.... what did they call it the air force organisation at Lidcombe, oh I forget the name of it now but they were making parts for and building

07:00 for the air force.... aircraft, amazing I forget that name but it was at Lidcombe that was part of the air what the air force itself was making parts for. It was a big government ...

A factory or?

A factory yeah

A factory yeah,

So he came back, he got a job there but I think

07:30 I was in the air force then when he got that so I didn't have much time to talk to Dad but he was pleased I was in it. He was happy but Mum was the main worry. Mothers always are and it's rather a right for them so I s'pose it's proper. They're wonderful people.

That's their job, isn't it?

Yeah.

Yeah. Now you mentioned while you were speaking to

08:00 **Graham about that there was some show off pilots that caused a bit of trouble. Can you describe what they would do to show off?**

Not in Australia so much.

Oh OK.

No that came later. Aircraft low flying was an exhilarating experience. When you're whizzing through very quickly over 10 feet off the ground it's absolutely unbelievable but it's dangerous, terribly dangerous

08:30 and we had fellows that did this and this is one fellow that Lindsay I spoke about that got killed at Evans Head, his pilot was one of those that was a smart aleck that was showing off and it never paid off. It just, you can see that even later years in England I could see it happening and I lost a good mate he flew, he

09:00 and his pilot flew into the hospital on his own aerodrome. This was showing off because they'd come in and buzz their aerodrome and it was only wasting petrol and energy and it was just ridiculous and the air force frowned upon it. I know this fellow that was killed and his pilot they were told never to do it again and what did he do? He came in and did it again and ended up

09:30 dead, so they were the types and you'd find.... there was East Anglia for example some nice long flat countryside and we had a bombing range up in Warwick called The Wash and you'd fly and oh this is great country to low fly but when telegraph posts go past like picket fences you're going too fast and that's too low and I'm glad

10:00 my pilot wasn't one of those but later on we had an experience that over night we had to, I'm getting ahead of myself a bit here. I'm just expanding on this dangerous flying. We had to stay at a station on the coast because our station was fogged in overnight and this was this huge aerodrome called Downbridge right on the coast

10:30 of England and it was made particularly for crashed aircraft that they'd come in and crash land there and they'd just bulldoze, put a bulldozer. Particularly for the Americans because they copped a lot and this particular night we stayed overnight at this airport and in the morning Willie who was my pilot says, "Come on, we'll go early, the aerodrome's...."

11:00 I think it was, I forget what time it was doesn't matter we got up he said, "I'll wake up Cambridge this morning." cause we had to fly more or less over Cambridge to get to our base. Well that was OK, he flew over it about 1,000 feet and what have you and did a circuit at Cambridge and woke them up but another time we were there we came up, no same time

11:30 we got airborne and he said, "Oh we'll fly about, we'll go low, not too low because it's nice flat country." and next thing here's a whopping great bird, this big bird coming directly for us and he smashed into

our propeller and missed the windscreen by not much more than that. Now if he had hit that windscreen

12:00 we would have gone down. There's no way he would have broken that windscreen and hit the pilot because he was on the pilot's side. That taught us after that that's out, low flying's not on.

That must have been a terrifying experience.

It was, it was shocking. There was feathers everywhere, blood all over the windscreen. Luckily he pulled up and he wasn't a show off, Willie wasn't a show off

12:30 but there were others that would be and they were dangerous to fly with.

It sounds like I mean the training, I mean not only just flying in combat but the training was dangerous as well?

Oh yeah always because you never knew how good the pilot was this was the trouble. A lot of them had just come off course and got their wing and gone off as training pilots.

13:00 A lot of them were quite good but some were shockers. You just couldn't trust them but I had no problems. I didn't have any of them but you saw some of them around the place that like you, you'd wished you never flew with. You heard rumours about them and usually they were pretty right.

So tell me how you felt when you got your wings?

13:30 Oh wonderful. That was end of the training, all the training is over I'm qualified and I'm now a Sergeant. I'll get an increase in pay from about six and six up to about 10 and six, 10 shillings and sixpence or something. Oh no it was great, it was end of a training era and I'd achieved something. This was the main thing. I have done it on my own.

14:00 You know it's got a lot of pride in it, it was great.

Now was there a special ceremony?

No, no, no, no we didn't have time for those things. They just said "You passed, here's your wings." and that's it. No, no there was none of that.

Were there any celebrations amongst the....?

Well all our messes were dry, so there was none of that. If we had to we'd go into Lismore, we might have a beer or two or stay there, but

14:30 no, we were glad to get posted back to Sydney, so then we came back from Evans Head to Bradfield Park which was in two parts, one's for training, initial training station, the other was an embarkation depot, so we came back to the embarkation depot, had leave, went back in the train a day or so later off to Melbourne embarkation depot, which was at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

15:00 **Oh that would have been good for you?**

Oh it was but we slept on in the grandstands in April. Now the grandstands were if you know Melbourne Cricket Ground, they're about two tiers and the second tier we were on and the stretchers we were on or the beds, iron

15:30 beds were tilted or on blocks to be level because you know the stands are tiered and they built up a screen at the front of the stand to stop the wind to a degree but then there was about 20 feet of open air up above and you nearly froze to death and they even said, "If you have relatives in Melbourne that you can

16:00 stay with, you can stay with them overnight." and that's unheard of at an embarkation depot. It was a frightful place but it was an experience and we ate in the officers', oh in the members' mess, so it was something say I've eaten in the members' mess with beaut cutlery and silverware and what have you, so an experience.

And did you ever make the most of being at the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground], at the MCG and playing cricket on the oval there?

No, no.

16:30 We were only there for a short time and it was mainly to dress us out again and this is where we learnt that we would be going north to England because they were given winter wear and some of the gear we thought what are these long socks for, never need these things you know came up above your knee up to your thigh,

17:00 we needed, we knew what they were for later in the cold weather.

So can you describe the kit that they gave you?

Well not much because they checked your uniform to see if it was capable of it, was in good condition. I

had an overcoat that had a patch in it so I fell asleep on guard duty one night, and burnt myself on the radiator at Cootamundra at the main gate,

17:30 see in between courses waiting for course they said, "You can do guard duty." and this was terrible this and I was on this and so they replaced my overcoat and they gave us these, any winter wear, large socks mainly. No underwear or anything like that. That was your problem and that was about it

18:00 and then we left there after about a fortnight I suppose.

Off to England?

Off to England.

Now tell me just before you do go off to England, did you have any girlfriends around at this time?

No, no none at all. Friends but no girlfriends no.

So what was, what do you recall of your farewell from Australia?

18:30 Sorry I didn't?

What do you recall of your farewell from Australia?

No, there was no farewell. We just picked up, transported to Port Melbourne, went aboard the Mariposa which was a passenger liner for the Matson line which plied from San Francisco to Sydney. And this boat had been, ship had been in, picked up prisoners of war

19:00 and taken them to India. From India to Australia then it had to be fumigated before we went on board because of lice from the Italian prisoners and then we set sail for America. I didn't know we'd even gone through the Heads or whatever they call the, in Melbourne and next thing we were out to sea and

19:30 we sailed through the straight, Cook Straight between the islands of New Zealand and that was the last land we saw till we reached Panama and I had that wonderful experience of going through the Panama Canal which was absolutely unbelievable.

Can you talk us through; describe what happened when you went through the Panama Canal?

Well you come in at a certain level and because of the different levels of the oceans,

20:00 the Pacific and the Atlantic they either lower you or higher increase your height. Now they put you into a let's say a big tank, the ship sails into this tank and they flew it through the water and it raises the ship and then you then go in and then they open the gates and you sail through again into another one and that raises you

20:30 again and that, I forget how many gates there were, it's so long ago and then you're out into the Panama Canal itself into the land portion and then you go, that takes you right through the Atlantic Ocean but the Americans came on board there with their guards, so that we couldn't take photographs or of anything. "Anybody taking photographs

21:00 will be executed immediately." was more or less the order. You know they were frightened that we were going to take photographs of their installations. You couldn't even see them for the ship. They were unreal. We never had things like this before and wondered what the hell had happened.

How did you find the Americans generally when they came on board the ship?

We had nothing to do with them.

21:30 They got off at the other end at Panama City, so they got off, we didn't see have anything to do with them at all. We had a, the Captain of the, no the officer in charge of troops was an American, Colonel Hawkins and never saw him until he went off and somebody threw a bag of flour at him. We went up the Atlantic

22:00 and we didn't go into New York, we went into Boston and of course by the time we.... and because of the fog we were going along at a very slow speed and they had more or less had run out of food and I think the frankfurts had been on the boat from American to India to Australia to America and you'd have bounced them off

22:30 the walls you know, they were shocking things and this was supposed to be our meal. Two meals a day you know, frightful. Anyway we got into Boston Harbour and somebody had a bag of flour, don't know who it was or how they got it, they dropped it behind him as he walked off the ship and he was covered in flour. The Yanks were up on board in no time but they couldn't find who did it. Nobody was

23:00 telling anyway. There was a couple, I think there was only a couple of hundred Australians on board so it had to be an Australian but anyway the Red Cross came to our aid and gave us a bit of food.

So what were the conditions like on board the ship?

Boring, absolutely boring. We had an apartment on board, oh a big cabin, nine of us in it and we had a bathroom as well,

- 23:30 salt water baths. Fresh water was restricted but it was comfortable. No chairs, no deck chairs or anything. You sat on the hard wood floor decks. I think I wore a pair of shorts out, it was rough but anyway it was good for companionship. You learnt about your fellow mate and this was good, you learnt to live with
- 24:00 people closely. You know it's alright to have a bed every eight feet apart but when there's nine of you in a double cabin you're really close and you get dressed in relays. You know one comes down, there'd be three decks of three beds and you, you'd have two changing
- 24:30 at a time. It was fun, it was great fun, we worked it out. We had no problems, it was good, that was good friendship. It was and for passing the time of day it was either Bridge, 500 or nothing. No gambling. I don't think any of our fellows opened up with gambling or two-up or anything like that. It just wasn't on.
- 25:00 It could have been but nobody did.

And what did you pack for the ship?

Just probably two shirts, underwear, couple of changes of underwear, about four pairs of socks that's about it, towel, couple of towels.

Did you take any personal mementos from home?

No, not really, they didn't recommend them. They

- 25:30 probably had shaving gear and like toiletries that sort of thing. No I don't think I had any photos. See I never had a camera in the family. You couldn't afford to buy the film, there was no money and the only photos we would have you probably if you were walking down George Street in those days there was photographers would take your photo and you'd go and get them at their studio
- 26:00 for about two bob or something or 20 cents, but that was and they were it, that's why we had no cameras, it was just not on, it was just unfortunately so but no, not many personal effects at all probably a writing pad that'd be it.
- 26:30 **So tell me, did you disembark at Boston?**
- Yeah, we disembarked at Boston then immediately into a train to New York and that train took us to Fort Hamilton at Brooklyn, so we were then for about a week and we saw luxuries of messes with canteens and things that were unavailable in Australia that the Yanks had for them and how they
- 27:00 spoilt their troops was just unbelievable but we were there for, oh I s'pose might have been 10 days at the most, two long weekends, two weekends. Once, I made the trip down with some mates down to Washington for an Australian function down there at Walderman's [?] Park Hotel, the biggest hotel I've ever been in, the most luxurious place, this big dinner for
- 27:30 Australia or something. I think the Minister for Air, Drakeford was there and Curtin, Curtin was there, John Curtin [Australian Prime Minister] was there in, he was in Washington at the time. Whether it was a delayed Anzac Day function I don't know but we were, we were asked would we like to go down. There was a girl in the, we had the Anzac Club in New York. It was run by a woman
- 28:00 called Lola Luxford. Now Lola was a New Zealander and she was the greatest con merchant of all time. She could get you free seats to anything and Lola, you could go to her she'd say, "What you want to do tonight?" and you know she was not handling six people, she had oodles of Australians coming in and say, "Can we, can you get us some seats to the Ziegfeld Follies?", you know,
- 28:30 we'd heard about these Ziegfeld Follies and she said, "Righto, we'll try." and because the mad thing at the time, the thing of the time over there was D day. It's coming up so she'd ring the theatre and say, "Look, I've got a couple of Australians that want to go would love to go to your show. They've come over here for D Day, have you got any tickets that these fellows could remember us by?" "Oh yeah send them along."
- 29:00 so we had a box seat at the Ziegfeld's.

Describe the performance of the Ziegfeld's?

Well they're, Milton Berle was the comedian of the year and was dancing, singing and good variety entertainment but he was the great comedian. He was on TV when it first started out here as one of the shows The Milton Berle show and yeah it was excellent, we enjoyed it

- 29:30 very much. Then the next weekend or one night we went to see Carmen Jones. We didn't have a box seat at that but we had good seats all the same and that's the, you know what Carmen Jones, the modern version of Carmen and it was excellent. It was above me you know but I was a bit illiterate as far as music was concerned but I enjoyed it but my mates did, they loved it too. Then,

- 30:00 the other weekend, oh one weekend we went out with an English couple billeted with them and the second weekend we went out to Long Island to a family out there that, he was in the electronics business and he, oh this was luxury unbelievable. You know here was a chauffeured Cadillac Packard to pick us up at the railway station but his daughter
- 30:30 was on the train and she came through and met us and so we went out but he wanted us, wanted to know if we'd like to go hunting with him that afternoon Saturday afternoon, said, "No thanks, we'll leave that one alone." but they were wonderful people and they've been out to Australia to see Joy and I since.

So you've kept in touch with these people?

We did for a while and oh they've passed on now but this family, the Bristles

- 31:00 were a bit unique. Their son was a mercenary. He had fought in the Spanish war and then he joined the Canadian Air Force and he used to bring Australians home from Canada and his mother and father would entertain them but then he got killed and they thought well we enjoyed those Australians, how can we continue on so they got in touch with the Anzac
- 31:30 Club and this is how it came about so we were great friends of theirs and oh even Mum had her own aeroplane. Oh she used to have some relative down in Washington she used to just get in a plane and fly her down there. Eileen, the daughter, was a pilot and she was scrubbed for flying these mighty big aircraft to transport them to
- 32:00 England you know they had all, everything up and go about them but she found that they were too big for her, too hard to handle you know, they had no automatic pilots or things like that was flying all the way but, they had a go at that.

They sound like a remarkable family?

They were but they were lovely people.

So it seems like you know I imagine like as a young Australian

- 32:30 **from Sydney turning up in New York and experiencing the Ziegfeld Follies and this family?**

It was unreal. It was absolutely unreal and the beauty of it was that we saw them again we when we first married, we had a little four 10 square eight 10 square house and they said they were coming out to Australia and

- 33:00 Joy and I were married at the time and I think at our wedding we had some bottles of sherry or something or port sherry I think it was that was left over and you know I didn't drink much in those days, not that I do a lot now and I'd put them in the bottom of the linen press. Anyway we met them in their pub in town with another fellow and some of the fellows weren't very responsive
- 33:30 to them and we thought, "Oh, they were good to us let's go and see them." so we went and had dinner in town with them one night and then we had young Rodney who was our son, was about 12-18 months old, two years plus a bit and we invited them out to our place for dinner and Joy had put on a leg of lamb and what have you, you know we were getting a bit over then, the budget was being blown out
- 34:00 a bit and they came out and they enjoyed our little home but when you consider what a palatial place they had they enjoyed every bit of it and the food was absolutely perfect as far as they were concerned and he said, "Have you got any wine?" "I've got this bottle of sherry." so I dug it out and by the time I'd drained the, you know being illiterate as far as
- 34:30 wines were concerned it was probably stood on its bottom instead of being flat and of course the cork was disintegrating, so I had to strain the cork out of the wine and he thought it was a beautiful wine. I thought, I'm made, I'm made, but it was lovely. We drove them home in our little Morris Minor we picked them up in our little Morris Minor
- 35:00 and I thought strange from the Packard. But they were wonderful. He was on his way to Ireland, the daughter worked for Pan American and they got cheap tickets and they were flying around the world and they were going to Germany to pick up their new their new Mercedes, that's how well off they were but they were beautiful people.

They sound like great people?

- 35:30 They were.

Yeah. So getting back to New York I'm wondering what your first impressions of this big city were?

Amazing, you couldn't believe it, the height of the skyscrapers and the movement of the people you know you never saw so many people in all your life. And we were well received you know, they didn't know anything about Australia, didn't have a clue. You know outside of Follies there a woman came up and said,

- 36:00 "Are you really from Australia?" We said "Yes." "Didn't they have an army?" Thought oh golly what's

New Guinea all about you know they've got no idea of the rest of the world. They have no idea of the next state even, it's incredible. One of mates, Ronnie Miro he was killed, he was a school teacher and

36:30 we were at this function we went it was funny Ronnie was a catholic and we were all protestants but we all went to the same church together you know. He was very liberal minded even though his sister was a nun or something or his aunts too, but Ron was good. He came to this church where it was a Sunday and our guests, I forget this English couple wanted to know if we'd like to go with them

37:00 and we thought well it's only right to go with them so we went and there was a, after the church there was a fellow there he was an inspector of schools and he said, "You wouldn't know much about America, would you?", and Ron said, "What would you like to know?" He said, "Do you want me to relate all your States in alphabetical order or from north to south,

37:30 south to west?" and the fellow said, "You couldn't do that." and Ron just went straight through alphabetically and he said, "Oh, I'm amazed my pupils couldn't do that." He said, "We learn about the world not just Australia." and this was the big thing. It was an eye opener to them but they were good, they were kind, good.

So you talked a bit about the conditions in the, that you experienced in the American

38:00 **when you first arrived in Boston or was that when you got to New York and Brooklyn?**

No, in Brooklyn.

So tell us about what the American soldiers had for conditions?

Well they had better food, this was the big thing. They had bigger messes; oh they had shops more or less where we never had anything like this. They could buy stuff cheaply, whereas we had thirty dollars to last us till we went on board ship,

38:30 so we were very poor people so we didn't do any buying but they even had watches, you could buy everything imaginable on the cheap but we never saw anything like it. It was just an eye opener but that was the Americans, they pampered their soldiers.

Now you also mentioned

39:00 **Lola at the Anzac Club.**

Oh yeah.

I'm just, can you remember where the Anzac Club was in New York?

Was it on 56th Street, I think it was. I'm not sure, wasn't far off.

Can you, I mean obviously it had like a social function in terms of like looking after you know the soldiers?

Oh, she would have functions on you know of a night time, you know a type of cocktail or get to

39:30 know you and see how we were going, if we needed help or anything like that. She had a lot of volunteers as well so that they were all helpful to anybody going through the country. They were just charming people. She was a New Zealander and she loved Australians but I think she ended up as PR [Public Relations] for the big hotel over there, Hotel Pierre but she was a beauty, she got

40:00 us everything for nothing. I was only trying to work out when we went down to Washington, I can't ever remember paying a train fare, I don't know who did but there were about four of us went down.

Tape 4

00:33 **Great, so Ian we got up to you talking about New York. What happened after New York?**

New York, we waited for the Queen Mary and we went over to England on the Queen Mary with about 15,000 Americans and believe we were lucky, we had six fellows in a single cabin this time so it wasn't too bad but we

01:00 were lucky in one respect that we were the bridge iceberg watch, so we got up on top of the bridge of the Mary and watched for icebergs for a couple of hours each. Well only on one occasion but it was quite an experience and I was on the outer limits of the bridge where the wing went over the side of the ship and it oh, it was rough holy mo,

01:30 the ship creaked and moaned and groaned all the way to Scotland. Anyway we got safely through and landed at Greenock in the River Clyde and I think that was about the 13th-14th of June. D Day had just happened and we transported then down to Padgate which was an Australian

- 02:00 reception centre. Immediately had seven days leave and a fellow I made friends with a Ross Williamson from Perth and I went up to Scotland for seven days under a scheme called Flora McDonald, the McDonald of the Isles. Oh she was a good sort, Flora, she got us free accommodation everywhere we went and we spent it in Perth
- 02:30 and fortunately we, oh my first ride in a Rolls Royce was a taxi at the station to take us to the hotel and we stayed at this lovely hotel called the Salutation Hotel and they'd kept a meal for us, the dining room was kept open for us even though it was after eight o'clock at night and we went down to pay for it next morning, she said, "It's on the house." We thought gee this is good for Scotsmen,
- 03:00 anyway then we were billeted out with an old family, old lady Mrs Browning and we stayed there and the amazing part of it was you have to sign the visitor's book at the City Hall. Now Perth was the original Scottish capital or Wiscone actually, which is part of Perth. Anyway we went down there to sign the visitor's book and thought
- 03:30 they've asked us to, we will do as we're to requested yet no compulsion, but we went and fronted up at the reception counter said, "We've come down to sign the visitor's book." Oh well righto we fix that up, out comes a lass and says, "Will you come with me?" We got into the warden clerk's office and he, in next comes the silver tray service,
- 04:00 we were having morning tea and then he says to us after we had done this, "The Lord Mayor would like to know would you come to his place for dinner tonight?" Here's two Sergeants, we're going to Lord Nimmo's place for dinner so we oblige, we go to this place, it was a lovely meal. He said "Oh, we have a lecture on tonight, would you like to come to
- 04:30 a lecture?" It's being given by Sir William James, Admiral of Information on how they delouse the first magnetic mines that were washed up on the England coast, so we went to that and it was amazing in the course of conversation Lord Nimmo addressed Sir William James as "Bubbles" and I said to him, "How do you get the name
- 05:00 Bubbles?" I was the first Pears soap bubble bath baby and if you can recall, you might not, a big old English baby's bath which was shaped like this and here's this little baby blowing bubbles, that's Sir William James and he was very proud of the fact
- 05:30 and we then went down, we were hob knobbing and a Lieutenant called Colonel Peter Nore was home, his mother was doing the organising of visitors. He was home from Sicily so he was going down to St Andrew's. "Would you like to come to St Andrews?" Who wouldn't want to go to St Andrew's, so we went down to St Andrew's and had a look there
- 06:00 and I played my first game, (not game I couldn't play golf), I played on the putting green of St Andrew's and that was one of my great treasureful memories but they were wonderful, anyway we got back to Scotland and then from there after a week or two we got, I did a night vision test of
- 06:30 which I think I cheated but I got through it. I won't tell you how but I think I wasn't the only one. They'd take you into a dark room and there would be a pyramid sort of thing in there and they'd throw lights on it and say "Can you read that?" and in the dark you were supposed to write down a letter that was A, it was upside down or what and it was rather difficult and
- 07:00 anyway I got a fair pass and they said, "You're sure to...., there's no flying experiences at the moment." They were taking some people off flying Tiger Moths around England having a look see at the country side so they said, "Oh, why don't you do the night vision course?" so I went and did that, was quite interesting and then no sooner I finished that we were posted. We're going to Bishop's
- 07:30 Court, where in the hell is Bishop's Court? It's in Ireland, so we were posted over to do a refresher course night flying astro nav and everything over there.

Just before we go to Ireland, can you tell me how you did cheat on the night vision test?

Well they put a bulldog clip on your.... they had highchairs, they put a bulldog clip on your collar and if you went forward too far the bulldog clip'd come off,

- 08:00 so what you did, you hung on to the bulldog clip and you went forward and put the bulldog clip back and if the clip made a noise you said, "Hey, I think my clip's come undone." so the girl'd come round and put the clip back on, that was the way if you couldn't see everything. Was bad, was wrong.

But apparently this happened quite a bit?

Oh I don't say a lot but it did happen. I know Dennis in Adelaide said he did it and I did it a couple of

- 08:30 times.

So there must have been some sort of conversation between you all to know how to cheat?

You soon worked that out yourself. Anyway we got through it, we did it. It was a, it was interesting anyway how they trained you on night vision.

So can you talk us through some of the night vision training that you underwent?

Yeah well they'd put you in this room and it had a scene

09:00 laid out in front of you of a countryside with roads and whatever and then they'd turn the lights off and they'd say, "Well right this is full moon." and they mount a light which would represent a full moon and next thing they would turn to you and they'd say, "What can you see?" It was open discussion, it wasn't a test

09:30 and you'd say what you could see, you could see a road down leading up to a farmhouse or something and then they'd start reducing the full moon, three quarter moon, half moon, new moon starlight and what have you and you did this for oh about a week. Was good, it was quite interesting how we did it but it certainly tuned up the eye night vision,

10:00 it was quite excellent, quite good, I liked it and then that was you know there was no test for that, that was just a revision of it.

So is night vision something that you can get better at as you....?

I don't think so, I don't think so.

So you either have it or you don't?

You've got to get accustomed to the darkness before you can do it. If you're not accustomed to it, if you went straight into it you could,

10:30 you wouldn't see anything but if you were accustomed and sat there for an hour you'd get do well at it but you know your eyes get that way. I don't think I could do it now my eyesight's gone that bad anyway.

So you mentioned just back before when you were doing the night vision test you mentioned that you were looking at a pyramid. Can you describe it?

Yeah well this was, this was the first test. It was a pyramid and it threw up

11:00 objects on it on certain lines of it and there'd be eight of you sitting around and there'd be eight screens showing the same thing and you'd watch it and write down what you could see. That was the pyramid, that's how they displayed it so they could do eight people at one time. I suppose you'd call it a pyramid that type of structure, a tower or something

11:30 you know, I think somebody called it a pyramid.

Sounds a bit interesting?

Yeah it was.

I've never heard of that before yeah. Now just before we do go off to Ireland I wanted to just make a bit of a leap back to your trip over on the Queen Mary

Yep.

And I was wondering if you could describe the Queen Mary to me?

Not really. We didn't see that much of it. We had two

12:00 meals a day in their stately dining rooms standing up. You know you'd have to stand up to catch everything as it flew past you and you know they were sliding all over the place. The gangways up on the decks were very wide and as the seas were so rough they lowered oh not canvas boards to cover

12:30 from the rail to the ceiling, so nobody could be thrown overboard. Apparently a couple of Americans were thrown overboard in the roughness of the sea and tossed in the wrong time. We had no upholstery, no furniture or anything just sat on bare deck again. All the good parts of it had been stripped off so you didn't see much, it was just more or less just a

13:00 shell with bunks. I don't know where the Yanks were. All the Australians were together on one deck but the Royal Navy were, the Royal Marines were the gunners on board it. They had a gun practice that nearly frightened hell out of me. I was on the deck down that wing I was telling you about on watch and next thing the

13:30 Bofors, they threw up a balloon the target, next thing the Bofors from underneath me went up and I got the shock of my life. I didn't know what was going on but that's what it was, gunnery practise. We used to have boat, no boat drills because there was too many people to assemble where we used to have them on the Mariposa but no you couldn't say, I couldn't say that I saw anything marvellous about it because

14:00 it was all stripped down. Because they knew that there'd be souvenir hunters and that wasn't on because the big cafeterias or dining rooms had these high tables erected where you all stood up for your lunch and you know there'd be rows and rows of them. I think breakfast went from six o'clock in the morning till 12 o'clock,

14:30 they had a couple of hours break and then it went, meals started at four o'clock again, so when you're serving 15,000 odd troops you don't have much room for three meals a day.

Would have liked to have seen the store room to feed that many men each day?

Well they would have but as I say it was two meals a day and they weren't bad meals I s'pose, I can't remember much about them

15:00 but they didn't make me sea sick, so it must have been alright.

So did you actually suffer from any sea sickness?

No, not a bit, not a bit. I used to sit on the Mariposa, you'd see the nose of the thing go up in the air on the Sunday deck service and Church service and the thing would be sitting there and the nose would go up and whack down it would come but no I never got sick thank goodness. Never got air sick,

15:30 never got sick.

You're lucky.

Yeah I was lucky.

Now tell me when you were on iceberg watch did you actually see any icebergs?

No, no. It was their summer actually. See it was in June and coming up summer and there would be little chance but we went far north into the Atlantic so we could have seen them but we didn't. There was none seen which was unfortunate. I would have loved to have seen an iceberg

16:00 miles away of course.

So tell me what was the, what was the mood like aboard the ship. Was there ever any threat of battle in the Atlantic at this point or?

No the Mary was that quick that you didn't worry about it. The Mary, The Mary and the Elizabeth could outstrip everything. They never were escorted and the Mary, why we had to wait for the Mary I think, it was because she ran through a cruiser.

16:30 She, this cruiser, zagged when it should have zigged and or that or similar or something like that and the Mary just ploughed straight through it, so she was in for repairs when we got, when we were waiting for it to come out from repairs when we got there. That was the story. I know she did go through a cruiser that was history but no it was

17:00 great, it was just another means of transport as far as I was concerned. I would love to have been on him when it was good but no wasn't then.

Now tell me, thanks for telling me that stuff about the Queen Mary, that was really interesting. I just wanted to hear about the detail but you mentioned that after your night vision training you then went up to Ireland?

Yeah we caught the train to Stranraer in Scotland

17:30 and crossed over to Larne in Ireland and then by train then went down to Belfast round the Loch of Belfast and on the station there we could see the first war damage because we saw a bit in Manchester which we had visited and Liverpool but in Belfast the railway station would had been bombed and all the broken windows

18:00 and what have you were still visible, were evident so we were only there for about an hour then we went down to a place called Bishop's Court, which was the aerodrome where we going to train and we were only there for a short time, about a month I suppose at the most and we flew the Irish Channel Sea up into Scotland and round the west coast into the middle of Scotland

18:30 and it was hazardous flying because again we were in Airspeed Oxfords which was bit faster than the Avro Ansons a similar plane and it was good. We did our navigation, we surprised them how good we were with astro navigation which was surprising and we went out on a terrible night and all came back on time

19:00 and our instructor went out on the same night and got lost so he was very pleased with us but I don't think we started to, we didn't make many friends there with the ground drill instructors. We insisted they were marching too quickly, not 120 paces to the minute, they were doing about 140 and of course the Australians hang back a bit. He used to blow his stack at us but

19:30 that was a bit of fun.

And what was, what were you actually doing there in Ireland?

Just refreshing our navigation skills, that was all and....

And I was also interested if you could describe for me at Belfast, what it was like at that time?

Belfast was peaceful. It was not that we only spent about one weekend in

20:00 Belfast. We went up; we were a bit more adventurous. We went out to the Giant's Causeway, now this is a great history point where England, Ireland and Scotland were joined together at one time and there was supposed to be the story of the big Irishman, was going to kill the Scottish man and oh it goes on and on

20:30 and on but there's quite a story about how they dressed this big infant up in the pram and pushed him across and he was greater than, oh I forget the rest of the story but the big fight came and the islands blew apart but all you can see the stones and the rocks and stones mainly hexagonal, octagonal, septagonal, all these

21:00 different types and they're similar in Scotland and then from there we went round to Londonderry and I think we mightn't have been so popular, there was a big naval base there for the western approaches.

Why weren't you popular there?

Oh well, well the Irish were funny people. They either liked you or not or you're a stranger

21:30 and I think they considered we were strangers. Although strangely enough my mate when we left we were in some house that we stayed at or boarding house or something, my mate one of the boys Leo Housfick [?], this woman came chasing, he'd left his wallet under there and she came down and give it to him. Thought it was amazing that somebody was so honest and but she was very nice but

22:00 none of them would speak to you. You didn't have many people I was called a foreigner there and you, I didn't appreciate that but anyway that was the Irish.

Now you were talking a bit about how you were flying the Oxfords and how they were a similar plane to the Avro Anson. Can you describe an Oxford to me?

Well two pilots, both were two pilots, a navigator

22:30 and had no wireless operator just the two. Sometimes you went out a second navigator. The automatic wheels came up, you didn't have to wind them up but it was very similar, except it didn't have so much Perspex windows or what have you. It was a good solid aircraft and we did later on in our next place, we were

23:00 on them again.

So where did you move to after Ireland?

Well we were then posted to a thing called 1655MTU. Now an MTU in most people's language is a maintenance training unit. Now we had engineers on the same course in Ireland so we thought well you've confused us, they're sending us to a maintenance training unit. Anyway we went into

23:30 ANZAC House at London, Australian Headquarters and we said "What's this 1655MTU?" They said "We've never heard of it." We said "They said get on the train and go up there up to a place called Warboys." and we duly did and got there late in the evening and put into a, went to the mess, had a meal

24:00 then taken back to a room where a hut where we were going to live for a month and but nobody could tell us what it was all about and we thought this is a mystery. Anyway we next morning down

24:30 for breakfast, all lined up and marched down to this big crew room and we were surprised we were in the wrong place. There would have been 50 to 60 pilots in there, DSOs [Distinguished Service Order], DFCs [Distinguished Flying Cross], Bars, you got no idea the decorations and I thought what are we doing

25:00 here? We're little sergeants and next thing on your feet, so in comes their Vice Marshal Donald Bennett, which we didn't know him at all at this stage. "Gentlemen, welcome to 1655MTU Mosquito Training Unit." You knocked the wind out of us. A Mosquito Training Unit,

25:30 we were only rookies. Anyway we were to be trained as navigators, bomb aimers in a Mosquito bomber. There were about nine squadrons of these. This was an idea of Donald Bennett's. He found, was the opinion that the most, a lot of nights the Lancasters couldn't and Halifaxes couldn't

26:00 fly because of weather, they couldn't get above the weather, they couldn't fly when there was a full moon because the cat's eye fighters could come down at 'em. Cat's eyes were people with superb eye vision at night time. Now he and Geoffrey De Havilland got together and planned to build, well they were building these Mosquitos but he wanted them adapted instead of

26:30 a fighter, to carry a bomb. Now there were two types of Mosquitos. One had Rolls Royce Merlin engines in and the other had a Packard Merlin engine. Well the Packards weren't quite as strong as the Rolls Royce one. There was a difference of a couple of hundred horsepower in each engine. Whilst they're going

- 27:00 next to the other, one could get a bit higher and carry a four, the Rolls Royce Merlin could carry a 4,000 pound bomb whereas we, the other one the Packards carried four 500s and we had the four 500s. Now we then learnt the use of the radar system, the thing called the G box which was a system
- 27:30 which they sent wire from stations in Europe and England, signals around and you read the screen which gave you a figure and you read another line which gave you a cross figure and you joined the two together and that's where you were. And you took three of
- 28:00 those fixes in six minutes and that was, measure the distance and that gave you the mileage that you had travelled or and your speed so we had to learn all that and we did that with any pilot that was flying, like star pilots were flying these Oxfords. After we'd done that for a fortnight or so we
- 28:30 were then taken into a crew room and the pilots joined us who we'd never seen, never flown with them, didn't know them from Adam and they said, "Pick a pilot you want to fly with." and I saw this fellow I said, "You got anybody?" "No." "You done a tour before?" "No,
- 29:00 oh ye Gods." He said, "Oh that's alright, only one problem." "What's that?" "I don't want you to fly me through any balloon barrages, navigate me through them." I said "I won't do that, I don't think there's much future in that." so he became pilot and he was Flight Lieutenant Robert Williams and I flew with him all my tours with Robert Williams
- 29:30 and then the instructors came and said, "Righto, this is your examination now." I thought "Oh." Now when you went to a heavy's operational training unit there was a written examination and if you didn't pass that you were tossed out. Now if you were a sergeant and you got tossed out you lost your rank and you went back to Australia more or less in disgrace. Anyway

Did that happen a lot?

- 30:00 I think it happened quite a bit. It anyway, at ours this will cost you money and the thing was if you couldn't answer the question, it cost you sixpence and that went into the ground fund Christmas party and I thought our turn came and it was a simple thing. "What engine's the alternator in?" Not that I was a pilot or anything I said
- 30:30 "The star, oh the port." "Yeah that's right, you're right." So that was our examination. From then on we went to the next station called Witton which was a permanent air force station. Oh it was a beautiful place. It....

What was beautiful about it?

Air conditioned heated brick buildings, not Nissen huts or anything like that this was top stuff and I think it,

- 31:00 the first air raid on Germany came from Witton and there we learnt to fly together. The pilots incidentally had to learn to fly a Mosquito in two hours, solo in two hours. But they had been experienced pilots. They had a minimum of 1500 hours flying combat flying. They'd done tours before. They were wonderful pilots.
- 31:30 Anyway the Mosquito was a dangerous aircraft in as much that its tail, the tail of it was too low for rudder control until you got the tail up, so that you could swing on take off. Now to swing it meant you didn't apply the same pressure to each engine and I
- 32:00 think we went, learnt to fly alright. I did a few tests with him and we went all over the England, Scotland what have you and that was OK then the last one they put a bomb load on. Dead dunce and you wouldn't know, we wiped an aircraft off on the runway. He swung it and I thought, "Oh God this is clever." He didn't put the right pressure on at the
- 32:30 right time. One engine was faster than the other so he tried to correct it. He overcorrected, next thing we're, did a circle on the runway and wiped the under carriage off and bent the propellers and what have you, so I thought "Oh well what happens now?" So the next thing we're taken back to the base and we get
- 33:00 posted to Gransden Lodge. We got posted alright but then we were, I was delayed from flying because he had to go back for an inquiry into why he crashed and of course he got a reprimand but he admitted it was his fault and they accepted it so here we were on the squadron.

So was that, that must have been quite a terrifying experience to have that happen?

It was,

- 33:30 luckily, I was belted up, belted in and see we, I only wore a lap buckle. Pilot was braced all over. Now this aircraft had no armament whatsoever, it was only bombs and there was a steel plate behind the pilot to protect him if he was getting shot at that way but if he's getting shot this way he copped it. Anyway he
- 34:00 admitted his fault and we met up with some of the mates again that we'd trained in Northern Ireland with. Not all those that we went to Northern Ireland got through. Some of them were missed out though

we went up with some other Australians that came down, we ended up with nine of us, eight navigators and one pilot and he was the snob from Cooma, the pilot.

34:30 **Tell me more about the snob from Cooma?**

Well he wore an English uniform but with the Australian emblem on the side on his shoulder pad but he would never talk to us really because you had to, his navigator had to call him "Skipper." "Righto Skipper." and things like this where I'd say, "Come on Willie it's time

35:00 to turn the and change course, you ready?" and you know it was Willie and Mack, that was it, was no problem and all the other fellows were the same but Tony wanted to be called "Skipper", it sounded so good. But you'd, he'd never, well he was an officer and we were Flight Sergeant then so it was just a ...

35:30 **What was it like getting back into the airplane again with Willie after he'd made that balls up run?**

No problem, no problem. I trusted him, he was a good pilot. He proved that beforehand and he'd come to prove it later on too. He probably saved my life possibly, I don't know but we were back again and we

36:00 enjoyed, we had a wonderful navigation officer Squadron Leader Cyril Hassall. I think Hassall ended up with a hundred odd raids in his life. He was a father to us. He was an unassuming Englishman who was just a beauty. He was it, was just a great man

36:30 and I wrote to him or somebody one time and said, "Nearly finished?" Hassall was just the ants pants. He was, I couldn't speak highly enough of him.

What was it in particular about him that made you admire him so much?

His record to start off with. His understanding of his boys. He was a lot older than we were.

37:00 He just understood us perfectly. He understood our cheek. We were rude to him. He never bothered to say anything to us. He knew we did damn good work. He recognised that. He was just so unassuming a fellow that could have been "Yes sir, no sir." but not Hassall. He was just wonderful.

37:30 I couldn't have wished for a better place. I was proud to be very pleased to be an, on an RAF [Royal Air Force] squadron because the Australians were so pompous. You got onto one with Rollo Kingsford-Smith as CO [Commanding Officer] and holy mo you know, you knew what you, it was a different world. They were God almighty but not this fellow and our CO was the same

38:00 and he, Basil Nathan, he was quite he was a bit more aloof but he was a nice guy and you know we'd say, "I'm sorry, we can't fly tomorrow, it's Anzac Day that's a sacred day. You'll have to do without us Hass." Oh no you couldn't possibly fly. He believed us. "Oh, we'd say "Look, you'll be short of crews, we'll do it Hass, on this occasion only this once." but you know he

38:30 knew we were having him on but everybody liked him. We'd be late; breakfast was awful in the mess. Fried bread, Haricot beans with tomato sauce on them and the NAAFI [Navy Army and Air Force Institutes] van would have something good on and that's where we used to get it but if we were late, you'd go up the met [meteorological] office and you can draw

39:00 the weather map.

What's the NAAFI van?

The National, I forget the words I'll look up the dictionary. I'll tell you in the morning.

Sure.

There was a services van that came around with food on it and cups of tea in the morning. Something like a morning tea van. Anyway we'd go up to the weather office and we'd have a beaut morning

39:30 tea up there. The girls would make a beaut morning tea and the joke was you'd say to Hass, "No Hass, not for one day, no that's a waste of time. I'll never learn anything about weather in a day. What about a week, Hass?" He woke up to us in the end, why we wanted a week. We were getting better food but he was just marvellous. I wrote to him after the war and told him what a great guy he was.

Sounds like

40:00 **he left a very big impression on you?**

He did on all of us and there was no snobbery. We, look we got on well with everybody. There was no jealousies, no anything. You could

00:32 **So Ian, you were talking about where you were situated in England at the aerodrome?**

Gransden Lodge was in between Cambridge and Bedford and our nearest station was Sandy and Bedfordshire sounded always funny that Sandy, Beds was the address of the place but it was a dispersed aerodrome, which meant the huts, the accommodation was far from the

01:00 runways or the crew rooms and even the aircraft were dispersed into separate little sections of say three or four aircraft to a section and it might be three sections around the A crew room or further out, you'd have the other B flight'd have theirs well past the hangars, so in

01:30 a raid, if we ever had one, the aircraft wouldn't be destroyed in one hit and it meant of a night time you always had a flight crew which'd transport the people around in case there were some accidents or they couldn't start a plane they would then take them to another aircraft, so there was always a spare aircraft. But it was the little village, was called Gransden,

02:00 Small Gransden and Great Gransden but there was nothing great about them but that was how the station was, it was and in the end every, most of our air crew were given a bicycle to get to a station to their crew rooms of a day time and night times, they were usually moated back to their mess for a meal after we'd flown but

So

02:30 **you mentioned yesterday that you'd seen some of the effects of the bombings on Manchester and Liverpool?**

Yeah, and London of course we'd been in London too and yes there was great devastation in London, particularly it was, thing that was you saw the worst of wars where houses in whole blocks had gone. It wasn't a very

03:00 good sight. They even, I think it was in The Strand there was the old church which they called the oranges and lemon Church, I forget the name of it now but it was really badly ruined and I think the Australian government helped rebuild it after the war. It wasn't that far from Australia House but it, the devastation was unreal.

What was the

03:30 **mood amongst the people of England at this time?**

They were all very happy. They could see we were going to win eventually. Churchill had the right message and they believed in him and by the time we got there the Battle of Britain had been won. The air force had been able to control the Luftwaffe coming in. Not that they didn't still make approaches into England but not in the volume but they met

04:00 the opposition and that was the greatest thing. The Spitfire people, their casualties were enormous but by God they were brave.

Now you mentioned you were talking a bit before about you know the location and the layout of the aerodrome where you were. What were the living conditions like?

There was no running water in our huts or anything like that. We had to go to

04:30 ablutions, we had to go to the mess hall and they were attached to the mess hall or adjacent to the mess, the sergeants' mess or the other ranks' mess and the officers' mess was in a similar instance and there it was a bit of a nuisance. You had in the side a huge water tank in the ground or a reservoir in case there was a fire and you

05:00 could put the fire out, and the huts were comfortable. They were Nissen huts with a pot belly stove in the middle and if you could scrounge enough coal you could make that thing hum and we certainly did. We knew how to get coal but you put up with that. That wasn't too bad, even though in the middle of winter it was

05:30 nice to get back to your hut because somebody would keep the fire going. It was never out but....

Tell me a bit about your room mates?

Well most of them were the Australians that I had travelled with or come from Northern Ireland and the other two stations. There are five, six of us in that plus myself made seven in that

06:00 one hut as well as a few English, about another six Englishman might be seven Englishman something like that. But they were all compatible. No fights, no arguments, they were just good mates they were cause not much good to argue. You never know if you were going to be alive next day or not so that, that we got on very, very well and our friendships carried on after the war, with some of them,

06:30 those that lived in Sydney there was only a couple that lived in Sydney but afterwards, I always kept in contact with a fellow in Adelaide and one that's lived in Canberra so I haven't seen, well I'm the last one that I know of in Sydney now. Age has taken its toll and

07:00 illness too and unfortunately we've lost, I've lost me best mate but he was a good navigator too.

And he was there with you?

Yeah he was there and at Evans Head on the ship going over to America we enjoyed each other's company in America. We were on the ship together to England

07:30 or the UK, went to northern Ireland together. Went to Warboys and Witton together and then finally and we were separated on the way home because he was only a Warrant Officer and I'd got me commission by that time so he came one way and I went later on.

What was his name again?

Jack Craddock.

That's right.

Yeah, Jack was a great guy.

08:00 **It must have been great to have someone to share your whole experience with.**

Yes, oh yes, well when this fellow wrote out to us I don't know how we got, they caught up with us I think it was through a New Zealand, one of the New Zealand boys that, well he was a lot older than we were, he was probably another 10 years older than we were Hank,

08:30 I forget Hank's other name now. He was Dennis Northridge's, from South Australia's pilot and Hank wrote to me about something or other and he then found somebody wrote to him and said they'd found somebody's log book in a tip and wanted to know the story of it and then out of the blue came this other fellow, was going to write the story

09:00 of the squadron and he was a neighbour of one of our pilots and so Jack and I got our heads together and worked out who the crews were again. Each pilot, who his navigator was and this is doing about forty people. Course towards the end of the war we got more crews in than we could handle probably and names were hard

09:30 to come by or their partners were, but Jack and I did this and between the two of us we wrote quite a bit for that fellow to fill in, we sent him the photographs and memories of what life was like so you'll find in that book on 42 Squadron quite a few quotes from Jack and myself and other fellows that were on the Squadron

10:00 but.

It must be marvellous to have the history written down yeah?

Yes it was and this fellow had done it so completely. He'd gone to war records and got all the, he got everything that made it possible. Got who was flying that night and you know there was no disputing it. It was a very good effort.

Now tell me, tell us a bit more about the radar because I believe that was a new technology at the time

10:30 **that you had to train on?**

Yeah this was the G box. It was a box that gave us information off radio beams where we could fix, a spot on the map where we were across, you had to get two beams on, you read the two beams or they gave us a signal on the dial of the, of the cathode ray tube and you then applied that to the map

11:00 and that was where your position was, then you'd do that for another three minutes later then another three minutes later and that gave you a straight line course that you were on and you could see if you were on your course or if you were off and that also by working that you were able to find out what the wind velocity was and what direction it was coming from, so then if necessary you altered

11:30 course to get back onto your own true track and but then the Americans had one very similar called LORAN [Long Range Navigation], L-O-R-A-N but we could never get it because it was being jammed by the Germans so much but this G was never jammed at all. We preferred it completely. Then we had another thing which was a bit of a

12:00 radar controlled thing called boozer. Now boozer was a little thing out the tail of the aircraft and it had two lights on in the cockpit. One was yellow and the other one was red. Now if you, the yellow light came on that meant you were being picked up by the German radar and if the red light came on it meant that a

12:30 fighter plane was being directed towards you and if the red light turned to cherry red you had to get out of the way, you had to take evasive action immediately because he was within, I think a mile of you at the time but that was the other piece. That was the only radar that we had in the Mosquito.

And did you ever have an incident where your boozer light went cherry red?

- 13:00 Yes, yes we, I quite often. I think on my second raid which was to Hamburg and which wasn't a very pleasant place to go to at the best of times. It was because it was a large naval area and was very well protected and they would send up that much flak, it was just unbelievable. It was like putting a carpet in and they call it box flak so that they'd have some
- 13:30 guns that are a certain height exploding, some shells exploding at a certain height and some under in volume and if you flew into it you were gone, you were, but then if it was only lightish flak you knew there was going to be a fighter coming around somewhere and we used to do a lot of spoof raids for the heavies. In other words the heavies would take off hours after us say for Kiel Canal
- 14:00 and we would then pass them in flight and we would proceed to say Heligoland which is a little island off the German coast and then start to throw window, which was aluminium strips of out of the aircraft. We had a little chute in the floor of the aircraft and we'd push this window out, which would fog up
- 14:30 the German radar thinking it was more aircraft and we would then turn around Heligoland and head for Hamburg and we would take their fighters with us and we might have about 20 aircraft doing this and the heavies would be going past Heligoland without much fighter escort, without much fighter attack. We'd take the fighters with us because they thought the main force was
- 15:00 coming to Hamburg and this was one of the ways we outfoxed the Hun. It was very dangerous for us at times because we could draw a lot of fighters away from the main heavier tanks. We didn't always spoof for the heavies. We had our own targets and I think in Donald Bennett's, Air Vice Marshal Donald Bennett's book he said, "We did some wake up calls too, that we'd kept
- 15:30 awake the whole nation awake of a night time." and he said, "You could hear the words over the air, "Achtung Achtung! Mosquito." and of course we couldn't say that but he used to say, "You could hear this Mosquito's were coming." and we'd fly over every night not half a dozen towns or close to them. Ones which were
- 16:00 industrial in particular. Not though the Ruhr, we didn't do much on the Ruhr because by that time the armies were getting close to the Ruhr and the heavies were belting hell out of it anyway, so Cologne, Düsseldorf, Essen and we weren't needed there but we were keeping mainly on railway tracks, railway lines and we never, sometimes we never knew what the target was
- 16:30 because we bombed on target indicators. See the Pathfinders would lead the way and then they would drop their target indicators over their target. Now it could have been a railway station or a cross road or and we would just line up on that target on the yellow on the coloured target indicators. Now they alternated the
- 17:00 colours of them because the Hun got a bit careful and used to plant his own target indicators out particularly round Berlin as to outfox us but we were a bit clever, oh our the British were a lot clever. They used to have stars in their yellow target indicators. They could never copy the tartan ones. They could copy the reds and blues but they couldn't get the yellow but then
- 17:30 there'd be stars coming out of some of them, so we would know which was the right target indicator to bomb on.

So when you, I obviously I'm a bit of a novice in all this but when you say an indicator would that be an indicator coming from the ground. Is that what?

No they dropped them from the aircraft.

Oh I see.

And they can float too. If you had heavy cloud over the target they would

- 18:00 float say a thousand feet up. If they knew what the level of the cloud was they could be floaters as well.

So who would lay the indicators?

The Pathfinders.

The Pathfinders would right.

Now the Pathfinders had a very good radar system called Oboe. Now this Oboe sent out a beam through the target from England in a great circle

- 18:30 and they had cross lines beams going across it on the approach. Now if you could imagine you're going to Berlin you saw a, saw a beam going from north to south like the right hand side of a circuit, a circle and then there were cross sections going across it, the pilot would fly, that Pathfinder pilot
- 19:00 would fly to that first beam and he'd get a signal that said "You've hit this beam, now turn right and then fly down the beam and you'll get the signal, a Morse code signal A on this side N on this side like da or da dit." If you got da dit you had to get back onto the centre of the blurred signal and then you'd get a section cross section
- 19:30 identify itself and until he got to the target and the radar told him when to drop his bombs. It was

perfect so that they could guarantee within 50 yards of their target the bombs that would go in the target indicators'd go down.

So the Pathfinder would put down, put out the indicators?

Yep.

Would they also put out bombs?

Yep

20:00 yep.

They would?

They'd do both if need be.

But the indicators would be for you to come and to do the back up bombing right?

Yeah.

So can you just for the, just to make it clear to me can you describe exactly what a Pathfinder was?

He was an expert trained navigator and pilot, mainly the navigator was an expert. They took fellows

20:30 that had done probably a tour and were good at navigation and the pilots were much the same. They had.... some of the Lancasters used to be Pathfinders too. They used to go out and mark but they used to use another system H2S but I couldn't tell you what H2s was because we were never involved with it but it used to bounce onto the ground and come back to the aircraft and

21:00 it, I think that was what it was all about and they were able, the Germans were able to latch onto it somehow and find where the aircraft was and of course problems for that until they came out with Oboe which made it a lot better but that was the main marking system.

It's a fascinating system.

Oh it is, it was, they were brilliant the boffins [scientists] were brilliant people

21:30 there were no two ways about it.

Yeah it's a fabulous invention too that Oboe marking?

Oh it was.

So I want to go back to your first flying operation and I'd like you to talk us through the first, your first operation from start to finish?

Well the first operation was when your name went up on the board that you were flying that night so

22:00 you'd report to the crew room at a certain hour and they would announce the target and then the weather forecasters would be there and give you the proposed or the winds and the air velocity of the winds and the navigation officer would give you the route, which was what you would travel. They would lay out the route

22:30 because you didn't go in a straight line. That was never on. You did various turns towards the target but never in a straight line. Probably because they wanted you to miss certain towns and what have you. Now my first place was to Hanover. Well Hanover relative was to be a quiet place and we, I forget what hour

23:00 we left, it'd be at night anyway and I was scared stiff I'll tell you that, you know scared stiff. This is something really new in my life. Will I survive tonight or not because you'd seen the casualties by this time, one of our mates that had been in course with us was killed on a station nearby. He went missing but and one of the other fellows

23:30 over at Oakington, I think it was Oakington he was at, he was killed too or missing again and so you were a bit wary of the first time and you hoped that somebody was on your side. You mightn't have to be a religious person but you always thought I hope somebody's with me and you would climb into that aircraft, after the briefing you didn't leave the

24:00 crew room usually. You didn't go back to the mess for a meal like or anything like that. The mess, the meal came afterwards. You would go out to your aircraft which was already primed, filled with petrol and bombed up ready to go. You'd climb in; we had had a collapsible ladder which we went in underneath the aircraft.

24:30 The pilot went in first because he had to sit on the left hand side of the navigator. We sat, I sat on the right, the navigator, the right hand side of the plane. He sat a little in front of me on the left hand side because I had to have a desk to work on which was about two foot square and I had a light which showed a picture

- 25:00 of or a light about six inches diameter on my map and we worked with pencils so you had to stick all your pencils in case you broke, the lead
- 25:30 and the Mosquito was built so we climbed in underneath it. Anyway my parachute went down in the nose or near the nose of the aircraft. The bomb sight was in the nose. The starting, the oxygen was on controls and petrol controls were at my right hand side so I controlled the petrol and the oxygen and behind the pilot's seat
- 26:00 where he had some armour plating, steel plating I had nothing, I had the starter motors or the starter plugs or whatever they wanted to call them. I don't know what they ever called them but when the engines start to tick over a bit I had to shove these levels in and that would kick the motors over and would really start them off and then I'd pull them off when we shut down and
- 26:30 , that was my responsibility too. The pilot flew the plane. That was his job. The navigator was responsible for everything else. Our only protection was a Verey pistol in the roof of the aircraft which fired out the colours of the day or in distress signals. We also had an RT [radio transmitter] in the aircraft which was called IFF, Identification Friend or Foe
- 27:00 and that was my responsibility to turn it on when we came back over when we were flying over England and not have it on over Germany. We kept it off over there.

And what was that, a special kind of light?

That no, that was a signal to the ground that they could pick up from their radar, they could pick up that we were friendly aircraft.

And also you just mentioned before a pistol for colours?

Yeah, a Verey pistol

- 27:30 very, V-E-R-Y or E-Y, it was in the roof of the aircraft. It was a big, oh shell like much bigger than oh about an inch thick, inch in diameter so that they were used only for emergency if anybody was firing at you say over England you could fire the colours of the day.

What's the colour of the day?

That would be a flare,

- 28:00 a flare which'd be go up and show so that even if you were coming back and you had no lights on or radar to help you and you flew over your aerodrome, you blew put a red cap in and you fired it saying "I'm in distress, let me in first." So they put everybody up a section and you came in in front of them because you were a menace without any lights. The lights were small you know, they weren't huge.

- 28:30 **So what were the other colours like if you were there, other coloured flares that would?**

No, mainly just the red we had.

Right OK.

But some had colours of the day but we never carried them.

So OK, so you're walking through your first mission?

So we, right and then we're set and we start the engines off and away we start to taxi down the runway then we get to the approach to the runway and

Just, just sorry, just, when you're setting off

- 29:00 **is there a certain protocol that the Captain would talk the pilot, talk you through or are you all silent at this point?**

We're all silent, all silent and we get down, we know that we've a lot of the time to get down to the runway. We're 12 aircraft to be on the one spot at the one time sort of thing, so we just trail each other down to the runway and then the ground staff ground controller

- 29:30 will fire, not fire, he will light his lantern red for stop, green for turn on and we'd get the green from the control tower, from the controller and away we'd go. Now, no voice would be given at all at the time and we'd race down. The Mosquito as I've told you before is a dangerous aircraft on the ground because

- 30:00 it will swing, so we take off rather slowly at first and get the tail up and we are racing down the runway at about 150 knots, which is probably closer to 200 miles an hour, forget the maths in it now and then gradually the wheels come up and I start work, getting the pilot to height, reading

- 30:30 the radar as I'm going along, I'll be having my radar set. Also I've got the distributor for the disposal of the bombs. There's a distributor which says I can unload one at a time or two at a time or three at a time or the whole lot four at a time but they're all safe at that time. The bombs are fused. Whether they're going to be used on an hourly

- 31:00 delay or instant delay explosion or 24 hour explosion , but they have these hooks in them in like a stopper in the fuse, so when the bombs dropped, that stopper remained on the clip in the aircraft and you always, when you came back, you always looked in the bay of the aircraft to see all the clips were there and you thought, "Oh thank Goodness for that.
- 31:30 Anyway when we'd climbed to height, you'd be climbing to height and we'd have our oxygen masks on. Now we had two means of communication. One was intercom on the aircraft and one was very VHF, Very High Frequency Radio which we could contact the ground at any time but we normally spoke for most of the way with intercom, "Pilot to navigator, navigator to pilot."
- 32:00 When we got to height I'd take bearings from the radar system the G box and work out where we were, how the wings were if they were as predicted as we were told, make adjustments to our flight, necessarily see if we were too early. We might dog leg, say you fly
- 32:30 90, not 90 degrees, eight 60 degrees left, say what they call 60 degrees left for a minute or two minutes, then come back another two minutes, so we were doing a little V shaped turn to maintain the right speed, right timing and later afterwards when they had so many rookie crews there..... was not that we weren't in waves, where we were
- 33:00 rookies too the leading aircraft may fire off a mark, a route marker like a green Verey Pistol flare and so that you knew you were right on track. Sometimes one of themand then you might see his contrails or his vapour trails behind him. You thought oh well I'm on the way with the right fellow,
- 33:30 the man's up in front right. Anyway this as I said, Hanover was supposed to be a quiet place but unfortunately one of our fellows' system which was proved to be faulty later was his VH system and they couldn't turn the VHF off, so all the conversation between pilot and navigator wasn't on the intercom, was going out over Germany on the, they were picking up his voice messages and they were getting the
- 34:00 tracks that we were coming into Hanover and of course they had time to prepare and it was rather a bit, instead of light flak we got heavy moderate to heavy flak that night and I thought, "Geeze if this is supposed to be light I'd hate to see it heavy!"

So what actually happened? You're in the plane, you're heading towards Hanover, you've got your wind velocity readings

Yeah.

etc. Just if you could give a,

- 34:30 **be a camera for us and take us through what actually happened that first action that you flew in ?**

Then when I decided which is the correct wind velocity and I've taken about three or four before we get there.

So this is on the trip to Hanover?

Yeah, on the trip to Hanover.

Yeah OK.

I then get into the bomb nose and adjust the speed, the wind velocity and the direction of it on the bomb sight. Now the bomb sight was a very intricate sort

- 35:00 of instrument but it still depended on visual sighting, so this allowed, the bomb would drift because the plane was drifting. The wind would carry it, so we would correct that by adjusting the bomb site, so then at the appointed couple of minutes, a minute or so before we'd shoot a bomb, I would then climb into the
- 35:30 nose of the aircraft on my belly more or less and sight, get the sight lit up and then the flares'd go down to mark the target and I'd tell the the pilot to open the bomb doors and then I would then guide him onto the target. He would not be able to guide
- 36:00 us on. I would be able to guide him because I had the sight set and I'd say, "Right, steady, right, right, right, steady, steady, left, no, back to right a bit." until we were dead on line with those flares. And then when we got the flare in the cross section of the target we'd just release the bombs and then he would then close the bomb doors
- 36:30 and then probably over the North Sea he would open the bomb doors and press the button, he had a button too, in case of fault and he wouldn't jet us and he'd bomb if it was on. Some bombs did hang up so that he had another one to send if it was necessary. Then we'd turn around,
- 37:00 then we'd fly it back making more wind adjustments because this helped the weather forecasters back home. So eventually after say another hour and a half, two hours we'd sight England. Now if our radar gear failed on us we could transmit, call up a station called Large Type and Large Type

- 37:30 we would transmit it and say, "This is Flamingo H Harry to Large Type, can you give me a course to base?" and they'd come back in seconds and say, "Fly course 274 to base." It was that quick, just amazing, plus the fact if you were caught out in Germany coming back without any radar you always had the Northern Star on your port, on your
- 38:00 starboard side and that was practically true north, so if you kept right angles to it you were doing roughly 270. It was 360 degrees away 270, so if you kept it on your port, the starboard tip of the plane, so you had that too until you got in the North Sea or where you thought you were in the North Sea you could transmit and get a fix and that took you back into your own base which was called
- 38:30 Ardmore. We had Ardmore, was the base name. R for radio and the, our planes all were Flamingo, Flamingo H Harry or Flamingo B Beer, so then we'd safely land we hoped and then go to debriefing. Luckily our dispersal point was about 50 yards from the crew room so we didn't have to wait for
- 39:00 trucks or anything like that. The only thing was that when you threw your parachute out, if the ground staff picked it up by the wrong handle your parachute might be flying, opened up and flying across the aerodrome but they soon learnt not to handle the silver button, silver ring on it because ours sat on the
- 39:30 chest. The pilot sat on, he sat on his parachute. I sat on my raft, you know dinghy. We still had dinghies for if we had to go into the water, we had our own separate rubber floating.

An inflatable thing?

An inflatable thing and then we went to briefing and all the questions were asked, "How

- 40:00 did you find the target? Was it heavy, how many search lights did you have? Did you see any searchlights? Did you see any fighters? Any troubles with the aircraft? Any troubles with the radar? Did you drop your bombs on time?" And that was that and the padre'd be there to dish out a dose of rum for everybody who wished to partake
- 40:30 but I think it was, we had a heated aircraft, we only wore clothes, like you I'm dressed today with just a jacket on and except with flying boots because it got damned cold on your feet, particularly when you put the hold in the window thing in because it was hollow and you threw out the window, the breeze came in and sometimes the temperatures outside were minus 60 degrees.

Tape 6

- 00:32 **I want to return to your first action to Hanover and I want you to describe to me that particular trip that you took and what you were feeling and what was going on in your head at the time?**
- Well I don't think we had much time to think we were so busy working
- 01:00 but you always were aware that there was danger ahead or danger about. You were hoping that the aircraft'd be good, wouldn't fail. You had these thoughts or I did on this first trip. You wondered how good your pilot was under pressure. He had already experienced 34 trips in previous old Wellington bombers
- 01:30 and he had 1500 hours flying up so you had a certain amount of faith in him but you didn't know him well enough under pressure and he didn't know me under pressure, either I could have cracked but it was something new for me and I thought I've got to make the most of this. I don't want to be a coward or anything like that like some people were.
- 02:00 We hadn't much experience on the squadron because we'd only been formed about a month beforehand so there was no great experiences to say what the fellows, the young fellows experienced so we, I felt that you know it was certainly strange, it was a strange new world when you're flying up about 28,000 feet and then you're
- 02:30 flying through turbulent atmosphere that your plane rocks and bumps and then you hit the air stream of another aircraft and you wonder what the hell that was, how close am I going to fly, on top of him, and things like this did go through your mind on that first occasion because when you're told that the bombing hour is say 11 pm - 2300 hours
- 03:00 that means there might be 70 aircraft trying to bomb at that one hour, that one minute and at the same height on the same route into there, into the target so the chances of a collision were great and I think some of our losses came from collisions in the night striking force and these all went through your mind,
- 03:30 after a while you found that you got to the target and thought that wasn't too bad. The flak was there, we dodged it or it didn't quite get to us so we had a adviser on the aerodrome or for the group, we used to call him Major Flak because he reckons that 28,000 of the Germans had no chance of hitting us with their flak but

04:00 we could prove him wrong at times but he gave you that confidence that you're safe at that height.

So the flak was being fired from the ground?

From the ground yeah and it came up, in Hanover I said was moderate to heavy but it wasn't heavy, like some targets were later on.

So what was that, what went through your head when you were under enemy fire for the first time?

Well the worst one was

04:30 the next raid was to Hamburg, I think it was to Hamburg and they really opened up onto everything. They really blackened the sky with flak and what have you and then on the approaches in the aircraft I think we were hit three times lightly, not hard. We had had marks on the aircraft which we didn't know we were hit even and somebody said, "Oh you've got three marks near the, some flak's fallen

05:00 on you." but they didn't do any damage but you also had the chance in a place like Hamburg of being coned with the searchlights. Now that shattered you really. You know here you were 28,000 or odd feet up in the air in a nice bright light. Then the flak'd stop

05:30 but of course they'd have their searchlights from some distance out and you would fly into the target area then out of it and you could still be caught in the searchlights because you can imagine the searchlights might start off at the ground at three feet wide up at 28,000, they might be half a mile wide you know you've seen searchlights like that so you had

06:00 to take evasive action all that time in case there was a fighter pilot because they wouldn't use their radar on you, they could see you and they'd come whizzing. Now the jets'd hone, they had some jet fighters the Germans Messerschmitt 262s I think their number was and they could come flying down on you, make one pass because they didn't have the power to get back again they were so,

06:30 used up so much petrol to get up there above us and they could only make one pass so you kept evasive action by changing course backwards and forwards, up and down and that was a bit hairy, that was a bit frightening but the aircraft'd stand it so you had to.

So can you describe a time when you were caught

07:00 **in a searchlight?**

Yeah, that was over Hanover we, not Hanover, Hamburg and then again later in Berlin.

Can you talk us through what happened at Hamburg when you flew into the light?

Yeah well we flew in and we had to keep course because we wanted, had to bomb so we took, you took the odds that you were safe and so you

07:30 went in there to bomb but as soon as you bombed you took evasive action, the pilot would take evasive action by diving a thousand feet, climbing a thousand feet, turning left, turning right and then I'd given him the course out of the target, would be roughly on that course and then we would get out of the cone of the searchlight and then it was all, we were very happy again.

08:00 **So when you were directing the pilot to the target and you told him to release the bomb at a particular moment was?**

No, I released the bomb.

Oh you released the....

I released the bombs.

bomb right OK. So did you stick around long enough to see if the bomb hit the targets?

No, no way. No, no as soon as that bombs away course and so you had that in your mind as soon as the bombs went.

So how

08:30 **did you know if your bombing was successful?**

Well at 28,000 feet you wouldn't see them explode; you were too far miles away.

So I guess that information would be relayed much later?

Yeah.

Right.

If you had a camera, we often had cameras in the aircraft which were automatic and they would say where if your bombs landed on a certain spot or not and you'll find that

09:00 in that book that that Englishman wrote, he recorded how somewhere, some landed but no we were too high to even see them. If there was a Mosquito with a 4,000 pound bomb on you'd see that, you'd see the flash of that because that was a big explosion. It was a semi blockbuster. It made a hell of a mess, a 4,000 pounder

09:30 nothing like us but they were better but you saw it, where they did go.

And was there ever a moment of reflection after you'd bombed particularly civilian targets or targets where there may have been civilians nearby? Was there ever?

War's war. You don't worry about civilians. They didn't worry about English

10:00 people or Scottish people or Irish people and I think it was the same with us. You couldn't be held responsible. You did the best to your knowledge. You bombed what was supposed to be an industrial spot or a freight terminal. No, you couldn't worry about that. I think afterwards, you, it never went through your head,

10:30 you were doing a job. You had to beat them and that was it regardless of what way you did it. If they killed a few, if we could knock a few houses over and close a road off which had transport on it, good luck we were happy to do that and that was I think, never went through our mind that way but the Brit, the brains of the organisation thought that was alright.

11:00 We obeyed their orders so there was it was, just a job; unfortunately not a pleasant one but was full of danger to both sides.

Now I'm interested to know how you felt after your first action?

I was very much relieved. I thought this is not bad.

11:30 The aircraft performed well, the pilot went marvellously well and I did well and when the navigation officer had a look at my flight workings he said, "Very good." so I thought, "I've passed, I'm on the way." And then after I think the next big one was New Year's Eve,

12:00 no before that, just before Christmas the fog started to move in and General 'Blood and Guts' Patton of the American Army had advanced so far ahead without bringing up his flanks in the Ardennes salient and the Germans were giving him hell because they got round the side of his flanks, so we were called out on Christmas Eve to,

12:30 bomb this town called Limburg, which was a supply area for the German Army close to the Ardennes salient and it was a piece of cake you know, it was not a very protected area at all but when we got back to base one of our, I think it was that night the pilot and fog was there,

13:00 that's right, fog was on a drome and one of the pilots came in on a on a beam approach and he undershot the runway and crashed and the plane caught fire which was a bit amazing. They were made of wood and anyway the navigator Lindy got out of it and as he got out through the top hatch

13:30 and then he saw his pilot wasn't coming out so he went back and rescued his pilot and both of them got burns so our aerodrome was closed for the night, so then they shot us off to a place called Downham Market which was another aerodrome in our group and we stayed, spent our Christmas there for three days and

14:00 before we could go back to our own drome but he, the navigator, got I think it was the OBE [Order of the British Empire] for bravery for that that was a frightful experience with fog. Luckily this aerodrome we went to had FIDO there which is Fog Disposal Unit [actually Fog Investigation and Dispersal Operation] and they would turn this, was lines of pipes down the runway,

14:30 which was fed with petrol and they would light it and they would try and disperse the fog. Now luckily we got there when it wasn't needed, it was just clear but for the, I think for the next two or three days we were stuck on that aircraft because we couldn't get off the ground and eventually we flew back to base after a couple of days.

So you?

15:00 That was a shocker you know, when your aircraft caught fire on your own home ground two of your fellows were hurt. That was bad luck.

And you actually saw that?

No, no we didn't see it, we were, the fog was that thick you couldn't see anything on the ground but he apparently had got in fast coming back. See we had plans laid out to us that you had a certain speed

15:30 to come back at and go out at to conserve petrol. Now petrol, the RAF looked at, petrol was a very precious commodity and those tanker ships bringing it from America and elsewhere don't waste it because a lot of those poor coots are getting killed bringing it over here, so you couldn't get petrol anywhere on the base. You couldn't say to the fellow, "Can you fill my car up?" if you had a car. No way, that was

16:00 not on at any time and so it was a terrible thing for this to happen. It was just unbelievable and that knocked the socks out of us a bit when we saw the result of it later.

What was the result?

A burnt aircraft smashed up, everything in ashes you know, just the engines and propellers there, the metal parts, it wasn't a pleasant site

16:30 for a novice.

What did that do to the morale of the people at the aerodrome?

Oh you got over it after a day. It didn't sit in your brain at all. You kept it out and on the New Year's Eve to make us really happy in celebrating the New Year, they sent us to Berlin with bombs for the first of January so

17:00 and that was that, was the worst thought in my mind. I'm going to Berlin. Why would I want to go to Berlin, the capital? You could see London was well protected and look what happened there. How? What's Berlin like? Well I think when we hit Berlin there were 400 searchlights up, was like day

17:30 and you took that much evasive action you could have been ill with air sickness but we got out of it alright no problems, but be caught for five minutes in a searchlight wasn't very good at all. I wouldn't sell it as a best seller, it was not that and then after that I think we went on

18:00 10 days leave. We got 10 days leave every six weeks because we were worn out. We were flying probably every second or third night.

Now tell me what was Christmas like that year?

Well we were guests of another station and of course we had no money so we couldn't buy any liquor

18:30 but they put on a good spread for us, you know it was a real good English Christmas. Like poultry, the puddings, everything went well with it. They really did us fine. Mind you I think they treated the air force like little tin gods. We were the favoured number even though the army was on

19:00 the continent then but they still thought the air force was something wonderful and we were spoilt. You know we got clean sheets to sleep between. When I got my commission they used to bring hot water to the bedside so we could wash and shave beside the bed, it was just you know they treated us like tin gods, it was wonderful I enjoyed it. Never been served

19:30 up so well in my life but it was strange being away and it was our first sign of snow and hoar frost and we were cold. It was just I think we spent most of the time at this station down on markets sitting in front of a big fire and then we had learnt the system of mulling beer you know you put the hot poker in the fire and

20:00 pull it out and shove it in your pot of beer but we remained sober, we didn't overdo it because we were being shouted by friends. Couple of them we knew because they were Australians. Never seen 'em again but they were good to us to

Now how many trips, how many flights did you do?

I did 41 all told.

41?

I think I did 17 to Berlin

20:30 and none of them were very pleasant. I think they took up roughly between four and five hours. It was about a 1,200 mile trip and we could have been faster if we wanted to by speeding up but we didn't, we, one we were away on our first leave,

21:00 we had one of our aircraft crash in a church yard at Gransden because he ran out of petrol. He was, probably he was a pilot, (UNCLEAR) and they were killed instantly but he it would appear and it never came out that he may have

21:30 come back too fast and overtaxed his engines and overused the petrol because of all our trips we did, there was never any shortage of petrol. We had ample, so that the pilot never thought we'll have to land at the coast or anywhere else and so I think that was the opinion at the time. Whether it was true or not but we were on

22:00 leave that day so that week and then when we came back our flight commander, Squadron Leader Don and his Canadian, he was an Englishman and he was a nice quiet guy and his Canadian navigator Allan went missing, so you know and that was January and that that was a frightful time you didn't think too hot of it, was frightful

22:30 that and you didn't want to experience too much of that and then things went a bit bad for us. I think it was on the flight to Hamburg we were, I was down the nose ready to bomb and the pilot said to me,

"Have a look at the starboard engine." and here's.... the propellers have stopped, have a look at the port

23:00 and I could see both sides - it's stopped. Thought, "God this is the end of it for us." you know, "We're going to be prisoners of war if I'm not careful." He said, "We forgot to change the petrol tanks." so anyway with that I pulled myself out of the nose of the aircraft, changed the tanks over well that seemed to be eternity before the engines started again,

23:30 thank God for the pilot's knowledge. The engines started but at the same time when I was scrambling out I broke my oxygen pipe off my mouth piece and I was going out to it and he realised this, so Willie grabbed me and pulled me back, took my mask off and shoved the tube down the throat, or into my mouth

24:00 and then I gradually regained my senses and with the oxygen tube in my mouth I went back into the air into the nose and eventually bombed the target but that was the worst air experience I ever had. The things that went through your mind for those two seconds, "One engine, two engines God, what's gone wrong? Have we been hit?" You didn't know

24:30 and then when he says change the petrol for goodness sake. We'd gone to extremes out on one lot of tanks and when we changed over we were OK, oh eventually we were. We'd lost a few thousand feet and we got into flak range then and we soon climbed up and did a bit of a circuit and then went back on and attacked the

25:00 target at the proper angle.

So you at this point would always have an oxygen mask on?

Yeah, yeah.

Right.

And your speaker was here too, so you just a flick of the speaker at your mouth and the oxygen tube went in, well you were breathing it all the time.

So you actually almost lost consciousness?

Yeah, yeah it was close to it,

25:30 it was getting that way. He felt that I was but he knew what had happened, he gathered, which I thought was very pleasing. He was a good guy after that.

So it sounds like after a while you start to develop a really close relationship with your pilot?

Oh yes, yes he was a good guy. We used to go; we always went on leave together. We'd go down to London and he'd go and visit his relatives

26:00 and I'd go to Boomerang House and see if I could find any. Boomerang House was where the Australians met, it was at the back of Australia House and they had a bit of a canteen there where they, the luxury item was waffles with ice cream, so you know we had a queue up to get our waffle and ice cream but you'd meet other fellows there that you knew or

26:30 you'd struck up on your, or you might make a friendship there. And then you might go down to the Codger's Pub which was down in Fleet Street off a little lane, off Fleet Street behind the Daily Express building and it was where the Australians congregated for their drinks and you'd always strike, might strike somebody you met on course, often you didn't. You didn't meet anybody but you would meet, have company and they were,

27:00 the publican and the daughter were lovely people and I think the Australian in charge of the troops was carrying on with the barmaid, the daughter. She was lovely, they were beautiful people you know, they weren't the usual run of barmaid, well I don't know what barmaids are like but the ones you see in films they're not like, she wasn't anything like that. These were complete ladies

27:30 and then I'd go up to a family in Stafford and I'd stay the rest of the time there, resting sleeping or.... he was a husbandry officer of the County of Stafford, so I'd go out in the car with him inspecting livestock and having a look around properties and it was a lot of good and then I'd, I was a favourite with the

28:00 kids because Mum used to send me a fruit cake over you know, in a soldier's tin, and I had these soldiers' tins and we got a flying allowance of sweets. Now I don't know why we ever got it unless the oxygen did something to us that we needed sweets afterwards but I wasn't a great sweet eater, so I used to accumulate these sweets and I'd take this huge tin or you know a round cake tin full with a lid on with sweets

28:30 up to the kids, so I was wonderfully received there and you know here's the three kids, one for you, one for me, one for you and dealing them out and I used to, I was introduced to them by an uncle of mine that had met them or met their father going back to England on the boat. He went over and joined the Red Cross as an ambulance driver in London Blitz and then he eventually went out to

29:00 Rhodesia with the air force and he wrote and said, "I'd like you to meet these people." so I rang them and they said, "Oh, we'd love to see you." so I used to spend a lot of leaves with them.

How important was that down time?

Oh great. You needed it. You were worn out. You were tired because you were up, you might be up all night and you might, you'd get there at eight o'clock, half past eight in the morning, you'd be there at midnight

29:30 and you mightn't get back till two o'clock in the morning. Then you'd go back to bed for a few hours, then you'd be up at eight o'clock again in case you were flying again that night so it was good sleeping time really. We never abused ourselves, and the squadron stood down one day in the month and then we might adjourn to a hotel, a pub. We used to go to a little pub, place called

30:00 Eltisley up the end of one of the roads. You'd say to one of the locals, "What's up the end of that road?" "Never been up there mister." Never been up that far and that was the English. They never travelled anywhere so we went up to this little pub at Eltisley and it was run by an ex-Navy fellow and we, on the second time we went up, we had a fellow that played the double bass, one of our fellows, he was a double bass champion

30:30 of Northern England, Georgie Richardson and one of the fellows was a beautiful pianist too, so we used to have a sing song and everything you know with a few beers. On the second occasion an old farmer, I'm going in there ordering the beers and this old fellow come out as if he's going to leave. I said, "You're not going to leave?" He said, "I'm going home to get my wife." He enjoyed our company so much and a sing song,

31:00 so it was, so that's the type we were. We weren't disruptionists of any description.

What sort of songs would you sing?

Oh I don't know now. Old English songs, old pack up your troubles and all those sort of things but they put on a good show. It livened the little village up but all the farmers used to live around the place, used to come in. Couldn't get rid of them and no it was great.

31:30 **Sounds like a great old time?**

Yep and then back to work again was no problem.

Now I want to find out more about your relationship with Robert Williams your pilot and that was his name, wasn't it?

Yeah, Robert yeah.

And you know you hinted that you did become very close with your pilot?

Oh, you did become very close to them. You went on leave, you went your own way because he had his friends, he wanted

32:00 to see and his own family and you're just hanging on and you went your way. You tried to see a bit of the country side or you wanted to see a bit of England, so but on you, on nights out say a trip we weren't flying tonight we might go to Cambridge together and have a meal there together and there might be four or five of us or six of us, do a thing like that but we

32:30 always did those things together. You were never, he was going to one dining room or you were going or restaurant you were going to another. You went together. As a matter of fact he said to me one time I was to meet him in London after he, when I was coming back from leave and he said, I don't know how he got in touch with me then. He said, "Meeting outside the Quality

33:00 Inn in Regent Square." I said, "Oh righto, oh Leicester Square." I think it was doesn't matter anyway I meet him there and here's a queue of the people to go into the place and next thing I said, "Come on, get down the end of the queue." and he said, "No, we go in first." I said, "You're joking." and he said to the doorman, "I am Lieutenant Flight Lieutenant Williams." "Oh yes, come in Mr Williams." He had been there the night

33:30 before and the couple of nights before and he was having his meal, it was a bit quiet, oh his table was and next thing they held the press conference, oh a staff conference on his table, so he went and complained to the management that he was upset. It upset his meal. He'd come down and the fellow said, "Oh well, we can't have that Mr Flight Lieutenant Williams." he said "Could you join us?" He said, "Well I'm expecting to meet my navigator

34:00 here tomorrow night in London tomorrow night." "Bring him here for dinner too, it's on the house." So we had a free meal on the house, so those things happen. That was really he, they thought all the girls seemed to chase him you know, I remember one time in Cambridge, he's hiding in between a sandwich board, hiding. "Did Willie come in tonight?" "No haven't seen him." and here he is,

34:30 one of us each side of the opening of the sandwich board hiding him. But he was fun, he was good.

Were pilots more popular than navigators with the girls?

Oh I'd say so, yeah I'd say they were.

And what about girlfriends for you?

No, no I was too young, too inexperienced, too naïve, innocent no. I didn't have time. I thought well there's no point forming a relationship you mightn't be alive tomorrow.

35:00 You'd only break somebody's heart and you didn't want that to happen. Not to a friends that you'd made over there, so it didn't happen, so when we went back to leave I told you Squadron Leader Don was gone and then on the 17th of March on a, don't know where we were going that night, we took

35:30 off with a bomb load on and three quarters down the runway at 150 knots, an engine cut out on us, so the only thing was to crash the aircraft. So he revved it up and pulled the, tried to get the wheels off the ground. He knew he couldn't get it airborne. He just belly landed on the ground.

36:00 I don't know how far we travelled but I know a hedge, you know one of those huge English hedges just disappeared as we, just a flash of flame as hit it and we ended, went through the boundary fence like nothing on earth. That fence fell flat and we ended up in a ditch probably 200, 300 yards from the end of the runway.

36:30 **What?**

We had wiped off and next thing I released the hatch on the top of the aircraft, there was a escape hatch there and we both scrambled out of that and one of the fellows reckoned that I passed him as he was taking off on the runway, I was that fast away from it not knowing if the bombs would blow up or what. You knew they were safe but you didn't know if

37:00 they were split or anything like that the fuses. The bomb itself, it wouldn't matter but the fuse might have cracked or the wire holding the safety pin had broken in the (UNCLEAR).

Did the plane blow up?

No, didn't blow up. It was complete wreck.

So what were you like after that event?

Well the ambulance arrived with a doctor on it,

37:30 he carted us back to the hospital, had a look at us. He said, "I've got the cure for you." and produced a bottle of brandy and that was his cure. We were shaken. Next day I was going up for my commission or one of the interviews for the commanding officer of the squadron, Basil Nathan and Basil said, "Why didn't you put your brakes on?" and I said, "And land on our bloody

38:00 back?" "Oh yeah, you could have too you." I said, "You know put your brakes on and you flip over." I said. "No, oh yeah I didn't think of that." he said, "Good thought." so anyway.

So what was it like when you got into the plane again after that?

No problem, no problem, actually the plane engine was tested by Rolls Royce and there was nothing wrong in it

38:30 but it cut out and it was flooded and cut. I heard it, the pilot heard it. He wouldn't have stopped flying, he wouldn't have stopped it and it would have been good. It was wrong alright but evidence didn't prove it, so anyway he got out, there was no court of enquiry or anything about it so, these things happen on

39:00 operational units but that was our nastiest thing, that was frightening. It was you can see the speed coming and the fences coming the hedges wasn't good at all. That was the worst thing. Raids didn't mean much after that. I thought if I've survived that, I'll survive this war and we did. We

39:30 as I said we did 41 trips and I think he, up, he in total had about 70 odd and no it was.

And here we are today.

Here we are today.

Tape 7

00:32 **Ian, could you talk about the notion of pilots as taxi drivers?**

Yeah well the navigators were always doing the work in the aircraft. They navigated, they turned oxygen on, they changed the petrol, they did all these little things and the pilot just sat there and flew the aircraft and we said you know when things got a bit

01:00 excited, we'd say, "Oh, you're only a taxi driver anyway." and you know they ummed and ahed about that but they took it in good part. It was a bit of fun, was only skylarking with each other but no we couldn't have done it without them of course because they were, they were expert pilots, they were not like some of Sydney taxi drivers were anyways.

Altogether how many pilots did you fly with?

On the squadron I, only

01:30 with him, I did all my raids with him. I might have gone with a pilot for a day night flying test or something or he wanted to test an aircraft but all operations was with Willie.

So to pick up the narrative from where we left off at the last tape?

Well, we had crashed that aircraft and you know that knocked the soul out of us a bit

02:00 and we were bit befuddled but I'd say that we felt that or I felt particularly that I survived that and I was going to survive the rest of the term because that was only about half way through March, middle of March so I had quite a bit of flying to do after that and unfortunately another crew got lost in action shortly afterwards

02:30 too and that, then they were the two, the navigator was a Welsh boy, we used to call him the gentleman farmer and he was a, Johnny Morgan was one of the nicest people you would ever meet and his Welsh brogue was just so beautiful it was and we missed him, we missed him and more than his pilot. I think his pilot; he was a good guy but he

03:00 was not in the same race in the eyes as Johnny Morgan and that was a bit discouraging but anyway we carried on and then I'd been in Boomerang House in London and I met an old school mate, on my next leave I met an old school mate of mine. He was in our class, 'Nippie' Milne, Keith 'Nippie' Milne lived in Burwood and Keith was one

03:30 of our star footballers at Homebush High a sportsman too, and Keith and I had a good old yarn together and he said, "Well I'm sorry." he said, "I've got to catch the train back to base." and he went missing two nights afterwards. That knocked me a bit, that was really hard because, I was with him and then word came through also that another fellow off

04:00 course was killed in an aircraft accident. His pilot was low flying over the aerodrome showing off and he flew into the hospital. Killed both of them outright and then to make matters worse and off that same squadron, which was in our group they were missing in action but fortunately they landed in bailed out of the aircraft and

04:30 they were, got returned to England fairly promptly. But if you'd heard Louis Stinson's remarks about the guns were going off over their heads one way and the others were going the other way he was quite an exaggerator of stories but he was lucky to get back. He was one of the few that we heard had crashed or bailed out and survived but overall the losses

05:00 on our squadron were three crews, was just absolutely amazing. Mainly I think because the maintenance crews did their jobs thoroughly. The radar gears usually operated, there were occasions when you thought they did were too good for you, you know. Everything seemed to go so well it, you never had, well in all the trips the radar went off once

05:30 that we had no communication with anybody and we just flew back to base. We knew our course, we could find that, that was no trouble, I was a good navigator apparently and I got us back to base.

How did you navigate back on that basis?

Well we pre planned the, you also pre planned your return so we couldn't,

06:00 we kept the northern star on our starboard wing and then eventually our aerodrome had its lights on too. They had, it was one of the aerodromes, most of the aerodromes had their light, a name light like GL for Gransden Lodge and luckily we found it. We found we were able to map read a bit,

06:30 it was early morning and we probably map read and came in and landed. I fired the Verey pistol over and fellow said, "You nearly killed me, it landed on my aircraft." you know just jokingly and we went and landed and we were safe so that was the only occasion.

What if there was cloud cover?

We were above it 90 percent of the time. It, the cloud, one reason why the heavies wouldn't fly on many nights

07:00 was because of the cumulonimbus cloud, the storm clouds, the thunder birds. They'd break an aircraft in half with their up currents and down currents, they were so turbulent.

When you say the heavies who are you referring to?

Lancasters and Halifaxes, anything like that and you steered away from them if you could but we could

get above them. We knew where they were and we'd set out mainly in the twilight,

07:30 a lot of twilight and we were warned that there were these clouds about and all of a sudden you'd feel the fringe of it as you flew into one. So then you'd detour around it a bit but no they never worried us but the most amazing thing we had was seeing the Aurora Borealis, the northern lights from the Arctic, we were flying oh very high.

08:00 Apparently we'd flown well up into the north of the North Sea then missed something or coming back and here's the northern lights, unbelievable.

Must have been an extraordinary sight?

It was. Wondered why I didn't know anything about it, you know being a southerner I couldn't, I saw all the oh look at that. They battleships out there? Northern lights, so I learnt very quickly but amazing

08:30 and of course they're only usually in winter you see them but we were pretty, must have been up pretty far, must have got him off course a bit.

Now I've detoured you slightly from the chronology of events. Let's return to that. Could you continue the story on from where we left off?

Well then after that we did all our tours mainly to Berlin. I think the squadron ended up or the group I think

09:00 did about 37 direct nights to Berlin, we did about 30 of it. Air Vice Marshal Bennett was asked at one meeting "Why Berlin again?" He's says, "You'll be going there forever if need be." so he was adamant that we were going to really follow up and beat the hell out of Berlin.

Who was Bennett having that meeting with?

Oh he was

09:30 at some social club which was having a social night and he happened to arrive there and I forget what station it was but he was there. I wasn't there but one of the fellows went and said, "Bennett wasn't very happy at being pulled up by some unknown pilot." He said, "The pilot said it was getting a bit boring." and Bennett

10:00 soon wiped himself of him, got rid of him but then my dear friend Cyril Hassall, our squadron navigation officer said, "I'm going to recommend you for a commission." I said, "Oh good, I'll enjoy that." and he said, "Alright then, you'll see the CO for the squadron." and he's the one I related to that told us to,

10:30 should have put our brakes on before we crashed, we mightn't have crashed and anyway he said, "Look, I'll endorse the application." he said, "I'll make appointment for you to see the station commander Group Captain Dunlop." so I saw Group Captain Dunlop he said, "I'll make arrangements for you to see Mr Bennett." and we waited

11:00 and anyway next word came through that I was to be driven to Huntingdon which was headquarters of number eight group which we were part of. He was commanding officer of eighth group and sitting in the room where his private secretary was, it was a personal assistant as they were called then I think, I can never forget Commander Boyce came, Air Commander Boyce,

11:30 came down, who I knew by sight and he said to the lass, "How's Mr Bennett this morning?" "I wouldn't see him if I were you." and I thought this goes great, doesn't it? So anyway there was another young fellow there, he was a wireless operator and he went in before me and he said when he came out he said, "You know, he tested me all over Morse code and everything." He said, "He really got into me, sending messages

12:00 to me if I could read them and what have you and how I could transmit." He said, "Wait till you get in there and see what he's got." Anyway I went in there and he had this huge map of Europe. He had wirelasses everywhere, information at his fingertips and he asked me quite a few questions about navigation and he said, "Righto, you'll hear from me." and

12:30 he said, "No." he says. "Come back next week, I'd like to have another yarn." I said, "Alright yeah." so I went back the following week. He said, asked me more questions on navigation and how was I progressing. He was an ex Australian. "How are you progressing and were you enjoying what you're doing?" "Yes, yeah no problems." "Good, good squadron life?" "Yes." "Righto,

13:00 you'll be advised shortly of, your commission will come through." So eventually it came through and course I had to be rigged out in a proper uniform, so I get advice to go to London to Australia House to Kodak House where Australian headquarters was situated and they gave me so much money

13:30 to buy shoes not boots, couple of pairs of shoes and ties. "You better get some new ties, a cap." They gave me a cap I think if I remember rightly and, "Here's a tailor we want you to go to." Well I never dreamt in my whole life that I would be dressed by a tailor from Saville

14:00 Row, so went down to Saville Row to a crowd called Carson and Waugh and they made a beautiful uniform for me. I was so proud as punch, I couldn't believe it and I had nobody to celebrate it with. Oh

no I didn't, I had Dougie Johnson with me at the same time. He got his commission too, so Doug was one of our Australian boys, so we both got our

14:30 suits tailored by the same people but when we were there you know, a pilot officer with just one single little braid, I look up and thought, "Hey look Doug, look at the suits he's making for Generals!" oh and you know all the gold braid. It was just incredible but we were there too and it was a reward for service, it was what and so we went

15:00 back and I think the crew, the few fellows in the ground crew lined up on the tarmac so I had to salute them as I walked past them every 10 feet or so. I thought, "You critters get out." but that was the reception. They were a good crew. I wouldn't have known their names under any scheme because they were changing so often. They were good, they were the mainstay of the squadron as far as I was

15:30 concerned.

Before we move too far away from Bennett can you describe him as an individual?

He was a tallish man. He'd joined the Australian Air Force and he found that they couldn't teach him any more so he went to England and he was ordinary flying as he was a wing commander at one time and he flew and he was shot down,

16:00 he was not shot down, I don't think his plane wouldn't have got back to England to my knowledge if I remember rightly, so he went into either Sweden or Norway and he eventually got traded for somebody else and he got back to England and he was convinced that we weren't bombing, or the RAF weren't bombing accurately enough so then he

16:30 devised the plan of special operators who could find a target and he got them off and developing radar systems and what have you and from that he developed the pathfinder group and then he was very quickly promoted to Air Vice Marshal. I think he had the CBE [Commander of the British Empire] he was a,

17:00 well he was an aloof man but you know the, you expect your Air Vice Marshall to be above, to not to socialise with the ordinary ranks that were, but he carried off the job wonderfully well and I think he was a respected by everybody who knew him as an expert. He had his own ideas. He was a great believer in Geoffrey de Havilland

17:30 and I think he and Geoffrey de Havilland hatched up the aircraft, the Mosquito, for night bombing because it helped Geoffrey Havilland, he made some more aeroplanes but.

Bennett sounds a remarkable individual?

He was a remarkable man. He started ferrying aircraft from America to England in formation and he was the pilot navigator in the one aircraft,

18:00 he was brilliant. He was, nothing would stop him. He did that for some time.

Now to bring you back to being an officer and going and being saluted at the aerodrome?

Yeah.

How does your story proceed from here?

Well this was probably about a month before the war ended

18:30 that I got my commission, something like that and the targets were coming a lot less. We were getting some new crews in too and some of them were very rookie types of kids and I was still a kid too, I was only 20 but you know we had one pilot, one navigator I don't know, he was an English boy

19:00 and he wanted to see what was on the other side so he wasn't caring if he got killed or not so we had to contend with and we eventually, he was still with the squadron when it disbanded but he didn't fly very much, we made sure of that. We didn't want a pilot killed because of this nut's ideas and you had people like this. You had but not we, that was the only one I'd ever

19:30 found. You had others on other squadrons which would go out into the North Sea and just circle round the North Sea.

And that was it?

That was it and they'd drop their bombs on the North Sea and they were cowards of some description.

What would their operation sheet say when they returned?

They'd left their IFF on and they were traced all on, every bit of movement they made.

Sorry what

20:00 **was their IFF?**

Their Identification Friend or Foe. We had that when we came back to England. Was a switch I mentioned earlier, we'd switch it on when we got the English coast, so that the locals wouldn't fire on us because what was happening in the end of the, towards the end of last few months of the war some of the Germans were coming back with us. The JU88s which was a two engine aircraft

20:30 not in line engines, they were air cooled engines but they were about the same size and they were coming in and shooting at us, our fellows down as they were going in to land because when you land you had your lights on the tips of your wings, not your headlights or anything or you and these JU88s were coming in and giving them a blast.

So how did the IFF stop this?

Because that signal

21:00 was received as soon as they put, found an aircraft coming in the radar, picked it up and said, "Oh he's got his IFF on, so he's friendly." but the German was coming with us and we didn't know or the ground staff didn't know but they did eventually. It was too late. They thought, "Oh that fellow hasn't turned his IFF on." but immediately there was

21:30 fire on an aircraft they realised what was happening.

So to get back to the people that were flying their circuits over the North Sea they'd left their IFF on by mistake?

Yes, yes.

How many aircraft and how many missions are we talking about here?

Usually it was when they were on their last few missions. See the Lancasters had to do 30 missions to do a tour.

22:00 We had to do originally 55 and then it was brought down to 50 and then the war ended. If it hadn't gone I would have done my 50 but the Lancs, some of them thought well we've got this far we've heard so many go in on their last trip, we're not going to do, have that happen to us.

Did they always leave their IFF on?

No, you weren't supposed to

22:30 over, once you left the coast.

Yeah exactly. So by leaving their IFF on, how were they able to detect back at home base what these people had done?

The radar'd pick it up, a noise out in the North Sea and trace them for all the way.

And so what were the consequences when they got back home?

Charged with desertion, cowardice or something.

How often did that happen?

I don't know but it did happen. We had,

23:00 I haven't mentioned this before but on our base we had a Canadian squadron of Lancasters. They were and they used to fly, oh they were a wild mob those French Canadians. They really misbehaved because they were, they had casualties and they lived to the, oh lived it up and so they didn't know what, whether they were going to survive tomorrow or not.

23:30 **What they'd go on R&R [Rest and Recreation] or they'd go on some sort of spree between operations?**

Oh yeah, yeah.

So what sort of things did they get up to?

Oh drinking you know. Well I think at the Christmas time they thought they were going to have a fight with us you know, that was the story. They were going to do the Mosquitos over somehow but we weren't there so you know they missed out and we came back oh the Red Cross, the Canadian Red Cross had

24:00 films sent to us and we had a, on Sunday nights I think it was the screen in the Sergeant's mess'd go up and we'd see the latest films. We came back on this night over Christmas and in their drunken frenzy they'd ripped the screen apart and wrecked windows in the mess. Oh they made a hell of a mess of it. It was a shocking exhibition of

24:30 vandalism but all drunk.

Did they know you were the intended audience?

Yeah, oh they were too. They used to come to the pictures. It was a common mess for both squadrons.

Sounds like it was quite a mess on this occasion?

Oh it was, it was, so we weren't very pleased with them but anyway.

So we're approaching the end of the war?

Yeah.

You're going presumably on your, on some of your last

25:00 **operations?**

Yeah with our, I think my last, I went one of the last ones I think I went to Travemunde which was the U boat pens there and then the last one they went to a place called Egbeck to an aerodrome and they reckoned that Admiral Doenitz was trying to get out of Germany by flying from Eggbeck, so we went over there and did the aerodrome over so that

25:30 they couldn't fly an aircraft out of it.

He was basically in charge of the U boats wasn't he?

Yeah he was the U boat commander and he was the fellow that was going to take over I can't recall now if Hitler died before the end of the war, committed suicide before the end of the war [30 April 1945] and Doenitz was in charge [In his last testament, Hitler appointed Doenitz his successor], but Doenitz was eventually in charge of Germany

26:00 at the end of the war, after the war was finished.

So did this bombing operation manage to prevent it?

Oh yeah we prohibited it, yeah we really did.

You prevented him from leaving?

Yeah that was the story that we, that's the only reason we went to this God forsaken hole and bombed hell out of the aerodrome. Bombs on the runway anywhere it would make holes so yeah and that was the last raid we did and then about

26:30 a week after war was over which.

The European war was over?

European war was finished. Then

I mean what did that feel like?

Oh that was...., that anti climax you know you wanted to get on and finish your tour and it was a great relief anyway because you knew your life, wasn't in

27:00 danger anymore. You were ready to see the world at different level. It was just exciting to know that you would be going home soon. You didn't know if you going to be taken out to Asia or not because the Asian war was still going on. The Japanese were still going. But then would we fly their aircraft out or what you know that went through your mind but

27:30 they said, "Well, we're finished with you."

The RAF said that did they?

The RAF said, "You're finished." You will have to then, we got notification that we would have to go to another base, another station or embarkation and few of us, the officers

28:00 had to go up to Gamston up in Nottingham so Doug Johnson and I, we were the only two and Jock Simpson we went up to Nottingham to Gamston air base which was I think it might have been a heavies base at some time in another group but the Australians were all going there and organising repatriation but of course when we got there they said, "There's no chance, you're

28:30 going home soon, you'd better take some leave." so I think Doug and I went down to London and we had a, we used to go to a club in London called the Kersen Club after we got our commission. A taxi driver took us there he said, "You'll get accommodation there." Was run by an east ended spiv, a real East Ender. He was a con merchant if there ever was one.

29:00 **Sounds a very prestigious address?**

Yeah, oh it was, it really was.

What did it consist of?

It was, this was a club, was a private house which had been converted into a few, had a ballroom, it had

a bar and a lounge which was a big room. It had small bedrooms upstairs for officers to stay and it had a dining room which was quite good. It wasn't too

- 29:30 expensive. The drinks were damned expensive but they had a lovely barmaid there, Pearl, she was a beauty, a lovely woman conscripted into the job you know and she said she was going down to the Isle of Wight for a holiday, so she said, "What about coming with us?" She and her girlfriend, her mother, the girl's mother were coming or aunt or something
- 30:00 she said, "We can't give you our accommodation, we've booked it some time. You might have to find accommodation down there." We said, "Oh yeah, we'll go down the Isle of Wight", never been down there, so we went off to the Isle of White. Got the ferry from Portsmouth or Portsmouth, I think it was Portsmouth or Southampton, one or the other, went over to the Isle of Wight and we went to one place, "No we haven't got any accommodation. I'll tell you what..." the fellow said. "There's that hotel
- 30:30 that's closed up on the main street." forget the name of it now. Had a marine name of some description and we went there and they said, "You might be, the old girl might take you in." so we went up there and knocked on the door and said, "Wondering if you've got any accommodation for a week, just the two of us." "Oh yes, I can fit you in, that's alright, that's no problem."
- 31:00 so we had beautiful accommodation. We had room service for meals. She used to bring the meals up or a manageress used to bring the meals up and the manageress was engaged to a lieutenant commander in the navy and so she was a good friend and we did the tour of the Isle of Wight with this other group and it was a wonderful holiday. It was so peaceful and ever, so anyway we go back to Gamston and they said, "Well you can't go on leave again,
- 31:30 you must do a course." We said, "Oh yeah, well what courses can we do?" and they said, "Here's one at Birmingham University, you ever been to Birmingham?" "No never been there." "Said, "It's a bit of a history job." "Oh yeah, we'd be interested in it, we'd learnt a bit about English history at school." so we go over to Birmingham University and we're in this big room and we're going to be
- 32:00 billeted out, so this lady comes up and says, "You're going to stay with us." and her name was Gladys Duddy and she and her husband had lived in Australia in the depression years. They'd lived in a shanty at Maroubra and they eventually went back to England and we were their guests and they gave us everything Doug and I. We had a
- 32:30 fabulous time and her sister lived round the corner and Arthur was a test pilot for BSA motorbikes. He was a speedway driver at some time and well we enjoyed a couple of stays there and then I rang our friends in Staff, oh the tour was
- 33:00 showing, was a tourist trip of the five counties of the midlands and we got to Warwick Castle went out to Warwick and at Warwick we saw an old English manor house which belonged to Simon De Montfort's brother and was owned by Piers Courage who was a speedway racer motorcar racer and the brewer of that area
- 33:30 Courage beer, and oh and they had all the art items from Stratford on Avon there because they thought if Stratford was bombed they would lose all the art and she had this whole house full of the art, oh it was absolutely beautiful.

With all the Shakespearean connotations?

Yeah, yeah absolutely glorious and there was a bust of

- 34:00 Bacon and Shakespeare and you know it was so interesting and anyway where did we go next? I think we went, oh we went to Stafford and we went through the potteries area and we had a visit to Wedgwood factory, their modern factory and another one we went to Derby and went through an old fashioned pottery there,
- 34:30 Derby Pottery and then we went back to Birmingham for the night and then peace was declared in the Pacific. So all next day Birmingham celebrated and we celebrated with them.

What do you recall of those celebrations?

Seemed to be millions of people in the streets and just cheering and jumping and laughing

- 35:00 and having a happy good time. No drunks, no none of that, they were just wonderful time, they were having so then we went back to camp and within no time, oh we played a few cricket matches and oh I forgot to mention on one of my trips to London in the Boomerang Club one day there was a fellow there (UNCLEAR) Australian said, "Any of you fellows going out to the
- 35:30 test match?" This was the unofficial test matches between the services and the English team and we said, "Yes, we've got tickets." He said, "Oh, can I come with you?" We said, "Yep, we'll try and get a taxi." he said the Australia Square was on The Strand but it was like this. The strand went that way and that way and the Boomerang Club was at the back of it.

Oh that's at the back of Australia House?

Australia House and there was this

- 36:00 lane I don't know if it had a name or not, so he went up there one side and we went down the other to grab a cab, so he got a cab and came around and picked us up and we went out to Lords and we got to the gate and we realised he didn't have a ticket and here's the gate keeper sitting there with a bunch of Australian tickets as they'd been passed in and I said, "You think can I have one of those?" "Yeah, sure son." so I got us in
- 36:30 one. He said, "One favour deserves another." so he said, "Come with me." I think, he was a flight lieutenant, might have been, anyway up we go back of the member's stand. He says, "Just wait a minute or two." He watched the hierarchy go in and talk to the usher of the door keeper and he came out, he says his name's Charles, so we
- 37:00 bowl up, "Morning Charles", "Morning Charles", "Morning Charles" and we walked straight in, into the members' stand, into the long room, had a good look at everything then went up on the deck and watched the cricket and over the other side was our 5,000 rowdy Australians and we was sitting amongst the admirals and generals. Was quite an experience, it was a wonderful thing and we saw the cricket from the first grade
- 37:30 seats but we never went back again to try Charles out. He might have thrown us out next time.
- Well you probably looked very impressive in your RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] dress uniforms?**
- Oh yeah, probably did. He probably got the shock of his life afterwards. Who were they but, "No hide, no Christmas box." this fellow said. We never saw him again; he didn't even sit with us.
- So you got away with it?**
- We got away with it, oh look it was the greatest pleasure,
- 38:00 I had been to Lords before on the outer but this was something wonderful.
- Now you've mentioned Boomerang House a couple of times in passing. Can you tell us about it?**
- This was the entertainment centre for the Australians, it was the gathering place. Was not a licensed bar or anything, was just a meal or snack and reading or they would write for you. They would do, there were a lot of volunteers that would do anything for you. There was a Barber's shop, a tailor
- 38:30 and I wouldn't have gone to that tailor. He always held the uniforms for about six weeks in case they got killed so he could use them for somebody else. That was the opinion of him, so when they said to go to Saville Row I was very pleased. I'd heard that before.
- So it was more than superstition?**
- Yeah, oh yeah. It, but it was the place where the Australians used to go. You could read papers there and have a
- 39:00 rest and they could tell you train timetables where you wanted to go to. It was just information mainly.
- And it was for Servicemen, it was for World War II Australian servicemen only?**
- Yeah, yeah only for Australians you could take a guest in there. That was no problem and it was what we enjoyed. We enjoyed that little bit of Australia and the Commonwealth Bank was around the corner if you wanted anything so
- 39:30 it was in the ground floor of the Australia Square Australia House.

Tape 8

- 00:31 **So end of the war, celebrations in Birmingham. After they were over what happened to you?**
- We only had a couple of days to stay in Birmingham, so we returned to Gamston and I think we then went out on a few little cricket matches against anybody that wanted to play cricket. We had to take on some sport. They said, "No more leave, you've got to." so we played cricket on some of the nicest
- 01:00 little ovals in the world, you know mental hospitals had these ovals, all the coal mines had them and we enjoyed that. You know we weren't equipped with nice creams or anything like that we were a rag tag mob but we had a good time. We weren't wonderful cricketers by any means but we enjoyed something like that and we, Gamston was right on the edge of Nottingham, ah Sherwood Forest so
- 01:30 you know there was the pub crawls there of course to see some of the places that Robin Hood was supposed to have frequented and we weren't far from Nottingham, so we'd go down to Nottingham and there was the some famous old pubs there. Not that we were drinkers. Don't think we were trying to drink the town dry or anything like that, we weren't, we were too young and we had more sense. There

was Pegasus,

02:00 the trip to I forget their names now but they were famous old pubs and they were lovely to go in and see them but English pubs had something about them, they were, we enjoyed them. The beers weren't always hot, weren't good or anything.

All of this must seemed just fantastic after the strain of all those operations?

Oh yeah, it was just, it was a real holiday you know, it was something.

So there was no further talk of the course?

No, no that was,

02:30 we were ready to go home and eventually they said, "Right pack up your bags and pay your mess fees." but the only trouble was we were paying mess fees for the other mobs debts that had left the camp, we got caught again but anyway we did that.

How many of those did you have to do?

Oh only this one. We knew what they were, some were like,

03:00 so we off by train, there was quite a few Australians at that camp so we all went down by train and took us right through to Brighton but the changes and routes that we had to go through when we got to London and side tracks and what have you I thought we'll never get out of London but we did and we got down to Brighton which was the embarkation depot. It was primarily the reception

03:30 centre years and years ago, oh not years ago, months ago before D Day and they thought well the D Day they, we'll go up to Padgate instead and we missed Brighton when we first arrived in England but we had a pleasant time down there you know, went out to see the sights of Brighton but we only there about a week

04:00 I think. Got a shock, I nearly broke my ankle. I jumped over the wall onto the beach and it wasn't sand, it was rocks and pebbles. I nearly got the shock of my life. I said, "Here's the seaside." thinking it's not sand.

Not like Manly or Bondi?

No, anyway then got word we were leaving so Doug and I, was still with Doug and

04:30 we got on the train with quite a few others and made it to Liverpool, so we went from one end of England down to the other end and up again and we boarded the Stirling Castle, a South African cruise ship which brought us back to Australia. We had, it was a good ship to travel on it was and we had no work to do. Was no time there was a lot of Australians

05:00 on it and out came the two, the crown and anchor games and the gambling and two-up but we didn't partake in that, didn't have enough money or weren't stupid enough and we were lucky, we oh we called in at Algiers on the way, the Bay of Biscay was as flat as a pancake which is one of the roughest seas in the world and we pulled into Algiers because somebody reckons he had

05:30 an appendix trouble so then we sailed, we didn't land but all the bum boats came out to sell their cheap merchandise to us and then next thing we made to Port Said and went through the Suez Canal back home, so I'd been, circumnavigated the world in a ship and eventually I think we got back to Australia at Fremantle

06:00 **What were the conditions like aboard the Stirling Castle?**

Oh very crowded, terribly crowded but we were up on top on deck and we got a lot of fresh air in and it was an enclosed structure that was on top deck and you could close doors off and but it was alright, it was not too bad at all. The food was good, it was a change but

What sort of food were you having?

06:30 Good roast dinners and what have you. I remember the day I came to into Sydney they served up a roast pork dinner. I said, "I'll come through the heads any time I'm going to have this roast pork dinner." I hadn't had one for years so anyway we sailed in through the heads. We stopped at Fremantle and a quite a few got off there. Mate Dennis from Adelaide he got off there too,

07:00 so Doug and I came through to Sydney and then we were taken out to Bradfield Park from the wharf by bus where our families were.

Your families were waiting for you?

Yeah they were waiting there for us rather than go down to the wharf and be in a hell of a pickle down there. They had signs up with Ms you know, alphabetical orders all over the place, so you went to your spot and there they

07:30 were waiting for you. Some woman grabbed me and someone said, "Sorry that's not your son." but you

know mothers had forgotten what their sons looked like or something. Might have been away for years, for all I know.

So your mother was there?

Mother was there and Dad and my brother and I don't know if my uncle wasn't there at the time. I don't know how we got home but we must have had a car of some description or a cab. We got home

08:00 to Concord so that was the end of the war.

How, what was your reaction to suddenly being back in Sydney?

Very strange to be quite frank. It was very happy to be you know, knew I was well and Mother was relieved that I came back in one piece. She didn't know if I'd be injured or anything like that because as I said earlier I used to just send, used to write a letter afterwards but we had,

08:30 I can't even show you one. I tried to find them we had a form which we wrote a letter on it, was like a quarto sheet and they used to photograph it and you you'd hand the letter in as that was your mail unsealed you just put this form in like a piece of A4 paper.

When you say they used to photograph it?

And then Kodak used to get them altogether and photograph them

09:00 by some method and they'd produce a photo about that size and that would be reduced down to that size and Mum had all these that I'd sent home and

Oh she had the photos?

Yeah that was what you received from, you never, didn't get the A4 size, you got this much smaller size and that was your letter but I used to send a cable every month if I could and she knew at that time I was alive. I didn't know how long it took to get

09:30 the cable because they'd be either flown through America or wherever.

Had you received much news from home while you were away?

Yeah, yeah I used to get letters and parcels.

How often?

Oh I s'pose I got something every month. It I'll tell you a funny story. Johnny Cowan was our Canadian, was our radar expert and his wife decided she'd send him

10:00 some eggs fresh eggs from Canada and she found out how to treat the eggs and Johnny Cowan's mail got a note that there was a parcel for him and he went up the local, out to the post office in the aerodrome and he asked for this parcel and he says, "It's out under that bush there." because the eggs had gone bad in transit, was a shocking thing.

10:30 **So when he went to receive it they ...**

They wouldn't have it in the office at all. It was crook.

I'm not surprised.

Anyway, no it

So you said it felt strange to be back in Sydney. Could you explain that a bit?

Well I suppose it was, I don't know. I quite, it was funny to be on, knowing that was peace around or something. It was just

11:00 totally different. I think people had probably had the forces by this you know, they were so many that had been through the place and we weren't a novelty any more but I had a good reception by the locals that I had no problems and I had, Mum had received word that I had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. I knew that myself in Brighton

11:30 but I appeared in the Government Gazette over there, the Kings Regulations or something.

Was there a ceremony for that?

No, no unfortunately because we were leaving, only it had been another few months I could have gone to Buckingham Palace but Air Vice Marshal Ridley in charge of Australia sent me a letter congratulating me and telling me the ribbon was on and unfortunately there'd be no

12:00 investiture at this time.

So how did you finally receive the award?

I received note from the Governor General, Sir (UNCLEAR) used to be the Secretary to the Governor General and that was to take place at Government House in Sydney by this Labour party fellow Bill,

12:30 oh what was his name?

Bill Chaffey?

No, he was a Premier of New South Wales and they picked him as Governor General.

Bill McKell?

Yeah, Bill McKell, anyway he presented me at Government House Sydney with it. Dad was in hospital with osteo arthritis in Sydney Hospital so I dashed up there and showed him me medal then I went back to work in me uniform.

How long did it take

13:00 **you to be demobbed?**

Six weeks. We came back in about the 6th of November something like that and I was out on, I think about oh the 15th of December, end of December anyway.

And so you then went to work with Pennys again?

I had to yeah, I had to get a suit of course, that went then I went back

13:30 to Penny's and eventually I met Joyce there, she was working there and in '52 we got married and a few years after that Coles took over Pennys and I stayed and worked with G J Coles for, and completed with Coles 44 years of service. Coles were a wonderful company to work for in those

14:00 days. The family was still very much in existence and very much respected. They were very generous to their staff. You were, , if you had medical problems Coles paid for it. I know that a young kid there had a blue heart or something a hole in the heart or something and Coles paid all his medical

So when you say the family you mean the Coles family?

The families.

14:30 They had five knighted brothers. There was Sir George, Sir Arthur. Sir Arthur started Australian Airlines and TAA [Trans Australian Airlines], Sir Norman, Sir Wilfred, Sir Kenneth, no Wilfred was a cousin, he wasn't knighted and Sir Edgar. Edgar was the financial wizard. Sir Old, Sir George was the founder and he, I never met him,

15:00 he was in Victoria and retired but they speak of him as a wonderful man.

So, which were the ones that were most involved in the running of G J Coles?

All of them.

All of them were?

Sir Kenneth was a Director for New South Wales. He was more, he wasn't so much an executive of the company because he got in very much interested in Crippled Children's Association or something like that and

15:30 he was a world president I think at one time but he did a lot of good charity work. Norman worked in the company and Kenneth ah, Sir Norman Edgar was the brains, financial wizard.

So what were your range of duties with the company in the post war years?

I was when Coles took us over; I went into their warehouse accounting

16:00 part. I had and then few years after that I was in their buying records department keeping records of all costs and what have you and then Coles decided they would take over a chain, a grocery chain. Woolworths had branched out in buying some, a Brisbane cash and carry company and Coles thought well we've got to get

16:30 in the grocery business too because they could see that variety stores were going to die eventually and they put in a bid for Matthews Thompson which owned about a half a dozen chain stores, chain of stores. Like their was Goodman's, Goodways, S R Buttle, Sydney Cash and Carry and Deli, certain delis [delicatessens] and

17:00 Rodney's was the chain store out in the Western suburbs and then I was asked by State Manager if I would go up to this chain store in the western suburbs called Rodney's and be their Office Manager and I went out there for about three years and then we all amalgamated. Coles let them run as individuals for a certain time because

17:30 nobody could teach the grocery people how to run not even Coles knew, no way and my General Manager out there was a young fellow. He must have been only 24, 25 but he was, his family had owned the business and he was brilliant, he was clever and he was outspoken too and he made good profits for the company and Sir Edgar and

- 18:00 Lance Robinson who was the General Manager of Coles paid us a visit out there with a, unannounced they called in and they didn't let the hierarchy of the food people know we were coming, they were coming so out they came and it was a hot day, my God it was hot and no air conditioning and here's Sir Edgar putting a handkerchief between his neck and his collar and Lance the same and they're both
- 18:30 moaning about the heat and they questioned this young fellow and Sir Edgar then came in and had a yarn to me and he said, "I'm very impressed with this young Allan Thompson." I said, "He's very good sir, he's excellent." He said, "He'll go a long way and what's your...?" and I thought yeah I hope so too but the axis their lives could be drawn by other people, but anyway Allan was taken into confidence with Sir Edgar
- 19:00 and he went, he even did a trip overseas with Sir Edgar but I think eventually the wise ones they went by the board you know, that you couldn't tell Coles had to run grocery you know and look what they've done. It was, it was a good organisation till I retired.

Just moving back to

- 19:30 **a few questions that I have relating to your war time period.**

Yep.

You said that the flights to Berlin none of them were ever pleasant and you never looked forward to going there. Could you be more specific?

They were long. You weren't worried by flak so much, you were worried about the search lights and you were worried that there were these jet fighters around because that's where they were, the Germans were losing

- 20:00 their bases, their air bases so they had to get towards Berlin or air fields around there so we were aware of this and we knew that these ME262s and 263s [163s] were very fast jets and if they came at you could cop one and particularly if you were coned in a search light and it was unbelievable.

- 20:30 That was the great worry about it and, they were long trips but we got used to long trips but it was a, that was a frightening one.

Now initially were you always nervous about going on your first on your initial trips?

No, not really you got over that. The worst was probably the first trip I ever did, that was where I was scared stiff and I think I got scared

- 21:00 stiff going to Hamburg a few times and there was another place I forget where it was but they fired rockets at us and you could see the head coming up at you the fire and I didn't like that very much, it was I forget where that was, might have been Travemunde up near there but we only did the one trip there thank goodness.

I asked you about cloud cover when it came to navigation. What if clouds

- 21:30 **closed in as you were approaching a target?**

That was a problem but the flares that they dropped were so bright you would see the reflection of them, so that there was no, you would never take your bomb load because it was covered in. The flares were so bright they would tell you.

They would indicate where the target was?

Yeah, yep and if it was that bright, that heavy

- 22:00 you, they'd have floaters off if it was low, could, they'd have floating type of target indicators which would sit on the cloud more or less at a certain height.

In other words if you even had quite thick cloud this would be able to penetrate the entire?

Yeah, yeah.

But so how would you still then be able to see the target?

We didn't have to, we saw the only, what they had the target colours, that's all we saw. We never saw,

- 22:30 half the time we wouldn't see what we were bombing but we'd see the colour down there which we were going to hit.

Now were the planes themselves able to avoid anti aircraft fire?

Yeah because we could them up to 30,000 feet and we could get above it yeah.

And your aircraft was never hit?

Well we had three marks on it at one time and somebody said, "Somebody must have had a bit of flak on it."

23:00 I think we were flying one night at 20,000 feet and I can't recall ever seeing it anywhere near us. It might have burst a bubble and fallen down but it was never hit as a direct hit or anything. There might have been a bit of shrapnel that had hit and marked the plane.

During one of our briefings for this project various pragmatic things were discussed in relation to RAAF and RAF

23:30 **pilots and one of them was, what happened if nature called when you're on a flight?**

The pilot had a tube which sat between his legs which he could pull up to urinate. The navigator had to put it through this window box but it never seemed to happen. I don't think I ever used it. The pilot did one time and

24:00 I don't know how often he used it but I never did. I seemed to be able to hold my bladder that.

What was the average duration of a flight?

Oh four, four and a half hours. We were fast so we could get back quickly. No it was four and a half hours would be the most. One I think to Nuremburg, I think might have been close to five hours or something but

So no copious cups of tea before the flight?

Oh no, no

24:30 it was no good taking your vacuum flask because the pressure would blow the top off it. Somebody tried it apparently. I didn't bother.

What, they ended up covered in tea or coffee?

Something like that so he said but I don't know why. He mustn't have screwed it on properly or

Now I just want to clarify although you did talk about it earlier on talking about procedure, I just wanted to clarify what your areas of activity were within the aircraft. There were two I think, weren't there?

25:00 **There was the area where you did your navigation?**

Navigation and there's the area where I bombed and there was the area where I helped with the starting of the motors and the closing off of the motors and the oxygen supply that was on and the petrol control and the IFF switches were on and that was all I was responsible for.

25:30 **And could you describe the area where you bombed?**

It was underneath the dashboard, the pilot's dashboard. I crawled down under a space and the bombsight was in the clear nose of the aircraft. When you see the photo outside you'll see what I mean as to the clear area and I just slid down into that area and

26:00 more or less on my knees and on and then flattened out and then I was able to set the bomb sight to the correct wind velocities etc and then stay there until I was about two minutes before the target and then I'd stay there for that period and then let the bombs go.

On average how many bombs would have been dropped?

Well we dropped four 500 pounders.

26:30 We didn't have the capacity to take anything bigger.

So it was four or five hundred pounders?

Yeah 400, yeah, yeah.

And were you the only person in the crew that was responsible for dropping bombs?

No if anything had happened to me the pilot could jettison them but whether they would go down safe was another matter. He had that power but well there's only two of us in the aircraft so he had to

27:00 get rid of it. He wouldn't want to land with a bomb load on.

Oh that's interesting, so what happened if there was an emergency shortly after take off and you had to return with the bomb load?

You took that risk. Now we had a fellow, Jimmy Courage. Burley and I happened to be the duty crew that night which, anything happened we had to see that pilot and crew got another aircraft and this fellow came in and landed and we said, "What's up Jimmy?" Says, "This aircraft's

27:30 cold, I'm freezing to death." and we said, looked at it, I said, "You flew through a tree." He said, "I didn't". Here's a limb that big through the nose of his aircraft so we got him out of that whizzed him

into another aircraft and he went off.

God. So....

And you know that was but he did land with a bomb load on.

He did land with a bomb load on?

Yeah, yeah that was quite safe. It

28:00 was a bit more difficult but it was safe. They didn't recommend it all the time.

No I'm sure. So if bombs had to be jettisoned where would they normally be jettisoned?

In the North Sea or if you could find or in Germany, you'd drop anything on Germany even if you killed somebody. You dropped them on Germany if you could but you'd rarely had hang ups, we never did, we were

28:30 probably more accurate than some but I think mostly the fellows were good. They never, some people said, "They used to come, you never brought a, what they call a 4,000 cookie back." because if you hit the ground you might drop it, they were so heavy and, the story went around and I don't know how true it was a fellow came back with a cookie

29:00 on and stopped his plane and went, ran like hell and he said the ground staff said, "What's up?" He says "There's a cookie on there." he said, "It might go off." He says, "Don't worry, it went off five minutes ago." but it went out and the pilot didn't even hear it. That was the story. Whether it was true or not I've never seen it, never wanted to.

Sounds uncanny.

Yeah.

29:30 **Right we seem to have covered most other things. You always operated; you always flew from the same airfield?**

Yep, yep.

Which was the one that you initially?

Yeah, Gransden Lodge, yeah all from there.

So alright, so we're basically I suppose now approaching the end of the interview

Yeah we probably are

30:00 **Yeah and I'm just wondering if there are any other aspects that have occurred to you as we've talked that you wanted to mention?**

I think we've filled it in pretty well as a matter of fact. I don't think there's, I can go on with anymore. I think we've you know, there only could be snippet here or there but nothing much really.

There are actually a couple of things that I should ask.

Go on, you go ahead.

30:30 **And one is the whole concept of veterans' Association and membership of the RSL?**

I am a member of the RSL. I've been one for years but I'm not an active member of the RSL at all, never have been and I, probably because I've got no mates in it and I'm not a very sociable sort of guy really. We used to go up to their functions up

31:00 here, they used to put on, the sub branch used to put on dinners about three times a year. The story was that the Epping RSL was in the other side of the town and they owned the property, the sub branch owned the property and then the club came, they formed the club and then they decided it wasn't big enough so they brought the land over this side and the sub branch had all this money

31:30 and they put on these dinners you know they were rather cheap 10 dollars, they were a three course meal and all the beer you could drink and what have you, my neighbour down the road said, "You've got to come to these." so Joy and I, it was husband and wife too so we went and I was disgusted with the whole thing you know and the free grog was just unreal. You know I've seen my neighbour with

32:00 a glass of red, a glass of white and a schooner of beer at the same time and the food eventually got up in the price and I didn't think I was getting value even, you know I can drink but I don't drink to excess and I don't want to and I saw all these trade and drink to excess and my neighbour absolutely,

32:30 he upset me you know he'd say, "Hey look at that bottle, they haven't touched it that table, will you get it and wine?", and you know and things like this.

That must be difficult yeah?

And I thought I'm not going to get a bottle of wine of any other body's table if they don't want it.

So what about service associations? Are you a member of any service association?

No, that's the only service association is this one and I've never been to a meeting and I don't intend to.

33:00 All I've heard from a friend was one person that goes there just for the free grog after the meeting and I went up there to see if I could get a pension for a bit of deafness but I didn't, I didn't succeed anywhere. Veterans' Affairs [the Department of Veterans' Affairs] knocked it back because they said it wasn't war related, so I haven't bothered and I've been healthy except

33:30 I did have a life scare back in the 80s. I had a lump in my groin and I had a hernia at the time, wasn't too bad. I had this lump and the doctor said, "This has got to come out." and next thing he said, "It's a bit malignant." so I thought oh that's great so I went into Sydney hospital for tests and what have you and they said I had lymphoma but it was

34:00 non Hodgkin's disease and we will fix you on the world patent of cure and you'll be, your name will be added to the world list and we will cover you, your cure will be what the world like medical people decide, so anyway this is the decision and, I had some chemotherapy I had to go to. I went back to the specialist

34:30 after that and he said to me, "I don't know enough about this stuff, I'll refer you to another doctor, a friend of mine who knows more about chemotherapy.", so I went to this new fellow and I've been going to him twice a year for some years now. The chemotherapy cured it. I went i into him and

35:00 oh about two a year or so later I felt I had a lump so I went to the local doc. He said, "Yeah, you'd better make an appointment to see your specialist." I rang him, he says, "Come in straight away." so I went in and he gave me more chemotherapy and I haven't been on it since 1983.

When you say non Hodgkin's disease?

It's a disease. Non Hodgkin's, Hodgkin's disease is a bad form of lymphoma.

Now of course one aspect

35:30 **that we haven't covered are the number of children you've got?**

Two, one boy and one girl. Rodney's in the Education Department, lives at Castle Hill with three children. Incidentally when I saw that notice from Veterans', in the Veterans' Affair paper he was here, Rodney was here with his young 11 year old son and he said, "Oh Pop, you've got to ring them." and he's the one I told you about that

36:00 wanted to speak to me last night to see how things went, so yeah he was tickled pink, yeah he and my daughter lives down in Canberra. She was a head hunter for Morgan and Banks, TPN Royal and she's made her fortune with them. She's a very rich, little girl. She worked hard for it and this is where we did our mowing to start off with. When she went to work

36:30 we looked after her place in West Ryde and then her old neighbour took ill and I used to mow his place too and I enjoyed it. It was good, it was all free they didn't pay me anything and then my neighbour up the road got cancer and he couldn't mow, so I used to mow his place too and you know I did all this for my friends and I loved it.

Now when it came to children and to your wife did you talk

37:00 **in the years after the war and certainly in the children's early years about your wartime experiences?**

No, no.

Did you not say anything?

Not really. Might have let a bit out periodically but never a serious session or anything no.

Did you ever dream about the war?

No, no had no problems afterwards. I was discharged I got a suit I went back to work a month afterwards or something new.

Because you've described,

37:30 **you've described to us some fairly stressful situations. I just wondered if any of that has ever bounced back in any form?**

No such thing as stress in my book. You know, you'll hear this post traumatic stress and I think that most of it's in the mind. You know I went through enough, friends died and what have you. They tried to kill me, we had accidents

38:00 but I got up and went again and that's all we could do. You didn't think about it. If you thought about it

you would have ended a nutcase.

What do you mean friends died, we had accidents?

In the war. I mean friends that I'd trained with had been killed. People from my own church were killed but you know, you learned about having to live again. Live without worrying about it. That was past history.

38:30 You were sorry that it happened and I go down to Canberra and Roslyn last time this is the only time I get emotional is when I go up to that wall [in the Australian War memorial] and Roslyn says, "Dad, anyone there you know?" The dead ones and she said, "I'd like to put a flower on each one." and then I get really emotional I say, "I'm going. Ta ta."

39:00 I can't stand it. That's the only time I ever get emotional and I think that's not stress, that's just me.

And how much has religion played a part in your outlook on life?

Played a lot early. I was a good Christian, I was a good church goer. I've missed in the last few, last 20 years or so. I found the church up here was very snobbish after going there

39:30 for years and they asked, "Was I a visitor?". That was it.

Did religion ever play a part in your wartime experiences?

Yeah I had my little prayers don't worry about that. I'd be the first to admit that I had a little prayer every night. Nobody knew that I used to say a little prayer. That's when I said I thought somebody was on my side,

40:00 **you'd say a prayer before each operation?**

Yep or in the aircraft yep. I don't think too many did but I did. I wanted some cover, some insurance.

Well that's taken us on quite a journey.

Well I trust I've done the right thing

40:30 with you. I think I, you've really bled me of knowledge. I've got a sore bottom.

Well both Rebecca and I want to thank you very much for what has been a really superb interview, it really has.

Oh it's been a pleasure. I always felt that I'm not one to seek publicity or anything like this

41:00 but I felt that the lads in our units didn't get any thanks at all. Not that we needed thanks or recognition shall I say? It because we were RAF mainly but they were good people. We got on well with the English. There was no trouble with those boys they were great mates.

Ian thank you very much.

Pleasure Graham, Rebecca.