Australians at War Film Archive

Donald Roydhouse (Don) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:41 **I understand you grew up in Perth.**

Yes.

Can you tell us about that?

Well, I was born in our house, actually in Mount Lawley, which is a suburb of Perth on the 29th of January 1923.

01:00 Over our back fence was the bush and today Mount Lawley is an inner suburb of Perth. So that's how it's changed over there. I don't remember anything of my early days until… but I do remember going to school, which was Inglewood State School which was only a couple of streets away from us. As children we didn't ever

01:30 wear shoes. It was all just bare-foot job in those days. Of course Perth's climate was OK. We didn't freeze and we just didn't wear shoes over there. Except for very special occasions, when we were supposed to go to church or something like that. You want me to carry on?

Tell me about growing up in Mount Lawley, which sounds semi-rural.

It really was.

02:00 I didn't really grow up there because when I was eleven we moved to Geelong. My father was the sales manager for Ford, Western Australia. And he was promoted. In those days it was definitely a promotion to be sales manager of Victoria. So we left in the end of 1933 and arrived

02:30 in Geelong. We came over by boat, my mother and my brother and I. Dad was already here doing his job and we came over by a ship called the Manunda. And I remember quite distinctly this long trip from Perth to Melbourne in a, what was in those days, a coastal passenger ship.

03:00 And when we arrived in Geelong we thought we were going to freeze because this is quite considerably cooler than where we grew up. Am I going too fast here?

I'll take you back. If you don't mind. Just curious about Mount Lawley. Did you have brothers and sisters?

One brother, two and a half years younger than I.

03:30 He was always a little bit frail, my young brother. Although we were the greatest of mates all our lives. But he was always much smaller than I was and wouldn't eat his meals. And was sick quite often. He was sort of the fragile part of the family. But

04:00 we were the greatest of mates all our lives. That was it. I think that probably what happened was that my mother had trouble having her second child and just decided not to have any more. That was it.

So what would you and your brother do as kids?

Oh, fiddle round in the bush and that's about all. We didn't do anything in particular. Just as kids,

04:30 as I said, when we left I was still ten. I was eleven when we got here. Brian was eight. And so we were just kids playing around with everybody else. Playing alleys and that sort of thing. That was our early childhood.

What was your house like?

Well, our house was built by our grandfather who was a, that was Mum's father, he was a builder. And he built the

05:00 house for my parents. It was a solid brick house. Still there. I've seen it since. We've been to Perth several times and I've seen the house I was born in. I still remember the address and where it was, etcetera, etcetera. My brother and I used to sleep on the veranda, you know, out the front. That was our bedroom.

05:30 It was just part of the veranda.

Was it enclosed?

It wasn't enclosed, no. It was next door to our parents' room. Just outside they had this sort of ingle where they put our beds and that was it. There was no worry about security in those days. That's, I don't know

06:00 what we did in the winter time. Oh, the winter wasn't cold anyway.

So you still slept out there in the winter?

Yeah. Slept through. I don't think there was anywhere else to go. It was a very small house.

It was very bushy around the house?

No, not round the house. Over the back fence there was a clearing and then there was a swamp and then there was the bush. And, of course, as kids we used to get involved in the swamp which,

06:30 we weren't very popular when we did that.

What did you like to do in the swamp?

Oh, look for frogs and all sorts of things like that. Collect tadpoles and what all kids do. That's about the beginning of the whole thing.

So you would have, when you went to bed at night, you would have heard the sounds of the swamp?

Oh, yes, yes we could.

07:00 I don't remember a great deal about it because it was in the 1920s.

What was your mum like?

Mum was fairly short. She wasn't very, wasn't very big. Dad used to call her 'Skinny', was her nickname. But she was very good at, with her

07:30 hands. In anything that you do with your hands, like making clothes or curtains or anything like that. She was excellent. And her father was her builder. She did all the repairs around the house too. Something with a hammer or a saw or anything like that she could do, anything. So that was Mum. She was a, I wouldn't say she was

08:00 artistic. But she was very practical and she could handle anything like that. That's about all I could say about Mum. She was a homebody. Stayed at home. She wasn't a particularly good cook but she was good at everything else around the house. She reupholstered chairs.

08:30 All those things.

Did she teach you any of these skills?

Well, we picked it up. Dad never touched a thing. If a blind fell off, he didn't do it. Excuse me a second. He just left it to her. So that was the situation. Dad was a sporting type who was out, he was a very popular

09:00 sort of a man. Before we left Perth, Dad was president of the Perth Football Club and he was involved in all those things. That's the sort of bloke Dad was.

Where did your mum grow up?

In Perth. She was born in Perth and grew up in Perth. And Dad was born in Adelaide and went to Perth when he was a lad.

Do what was your mother's

09:30 **family background? Many children?**

Yes. They were two Scots, my mother's parents. And they had six children. She was the second youngest of the six. They had two boys and four girls. And she was sort of the, almost the baby of the clan.

10:00 But her father, well, led what you'd call a pretty smart life when he moved to Perth. He was a carpenter and he worked as a carpenter as a while. Then he thought it was a good idea to go into the bush and create a mill. And so he had a mill in the bush, cutting trees down and processing them up there.

10:30 And then, because he did that, he decided that he'd better start building houses and he built a whole series of houses. And then he retired early and spent his retirement going round collecting the rents. And when he started running out of money, he sold a house. He was a pretty smart Scot, for sure. So that was her father. And her mother, unfortunately went blind very early

11:00 in life. And just couldn't go anywhere, couldn't do anything.

So did your mum help to look after her mum?

I don't know. Because, I think the whole family did. They all hopped in together and did whatever they could for their mother. One of the sons was killed up in the mill in the

11:30 country up in the hills. Something fell on him and he was killed.

Was that during your childhood?

No, it, yeah, it was during my time but I don't remember all the hassle that went on. It must have been when I was probably three or four, something like that. And the other son was gassed during the First World War and he didn't last very long either.

12:00 He was an invalid from when I remember.

So did you have a lot of contact with this extended family as a child?

Oh yes, they lived just around the corner from us. I had a few cousins who, everybody lived within, I suppose, within a mile of each other anyway. Or half a mile maybe. Just, a very closed

12:30 or close family, it was. Didn't see much of Dad's family because he had two brothers and neither of them had any children. So I didn't have any cousins on his side. But I had a few on Mum's side because of the other three ladies and one brother. He had two daughters even though he

13:00 was gassed. He finished up with two daughters. I think we only had about five cousins anyway, but they all lived close.

Did you all go to the same school?

No, we didn't. It was one of those things that, we were at one end of Mount Lawley and they were sort of at the other and they went to Mount Lawley school and we went to Inglewood because it was closer.

13:30 So we didn't go to the same school. But that didn't stop us being good friends.

Can you tell me about school? The Inglewood school?

Well, it's still there. It's in Second Avenue in Inglewood. The school grounds were just dirt. It was very, very

14:00 primitive, the school. Very small and dirt grounds where we came home very dusty each day. Used to play marbles in the dirt and, I can't tell you any more than that.

Tell me about the marble games.

Oh we all had our little set of marbles and we played in a great big ring and tried to hit everybody else's out and if you hit them out, that was yours.

14:30 Gee wiz, I haven't through about that for a long time. So that was the sort of thing we did. We all had, what we called, a big tor, a bigger marble, so we could knock everybody else's out.

How did you go at it?

Oh, I suppose I was average anyway. I was always

15:00 interested in games and sport and things like that. Which probably wasn't good for my education. Well, didn't affect it, I suppose.

What do you mean? You didn't concentrate?

Oh, I wasn't very interested in what was happening. But I think at that age, very few of us were. (PHONE RINGS)

15:30 Go into town occasionally.

When you were kids, you'd go into town?

We're in business again?

Yeah.

Right. No, very seldom. But we could walk into town very easily. And you could today if you were energetic enough. I've been to Perth quite a few times since the war.

16:00 And I'm amazed how close Mount Lawley is. And when you go out there now, it's like going to Toorak and then the rest of the city goes on from there. It's huge.

So why would you go into town? Would that be a big excursion?

Oh, there was a park on the way. We used to go to the park and play around in the park. And then we'd go into the town and look at the shops and come home again. Nobody

16:30 escorting us. Just Brian and I would go and do it. Just for a bit of excitement, I suppose. I do remember something else when we were at Inglewood State School. We learnt to swim. It was compulsory for everybody at the school. They used to take us in buses down to Crawley Baths. And we all learnt to swim

17:00 when we were little kids. Which is pretty important if you're living in a city which has got plenty of water around it. Like the Swan River and the beaches and everything else. So we were all reasonably good swimmers by the time we were eight or nine. Because of the school. I don't know if schools still do that. The whole school used to go. Crawley Baths have gone since. They've disappeared. But that's where we

17:30 used to go and we certainly, it was a good thing for people to learn to swim when they're young. No drowning. We handled the water well. Still do.

Did you get swimming certificates?

I don't know. I can't remember if we got any certificates. But I know we had to do a test

18:00 anyway. You had to swim fifty yards and all those sort of things before they would be satisfied you could swim.

Just freestyle?

Yes, freestyle only. No dog paddle allowed. We started off learning to swim by doing what they called the dead man's float. So you were used to having your head in the water. I don't know if that's modern

18:30 practice. But that's the way we learnt.

As a kid, in Mount Lawley, how wide would your territory be that you wandered in?

How wide would we wander? Oh, within a mile or two of where we lived. Yeah, within a mile or two of where we lived, we'd wander.

19:00 I used to have to go, I think the last year I was there, I had to go to carpentry which was at another school over at Maylands. And that was, I suppose it's about three miles away and we used to have to walk across there. And I remember, gee wiz, it's coming back. I remember I used to get threepence for lunch because it was a whole day to go over to Maylands and do carpentry.

19:30 That didn't do any harm, either, learning a bit of carpentry when I was a youngster.

How did that come about that you went to another school?

That's where the teacher was who taught carpentry and that's where they had the facilities. And our class, I'm sure it must have been when I was ten because before that you didn't, our whole class would go across to carpentry.

20:00 It was a totally different education to what happened when I came over here.

Your mum would have been pleased about you doing carpentry?

Oh yes. Yes. She expected us to be able to handle carpentry anyway. Don't know why she didn't expect Dad to, but he couldn't. He didn't,

20:30 he couldn't be bothered. That wasn't his forte. What else comes to mind from Perth? I don't know.

I'm curious about your brother and your relationship with him. You were older so you would look after him a bit?

A little. We had the

21:00 same sort of interests. We did the same sort of things together. We were just a couple of mates. As the years went by, we probably became closer. When we went to school here and when we grew up. We became our, he was my best friend. Always was. He used to, used to get a bit

21:30 frustrated because I was bigger and could do things he couldn't. But, apart from that, we were mates. Always. Unfortunately he's gone.

You said his health was delicate?

He was never robust. When he grew up, I don't think he ever got past eight stone. He was only a little

kid.

22:00 Always.

What were his interests?

Oh, when he was a little boy? I don't know. Just the same as mine. Just wandering around finding things to do and messing about making a nuisance of ourselves. That was about all. We're talking Perth.

22:30 I had, no there's nothing that we didn't do together. We did everything together. We'd go swimming together. Actually, something I forgot to tell you. When we were going swimming one day, during the holidays, and we were going to go down to the baths during the summer. And it rained.

23:00 And I remember going up the back stairs of my grandfather's place and I slipped and I fell straight on the stairs and I broke my nose. Which I didn't know. So they, we just didn't take any notice of that and that had repercussions many, many years later. I broke my nose in Perth when I was eight. I also broke my arm. And broke my collar bone

23:30 a couple of times. So it was a pretty adventurous time over there. You know, I seemed to be accident prone, getting into mischief and doing all the things I shouldn't have been doing. And coming to grief. But I mentioned the nose because that comes into effect later on in my life. Having broken it and I've

24:00 got a scar there now, across the bridge of the nose of what happened when I was eight. It's worth mentioning at this stage.

Definitely.

The broken arm and the collar bones also had an affect later on. The arm didn't, the collar bones did.

How did you break you arm?

Oh, fiddling around on a lawn that was on a slope and jumping off the, on to the lawn and I landed

24:30 with my hands behind me and the arm decided to go up at a bit of an angle. It was my own fault. I simply jumped off and landed with my hand underneath. Sort of clumsy clot that I was in those days.

Were you playing a game?

Oh, yes, I think we were trying to jump as far as we could off the bank. It was a simple way to break your arm when you're a little boy.

25:00 Just land on it.

It was pretty hot most of the time over there.

Yeah, it was. It's not excessively hot but it is hot, yes.

Were there many snakes around?

Never saw a snake. Never. Even in the swamp we never saw snakes. Probably didn't know they existed.

25:30 Well, we didn't see any, anyway. We weren't a bit frightened of snakes. They didn't exist. Can't think of any other accidents that I had. But they were enough. The first time I broke my collar bone I was

26:00 only a little, tiny kid and my mother used to bath me in the trough outside in the laundry. Which was concrete. Everything in it was concrete. Concrete troughs, concrete floor, etcetera. And she left me and I tried to get out. I fell out of the trough onto the floor and broke my collar bone. I think I was about two or something like that. So it was a good start.

26:30 And I think I've run out of things that I can think of.

Did you have a car?

Yes, Dad, being the sales manager for Ford, we always had the latest Ford motorcar. He always did have a Ford car. All the while he worked at the Ford motor company, he had a car belonging to the company because of his position.

27:00 So, yes, we had a car. I can't remember what it looked like but yes, we had a car. We were very fortunate in that, as we grew up threw the Depression years, Dad was always in a job. A reasonable job so we didn't starve. We were never affluent but we were, we existed quite comfortably.

27:30 So I was very lucky in that way. That Dad kept us going pretty well. A lot of other people were in real trouble but we never were.

So did other people in your neighbourhood at Mount Lawley have cars? Was that common?

I wouldn't know. Sorry, I don't remember that one. I just do remember that we had a car. But we used it sparingly. Dad went to work

28:00 in it and we didn't go out on Sunday picnics or anything. But we did have a car, yes.

Tell me about the move to Victoria?

Well, Dad came in one day at home and he said, "Well, we're moving. We're going to Geelong." And my young brother and I both thought we were going to Ceylon.

28:30 Because we'd never heard of Geelong. We thought, "Well, crikey, we're going to India." You know. Anyway, Dad then left and came over by train to Geelong. And took up his new position. We had to do all the packing up and we came across on the boat which was good. It was great.

29:00 And when we got here Dad had a house ready for us which he was renting. And we, we got here in February 1934, and Dad said, "Well, you're going to Geelong College." Which, as it turned out, was about two streets away from where we were living. And so my young brother and I went from Inglewood State School to Geelong College

29:30 over the Christmas period. And when we got to the college they sort of tested us out on knowledge, etcetera and the difference in Western Australian education and Victoria education at that time, was quite notable. And so we went back a class. We went back a year, both of us, automatically. We didn't know a lot of the things

30:00 that the other children knew. And so, instead of being with the same age group that we were normally with, we went back a year and I was always the oldest one in my year because of that. Because we, because of the change in education from one state to another. Probably didn't do us any harm. It enabled us to catch up. Or nearly anyway. So

30:30 that was the start and I went to the college. I started at eleven and my young brother was eight when we first went. And we were around the corner so we were day boys. And I used to freeze every morning walking along to go to school. It was terrible. It was too cold for me. But anyway, we made it and settled into the college. Incidentally, one of the lads in the same form

31:00 as I was, when I first went to that school, is still a great friend of mine living in Geelong. And he's still a good friend of mine. He's a year younger than I am because that's what happened. We went back a year. Which is a pity really but I suppose it doesn't do you any harm to be at school longer than you would have been.

How did you feel about it at the time?

Didn't worry about it.

31:30 When I tried to do the things that the other children were doing in the same age group, I couldn't do it. Didn't know. But when I went back I was OK. Caught up pretty quickly. And from there on I was in reasonable shape at school.

In what other ways was that school different to your old school?

32:00 Oh, it was totally different. At Inglewood State School there was no sport. At the college there was sport. We started football and started cricket and athletics and everything they do today, almost, was there. And it was a totally boys school. When I was at Inglewood it was a

32:30 mixed school so it was a complete change in our education. And that's when I first started to play cricket. When I first started to play footie. We didn't ever do that where we were in Inglewood. And that generated an interest in sport, as far as I was concerned.

And what sport in particular did you like?

I was better

33:00 at cricket than I was at football because I was pretty light. And in footie I was getting bowled over left, right and centre. But I was better at cricket and I was always in the cricket team in the age group. Probably going ahead of myself a bit, but when I was in the under-14s, I took on wicket keeping as well as batting, etcetera, and I was a wicket

33:30 keeper for all the under age teams until I was in the under-16s. And then I was promoted to the college firsts as a wicket keeper and batsman. So cricket was, you know. At football I was mediocre. But at cricket I was obviously adapted to it. It went pretty well.

And what about Brian, what did he like to play?

34:00 Well, physically he wasn't capable of doing a great deal. But he liked cricket too. He played a reasonable game of cricket. But I think the best he ever did was about college thirds or fourths. Something like that. But he just enjoyed it. Talking about sport, I took on tennis when I was thirteen. And that suited me fine, as fine as tennis was concerned,

34:30 I took to it like a duck to water. So my two main sports at school were cricket and tennis. That sort of sums it up. As the years went by, I became better at both. And I finished up,

35:00 I played three years in the first eleven and I was a college tennis champion. And that carried on right through my life, I was able to do those things. Ball game? No trouble.

So what were you studying academically at the college?

Well, I sort of lost my way a bit. I just did all the things they suggested I do. And in the end I decided

35:30 I was going to do engineering because that was my forte. Maths and physics was what I was best at. No good at art. Terrible at arts and history and geography and things like that. I couldn't be bothered. But maths and physics and science. Those things were what I needed. And I did.

Where did that interest in maths and physics start to emerge?

36:00 **Was that back in primary school?**

No, no, no. It didn't happen until about intermediate. Of course, they don't have intermediate these days. But intermediate would be today probably about year 10, something like that. And that's when I started to say, "This is what I want to do. I want to be an engineer." So academically

36:30 that's what I did. I did, concentrated on maths and physics and in the last year I was at school I did honours maths and physics which actually dictated what happened when I went into the air force.

So what level did you get to at school?

Well, I matriculated and then I did another year after that. Specialising in maths and physics. And there's a reason

37:00 for that. Dad didn't think I was mature enough to go to Melbourne to stay at the university and do engineering. And he thought I should do another year specialising before I went to university. So that's why I did the extra year after I was entitled to go to university. Qualified to go up there to do engineering but

37:30 he thought it would be a better start if I did another year in my speciality.

So where did you do that extra study?

Oh, at the college. They had a, what they called the honours year, and you were able to stay another year and do honours in whatever subject you wanted to do. And that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to do, I did a couple of maths and physics specialities.

38:00 Which was a disaster because when I joined the air force, they wouldn't have me as a pilot. They said, "No, you're too good at maths and physics." Bad news.

We'll get to that. Just a little bit more about life in Geelong. For your mum and dad, how was it for them, that move?

Oh, Dad was immediately involved in all the sporting

38:30 places. He joined the Geelong Golf Club and he joined the racing club and he joined the footie club. So he was very involved, not only with his job but with all the people that he met in those clubs, etcetera. And Mum did her usual thing at home, doing her hobbies and all the things she wanted to do. I remember she, she was perfectly happy doing what she, doing everything at home. But we changed houses

39:00 about three times in the first couple of years because we hadn't settled in and just had to rent different houses. It was all in the same area, within a hundred yards of each other. So she was busy house minding, I suppose you'd say. And cooking for her children and looking after them, etcetera. But Dad was involved in everything you could think of.

39:30 He was that sort of bloke.

Did you miss your cousins?

We kept in touch with them. As matter of fact, this is jumping the gun a bit, but last year we went to Perth for a reunion. And we had a cousins' reunion. We all went and had lunch together. I met the cousins who are still

40:00 alive and we all had a big reunion with my Perth cousins last year. So we've kept in touch.

So when you came to Geelong you had no other family here?

No. No. Not a soul. It didn't worry us two boys because we were at school and we made our friends at school. It didn't worry Dad because he was the outgoing type of bloke who met everybody,

40:30 "Hail fellow well met", sort of bloke. And I don't think it worried Mum because she was happy in her home. She had all the things she needed. No, it didn't really worry us very much, having to start again. As I've said, I was just turned eleven and Brian was eight and at that stage, it's not

41:00 hard to settle in. Make friends at school and do all the things you're supposed to do. I remember we joined the Geelong West Swimming Club too because, as I said, we were good swimmers. Brian was a better swimmer than I was. And a diver. He was a fantastic diver because he was a tiny, little kid. But we joined the Geelong West Swimming Club. Now that

41:30 was part of our assimilation into Geelong. I broke my collar bone again by playing with them.

How did you do that?

Oh, riding a bike out in the switchback and I came a cropper. Bang. Away went another collar bone. So that was a start where we joined the swimming club and we got all our friends

42:00 at school.

Tape 2

00:31 **Tell me about your grandfather?**

Well, that's about all I know. That he was a printer and he wasn't doing very well in Adelaide. He wasn't earning a great deal and he had a wife and two sons. And he thought he'd, the gold rush was on and he thought he'd go and make some money

01:00 by going across to Kalgoorlie where they were finding gold. And he pushed this wooden barrow, with all his belongings in it. Well, not all his belongings but belongings enough to survive, all the way to Kalgoorlie. Tried his hand at gold mining and didn't do any good. So then he just pushed the barrow down to Perth and when he got to Perth he got a job with the government printing

01:30 office because he was a printer. And then he settled in, in Perth. He got a house up in Subiaco. He sent for his wife and two sons and they arrived there and they settled into life in Subiaco. Then they had another son who was born in 1902.

02:00 I remember that distinctly for a very good reason. And they settled down to life in Perth, in Subiaco. My grandfather became interested in the council and he was Mayor of Subiaco from 1922 through to 1925, something like that. They named a Roydhouse Street after him up in Subi. And

02:30 he was very much involved in the setting up of Kings Park. So he had a very interesting life after he got to Perth. And his three sons all grew up there and were educated there and became a Perth family. But before that, before he got to Adelaide, he was born in New Zealand. Interesting life. He was born in New Zealand and when he grew up, he migrated to Adelaide and married in

03:00 Adelaide and, as I said, from there on, that's what happened. I remember him pretty well. Good old bloke he was, when I was a little kid. That's about all I can tell you about him.

Did he spend very much time in the goldfields?

I don't think so. No, I think he gave it a bit of a go and said, "This is no good." And he moved on. I don't think

03:30 he did. I think he just gave it a try for a few weeks and said, "I'm not doing any good. I can't afford to stay here." It's interesting history of the Roydhouse family, that he started our branch in Australia but the rest of the Roydhouses stayed in New Zealand. Where they bred like

04:00 rabbits and now there are many more Roydhouses in New Zealand than there are in Australia. So that's how grandfather started his dynasty.

Let's talk now about the period of time, 1939 and

04:30 **the war starting. How old were you?**

Oh, well I've probably got to talk about my broken nose. That was one of the reasons why Dad decided I should do another year at school too. Because, when I was wicketkeeper for the college under 14's cricket team, I got hit on the nose with a cricket ball again. And it broke my nose again.

05:00 And I didn't know it was broken in the first place. And so they took me down to this bloke who was an eye and ear specialist. And he said, "This has been broken before." And he said, "You haven't breathed through your nose since the first break." I didn't realise that. As a child you just, I just breathed through my mouth all those years. And he said, "I can't, I'll put it back again, but you'll have to breathe

05:30 through your nose until you're 18. Because I can't operate on it until you are fully mature." So from the age of 14 until I was 18, I still breathed through my mouth. And then it was arranged for me to have this operation on my nose so I could get two new channels. And he waited until I was 18, which was actually January 1941. War had been going

06:00 for a while. I turned 18 and I had this operation. Where he drilled two new channels and gave me splints to put up my nose every night when I went to bed. So that everything would stay open. And so it was about four or five months before I could really breathe through my nose properly. And that was the first four or five months of 1941.

06:30 And when I went back to college to do another year and that's one of the reasons why Dad thought I ought to do that. And by the end of '41, I still wasn't breathing through my nose happily. You want to know about my joining up. so what happened was that I, I became a good tennis player.

07:00 I was college champion and the college decided I ought to enter in the Victorian school boys under-19 championship. Which I went up to Kooyong and played in that. And, luckily, I got to the final. And Peg came up, she was my girlfriend at the time. She still is. And she came up to watch the final. I was beaten in the final by a bloke who was definitely much better anyway. So that was alright.

07:30 I was runner up in the Victorian under-19s singles and I came back to Geelong and I said to said, "I want to join the air force." He said, "OK, but you can't breathe through your nose so you'll never get in." So I said, "Well, I still want to join." So I went down to the Town Hall and signed all the papers and Dad signed it as my guardian because he didn't think there was a chance of me getting into air crew.

08:00 And then, I don't know how long after that it was, this was early '41 that I actually signed to join up. And then they sent me a letter and said come up to Russell Street and go through all your tests to see if we'll accept you. So I had to go to Russell Street and there were two tests there. There was what they called an aptitude test

08:30 which a whole lot of us sat around in a room and filled in all the answers to the papers which they gave us, etcetera. And then there was a medical after that if you got through the aptitude test. Which quite a few blokes didn't do. They didn't get through because they were obviously not well enough educated to be air crew. Or too slow in thinking or something. And then I went in to the medical which Dad thought, "Ha ha, he'll never make it."

09:00 Part of the medical was, you had to blow up mercury and hold it up to a certain level, for as long as you could. So, got there and took a big breath and I held this mercury up for as long as I could and in the end the bloke said, "That's enough." So I let it go. And then he said, "Now, lie down on that couch." And I lie down on the couch and he put a finger over one nostril and said, "Breathe." And I breathed.

09:30 Put it over the other nostril and I breathed through that. And I couldn't believe it. Because what had happened was, blowing up the mercury had cleared the channels. And so I went through all the medical tests and I went outside and he said, "Right, you can go outside and sit down now." So I went outside and sat down and I couldn't breathe. It was absolutely incredible. So I got through. And I came home and I had the Air Crew

10:00 Reserve badge on the lapel of my coat. And Dad looked and he said, "You couldn't have passed." And I said, "Well I did. I got in." I told him the story. So that's how I actually got in the air force. And that day then, sent you away and said, "Right oh, we'll wait, we'll call you up to start your air force career." And I thought "Beaut. I'll just go and play tennis and I'll go

10:30 swimming and I'll have a lovely time." And Dad said, "No way." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You're going to work at Ford's." So I went out to Ford and I worked in the drafting office because of my bent in that direction of drafting and maths and things like that. And I worked in the drafting office waiting to be called up in the air force. Which eventually happened. Took a long time

11:00 because they had a lot of applicants at the time and they couldn't fit them all in together. And it was several months before I was actually called to go and went up to Melbourne and was signed in and got my number etcetera and then taken down to Somers.

So what was the date when you had your medical?

I don't know.

What month?

It would be, the medical would have been in January.

11:30 Would have been early January. Which would have been '42. It would be early January when I did the medical and then I don't think, I don't think I was called up until around about May. And I had to work at the Ford Motor Company starting work at 7 o'clock every morning. And getting the bus out there early. I never, ever worked for them again. Or for anybody.

Were you impatient during that time?

12:00 A little bit, yes. Saying, "When the heck are they going to let me know?" You know. While we were on the reserve we were going down to the post office doing Morse code every couple of nights. We'd go down and we'd learn Morse code. Banging away at little zipper things and trying to learn

12:30 before we went in. That was their idea, that's something we don't have to bother a great deal about when you do get in.

Was there any other training that you did when you were on the reserves?

No, that was only Morse code when I was on the reserve. That's all we did. Yeah, I'm pretty sure that's all we did, the Morse code. A mate of mine lived a couple of doors away from me.

13:00 He joined up the same time as I did, and we set up a buzzer in his attic and we buzzed each other up there. And we used to go down to the classes together. We both, we were both adequate at Morse code by the time we went in anyway. So it was something you didn't have to concentrate on a great deal when you were at the initial training school at Somers.

13:30 That's all I can say about the enlisting part of it.

When you had to blow up the mercury, what was the device?

Well, you had a tube that you blew and the mercury went up the scale and there was a sort of red line there that you had to hold it above that. It was quite a strain on you.

14:00 Well, I think it proved a little bit about your lung capacity and your endurance and your determination and things like that. But they did that and they knocked a few people out because they couldn't hold the mercury up for long. Incredible how many people failed the medical tests and the aptitude tests, etcetera, to get into air crew. It was amazing. More than half the people who applied

14:30 didn't get in at that stage. Because they were being very fussy. That's why Dad didn't think I'd make it.

Well, it was '42 and the war had progressed quite a bit. Were you following closely what was going on?

Ah yes, I was reading the paper and that was how it, see, I actually joined, well I signed up, didn't join because that's when I applied, I think two days after Pearl Harbor

15:00 was, Pearl Harbor happened when I was playing tennis up at Kooyong. And that sort of tipped me over the edge and I said, "Well crikey, I've got to get into this." Although I had indicated to Dad prior to that, that I was going to join the air force because it was safer than being in the army. Which it wasn't.

15:30 **But that was your impression at the time?**

My impression, and one of the reasons that I joined the air force, was that I thought I'd either be killed or I wouldn't. But, as it turned out, a lot of the people in the air force were badly maimed. I didn't even, I didn't think that would happen. I thought you'd get shot down, you'd die or you'd come home whole. But a lot of blokes didn't. There were horrible burns and all sorts of things happened to airmen.

16:00 So I was wrong. But that's one of the reasons I joined. The other one was the glamour of being a fighter pilot. Which I never ever saw of course. Never ever. They just shot me through as an observer.

So did you have a particular interest in planes?

No. No, I didn't. I just,

16:30 I joined because I thought that would be the best place for me to go. No, I wasn't interested in aeroplanes. I didn't know one from the other.

So, what did you say? May you got called up. May '42?

I think. I couldn't tell you. But it was about that. Yeah.

Tell me about that time,

17:00 **getting your call up papers and what you had to do.**

Well I just got the call up to report to Russell Street headquarters at 7 o'clock on such and such a morning. My father had a very good friend who was the licensee of the MCG [Melbourne Cricket Ground] Hotel up in Jolimont. So I stayed the night before with Harold. And got up very early and walked down to

17:30 Russell Street from there. And just reported in. Where they gave us a bit of a lecture and lined us up and we got our numbers and they put us in buses and took as down to Somers where we started our air force life. Which was mostly drill for start and discipline and

18:00 all sorts of things down at Somers. And classes on all sorts of things. Where, unfortunately, I knew most of the answers when it came to maths and physics, which they were putting us through that sort of thing for the navigation. And, unfortunately for me, I knew them all. Because of my last year at school.

18:30 We did physical training. We did all sorts of things down there. And after two months of initial training, they sorted everybody out and told them where they were going. And they picked on a lot of blokes and said, "You're going off to be wireless air gunners and you're going up to Ballarat", or so and so, "and you're leaving now." The others, they said, "Right oh, you're going to do a pilot's course and you're staying here for another month."

19:00 “And you’re going to be observers and you’re staying here for another month.” To do another month’s training at ITS [Initial Training School]. So that was sorting out of everybody and what they were going to be down there. Lots of physical training and lots of everything that went on. I think every air crew bloke went through exactly the same thing. Either for two months

19:30 or for three. So we were down there for three months. And I remember, just as an aside, we used to get an occasional day off and a couple of mates and I had this day off and I said, “Let’s go up to Melbourne because Dad’s got a horse running at Moonee Valley.” “Oh, beauty, we’ll go up to the races for the day.” So we went up to the races at Moonee Valley and

20:00 I saw Dad and I said, “How’s the horse going to go?” He said, “Well,” he said, “It’s a bad starter.” He said, “If he gets away with the rest of them, he’ll win easy. But he mightn’t start properly.” So I said to the boys, “Right oh, this is the story.” So we all put what little money we had on Dad’s horse and it never got away from the barrier. So that was our day at the races and it cured me. I didn’t ever worry about the races from there on.

20:30 But that was just a little aside for when we were down at Somers. We had this day off and we lost our five bob [shillings], or whatever it was we put on the horse.

Can you tell me a bit about the training? Can you recall much about it?

Can’t remember a great deal except it was mid-winter and we were freezing. We were in tents. I actually met, in our tent there were

21:00 a couple of people who became famous later on which was interesting. Because they put us in tents according to our alphabetical order. And I was in a tent with a bloke named Tony Roberts, because we’re the R. And there were two Steeles in our tent. One of them was a fellow named Rupert Steele who had everybody else down there jealous because he was very wealthy and he had a sports car.

21:30 And all the women were falling all over him because he had a sports car and he was a tall, good-looking bloke. We were all very jealous of him. And the other bloke was named Ken, Ken Steele. And he was a pretty volatile sort of a bloke and we got on extremely well in the tent. There were six of us in the tent. So there were three others who were, turned out to be very successful.

22:00 After the war we had several meetings at lunch time. Ken Steele became managing director of the Myer Emporium and became Sir Kenneth Steele. Rupert Steele was chairman of the VRC [Victorian Racing Club] at Flemington and he became Sir Rupert Steele. And Tony Roberts became head of a national

22:30 real estate agency. And I, poor old Don, he just came down from Geelong and ran a shop. So there were three blokes who turned out to be extremely successful. As I turned out, the three of us all became observers. The four of us became observers and we did our observers course all the way through together. We went to England together. We all came home together. So it was a great association to have

23:00 with people who became very, very well-known people. I was the also-ran.

Were there WAAAFs [Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force] down there?

Yes there were and I did my best to get on with the WAAAFs. I was too inexperienced. There were other blokes who did better. This has fallen out.

23:30 Tell you more about that? What, about the WAAAFs?

Yeah. Did you train with them?

They were just part of the staff. They weren’t training down there. They were in the kitchen, they were in the office and that’s where the WAAAFs were. I didn’t know anything about girls because I’d been,

24:00 well, I didn’t tell you, at the college, we’ll go back to that. When I was fourteen I’d been at the college for four years as a day boy from round the corner. And I thought, “I’d better help Dad out a bit. I’ll sit for this scholarship” that they brought up. So I filled in the application for the scholarship and I was lucky enough to get it and it turned out to be a boarding scholarship. I hadn’t read the fine print.

24:30 So I got this scholarship and I went home to Dad and I said, “Look, this is crazy. I’ve just won a boarding scholarship for two years at the college.” He said, “Well, you take it. You become a boarder.” So I was a boarder at the college and I lived around the corner. And Dad agreed with it totally because he, at one stage, before he joined the Ford Motor Company, he was a housemaster at Hale School in Perth. And he thought

25:00 that boarding was very good for lads. So I became a boarder at the college accidentally. So I was a boarder for the last four years. The last two years at the school, Dad paid the boarding fees for me to be at the school. Where was I up to? Why did I say that?

Inexperience.

Yeah, that’s right. So I was a boarder at school, in a boys’ school, for the last

25:30 four years, from the time I was fourteen till I was eighteen. And there was very little opportunity to meet girls. I was stuck there, I couldn't get out. The only time I met girls was, we used occasionally have a dance at Marengo or the Hermitage or there was an occasional tennis match between the

26:00 schools. Where they, I remember the beginning of our romance was at the Hermitage where there was a mixed doubles tournament and Peg and I won it. So I thought, "She's not bad, this girl. I'll stay with her." But that was it. I really and truly didn't have a great deal to do with the female sex because I was interested in sport and I was in a boys' school as a boarder.

26:30 And there weren't any opportunities to mix. So when I got down to, and, of course, when I joined the air force and they took me out to Ford at seven o'clock every morning till six o'clock at night and that was it. So I arrived at Somers with very little experience. And I was outgunned.

27:00 **Tell me more about that?**

Well, I didn't know how to talk to girls or anything. How to get on with them, I didn't know. You know, I knew a couple of the girls in Geelong because we used to go down swimming together in the summer time. And play a bit of tennis together and that was it.

27:30 There was no romantic opportunities as far as I was concerned. Anyway, I didn't do any good down there.

Did you form any friendships at all with the women?

No, I didn't. I did with a couple of the blokes that I was training with. One fellow in particular, a bloke named Bert Salt. I was, at that stage, I've turned nineteen.

28:00 Bert was twenty-nine and he was a school teacher from Warrnambool. Strange to say, we got on extremely well together and he and I became the greatest of mates. When we went down, we were posted to Mount Gambier to do our navigation training and Bert and I flew together all the time. We were really very close friends.

28:30 And yet he was ten years older than I was and he was married, well everything was different, you know. But we got on extremely well together. So, actually we graduated together and we went overseas together and, unfortunately he was killed. When he was I thought, "Well, why? Why would a married man cop it and I haven't?"

29:00 Because nobody wants me anyway, you know, I'm just a single bloke. But that's how it went.

Where was he killed?

Over Germany, he was killed over Germany. He went on Bomber Command and he was shot down. And that's another story. Because when we got to England, I'm jumping the gun.

That's OK. Go ahead.

When we got there, they said, "Right, we're changing the system and we're creating specialised

29:30 bomb aimers. You are navigator bomb aimers, you both. We're creating specialised bomb aimers and we're getting specialised navigators. One or the other. There's still a little bit of an opening for some observers. Now, we want you all to make up your minds what you want to be." And Bert said, "I'm going to be a bomb aimer." I said, "Don't be stupid, you know,

30:00 you're a really good navigator." Well, every time Bert went up in the air he was sick. I used to do his drifts for him and help him because we flew together as trainees. He said, "Well," he said, "The way I look at it, I'll be sick all the way over the Germany and I'll drop the bombs and I'll be sick all the way back. Nothing else that I've got to do." But he said, "If I'm navigating, I'm going to have to be working while I'm sick. So," he said, "I'll be a bomb aimer." And he

30:30 was and they got shot down and killed. And I think they probably got shot down because he had a rotten navigator and they got out of the stream. That's way ahead of what I was talking about.

Where were you when you found out he'd been killed?

I was doing what was called a general reconnaissance course. I hadn't got on to operations at that stage because it took a long time before I did. I had to do

31:00 specialised courses. Anyway, I decided I wanted to stay an observer and I was. But that's Bert.

And news came through to you?

Yeah, I'd been writing to him and one of his mates knew that and he wrote to me and said, "Bert's gone. He's bought it." So you did make great friends and he was my closest in the air force

31:30 at that stage.

Back at Somers, that's where you met Bert?

Yeah, I met him in Russell Street when we were lined up to get our numbers. He was standing behind me. And I said, “What do you think about this?” So we started to have a bit of a yarn, you know, and we went through that morning and then the bus going down to Somers and we just sort of clicked

32:00 from there on. But that’s the way things happened, you know. You just had to accept it. Some people didn’t make it, some did. He was, he was sort of good at the same things that I was and even though he was ten years older, we did very well together.

32:30 Going across to England on the boat he taught me how to play chess, which I never had done. He taught me how to play chess, then he wanted to teach me how to play contract bridge and I wasn’t very interested in that. But that’s, we were great friends, Bert and I. I wrote to his wife, that I’ve never heard of since. She’s probably remarried many years ago.

33:00 That’s the sad part about war, you lose your mates. If you were lucky enough to come back. Where were we up to?

I was going to ask you about Peg. You knew Peg before you went to Somers?

Oh, yes. Well, as I’ve said, we played tennis together in a tennis tournament when we were both at school. And we won the tournament and I thought

33:30 she was pretty good then. And then we used to go down swimming, down at Eastman Beach. And I was attracted to her there. She was always the life of the party and laughing and carrying on. And I thought, “She’s a great girl, this one.” So when I went away I wrote to her and she answered. So we corresponded all the way through the air force career. She corresponded

34:00 with another bloke too. Which I didn’t know. So, yes, we knew each other when I joined up. And we wrote to each other all the time I was in the air force. And when I got home I said, “You’ll do me.”

Was this a romance that was brewing in your letters?

Oh, yes.

34:30 I’m sure it was. I’m sure it was. Yes, it was brewing. I was keener on her than she was on me but I had to convince her that I was the right bloke. So, it’s worked out pretty well. We’ve been married 57 years now. And that seems to have worked pretty well.

We haven’t really

35:00 **finished with Somers yet. It would be good to get a bit of detail about the specific courses or programs you were introduced to.**

I’m not sure. I can’t remember. Can’t remember the actual subjects we did. We did Morse code, which didn’t matter. We did meteorology and

35:30 a little bit of engineering about aircraft engines, which never ever worried me, of course. But the pilots were supposed to know something about that, those who went on as pilots. A bit of primitive navigation we did down there. I can’t remember what

36:00 else, I’m sorry.

But at that stage, did you know whether you had an option of being a pilot?

Only the last month. The first two months I didn’t know. I was just, just doing everything that everybody else did. And quite positive I’d go out as a pilot then. But no. Big shock. They had a bit of sport there.

36:30 Physical training. Drill. All sorts of things to introduce you into the air force. That’s about all I can say.

On the technical side, because that was your interest wasn’t it?

Yeah.

Were you introduced to very much?

No. Well, we did have the simple maths

37:00 and physics things that they took. But, unfortunately that, I should have failed in that. Should have. Well, I shouldn’t have got everything right, put it that way. Because that’s where they looked and said, “Ha ha, we need blokes to go and do this geometry and things like that.”

37:30 **So in the two months leading up to being told what you would be accepted as, did it dawn on you that you may be rejected as a pilot?**

Never. No, I felt absolute certainty. Because I was young. I was reasonably fit and all that. I was able to get through everything that we were supposed to do. I thought, “I’m in.” But I wasn’t. Didn’t matter because when I

38:00 stop and think about it, in my latter years, the people who chose where you were going were pretty

smart. Because they were absolutely right. I should have been an observer and I was. And that's where my forte was. I loved it. When I got into the navigation system I just loved it.

38:30 Was a much better job than being a pilot. Particularly later on when I went on to Coastal Command and it was all a real challenge.

So, at Somers, what were you introduced to as far as navigation went?

Couldn't tell you. Simple, simple courses and tracks, you know, that sort of thing that a pilot should know.

39:00 That was about it.

Map reading?

Yeah. A bit of map reading and bit of what drift was and the, what deviation and what that was and all the sort of simple things that you

39:30 learn, even if you want to know anything about navigation you've got to know what a compass will do the fact that an aeroplane drifts off course because of wind. The very easy part was what we learnt down there.

Did you know how to read a compass before you went there?

No. But that's simple work. Those were

40:00 the sort of things that they taught us down there. The very simple parts and pilots had to know that too. They had to know variation and deviation as far as the compass was concerned. I don't know if we learnt how to swing a compass down there or not. I don't remember.

Do you remember going out in the field doing exercises?

Oh, cross country

40:30 and things like that to get us fit. But that was part of the physical training that we did down there. We had long runs across, lots of marching in the parade ground. I suppose that was the same as being in the army. You just had to learn all these basic

41:00 things of being in the air force. Somers is a bit of a blur to me really. It happened mid-winter, wasn't very pleasant. We froze to death almost. And it wasn't something that I was terribly interested in, all the discipline and the exercise and things that didn't really interested me. But when I got to Mount Gambier, that started

41:30 to gel.

Tape 3

00:31 I know two of them are dead now. I haven't seen them for some years. I'm not quite sure about the other one. But I haven't seen them now for five or six years. That's what happens as the years go by, you gradually lose all these friends and acquaintances that you've met in the past. It's natural progression. Are we in business?

01:00 **We're back on now. On the last tape we finished off the chapter at Somers before you went off to Mount Gambier. But is it possible to hear about your father? He had some involvement in the First World War.**

Yes. Oh, what I told you there?

Yeah, if you can, for the records.

Yes, well Dad was a schoolmaster.

01:30 He trained in Perth and became a school teacher. And he joined the army. He was very interested in athletics and sport and everything else. And the first morning he was in the army, when they were on parade, and the person running the parade said, "Does anybody here know about physical jerks?" And Dad immediately stepped forward and said, "Yes, sir, I do."

02:00 And so the man in charge said, "Take the parade in physical jerks." So Dad stepped forward and there were a couple of hundred people there. He stepped forward and he took the parade in physical jerks which he was used to doing anyway. Taking all the kids in, what today, didn't call it physical jerks today, but it was exercise. So a couple of days

02:30 later they decided this was a man who was a leader and they sent him away on an officer's course. He became an officer. He went away as a lieutenant. Went away to Spain as a lieutenant. He progressed through there. He finished up in the Somme and he won an MC [Military Cross] in the Somme. He also

won a

03:00 mention in dispatches for another incident. He was promoted to captain and then he became a major. Temporary major because they didn't make them permanent in those days when they went up that high because he wasn't permanent army. And he was assigned to the staff, looking after the then Prince of Wales. There's a picture of Dad in a shell hole having breakfast with

03:30 famous people. General Monash was one of them. And Stan Savage was a great mate of Dad's. They were both in the shell hole together. They were the same rank and they fought together. I remember when the first lot were moving out in the Second World War in a parade in Melbourne, through Melbourne of all the troops about to disembark, to embark.

04:00 And Dad took me up there and I was only a lad of sixteen. Dad took me up there and we were in the crowd and along came Stan Savage and I remember the old man yelling, "G'day, Stan." And Stan yelled back, "G'day, Jack. How are you going?" So they were mates. It wasn't any tomfoolery about it. They were good mates and he met him quite a few times after the war as friends, army friends.

04:30 Dad was never interested in staying in the army but Savage did. So he had a, had quite an interesting army career. He was wounded twice and came back with those decorations. So he did very well.

What did he win the MC for?

He led a platoon somewhere

05:00 in an attack. And they were, it's in the records of the First World War, they talk about this action. This platoon was cut off and surrounded and Dad rallied all his troops and fought it out until the others came and rescued them. And he got the MC for the leadership in what

05:30 he'd done there. He was wounded in the knee at the time. And he always carried a piece of metal in his leg, all his life. But that's why he got the MC, for outstanding leadership in an awkward situation in the Somme.

Did he talk much about his war experiences?

Oh, never did, no. But he was in, was it Bean or somebody who wrote the history of the First World War? And he's mentioned in that, of this action that happened.

06:00 I haven't got the book. I don't know where it is.

And how well aware of his exploits were you during your childhood?

No. No, we know that bit because we read it in the book. It was showing in the book and there was, in Stan Savage's life, there was a book called

06:30 There Goes a Man, which is the history of Stan Savage and Dad's mentioned in that. And that picture you saw in there is in Stan Savage's book. The one in the shell hole. That's how we picked it up really. The history of that action is in that First World War book which I read.

You said how your

07:00 **father thought there was no way you'd get into air crew.**

Yeah.

Do you think he had an opinion about your choice of air force over army?

No, he never mentioned that. He never mentioned to try and change my mind, what I wanted to do. My young brother joined the navy. So we finished up with the three services in the family. But, no, Dad never said, "Oh, why don't you join the army instead of the air force?" I just said, "I want to join the air force,

07:30 Dad." "Oh, yeah. You'll never get in." You know, that's, so no, he never ever tried to influence me there.

Sounds like he was a very modest person.

He never ever talked about his war experiences. Well, you don't. Some people do. But I think most people who talk about their war experiences

08:00 exaggerate how good they were. And Dad never ever talked about it. Except maybe to say, "Listen, war is a terrible thing. You don't want to be in it." I agree.

Last tape you told us about your initial training school, Somers. Are you able to recall for us that time that you found out which role you'd been

08:30 **designated?**

I was very disappointed. Very disappointed at the time. I thought, "Why? Why didn't they pick me when they're picking all these older fellows and a young, fit man who could be a great pilot doesn't get it?"

That was my reaction and it went on for a little while where I was a bit crook on it all. But you get over that and say, “OK. Well, they’ve decided. You can’t do anything about it. You’ve

09:00 got to go along with it.” And, of course, then when I started the navigation course, I started to think, “Jeez, this is good. I like this.”

I like what you said before because you said that looking back the people who made those decisions made the right ones.

They were dead right. They were absolutely dead right. Because I turned out, skiting a bit, but I turned out to be a very good navigator. That’s why they sent me to Sunderlands. Because you’ve got to be pretty good to navigate over the ocean all the time.

09:30 **Are you able to describe what were those requirements of a good pilot or a good navigator? Are you able to work out why those decisions were made?**

No, I think it was just simply that I, they picked me because of my maths. Maths and physics that I understood. I think that’s why they picked it.

10:00 Since the war, by the way, I decided I was going to learn to fly because I reckon that they made a mistake and I did, I got a pilot’s license. But I was interested in just flying. I was always interested, as a private pilot, in going from A to B and doing the navigation to get there. So it proved the point.

Can you tell us about that move to

10:30 **your next point of training?**

Yes. Well, we went to Mount Gambier where they had Anson aeroplanes with a pilot and a wireless operator on board as staff. And they used to take two trainee navigators up with them every time. The trainee navigators, there were specified routes

11:00 that we had to do. The first one was only about a twenty minute flight, from A to B to C and home again. Just to get us used to flying in these Anson’s. And then they gradually increased the range of where we had to navigate and I was talking about Bert Salt before. Well, the first time we had to go up, Bert he was terribly sick. Even in a twenty minute flight. I thought, “Oh, crikey.

11:30 What are we going to do?” Anyway, as we progressed, I found that Bert couldn’t take a drift sight, because every time he looked down a drift sight, he was violently ill as soon as he did it. Looking down a drift and seeing all the things moving. So I used to do his drifts for him and he’d do the navigation when it was his turn to do the thing, he would do the navigation, I would take his drifts because he was sick.

12:00 And he was sick every time we went in the air. Every time he was sick at some stage. But he did his job and he knew navigation very well. We had a good time at Mount Gambier because it was a nice station. We both played in the cricket team, in the station cricket team against the locals when we had time. We had a pretty

12:30 happy time there, learning navigation. And I remember we had to learn all sorts of different things like recognition of flags and Bert and I used to sit there with a pack of cards that had all the flags on one side and the answer on the other and say, “What’s so and so?” And we’d look at it and we’d say, “No, you’re wrong.”

13:00 So we actually trained together, learnt together. And I thoroughly enjoyed the three months we were at Mount Gambier. That’s about it. We both did pretty well there because we were involved and settled down and got into it. And loved it. Both of us loved the navigation side.

13:30 **You said that Bert got sick every time he went up. How about you?**

No, never. The only time I was ever sick in the air was after a very big night out in Scotland. The whole crew were crook. It was the only time I was ever airsick. It wasn’t airsick. It was a hangover. So I was lucky. I just didn’t get airsick. But Bert did. Terribly.

So why do you think he persevered?

14:00 He was just determined to keep it going. It cost him his life, really. He should have been scrubbed. But I wasn’t going to tell on him. And he should have been scrubbed early. Because it’s just not on, to be airsick every time you go up. Yeah, but anyway, that’s

14:30 what happened.

And this was the first time you’d been up in a plane?

Yeah, the first trip. We did twenty minutes in an Anson.

And what did you think of that?

Oh, I thought it was great. I thought it was terrific, looking down and seeing what was going on. Yeah, I was rapt. I thought, “Beauty.” And then working out where we were going. That started to get me interested.

15:00 The things we were learning, I was interested in that. As I said earlier, they picked the right job.

Can you tell us about those things? This is where you really get into the nitty gritty of navigating. What did that involve?

It involved learning how to plot a course. Learning how to use drifts and how to do

15:30 winds. How to work your wind. What we used to do was, you got a wind by what was called a three course wind and we also worked out a wind by, over the land it's very easy because you can aim somewhere and finish up somewhere else and the wind has done the difference. Made the difference between where you should be and where you are. So that's quite a simple thing to

16:00 work out. And then you alter course and allow for it all on the next leg. But over the sea, you don't do that. You can't look down and see where you are and do that. But that's just one of the intricacies of navigation and learning how to use the drift. And your speed and your direction and everything else of where you're going and what's happening. And allow for it for the next bit and alter course to where you want to go.

16:30 Navigation over the land is very easy if you know what you're doing. It's a breeze. But we learnt how to use all sorts of other things like position lines and pin points and all those things that have an effect.

17:00 It's hard to explain, just where to get you in over navigation. Making sure you've got where you wanted to go on time and didn't have to do alter courses right at the last minute to get there. That's how they sort of worked out how good you were or what you were doing. If you knew what you were up to.

Can you describe the sorts of instruments that you were working on

17:30 **and how they worked together?**

Yes, well the drift sight, you looked down through a sight and you line up a grille with the land moving. You can look down the sight and you can see the movement of land underneath you, or the water. And you line the instrument up so it's parallel to the movement. And then you

18:00 can read off what the difference between where you're going or you're aiming and where you're actually going, what your drift is. It'll read on this instrument, "Drift is so much, so many degrees to port or starboard". And then you can apply it to what's happening. And navigation over the sea, you've got to do that regularly because you don't get the chance of looking down and saying, "Oh, we're over Melbourne."

18:30 And you've got to take, as I mentioned earlier, three course winds. Where you take a drift on your original heading and then you head off sixty degrees one side or the other. Then you turn back a hundred and twenty degrees and you take drifts on the three legs. And by plotting that, you can tell exactly what the wind is at that stage. It's going to change pretty regularly

19:00 so you've got to keep doing it. That's the major thing in aircraft navigation, is to allow for the wind. Find what the wind is, allow for it, and find when it changes. So you're on the job all the time, just checking on those things. Fundamentally that's what it's about.

Were you doing night flying at all at Mount Gambier?

No, that's later.

19:30 That was later. We didn't do any night flying at Mount Gambier. Later in the course we did a month at Newell doing astronavigation and taking the shots of the stars and learning how to use them. That was interesting too. I learnt how to use a sextant and do your position lines, etcetera, from taking positions of the stars. Taking shots of the stars. Interestingly enough, we knew

20:00 all the stars in the Southern Hemisphere, so they sent us to England. Where we had to learn them again over there. Different ones. How to use different stars. But that was unavoidable. But we learnt how to do it.

So how long was that period at Mount Gambier?

Three months. We were there for three months and then they sent us from there down to Sale. Which didn't

20:30 interest me at all, Sale. It was bombing and gunnery. A month of bombing and a month of gunnery down at Sale. And I didn't, I wasn't interested. I did it.

You'd obviously been earmarked as navigator, observer, why did you need to do those courses?

Well, an observer did those three things. He was supposed to know how to use a gun if he had to. And he was supposed to know how to use bombsights. Which, incidentally,

21:00 we had to do in, in Sunderlands I was the bomb aimer as well as the navigator in the Sunderlands. That's why I obtained the O [Observer] rather than an N [Navigator] or a B [Bomb aimer]. Because we

did do both on a Sunderland. But I was certainly wasn't interested in gunnery. I was probably the worst shot in Geelong College when we went down to the (UNCLEAR) to

21:30 use rifles. I was a terrible shot. And I couldn't hit anything with a machine gun either. But I was reasonably good at bomb aiming. Although, it's a, it's one of those things that I would rather have been navigating than bomb aiming. It's interesting thing, at Sale, that was the closest I came to not making

22:00 my, not making it. Down at Sale, I very nearly lost my life at Sale, when I think about it, in an accident. I was up doing a bombing exercise at the range from ten thousand feet, in the back of what was called, a plane called the Fairey Battle. The Fairey Battle was a single-engined plane. It was a real mess.

22:30 And the bomb aimer had to go right down underneath the pilot to the bombsight, which you crawled on your way down to get to the bombsight and you used a speaking tube to tell him what to do. And you had to drop ten bombs, they were smoke bombs about that big, on the target. Interesting that a bomb aimer has to direct a pilot on his course.

23:00 He gives the left, left, steady, right, steady, to bring him right on course over the target from ten thousand feet. And I finished all the bombs and said, "All bombs done. We can go back to base." So I then came back and I sat in the seat, there's a seat at the back of this passage with an open canopy above you. And I sat in this seat

23:30 for our way back to the aerodrome. And the pilot decided to do a loop and I wasn't even strapped in. And over we went, right over the top. And I'm hanging on both sides so I wouldn't fall out. It was the most terrifying thing, for an aeroplane to be upside down. And you could easily fall straight out. I wasn't strapped in or anything.

24:00 Now when we got down, I abused the pilot. He was much higher rank than I was but I still abused him. And he said, "Oh, I didn't realise you were at the back. I thought you were still down there at the bombsight." So it was a very close thing. I was just hanging on by grim death by my hands at my side hanging on to the ribs. "God." Right over the top. And he said that he bet one of his mates he could loop a Fairey Battle. But he didn't warn me that he was going

24:30 to do it, otherwise I would have crawled back inside. Anyway, that was probably the closest thing you can ever have. So I didn't like that.

So you said it was just a canopy?

The canopy was open. That's where we used to go up in a Battle and they had a gun there and you'd fire at the drogue from this back area which was open. And you had

25:00 a gun there. But for bombing, they didn't mount the gun. So you stood up in that in your gunnery part and they'd fly another aeroplane along dragging a drogue and you'd pepper it from the back part. It was quite open. Anyway, that's what happened. But I just mention that as saying some of the hazards in

25:30 training. A lot of blokes lots their lives in training and I could have, doing that. Bloke would have got a hell of a surprise when he got back and found he didn't have a passenger.

What about at Mount Gambier, were there any sort of hazards there? Any accidents?

No. No. Didn't have an accident at Mount Gambier or Newell. Didn't have an accident down at Sale either. There were no accidents because the,

26:00 there wasn't any reason to. But there were things that happened at Sale, not when I was there, but somebody, they had a terrible accident on 90 Mile Beach where some pilot came in too low and he was dragging a drogue or something and he wiped people off that were on the beach. But not when I was there. But that's history. That's what happened.

26:30 Don't know if it ever got in the papers about this stupid idiot going along a beach with a drag, drogue dragging along the sand. No, there were no accidents during my training. There were for pilots who crashed themselves when they were training. A lot of them did that. But not, we had trained pilots who took us and took us very safely.

27:00 **So what was the observers' language? How would you be communicating with the pilot? What was the terminology and the shorthand that you used?**

How do you mean? In the training in the aeroplane?

You've got to let the pilot know where you're headed.

In an Anson you simply went up to

27:30 him and said, "Look, alter course to so and so." When you wanted to alter course you went up and spoke in his ear and said, "Alter course at such and such. ETA [Estimated Time of Arrival] at so and so will be so and so." Actually the pilots on the navigation courses knew better than you did where they were. So that was that was the situation there. It actually did happen on Sunderlands as well because

28:00 I was situated upstairs on the upper deck and I was from here to the wall from the pilot. And I just used to get up from the deck and say, "Alter course so and so. Right." And he'd alter course. So it wasn't anything complicated. You just told them alter course to so and so now. No secret language or anything, just do this.

28:30 And they never argued with you. So all we did is tell them what course to fly and when to expect to get to where they were going. Sometimes it worked.

Were there times in those early training days when you got it wrong?

Oh, of course. Of course you did. But you learnt to correct if you were wrong, if you were off track and you

29:00 realised you'd made a mistake, then you learned to correct that mistake so you'd get to where you were supposed to be going. Didn't ever do it when we were fully trained, you didn't make mistakes. You couldn't afford to. Or if you did, you'd get scrubbed.

29:30 **What about the regimentation of life during the training days? How did you respond to that?**

I didn't particularly like regimentation. I wasn't very good at drilling. I did it. I wasn't interested in keeping straight lines or marching along like a soldier. Didn't impress me at all. My main

30:00 interest was in the job I was supposed to do. Not air force law or anything like that. That didn't interest me. No. Later on when I was fully qualified they, they fortunately didn't worry me with drill.

Did that attitude get you into any trouble?

No, never got

30:30 in trouble that way. I just used to wander along with everybody else and you knew what limit you could go to without getting into bother. Stay within the limits and you're in business. It's alright. No, no trouble there.

In order for us to get a comprehensive picture of the training you did at that time,

31:00 **we've talked a bit about navigation at Mount Gambier, can you tell us about astronavigation?**

Yes. Astronavigation was an interesting thing that we were all issued with sextants and a book of tables and we were sent to Newell because Newell is a place where there's not much cloud. And you don't want cloud

31:30 when you're trying to take shots. And so we used to practice at night. We'd use the sextant in the daytime too, to take sun shots. And using astronav, you're interested in what time the sun gets up. You're interested in what time it goes to bed. And you're interested at any time of the day in what elevation it is. So you can use a sextant

32:00 any time during the day to get a reading on the sun. And then you can look through your tables and find out just what your position line is. Because one shot gives you a position line. Doesn't give you where you are. It tells you you're somewhere along that line. At night, if you take shots of different stars, you pick stars that are not in the same direction so that

32:30 your position lines are going to cross. And you generally pick three so that you get a triangle of the three different position lines crossing in a triangular way. And the middle of the triangle is supposed to be where you are because you're allowing for a little bit of error. So that's fundamentally what you, at night you can do that. In the daytime you can get your longitude by the

33:00 time the sun rises or when it sets. You can work out your longitude. And you can get another position line by taking a reading of the sun during the daytime, get another position line then. But it's not, you can't get three. So you get longitude and you can generally get latitude by the sun shot. I was never very

33:30 confident in astronav because I reckon when you're in an aeroplane and it's moving, you've got to use what they call a, oh, what sort of sextant is it? It's a sextant with a motor drive. You take your reading and it reads through a minute and then it gives you the average reading that minute. Because the

34:00 aeroplane's moving and, what do they call that sextant? I've forgotten. Anyway, I was never very confident that it was really accurate within a mile or two. If you were lost, I suppose it would help. But we, the theory was that we had to used astro shots to get us position lines or fixes. Which are, fixes are three different ones and you get the position.

34:30 Or two would do to give you a fix. You were there, rather than just along there. So in practice, we used to have to do it, get our position lines or our fixes by astro and then you weren't obligated to use them. So, if you say, "Well, that's wrong. I won't use it." Discard that. But I've done it. I've put it in the log. I've done it and I ignore it.

35:00 And I'll just go on other factors. Which proved, in the end, to be better anyway. So astronav, in my

opinion, wasn't very useful. Except if you were in real trouble, it would certainly tell you approximately where you were. If you'd lost your way you could get a rough idea where you

35:30 were. Within a few miles. But in Coastal Command, if you were that far out ,you were in real trouble. When you got home you'd be up before the beak.

So when you say, you'd rely on other factors, you're talking about?

I'm talking about DR navigation. That's taking drifts and winds and plotting away, all the way, all the time. And that was, if you're on the beam all the time,

36:00 that was right. And then you'd get a position line with a sextant and it was different to where you said you were. And I always relied on where I said I was. Not the position line from the astro-shot. If you were fairly close to land and you can get a position line from a loop aerial, of tuning in on a radio beacon or a radio station, that would probably

36:30 be much more accurate than from up there.

So DR is dead reckoning is it?

Dead reckoning, yeah, dead reckoning. We used, in our squadron used dead reckoning. All the time and we were generally out for fourteen, fifteen hours. So you were on the beam for fourteen or fifteen hours, taking drifts, doing winds, plotting. Just as

37:00 well we were young.

What about night? Is DR still… ?

Yes, well, talking Sunderlands, we got drifts at night by dropping little flares and getting tail gunners to read where we were and to give us readings from the tail. So it was just the same. Instead of looking down the drift sight, we said, "Right, flare out. Tail be ready." He'd give you the reading,

37:30 so and so and so and so and so and so. Swung a bit. So we'd get drifts, just the same, at night.

Later on you were observer and bomb aimer as well. You learnt that at Sale?

Yes.

Can you describe what the training involved there?

That's a fairly interesting question because at Sale

38:00 I made a very big mistake. I knew the theory of dropping a bomb because of my physics. And we learnt, there was an instructor who was telling us about how the bombs went in an arc, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, and he got it wrong. And Ken Steele, who was pretty

38:30 knowledgeable, got up and said, "I'm sorry sir. But that's not right." And muggo backed him up. I said, "No, that's not right. This is so and so and so and so. That's wrong." Fancy having the audacity to tell an instructor that he was wrong. And he was. And an offshoot of all that, when we left Sale, we had to take a sealed envelope with us to take up to Newell, which was our last

39:00 station before we graduated. And in the sealed envelope was all our records. So, of course, everyone steamed them open to see what was happened. And at Somers I was recommended for commission. At Mount Gambier, recommended for commission. At Sale, not recommended for commission. So we didn't get it. Both Ken and I had the same thing. Recommended, recommended, not recommended. And we both went out as sergeants. It was a stupid

39:30 thing to do. But, as I said, that was the biggest mistake I made. It was dreadful thing to do. If I'd thought about it, I would have shut up. But somewhere along the line, we just didn't want the instructor to tell everybody the wrong thing from there on. I think he probably did anyway.

So you would have just changed your practice?

It had nothing to do with the actual practice of dropping the bomb. It was just the theory

40:00 of the arc in which the bomb went. And the path it took. It was only theory and it didn't affect anybody in particular because the bomb sites we were using at ten thousand feet were good bomb sites. And you were looking through a view piece, through the end of the thing. You set up what height you were at and what speed you were doing and everything else. And you're looking through this

40:30 sight and you had to allow for the drift and it was a pretty good bomb site. And then you pressed the tip and everything came together. When the target came into the crosswires, bam. That's all you had to do. You had to learn to set everything up and the press the tip at the right time. You didn't have to know the theory of why it did this, why it did that. And so it was a stupid thing to correct him. Crazy.

41:00 Anyway. That's what we did.

So the sights are calibrated to allow for…

Yeah, calibrations. You set all your calibrations on the speed of the aeroplane, the height of the aeroplane and the drift. They were the three things you had to put in. And then, when the right time came, bang. I wasn't terribly bad at that. I certainly wasn't anywhere near the worst bomb aimer. I wasn't the best either. Some of them were really good.

41:30 **So, time-wise, what was the difference between being a good shot and not?**

Oh, a fraction of a second. Fraction of a second because, what are you doing, I think they flew at about a hundred and eight knots. So you can imagine the difference in difference with one second. It's a heck of a lot of difference.

42:00 It's a fraction of a second. Just go, right, bang.

Tape 4

00:30 **Can you tell us about the end of that training period in Australia?**

Yes, well, as I said, we went out as sergeant observers. On leave for a week or something and then we were, then we reported to the showgrounds.

01:00 There for a short time. I couldn't tell you how long but not very long. And then we were put on a train and taken up to Brisbane. And got to Brisbane and they put us off the train, on to an American trans-steamer in the Brisbane River. And there were about, I suppose 150 blokes.

01:30 Various categories of pilots and observers, etcetera, and radio operators. And we were put on this boat called the President Taft. Took off out to sea and there were quite a few American servicemen on board as well who had been wounded and were being sent back to America.

02:00 And we took just on a month to go across the Pacific Ocean because we zigzagged and we went way down south. And the interesting part about it, was some of the navigators were just so rapt in navigation that they plotted the way across there on an atlas of where we'd gone. And they did it with a simple situation that I told you about, of noting sunrise and

02:30 sunset, of measuring one of the poles on the boat, one of the dabbers or poles that went up. And then measuring the length of the shadow several times during the day and using their tables that they had. And they plotted, with such a simple situation, they plotted our course right across the Pacific until we arrived at

03:00 Oakland in San Francisco Bay. And I was amazed that they were so interested. I couldn't care less. Bert and I just, that's where Bertie taught me to play chess, on the way across the Pacific. So we landed at Oakland and they put us on a train and for five days we travelled all the way across the USA.

03:30 We were allowed off every day for a bit of a walk around. And then we arrived at a place called Camp Miles Standish. Which is at Taunton in Massachusetts. And so we landed at Camp Miles Standish and we were allotted where we were staying in our huts, etcetera. It was an American army camp. Every morning at

04:00 Camp Miles Standish, we reported on parade at eight o'clock. They'd go through the role and they'd say, "Right. See you again at eight o'clock in the morning. Go where you like." So we then had twenty-four hours leave. And we went all over the place. Went to New York. We went to Boston. We'd used that twenty four hours so we'd be back again the next morning at eight o'clock.

04:30 And we were there for five weeks. By that stage we knew the country pretty well. And Bert and I were together all the time. He was an officer. I was a sergeant. But it didn't make any difference. We just stayed together and did what we wanted to together. We went out in a bus one day. And we were passing a golf course. Bertie said, "Do you play golf?" I said, "Oh, you know,

05:00 as a kid I hit a few." He said, "Well, come on, let's get off the bus and go and see these people." So we got off the bus and we walked up the path up to the clubhouse. And we went in there and we asked, could we possibly have a game? And they said, "Oh, of course you can have a game. You are visitors to our country." We said, "We haven't got anything." Well, they lent us shoes, they lent us clubs and they lent us balls. And we went and played golf in this country club. And they treated us like kings.

05:30 They were fantastic. So that was one of the things we did one day. We had a game of golf at one of their country clubs. You'd probably have to be a millionaire to be a member. There was nobody around and they said, "Oh, it's all yours." Of course, we went, Bert and I were walking down the street in Taunton one afternoon and a car pulled up alongside us. And there were four girls in the car.

06:00 And they said, "What are you two Aussies doing?" We said, "Nothing." They said, "What about coming to the dance tonight with us?" So we went to the dance with these girls that night and we were introduced as VIPs [Very Important Persons]. At the dance we had to get up there and say hello to everybody and it was incredibly, our short stay in Camp Miles Standish, we enjoyed it thorough. Then

one morning they

06:30 said, “Right. Now, you can’t go away today because we’re leaving tonight.” Or leaving this afternoon. OK. So they put us on a train and we didn’t know what the heck was going to happen. And we went on this train down to New York. And we went on to a wharf inside a huge wharf with a canopy over the top. It was a huge shed.

07:00 And they let us out of the train and we looked through one of these great doors that was open and we could see the side of a ship. So we said, “Oh, God, we’re going on a ship.” And we walked through the door and whichever direction you looked you couldn’t see the end of the ship. It was the Queen Elizabeth. It was huge. Eighty odd thousand tons. You couldn’t see the top of it from the wharf. You couldn’t see either end. They put us in there and there were eleven of us in

07:30 a single cabin. Anyway, away we went from New York. Flat out across the Atlantic. There were something like twenty thousand Yanks on board. And they were three to a bunk. So they had eight hours in the bunk and sixteen hours somewhere else. We, fortunately, had our own bunks and they were sort of four, tier of four in the cabin and there were two fours

08:00 and a three. Anyway, one meal a day for three days and we tore across the Atlantic. And landed at Greenock in Scotland. That was quite exciting really. They went so fast the U-boats [Unterseeboot – German submarines] couldn’t get them. But it was the Queen Elizabeth which, at that stage, was the biggest liner

08:30 in the word. You wouldn’t want to jump off the top, you’d break your neck. Anyway, that’s how we got to England. Then they put us on the train and took us down to Brighton where we were deposited at Brighton waiting for postings. So that’s how I got to England.

So at any point did you know exactly where you were headed? Or was it all just a matter of turn up?

Never. I knew I’d have to be going to England.

09:00 When they put us on the boat in Brisbane, we all knew, “Well there’s no way we’re not going to England.” We had to. But we didn’t know how we were going to get there. And we didn’t even know how we were going to get there when we were in Massachusetts. We didn’t know what boat we were going on or how or what. But we got there and we went on the train all the way from down from Greenock all the way down to Brighton.

So this is after

09:30 **how many months of training?**

Well, there was nine months of training and a lot of messing about afterwards before we got on the boat in Brisbane. Was probably two or three weeks after we finished our training. Then there was a month going across there, another five weeks, another five weeks. And time just kept on going. Doing, not getting to where we thought we should be.

10:00 Took a heck of a long time and then when we got to Brighton they sent us off on leave. I went to Norfolk to a farm where, they had a whole lot of people who wanted to be hosts for us and I was sent to this farm in Norfolk which was good fun for a couple of weeks. Interestingly enough, in our room in the hotel, one of my roommates

10:30 went to Yorkshire. And when we got back from this leave he said, “You should have come with me.” I said, “Why?” He said, “I was posted to a Yorkshire village which was full of Roydhouses.” He said, “They were all Roydhouses. Tom the butcher and Dick the baker. And,” he said, “It was incredible. It was a whole Roydhouse village that I went to.” I said, “Oh, you know, fancy that.” And I then forgot

11:00 about it. Stupid as, at that age you don’t really take note. But I should have written it down where this village was and sent it back to Dad to tell him that this was a Roydhouse village, it’s where our roots started. And I didn’t. I just said, “Oh, isn’t that interesting.” You know, found a Roydhouse village up in Yorkshire. I knew we’d originally come from Yorkshire from way, way back. But I could have pinpointed the actual

11:30 village and I didn’t. But you didn’t think when you were a youngster and you didn’t think about it. Anyway, that’s, we then spent quite a lot of time in Brighton, waiting. I remember they called us, called all the observers into the big hall. And the man in charge got up there and he said, “Right.” And I mentioned this before about Bert.

12:00 He said, “OK, we’ve changed the system. You’re going to be a bomb aimer or a navigator. And they’ll be some who’ll stay as observers. And I want those who are going to be bomb aimers. Think about it for five or ten minutes then we’ll call for you to change. And if you want to go as a bomb aimer, you’ve got to go to the left hand side. If you want to be a navigator, go to the right hand side.” So eventually they called on everybody to move. And there were about twenty or thirty

12:30 of us stayed in the middle. “What, do you blokes want to be observers?” “Yeah, we still want to be observers.” “Alright.” So they took our names and they took the names of the blokes who wanted to

differently. And that's what happened. They split us up and Bertie went off as a bomb aimer within the next week. I waited a bit longer and I was posted to a place, Squires Gate which is up near

13:00 Blackpool. And we got to Squires Gate which was a general reconnaissance course and therefore we were posted at Coastal Command, the observers. Because that's the only place they used them from there on. Posted to Coastal Command there. And we did, when we walked into the classroom in the morning and sat down and the instructor walked in and, as it turned out, the instructor was a

13:30 bloke who was a senior at the college when I was a junior. And he recognised me. "Hello. How are you going?" Anyway, he got up and he told everybody. He said, "Right, now, there are twenty-six of you in this course." He said, "I can tell you right now that seven are going to be posted to Sunderlands." He said, "The others will go to Wellington torpedo bombers." And he said,

14:00 "It will rest on how well you do on this course." And I thought, "Wellington torpedo bombers. My God." And everybody thought the same. They thought, "How the hell would you survive on those?" So we all worked the midnight oil. And, fortunately, I was in the top seven. And so I was posted to a place called Durness up in northern Scotland, which was an operational training unit.

14:30 And I blessed my lucky stars, my mate in my room, finished up eighth and he went to Wellington torpedo bombers and I never heard of him again. That was suicide. You imagine in an old, slow aeroplane, coming in low over the water and aiming at a battleship or something. And boom. It was bad news. Anyway, finished up

15:00 on Sunderlands up in Durness. And when you got to Durness there was a crew, this was a place where they put crews together. There was a pilot who'd been sent up from 461 Squadron Sunderlands, Australian Sunderland Squadron. He was sent up there to pick up a crew. There was another pilot who'd just come off course who was going to be second pilot. I'd come off this specialist course as a navigator.

15:30 Of course at Durness, not at Durness at Squires Gate, we did a lot of flying at night over the seas, over the Irish Sea and all the way around those places. So that we learnt to navigate over the sea from Squires Gate. And they put together then some wireless operators, air gunners, a couple of engineers and some straight people who

16:00 were just gunners. And they formed a crew. And there were about five crews put together for this one course. They took us, the first day, into a hangar and for the first time I saw a Sunderland. And it was huge. I'd been flying on Ansons. But Ansons and Fairey

16:30 Battles which were small. And when you walked into this hangar and looked at a Sunderland, it was huge. It was the biggest aeroplane that flew in the Second World War. It was absolutely enormous. I thought, "My God. Are we going to fly in these?" Anyway, to cut a long story short, we got on well. The crew got on well together. We were put together and we were doing lectures together and we flew together and we,

17:00 we flew for about two and a half months in mid-winter in Scotland, northern Scotland. The sergeants were up in a Nissen hut up in a hill and we had to walk down through the snow every morning to join everybody else. And it was a real experience. One of the blokes had trained with me all the way from

17:30 Somers, all the way through and through everything else. A fellow named John Bishop. Was a bit unlucky, he was posted to an English crew at Durness. I, fortunately, got an Australian crew which belonged to an Australian squadron. And John got this English crew who finished up being posted to West Africa. I see him occasionally at our reunions in Melbourne.

18:00 He's quite a lot older than I am and he's pretty weak now. We still talk about that and he said, "Oh, yeah, well, you were lucky. You went to the right crew."

What do you mean by the right crew?

Well, I stayed in the Sunderland, in an Australian crew in an Australian squadron, rather than being posted to foreign waters with people who came from a different country. So we all

18:30 wanted to finish up on an Australian squadron if we could. And I was lucky enough that I did. So that was the situation. We did our training up there. Incidentally, the tail gunner or one of the two tail gunners that we had on our crew up at Durness, was a man called Colin Grant who you probably

19:00 should be interviewing because Colin has a complete diary and photographic album of all his air force experiences. Lives in Adelaide. He was the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of Grant's Orlando Wines when he came back. But he was our tail gunner up in Durness. And he's a great bloke, Colin. I think he's about 87 now. I've just

19:30 mentioned that because he's a terrific fellow and he's got all the records. You know, he did that because he was seven years older.

Did you tell the interviewer on the phone about him?

No, I didn't.

OK, well, we'll take a note.

Yeah, I didn't but if you can get hold of Colin, he will certainly be an interesting bloke to talk to. As it happened we were then posted to 461 Squadron which was down at Pembroke Dock at southwest Wales.

20:00 **Can you just hold it there. Can we get a bit more detail on some of this. Did you have a decent send off back home with the family? Was there a farewell of any sort?**

Back here? Before I went away? Dad took me up to Menzies Hotel

20:30 for a farewell with all his mates, etcetera, etcetera. And at that stage of the game I didn't drink anything else but lemonade. And I remember having this great party at Menzies to farewell me and I finished up drinking up so much lemonade I was in real trouble. All his mates had a great time. That was my send off. And I knew all Dad's

21:00 friends. I said, "I can't drink any more. I've had it." But mentioning Colin Grant, he was the bloke who actually was a bad influence on me. He introduced me to alcohol. So I was twenty before I drank anything alcoholic. I've made up for it since.

21:30 No, that was my send off. And I'll never forget drinking so much lemonade. I said, "I'll never do this again." Feeling terrible. And I'm afraid that was it. Because I really wasn't at home very long after I graduated before I was sent to the showgrounds. I can't tell you any more about that.

22:00 **You were telling us earlier about your inexperience with the opposite sex? Had that made inroads?**

I gradually learnt. Gradually learnt. I remember, going back to Mount Gambier, there was a fellow named Les Airsh and I were in the cricket team playing the locals. I was the wicket keeper and Les was the fast bowler. And every time Les was bowling and I was receiving

22:30 we had two girls on the boundary cheered like mad. We thought, "Oh, this is a good idea." So, when tea came, we walked down to the boundary and introduced ourselves. And that was, I was learning. We had quite a few outings with those two, too. The two of us.

23:00 Didn't get into any trouble but it was good.

What about in the States? How did the girls there respond to the Aussies?

Oh, unfortunately for the, for us, when we arrived there had been a contingent arrive before us and, unfortunately, they left a lot of pregnant girls behind when they went to England. So, in most cases, the girls would say, "Go away.

23:30 No, no, no, go away. Australians, bad news." But then of course these four girls picked us up in the club and took us to their dance. But they were quite safe at a dance with all those people there. No, we were a bit on the outer in the area because of the previous blokes.

How did people in both America and England, respond in general? What was their attitude towards the Aussies?

24:00 Oh, fantastic. We were very popular people. When I say that, as a general rule, you know, we were accepted with open arms in both America and, as I mentioned, we were given a free game of golf in the States. "Marvellous for you blokes to be coming to help us," when we got to England. They wanted to have us as their guests. It was good.

24:30 No, no complaints about that. I did have some distant relatives in England. A very distant cousin of Dad's who lived at Bristol and I occasionally went down to stay with her. I had some distant cousins in Bournemouth and I went and stayed with them a couple of days. and I had cousins on Mum's side, lived in Edinburgh.

25:00 Where I went and stayed with them too. So I had a few bases around the place with distant relatives.

Were you seeing much of the aftermath of the Blitz and the bombing rates?

Oh yeah. If you went to London it was horrifying to see all the empty spaces and it wasn't good.

25:30 Later on in the war when we, I very rarely went back to London on leave. I'd go somewhere else on leave. But later on in the war I remember two us went to London and we decided to go to a soccer match. Well, we went to this soccer match and half way through the game you could hear a buzz bomb [V1 rocket] coming. And it actually

26:00 went right across the top of the ground, this blooming buzz bomb. So, as I said, it was later in the war. I reckon the only people who looked up were us two Aussies. All the rest just didn't take any notice. It was bump, bump, bump, bump right over the top of the ground. "Oh, God. Wow." And then a little while later it would cut out and bang. But we saw a lot of devastation there in London. In the outskirts and

26:30 we just didn't go there. Not very often anyway. And down in Bournemouth there was quite a lot of blank spaces too. But not over at Pembroke Dock.

Were you there for any raids when the sirens went?

Yes, at Bournemouth we were. I was at my cousin's place at Bournemouth and there was the sirens and carrying on and the aeroplanes over the top,

27:00 etcetera, etcetera. Yeah. Not a nice feeling. But never when I was in London. Didn't have any raids while I was there.

What was the general mood of the population when you were there?

Oh they just carried on their normal fashion, living and

27:30 no, nothing different. It was just, there's a war on, so what. They all had rationing and they all just put up with that and they just did their normal things. They had their dances at night. They had their pubs that they would go to and play darts, etcetera, etcetera. No, the general public didn't show that the war was affecting them. As far as I'm concerned

28:00 anyway, they didn't. They just accepted what was happening. We came to the same conclusion. We just thought, "Oh well. We'll just carry on with life. Do our job and hope we make it."

We're talking late '42, '43, I guess?

That's right. Yes.

I guess the war in the

28:30 **Pacific had been on for a little while?**

It had been, yes.

Was there any talk of your guys heading in that direction?

No, there was never any talk of that until the war finished in England. The rumour went around our squadron that we were going to be posted out in the Pacific. And then they decided it was too late. That they wouldn't send us out.

29:00 So they just sort of disbanded the squadron actually and put us into limbo, I suppose you could say. No, they never. Some of the Sunderlands did come earlier out to operate out here. But they never thought for a minute, well they didn't tell us that our squadron was going to move out.

29:30 **What about early on? Do you remember hearing about the raids in Darwin?**

No. No. It's got to be remembered that I was pretty young really. And my main thoughts were what we were doing where we were. I wasn't really thinking worldwide.

30:00 From what I remember. I was very colloquial, you know, what's happening here? What's doing? No, it's a, I'm afraid I didn't think about out here. I wrote letters to Peg and to my parents regularly, about every couple of weeks, telling them that I was

30:30 carrying on and alive, etcetera, etcetera and hoping they were alright. But you didn't seem to get the news. Didn't read the paper. Don't think I read the paper for years.

You said that you heard that Pearl Harbor had fallen.

Oh yeah, well that happened before I joined up. Actually a couple of days before I enlisted. Before I signed

31:00 to join, put it that way. So I knew what was happening out there but by the time we left, it was all happening. But we weren't kept up to date.

When you decided to join up, what was the real motivation for you? You said that Pearl Harbor tipped you over. But what was the duty

31:30 **towards?**

Oh, I suppose you can say it's the, I suppose there were two reasons. Firstly, it's my duty to go and help. It's a duty that you feel obligated to go and do. And the other reason is one of adventure. Which is personal.

32:00 But I think that most of the blokes joined up from the duty point of view, going, "Look, I've got to be in this to try to fix these blokes." You know. No, it was patriotism. Which is hard to define, isn't it? But that's the reason really. Really, I thought, "Well you've got to join up and be in this and help. And it'll

32:30 be exciting if you do." That's my attitude. Or was.

Was it patriotism for Australia?

Oh, for Australia. It wasn't for the Poms. Although I finished up there under their control. Because we were an Australian squadron attached to the RAF [Royal Air Force], under their jurisdiction.

33:00 Even had our RAF maintenance crews looking after our aeroplanes and the CO [Commanding Officer] of the station was a RAF bloke, was a Pommy bloke. Because there were three squadrons down at Pembroke Dock. I think I've almost covered how I finished up

33:30 on 461 Squadron.

I guess we have. One gap for me is that training period you had at Blackpool, Squires Gate?

Yes.

How long did that last?

That was a five week course. We learnt ship recognition. We leant aircraft recognition for what we were likely to run into. We learnt Morse code

34:00 by using an alders lamp. Because we'd be sometimes talking to the navy with a flashing an alders lamp. And we learnt navigation over the sea. Which is quite different from land navigation, as you're probably aware. So those were the things we learnt there on those five weeks. And we'd be able to, they'd flash up a silhouette of a

34:30 ship. We had to say, "Right, bang, it's so and so." If it's a German ship or an English ship or what it was. Nominate its class. Because it's fairly important if you're flying around and you see a ship, you've got to know whether it's yours or theirs. That was part of it. Aircraft recognition. You see a spot coming at you, you've got to know whether he's friendly or not. We, I

35:00 never, ever used the alders lamp because we had a radio operator on board who was better at it. And we had several radio operators on the crew anyway, and they were better at using the alders. Because, if you're way out at sea with a convoy, you don't want to break radio silence and tell everybody where they are. So you've got to use the sight. That's about what we learnt up there. For five weeks. It was solid too.

35:30 **I don't know anything about navigation at night. So is it possible for you to tell us a little bit about what that involves?**

Well, it's what I was saying before. It's DR nav and you're taking drifts by the tail. In an Anson, of course there's no tail. So you had to squint through a drift sight and try to pick out

36:00 white caps that were going across and pick up their drift at night. Night is never terribly black. It's not absolutely black. There is some sort of reflection on the sea of some sort and you can pick it up if you squint and look down through the sight. And you just imagine you can pick up the movement of down below. You can pick up the movement and line it up.

36:30 So we learnt to do that at night. We just used DR nav because there were no pinpoints. Running around the Irish Sea wasn't terribly difficult but that's what we did. We learnt that there. Of course there was more training when we got to operational training unit with a full crew. We had to go out on various exercises there.

37:00 And that was a hell of a shock because, a couple of weeks after I got there, one of the crews didn't come back. And that's not good.

This is in Durness?

That was up at Durness. We were flying north from there up in the North Sea. And there were two ways you mightn't come back. There were enemy aircraft shoot you down or you might just get too low and crash into the sea. At night you could,

37:30 if the pilot wasn't really good, you could do that. And storms and things like that could create problems. But we lost a crew in the first couple of weeks. Which is very frightening.

What were they lost to?

Oh, if you lost a crew, they were all gone, you know. No graves or anything. Just bottom of the sea. So that training carried on until

38:00 Durness.

So that's when you first flew the Sunderlands?

Yes. You had new pilots flying Sunderlands, most of them. So it was a bit dangerous. New navigators who made mistakes. One of the, one of the last exercises that we did up there, one of the last tripos, was to a place called

38:30 Rockall. Now Rockall is a rock. Way out to glory in the Atlantic. You had to up, right around the tip of Scotland and head off for Rockall which was a few hundred miles out. And Rockall's only, at high tide it

is seventy feet high and just a big rock. Nobody ever found Rockall. They'd just go out there and do what's called a square search for Rockall

39:00 and couldn't find it so you'd come home again. And I remember, we were heading off for Rockall from just north of Scotland and I had it all set up, and this is where I learnt a lesson, because I took a star shot and it showed that I was a long way south of where I thought I was going to be, thought I should have been. So

39:30 I altered my plan and said, "Right, well, we'll get out to this point where we should be over Rockall but we're not going to be because this is showing I'm too far south. And when we get to that point, I'm going to alter course up to Rockall." We got to that point and we went right over the top of Rockall. I didn't ever admit to anybody that I thought we were way south.

40:00 And that's the last time I used an astro shot in anger, shall we say. Never ever used one again because it put me wrong. And, of course, my crew thought I was absolutely spot on, marvellous. Because I never told anybody that I was about to alter course. And they thought, "Wow, what sort of a navigator have we got? Fantastic." Bit of a lucky mistake.

40:30 **That was with dead reckoning that you got there?**

Yeah, well, it would have been if I'd, yeah we did. We got there with dead reckoning. But the position line showed I was wrong and I altered it. If I'd stuck with my dead reckoning and forgotten about the position line, we'd have hit it on the nose. And so then we immediately flew round and round the rock and went downstairs into the galley and I got the camera and I

41:00 took pictures of the rock from everywhere. And when we got home, the photos didn't come out. So we couldn't prove that we'd actually been there. I don't know whether it was the photographic department mucked it up or me. Probably me because I finished up in the photographic world. Anyway, that's the story of Rockall and I never, ever told the crew. I let them believe that I was spot on, and I wasn't.

41:30 So. We did a lot of trips in the North Sea from there and it was an interesting thing to do because we were new. We'd just all got together and had to work as a crew. And I was telling you that that's the only time that I was ever airsick, because we had a party one night and we were all crook the next day when we had to fly. Memories, eh?

42:00 **So you were the first to hit Rockall?**

No, I wasn't.

Tape 5

00:33 … squadron in South West Wales. That's where we're up to, I reckon.

Do you want to take it from there?

Yeah, well, we arrived at the squadron. Had to report to the adjutant. And he looked at me and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I've just come down with Ivor Petty's crew, sir."

01:00 He said, "But you're a navigator." I said, "Yes." He said, "We don't have NCO [Non-commissioned officer] navigators on 461 Squadron." I said, "Oh." He said, "All our navigators are commissioned officers." I said, "Well, I'm sorry sir, but I'm here and I'm on Ivor Petty's crew." "OK". So that was my reception. I was the only NCO navigator on the squadron. Our

01:30 squadron had the habit, and it was nothing to do with me being an NCO, they had a habit of when a new crew came down from Durness, of removing the navigator and putting on a more experienced navigator. And then the navigator had to do about half a dozen trips as a second nav with an experienced navigator on operations. So that's why I was taken off the crew.

02:00 Unfortunately, before I went out on any second nav exercise, as a second nav to learn what we were doing, one of the crews came back and the navigator had been killed. So I was put on that crew as the navigator on this experienced crew that had been there for about twelve months and done a lot of flying.

02:30 Which was rather an interesting start for me. I went on, I was still a flight sergeant, I went on to this crew as navigator and the first trip out, and I'll never ever forget this. First trip out, we were out about an hour, and this is night time, and on the intercom came up a, "Hey Bill, how'd you go last night when you went out

03:00 with that girl?" "Oh, did very well." And I thought, "Hey, wait a minute. This is wrong." According to all our training there was never any conversation over the intercom because somebody might want to come up and say, "Aircraft so and so", and give a report. And you didn't want people carrying on and making a noise over the intercom unnecessarily. So I thought for a moment and I thought, "Right oh, stick with the training, Donald." Now,

03:30 the navigator on a Sunderland was what's called control. He was in control of all the intercom on the plane. So I came up, and here I am a junior. I said, "Control to all positions. That will not be tolerated while I am in control of this crew. So, if I hear it again, you're in trouble." I was sitting there at the nav table and the second pilot came up

04:00 and tapped me on the shoulder. And I said, "Oh God, what have I done?" He said, "The captain wants to see you?" So, the captain's only about six or eight feet away. So I get up and I went over and he said, "If you hadn't done that, you were off the crew tomorrow." He said, "That's fine." He said, "They were just having you on to see if you knew what you were doing." So that was my introduction. And

04:30 I've been to many reunions with these two blokes that did that and they're great fellows. And they were just having a go at me to see if I knew what I was doing. So that was, that was great. I stayed with that crew for some time and then they all finished their tour. They'd had a lot of hours up before I joined them. So the next thing that happens, I'm on another crew which is also halfway through their tour.

05:00 And, to cut a long story short, I was actually on three crews on the squadron because people, I appeared to be then, the spare nav because of the circumstances of what had happened. And then about, oh nine months before the war finished, I suppose, I got on a crew that wasn't as experienced as I was by that stage. So by the end of the war, I'd more than finished my tour.

05:30 I'd done too many hours but they kept me there because it was getting close to the end. And I just saw out the war in England with the last crew. But the first, that first operational trip, I'll never forget it because they had a go at me. So that was my introduction there. "What are you doing here? You're only a flight sergeant." And then this other crew which

06:00 all outranked me. They all outranked me because they'd been there so long, tried to take me on. Now, where do we go from there?

Well, we could explore that a little bit more. Just locate us again. Where are you?

We're at Pembroke Dock in southwest Wales. And we are doing anti-sub patrols down the Bay of Biscay. This particular trip, the first one I did, we went down the Bay of Biscay to Spain and back again. Trying

06:30 to chop off any U-boats who might be trying to get out from the coast of France in to the Atlantic. That was a normal trip for us, down to Spain and back again. With a few zigzags for various reasons. But that was what we were doing. We were going down, right down the Bay of Biscay down to Spain and back again.

So this is your first operation ever?

First operation. Yeah.

07:00 I'd only done training really, up to that stage. And, as I said, the nav who arrived had to go, was supposed to go as a second nav to get the experience but I never did that. Just went on with an experienced crew when I wasn't.

Well, perhaps it's timely to hear a bit about the Sunderland as a plane?

It was, as I said earlier,

07:30 it's a very large aeroplane. And it had two decks. One upon the other and up on the upper deck there were two pilots. There was, when I first joined the squadron there were two pilots, then there was a little bit of a gap and there was a radio operator on the port side and the navigator's table on the starboard side.

08:00 And then there was a sort of a, I suppose you'd call it a table, but it was a fold down thing that went against the bulkhead and behind that sat the engineer with all the gear in front of him, reading all his dials. And to his right, there was a hatch with stairs. And you could go down the stairs and when you went down the stairs you were in galley.

08:30 Forward of the galley there was a ward room, with a couple of beds, which is right underneath the working area that we're in. And forward of that there was a toilet just to the starboard side. And then a few, and then a door on the port side which everybody entered when you were getting into the aeroplane. And just in front of that there was a

09:00 nose turret which was retractable into the aircraft so you could moor up. Used to get one of the gunners, they'd bring back the turret and the gunner would get up in the bowels so he'd be able to pick up the moorings. Underneath that turret, of course the gunner in the forward turret, in the nose turret, used to stand. He'd be standing in the turret. And if we were going to drop

09:30 any depth charges, you needed a bomb aimer. The bomb aimer crawled through between the legs of the nose gunner and there was a sort of a Perspex front there so you could check through your bombsight where you were going. So that's the set up going forward. Aft of the galley

10:00 you went through a door and above you were eight depth charges slung across the roof on the racks. 250 pound depth charges, eight of them. If you wanted to drop any depth charges, the captain would

press a button. Doors would slide down and four depth charges would go out on either side beneath the wings on a rack out there.

10:30 So that was straight between the ward room and the galley. Then you climbed up a bit and you went further back on a, sort of a gangway that took you right back to the tail turret. Where the tail gunner got into a turret right at the tail. I forgot to mention, once you got through the, where the bombs were, there was a mid-upper

11:00 turret. And on either side, later on during the war, there were hatches that went down either side with a free-standing point five machine gun on each side through these hatches. So we had a fair amount of armaments. The nose turret had two Brownings. The upper turret, the mid-upper turret had four Brownings. The tail

11:30 had four Brownings. And the two in the middle had a point five each. So we were bristling with guns. On top of that one of the pilots could stick a gun out through his window. And there were four, there were a couple of fixed guns in the bow that the pilot could fire if he was going straight at something. And we were called the flying porcupine because of all the spines that were sticking out.

12:00 That's a pretty good run down. Oh, if I wanted to take an astro shot, there was an astrodome straight above that ledge that I said, that folded down. Just above that. You'd stand on that and you'd hang on to the side and use your sextant through that astrodome. Also, if you were attacked by

12:30 enemy aircraft, the observer had to stand in the astrodome looking out, getting all the reports from the various turrets on what was coming and who was coming from where, and give the evasive action. Because he could see what was going on and he could say to the pilot, "Prepare to turn left, dive left, go." You know, so you gave the evasive action if you were against enemy aircraft trying to fight them in air to air combat.

13:00 So that's a real run-down of a Sunderland.

That's excellent. Very good.

It was a big aeroplane.

So what were the instructions for evasive action if you were in that position?

Well, there were several things that you could do if there were aircraft attacking you. And the first thing that you have to do is restrict the

13:30 chances of them hitting you. To do that, you turn towards them. If you turn away they're right up your tail. Away you go. But you turn towards them, you dive or you climb or whatever. But it all depends on where the aircraft is. Where it is approaching. And evasive action sometimes became quite difficult if there were several aircraft attacking you from different areas. So that

14:00 was the story. Your evasive action was dive or climb or steep turn or, it was never zigzag because that wouldn't have done anything.

So from the astro-dome you've got to get a picture of 360 degrees around of where the planes are positioned?

Yeah. You're getting the reports from all the turrets. And you didn't

14:30 give any evasive action until the enemy was within range so that they could have a go at you and then at the last second, you give your evasive action so he couldn't get you.

Very split second.

I, fortunately, never had the experience of having to evade enemy aircraft. But we used to do air to air combat practise with several Spitfires.

15:00 So I knew what I had to do but I never had to do it in practise. Which was good. One of our Sunderlands went down the Bay and they met eight JU88s all attacking him. Two went up in front of him that side, two went up the other side. They formed a box around him. Four lots of two. And one would start and just as he turned in towards him, the others would come in from the other angles. And they had a

15:30 terrible fight. They managed to get home. Shot up badly and they managed to down a few of the JU88s. But that was a quite famous operation where they were attacked by eight and got away with it.

How manoeuvrable is a Sunderland?

Very. Very manoeuvrable because it was so slow.

16:00 That was an advantage in air to air combat. Because you could turn slowly and the fighter couldn't turn inside you. He'd slip outside you. He couldn't come round with you because he was going too fast and he couldn't turn inside your circle. So we were pretty good as far as manoeuvrability was concerned. Because we were slow. Which surprisingly is an advantage in that case.

But you couldn't outrun them?

Oh, no way.

16:30 No way. No, you could head, if there was any cloud anywhere, you'd head for the cloud and try to hide in the cloud. But there generally wasn't when you needed it. I'm talking about what other people ran into. Because I never ran into any 88s down the Bay.

Were you under attack at any time on any of those ops?

Not by enemy aircraft. No, we weren't.

17:00 That's a later story. But, no, we weren't attacked by enemy aircraft at any stage. We were supposed to be the attackers. And the Junkers 88s that came out on the Bay were just trying to stop us from preventing their U-boats from getting out. So it was all,

17:30 we were armed, but we were armed from a defensive point of view.

Can you give us an idea of why the 461 Squadron, what their purpose was at that stage in the war?

Yes, well, we had two purposes. One was anti-sub patrol, which is what I was explaining before. You go down there and if you saw a U-boat, you attacked

18:00 it. The main thing we were told, time and time again, was it's not the U-boats you see that's important. It's the ones you don't see because you've kept them down. They've seen you and they've dived and they had to come to, U-boats had to come up to charge their batteries and they couldn't do that underwater. So after their batteries started to run out they had to come to the surface, turn on their diesel motors and charge all their

18:30 batteries for underwater use. And if we kept them down all the time, they were in trouble. And that was really, they said, "Look, we don't care if you don't see any because as long as they've seen you, they will stay down. And then they've got to come up some time or other and that's when they're in danger." So, you might fly for two years and never see one but you still have been of value. According to the

19:00 experts anyway. So that was the story there. Keep the U-boats down. The second thing we used to do, we used to go out west of Ireland, right out in the middle of the Atlantic, west of Ireland. We'd be four or five hundred miles out to sea out west of Ireland and pick up a convoy. And we'd do convoy escort by flying round and round the convoy to see if we could spot any U-boats trying to attack

19:30 them. So that was the second thing, convoy escort. They were our two purposes: anti-U-boat and convoy escort.

Any rescues?

No. Some of the early blokes on our squadron, they used to land and pick up people out of dinghies and things like that. But

20:00 it was barred by the powers that be because they lost a few aircraft doing it. It might look nice and calm out in the middle of the Atlantic, but it never is. And too, you could land but then when you went to take off, you had great big waves which Sunderlands weren't built to take. And the famous one, really, was that one of our aircraft,

20:30 this is before I got there. One of our aircraft landed down the middle of the Bay of Biscay to pick up the crew of a downed aircraft. And they rescued them, got them out of their dingy and then they decided there were too many people on board for them to try and take off. So they rang up the navy and the navy came along and took off half of their crew plus all the people they'd rescued. And then five of them

21:00 decided they were going to take off in this heavy swell. Well, they managed to get off but when they did, the last bump knocked a huge hole in the bottom of the Sunderland. So it was obvious, when they got back to Pembroke Dock and flew over the top, you could see this enormous gap. It was obvious if they landed on the water they were going to go straight to the bottom. So this is the only time on record that a Sunderland landed on

21:30 the land. And these people actually did land on Angle Aerodrome, on the grass side of it. And it landed there and then eventually it tipped and the five blokes got out. But that's when air command said, "No more. Nobody lands to rescue anybody from now on. What you can do

22:00 is drop dinghies to them so they're more comfortable and radio for help from the navy. But you are not to land any more." So that was that. Answered your question.

Did they know they had a big hole in their hold?

Oh, yes. They knew. They knew all right. I've actually got a video which has been transferred. When it was all,

22:30 when they were going to land on Angle Aerodrome, the CO and half the staff on the squadron all went out to Angle Aerodrome, which is about five miles down the road. And the CO took a little eight mil

movie camera with him. And he took a picture of the Sunderland landing on the land. One of, a Geelong bloke, a fellow named Harry Winstone, he was the navigator on that, and he was one of the five.

23:00 And the eight millimetre movie has been put on tape. Harry has put his commentary on it, on the whole story and I've got that. Harry didn't actually put it on the tape. Harry sent me the tape, the silent picture. And he also sent me a tape of his commentary. So, in our business, it was easy for us to just put the commentary

23:30 on the movie. And that's there to, the story of the Sunderland landing. And the last time a Sunderland ever landed out on the open sea to try to rescue anybody.

Sounds like a copy of that should be with the National Film and Sound Archives.

It probably is. But that's a very unusual thing to have happened

24:00 and the last time it ever did.

What did the Sunderland need in regards to landing space? How much space did it need?

Depended upon the wind and the water. If you were able to land into a fairly stiff breeze and it was a bit choppy, you didn't need much. But if it was still and a glassy surface, then you went a long longer.

24:30 Same thing with takeoff. It was choppy and into a decent breeze, you'd get off pretty easily. If it wasn't, it was a long way before you took off.

So it was a very heavy…?

Yeah, when I first went to the squadron, the Sunderlands were underpowered. And the powers that be knew that. Because what they'd

25:00 done was gradually increased the gear on board. Same Sunderland, they put more and more weight on board with various great. And so it got to the stage we were underpowered and it used to take a heck of a long time to get off. And dangerous too. And then they changed the motors. They went from Pegasus motors to Pratt and Whitney and it made an enormous difference. Because they were about twice as powerful. So

25:30 it wasn't a matter of how heavy was the aeroplane, it was how much power you had to get it off. And then, as the war went on, they added more and more equipment. Like radar and heaven knows what. Everything they could think of, they started to put on board. Which meant, of course, the size of the crew grew too.

How many engines did it have?

Four. Four motors. And when I started

26:00 on 461, we have 12 in the crew. And when I finished we had 14.

So were you there during that time when they changed the engines?

Oh yeah. They didn't change them in the squadron. Just got other aircraft came down from the factory that had the new motors in. It didn't affect me because I had nothing to do with the flying part of it all. All I did was tell them where to go.

You had a stake in making sure they stayed up in the air.

26:30 Of course, yeah. But I didn't fly, I didn't actually fly it. As it turns out, the silly part about it was that the navigator was actually two, second in command, after the captain. And when we took off on an ops trip the rest of the crew would go and prepare the aircraft

27:00 for take off, etcetera, etcetera. And the captain and navigator would go to briefing. They'd get all the briefing on what we were supposed to do, where we were supposed to go, etcetera. And then we'd go out in a dinghy and get on board the aircraft, and they'd take off. And when we landed, there'd be a dinghy come up to the aeroplane, once we'd moored, a dinghy would come up to the aeroplane. The captain and the navigator off. All the rest of the crew, clean up. So, even though, I was saying

27:30 I was the lowest rank on the first crew I went on, I was still second in command. Which in an Australian crew, everybody took notice of your position, not your rank.

Did you have to have any knowledge of how to fly the plane?

No. Not the slightest bit. We finished up with four pilots. So I didn't have

28:00 to do any of that. Didn't do a thing about it.

What do you mean, you finished up with four pilots?

Well, towards the end of the tour we had four pilots on board. Because they were doing radar work and they're would be two flying all the time. One resting and one on the radar.

So was there always two pilots on board?

Oh yeah. Right from the beginning there were two pilots

When you were crewed with 12 who were they?

28:30 Well, we had two straight gunners, a flight engineer and a flight mechanic. That was four. There were four radio operator air gunners. That made eight. Where am I up to? There were three pilots when I went first down to the squadron. There were two when we trained

29:00 but then there were three. And then the navigator. That made up the twelve. But they added another pilot and they added another radio operator who was a specialist in radar and radio technology. So he could fix anything if it went wrong while we were away. While we were up. So it finished up with fourteen. Which is a lot of people, isn't it?

29:30 **Just going back to that first operation again. What did you do in the way of briefing with that crew before you went out on the plane?**

I didn't do any briefing. I met them. I met them. We used to be woken up and have breakfast any time of the day before we went. And I met them at breakfast and they all went off to get the aircraft ready to take off and I went into briefing with the

30:00 captain. And then when we'd taken off, they had a go at me.

So you hadn't been up in the air with them before?

No, never. No, it was the first time I flew with them. Although I had done three months up at Durness with another crew. So I was used to crews and I was used to a Sunderland by that stage. No, there was no briefing and saying "What do you want me to do?" or anything. No way.

30:30 We all had our jobs.

Were they all Australian?

No. Generally speaking the flight engineer and the flight mechanic were English. Because they trained them and on our squadron I don't think we had any Aussies who were flight engineers or flight mechanics. So there were always two Poms on board. That was generally the

31:00 maximum. All the rest were Aussies. I think at one stage we had three. We had a specialist radio mechanic who was more highly trained than the normal radio operator. He actually

31:30 wrote a letter to me some time ago. After the war he did medicine. He was a doctor in England somewhere or other. And he wrote me a letter a few years ago saying nice to renew acquaintances.

What was it like working with the Brits?

Oh, we were all mates. In the mess and everywhere else. Didn't matter. Pembroke Dock had a Canadian

32:00 squadron and an English squadron there. We were all in together. We were all with the same object, weren't we? All doing the same job in the air and with the same object in view. Oh yes, we used to get into terrible trouble in the mess at night. Fun and games. There was

32:30 no animosity at all between the Poms and us.

What about the way they did things?

Oh, they did things quite differently. They were all saluting the higher rank and all sorts of things. We didn't do that. We didn't walk along the street and salute somebody else. We just ignored them. But that was common,

33:00 that the Poms saluted each other and carried on. I don't know what they did in the air. I never flew with them until we had these blokes on our crew and they just had to do what we did.

So you never saluted your commanding officer?

Oh, you had to do that of course. But if you were going down the street and you saw somebody slightly higher rank, you didn't bother. But the CO, I'd say. You had to do that.

33:30 **Can you remember what the specifics were of that first flight? That first ops that you did?**

No. That's the only thing I remember, that they had a go at me. But we went down and did the job and came home again without any further ado. And I was on that crew then. That was it. So then during the day time we all mixed up together and did what we wanted to do.

34:00 We lay down in the sun together and sunbaked. Or we went for a walk, or whatever, when we weren't on duty.

So that was a night operation?

Oh, well, a normal flight was twelve to fifteen hours. So it would probably be daytime, night time or both. That particular one we started at night but we finished in

34:30 daylight. It was never only a night operation or a day operation. It was always overlapped a bit. So you did some nights, some day, on every flight.

Had you flown over that area before or was that completely new territory?

Never been down there. That didn't matter. I had the chart. I worked on the chart and we got down to Spain and got back again.

35:00 **And your purpose was to spot U-boats?**

We didn't on that day but that's what we were trying to do. You were trying to keep them down. Not talking about that particular time but there was one night we were down just off the coast of Spain, and radar, which in those days was pretty primitive, came up and said, "We've got a couple of blips here. We'd better check them

35:30 out." So we flew over the blips and dropped some flares. And it was a Spanish trawler. Well, we knew that Spanish trawlers were on the Germans' side. They used to hide the U-boats. What would happen, the U-boat used the trick of going out through the Bay alongside a

36:00 Spanish trawler. And, if any aircraft appeared, they just dived and when you got there all you saw was the trawler. And nothing else. The U-boat had gone. Well, he'd just gone underneath. So I remember, this was at night and we lit this trawler up. And the tail came up and he said, "Can I have a go at him?" I said, "Control to tail. No way in the world." And just as I was saying it, on the intercom came Brrrr.

36:30 He was sick and tired of these Spanish trawlers so he took upon himself to give them a burst. He wouldn't have done any harm. I doubt it anyway. At least he was passing a message on, "We don't like you here." So that was one little incident where we were down by Spain and that was it.

So was that an agreement between

37:00 **the Germans and the Spanish?**

I don't know but we knew that's what they used to do. People, the Spaniards who were in sympathy with the Germans would cooperate with them and sort of help them out through the fence, shall we call it. We had a fence, we had people going up and down it right, all the time. And they had to get through the cover. So the Spaniards used to help them get out.

What do you mean by

37:30 **a fence?**

Oh, well, by a fence I mean that there were aircraft patrolling all the time so, from England right down to Spain, so it was like a fence to try to stop them from getting out. That's what I mean. Later on during the war, later on when, after the invasion, we made it a different sort of a fence.

38:00 Because they set up what was called a series of box patrols all the way down, where you went to your patrol and you just went round and round and round in a box shape and there was another aircraft to your north or your south doing the same thing. So there were aircraft there all the time and the distance between the aircraft was just double the distance you could see a U-boat. So if he came through here, we'd either see him

38:30 or they'd see him. And that was later on after the invasion when the U-boats were all trying to get out of Spain, out of France. So it was a different sort of set up. And it was very boring going round and round and round in a rectangle, really.

So what was that distance? What was your scope?

Oh, the distance between was twice the viewing distance.

39:00 You could say, say there was an aircraft going east on a certain spot. Then he could see, shall we say, five miles from where he was. You'd add another five miles and there'd be another aircraft going in the opposite direction. So he could see up to that five miles. Take another five mile to the centre of your box control, so you could see both sides, five miles each side.

39:30 And you went down ten and came back the other way so you could see what you'd covered from the other way. And you just went round and round and round like that. And you did it all day or all night and it was, for probably about twelve hours going round and round like a, that was very boring. But it didn't last for very long because it wasn't that long before all the Germans were out of France and there were no U-boats trying to

40:00 get out any more. I'm jumping the gun, because that was after the invasion. And they had to get out because they were being run out.

So was that five miles, was that five miles what the radar could read?

Yes, in as far as you could see comfortably what was on the surface. I'm just

40:30 quoting five miles but I'm trying to indicate how they set the boxes up all the way down. So it was an impenetrable barrier if everyone was in their right position. But I remember, and I mustn't say much about it. I remember once there was another aircraft which was in the wrong position. And I knew he was in the wrong position and my crew had a go at me saying, "Hello Royd, ours is out

41:00 of position again." But I wasn't. Because when we got back my landfall was spot on. And that was your proof that you did it all in the right spot.

Landfall?

When you first spot the land when you get home again. And we came back to where we should have been at the time we should have been there. Which proved that we were in the right place further down. That was your proof that you were right. And it was.

41:30 End of tape

Tape 6

00:31 **Two years.**

Nearly two years anyway.

When you were doing these box searches, after a while you didn't need to do much navigating?

Not quite

01:00 that true because the wind changes. And, as I explained earlier about navigation, it's all to do with the wind. So you've got to keep your eye on whether there's any wind change or not. So it wasn't quite a point of setting up your box and just doing it and doing it and doing it. You had to keep just an eye on what the drift was to make sure it didn't change. And if it did then you had to readjust to stay where you should

01:30 be. So you were still doing your, still doing your exercise of making sure you were in the right position all the time.

Were you getting weather readings from elsewhere?

Not really, no. We wouldn't have taken any notice of them anyway. When we're out on patrol we wouldn't, we always had a met

02:00 briefing before we left. Telling us what the weather was going to be like and what they thought the winds would be, etcetera, etcetera. But they never were the same. So, no, we didn't get any weather reports. We knew where we were and what was happening and we knew what the weather was like. No warnings about, there's a storm coming from the west and it will hit you at such and such a time.

02:30 I think that was probably a waste of time if they'd done that anyway.

What were the weather conditions like? Were there extremes?

Sometimes. Sometimes they were extreme. They were certainly extreme, more extreme when you went west out through, out into the Atlantic than when you went south. Because going south from England, you're going towards the Equator and the weather's better. Down toward Spain the weather's warming and there's not

03:00 so many things that you could worry about. But we had lots of storm and rain, etcetera, where we took off. No, it wasn't too bad down there. It was awfully bad when we went north. When we went up to the North Sea. But that's another story which we can come to.

Where your

03:30 **base was, where the Sunderland took off from and landed, what was the water like there? Was it a bay?**

It was an inlet. Quite a big inlet. No, it wasn't a bay and it wasn't a river. It was a, a fairly narrow inlet going in between the hills.

04:00 No. It was well protected really. Except if you got the wind in the wrong direction, then it wasn't that much, wasn't protected that much. But it opened out into a fairly big area down by the mouth of this inlet. If we were in trouble when we came home and the weather was all closed in and you couldn't land where you were, we would down

04:30 and be diverted, probably to Plymouth, where the other Australian squadron was based. Plymouth. That was 10 Squadron. They were based at Plymouth. And that was our diversion area. If we came home and the weather was wiped out, and we couldn't get in, we'd go down to Plymouth and land there. Because, generally speaking, they weren't both out together anyway. And the vice versa used to happen. The people on 10 Squadron, if they couldn't get in at Plymouth, came up to our area

05:00 and landed there. Never had to go away any further than that anyway.

So how did the Sunderland handle in stormy weather and turbulence?

Oh very good. Very stable. But of course, stormy weather, even the aircraft today are jumping up and down, aren't they? So you've got plenty of that. But, of course, if you're flying all the time, it doesn't worry you a fraction. The movement.

05:30 The turbulence. Just doesn't worry you. You go with the flow. That's no problem at all. I was just trying to think. I'm not sure what time, what time of the year or whatever that we went up to Sullom Voe in the Shetlands. I'm not sure. I think it was after the invasion. That what happened was.

06:00 Sullom Voe is the end of the earth, absolutely, right in the Shetland Islands. And there was a Sunderland squad there, manned by Norwegians. And they needed to come down south to do some conversion to a different aeroplane with the new motors and everything else and all the new equipment that was being put on Sunderlands. They needed to come down and do some

06:30 training our way. So they sent four of us, four crews, up to Sullom Voe to take over for a while, while the Norwegians did their training. So we were up there for three months. In the middle of winter it was. Yeah, it was after the invasion. It would be round about Christmas 1944, that we went up there. And we landed at Sullom Voe and we looked around and it all, everything on the horizon was just a peat bog. Nothing.

07:00 There wasn't a tree. There was sheep everywhere. And peat bog everywhere and these Nissen huts that we had to live in. Oh, and from there, what we did was fly north up around the Norwegian coast. Right up because that's where the convoys used to go, right through to Russia. Round north of Norway. We had to fly up through there and the weather was atrocious. It was freezing

07:30 cold, blowing gales all the time and stormy and terrible. So that was the worst period we ever flew through. Up in the Shetlands and we admired the Norwegians very much for doing it all the time. It was dreadful. The first trip I did out of there, I, we didn't use gloves down the bay because it was reasonably warm. And here I took off and my hands froze. And I finished up

08:00 sticking the pencil in between my fingers and doing the log with it stuck in between my fingers because I couldn't hold it. And I remember when I got back to debriefing, officer went crook about an untidy log. Anyway, I didn't take that. I had a go back at him. But that was a diversion where they sent a few of us up there to do that. And that wasn't good. It was very bad.

08:30 We were very glad when we got home back to Pembroke Dock again. And that was round about winter 1944. Great time to go north.

What were you actually doing up there?

We were anti-U-boat patrol there. Exactly the same job that we were doing down south. Exactly the same job. That's where the convoys went through. They were going up to Murmansk.

09:00 Right around the north, around to Russia. But we didn't do anything. We just flew up there, saw nothing, came back to base again. Very exciting.

So that's what the ops consisted of? Just going to see if you could see anything?

Yes, most of the time, you couldn't see a thing. Just went out there, did your patrol, didn't see a thing.

09:30 And I think I explained that one of the reasons we were there was for them to see us. And I think that happened a lot. I think they saw us much more than we ever saw them.

Did that bother you?

No, we knew it was likely to happen. Some blokes went right through their tour and never saw a thing.

10:00 And they were consoled by the fact that they must have been seen. In all the time I was on the squadron, we only had one action. And that was, remember D-Day was the 6th of June, '44. Well we took off on the 7th and our patrol was going from England to France across to Brest and back again to try to stop U-boats

10:30 from coming up to interrupt the invasion that was going across. And so we took off in the afternoon of the 7th, which is the day after D-Day which is pretty close to it all. We could see, see all the invasion going on. Then, when it became night, we were still doing this patrol backwards and forwards from England to France. But not right in the Channel. It was a

11:00 bit south of the Channel. And, at one o'clock in the morning the radar came up and said, "You had a

blip." And we sort of homed in on it a bit and he said, "I think it looks about the right size for a U-boat on the surface." So we did all the exercise and homed in on this U-boat and, of course, I had to go whizzing down to the bombsight and we homed in on this thing and the flares went and

11:30 it was a U-boat so we attacked. As it happened, that night the CO had decided he'd like to fly with us. And he was sitting in the second pilot's seat. And just as, I think I probably explained that a bomb aimer took over and gave the directions once you saw your target. And I had to give the left, left, steady or right, steady,

12:00 etcetera to get on this U-boat. Just as we dropped the flares and the U-boat come up in sight, the CO panicked and said, "There he is, there he is, there he is." And I had to say, "Shut up." Because I had to take over then. And the bloke above me, I explained that we had the nose turret and I was in between his legs, he saved us

12:30 that night because the U-boat decided they didn't like us and they were firing at us and there was tracer going over the top of us, to the side of us and underneath. Tracer and he fired his two guns and he wiped off the gunners on the deck of the U-boat. It was a tremendous job. And then I had to carry on and drop the bombs. So we attacked the U-boat and then we circled round. We couldn't see him.

13:00 Everything was missing, we couldn't see anything. So we then reported everything and the navy came along to see what was going on. Well, unfortunately, that attack, they didn't confirm a sinking. And so we weren't credited with sinking a U-boat. But we certainly attacked him and we must have been very close to sinking him because I reckon I dropped the bombs at the right time and if that happened, then he was in trouble.

13:30 But we never got the confirmation for it. The captain of the aircraft got a DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross] for that night, the action. The radar operator got a mention in the dispatches and so did I because of our part in the action. And the bloke who should have got it was the nose gunner. He should have got it because he saved us all. He wiped them off.

14:00 Anyway, that was the only action I saw in nearly two years.

So the CO's reaction there, was that..?

Oh, he was very, very upset about that. He hadn't flown on ops for a long time. And when he saw the U-boat he panicked. fortunately he didn't go crook at me for telling him to shut up. But that's what you had to do, you know. It was the same sort of thing as these blokes carrying on on the intercom when

14:30 I first joined that crew ages before. You can't do that. And the person in charge has got to have control of it. Otherwise the skipper couldn't hear me if somebody else is yapping. Anyway, that's what happened.

Did he come on ops very often?

No, I think that was the only time he did it in our squadron. He was a very experienced bloke. A permanent

15:00 air force fellow who was, he was a group captain and he was, you know, permanent air force. But he hadn't flown with us. Anyway, that was just by the way. I probably shouldn't have mentioned that the CO panicked.

How far up were you from the surface?

When you attack at night, you come down to 200 feet. And I was always very upset about the low level bombsight.

15:30 I reckon it was crook. Somebody had designed it who didn't use it, I'm sure. We got used to it because we were training in a training thing on the squadron. We had a training part where we used to go up there and practise. It's like today, they've got these simulators. It wasn't quite as good as all that but they had things moving down below and you're watching it.

16:00 We got used to using the low level bombsight but it was really a mess. It was somebody who hadn't thought it out properly I reckon.

So what was wrong with it?

Oh, it was difficult. It didn't have a particular time that you could pinpoint. You had a moving graticule coming towards you all the time. And you could see the object, the target. And for a beginning the target

16:30 would be moving slower than the graticule. When the target and the graticule were moving at the same speed, you had to press the tick. And if you were a bit late, the target would be going faster than the graticule underneath you. And it was, there wasn't a specific point, you just had to pick when they were both going at the same speed and that was crazy. We got used to doing it but you had to have a lot of practice.

17:00 **Was that idiosyncratic to the Sunderland, that kind of bombsight?**

I don’t think so. I think they had it on all Coastal Command aircraft. Of course there were Liberators doing the same job that we were doing. And they probably had exactly the same low level bombsight that we did. I don’t think that, well the Catalinas weren’t doing like we did. They weren’t there with us.

17:30 I don’t know if they had it. Anyway that’s a bit of a critique on the boffins.

Just because of my ignorance, can you tell me what a graticule is?

Well, it’s a series of lines that’s coming down towards you. It’s moving. And these lines are parallel

18:00 lines coming towards you all the time. And you just had to try to pick the time that the target was the same speed. Because, as you’re probably aware, when you’re looking at something out there and you’re coming towards it, gradually it comes towards you and then it disappears underneath in a hurry. You had to pick the time when I was just exactly the same speed as these lines were. Everything going down together.

So what would have worked that out?

I think, the fact that we were 200 feet up, a

18:30 straight up bombsight would have been much better. When it came to the right spot, bang. Anyway.

So it was the moving lines?

The moving lines were not good, in my book. But I’m no expert. All the experts knew better apparently.

How fast could a Sunderland go?

We were very slow. About 130, 140

19:00 knots. Later on with the bigger engines we got a bit faster. But that didn’t matter. It was the fact you were up there just chuffing along that covered a big area in a long time.

Did you ever have to moor in places other than your base?

No. No. I never moored up. I always got off on the dinghy.

19:30 **I mean land.**

Oh, land? No, we didn’t land anywhere else. Except sometimes down at Plymouth which was a base anyway. No, we weren’t forced to land anywhere else. Except up in Sullom Voe, we landed on the place up there too.

What was the noise like inside the cabin?

Very noisy and very windy. No

20:00 insulation. So it was cold in cold weather. It was hot in hot weather. Or not very hot really because you had the wind blowing through all the time anyway. So it was noisy and windy inside. Not too bad downstairs in the wardroom because they were shut off. They were protected. But it used to come screaming through. There was a,

20:30 there was this little staircase went down to the bow between the two pilots. Just about that wide. You’d go whiz, straight down there. That’s where I had to go to get to the bombsight in a hurry. And that’s where the wind came. Came whistling up through this little staircase. You got used to that. Just part of the deal. You weren’t in a luxury aeroplane.

21:00 Not in a Lear jet or anything. Far from it.

So what little luxuries did you have on board?

Oh the crew used to come up with cups of coffee or anything during the trip, that they’d do down in the galley. They’d come up with cups of coffee, Bonox or something, you know. Have a drink. I never ever

21:30 had anything to eat on board. Because you ate before you left. Went and had bacon and eggs and all sorts of things before you took off. And I didn’t need anything to eat while we were flying. But drink was important. That came up and warmed you up. Those, the rest of the crew always had a bit of time off. The navigator didn’t because there was only one navigator and he had to be

22:00 on the job. And you didn’t want to anyway. You didn’t want anyone interfering. You knew what had happened, what was going on and were stuck with it. And that was it. You just got used to doing it by true. Gunners and the rest of the crew would take shifts and they’d lie down in the ward room or talk to somebody down there or, have a bit of time off. Same with the pilots.

22:30 They’d have an hour off every now and then. So it wasn’t that hard. It was constant, but it wasn’t that hard.

You didn’t have any kind of a break?

No, no chance. No chance. That was our training. We just, well I think I was explaining earlier about navigation where you have to take all these drifts to make sure the wind hadn't changed.

23:00 Every hour the navigator was supposed to take four drifts, do a three course wind, which I think I explained earlier, and get a position line. Every hour. So you didn't have time to do anything else. Because you were planning where you were going and you're doing all these things. Time went pretty quickly. Except sometimes at night, where you're going round and round in

23:30 circles or something and you've got to alter course to so and so and nothing else was happening, it used to become a bit boring. But there was no way you could leave that nav table. You didn't want to. You might tear down to the toilet but then you're back again in a hurry. Interesting exercise isn't it?

It is.

Interesting job.

So you had your regular operations

24:00 **that you went on, which was the routine work?**

No, no. No regular operations. The briefing always came up with what you had to do. It was very rarely the same as some other time. Very rarely. They knew from intelligence where U-boats were likely to go and that's where they put us. So it wasn't, there wasn't any routine trip.

24:30 When I said we went down to Spain and back, sometimes we'd go down closer to France than we did last time. Or we'd do a zigzag down past Brest and across that way. But all sorts of things like that. We had our trips to do. No, no routine.

Can you think of any other operations

25:00 **that you did that were unusual or were challenging?**

Well, towards the end of the war, U-boats had brought into operation, snorkels, which were breathing apparatus so they could run their diesels when they were down and they could get the breathing for the diesel. And that made it extremely difficult for us to see them. Because all there'd be was a tiny

25:30 little wash from this snorkel. And they had the audacity to come up the Irish Channel, the Irish Sea. They came up the Irish Sea because we couldn't pick them up. So there were times towards the end where we were go up and down the Irish Sea looking for snorkels. Very frustrating because they were very difficult to see. But that was all that happened. That's what changed things to

26:00 a different exercise to what we were doing. Just going up and down outside our base wasn't a good idea but that's what we had to do.

So translating the blip that you're seeing on the radar to what's down below, and pinpointing it, that's where the specific things you do as a navigator come into it? If radar says there's a blip at this

26:30 **position and you fly to that position, how likely are you to see.. once they had the snorkels up?**

You couldn't pick them up. Radar didn't pick up snorkels. They were too small. Radar, in those days, wasn't as sophisticated as it became. The radar said, you couldn't pick up a snorkel. It wouldn't show.

27:00 You'd pick up a U-boat and our operators got to know the size of the blip for a U-boat on the surface. You couldn't pick up a, no way could you pick up a snorkel. You just had to have everyone with their eyes wide open trying to find it. And even then, they could bring the snorkel down and there'd be nothing. It was a, fortunately for us, the snorkel came in, I think too late to save the Germans.

27:30 Because we couldn't find them after that. We still went up and down.

So once you got out there to vicinity of where there was suspected U-boats, what would your plan be? Was it just cruising in a particular direction? How did you determine?

Well, that all depended on what they briefed us to.

28:00 Later on in the war went down right along the French coast and we were going up and down outside a place called Le Palais, about a mile off the shore. Just going up and down. That was unusual to be that close in, just trying to stop them coming out through the mouth of the river. And, unfortunately, we went over a little island there.

28:30 I said, "Look, we're going to go over the Isle de Yeu." And skipper said, "Well, that's alright." I said, "Well, it's still occupied by the Germans." He said, "Oh, no, nobody will worry us about the Isle de Yeu." So we go over the Isle de Yeu. Looked down and saw lovely fields with cows in the fields and everything else. It as very peaceful. So when we got home, at our briefing we told them that we'd gone over the Isle de Yeu because we were slightly off track and we didn't worry about it and we went on

29:00 from there and took our patrol. And they told the next crew and they went down there and got shot at. And they said a few words to us about the peaceful little island. They didn't appreciate that sort of

information. But that was a, we shouldn't have gone over the island because we knew it was occupied. But they must have got such a shock, nobody came out and fired at us.

29:30 **But they were well camouflaged.**

Oh yeah. But we just appeared out of the blue and suddenly, oh it's only a few miles long this little island and we went over it and said, "Oh, isn't it lovely down there? Beautiful."

When you were doing those patrols, how low were you flying?

We generally went a thousand feet. Sometimes we'd go a bit higher. It all depended upon the

30:00 ceiling of the clouds. We liked to fly just below the cloud ceiling. And so that you were harder to see. If you were just below the clouds you were harder to see than if you were out in the open. And if you were attacked it was easy to get into the cloud. So we generally flew just below the cloud level which was somewhere around about a thousand or fifteen hundred feet generally. .

30:30 But, as I said, if we attacked the U-boat, we came down at night to 200 feet and if were in the daytime the captain dropped the depth charges down about fifty feet. But the rest of the time we were up about a thousand, fifteen hundred.

So if you were coming down that low, would there potentially be a different wind?

Oh yeah. Always different wind at different

31:00 heights. But if we came down low it would only be temporary. You have to adjust.

So you would take wind readings down low?

No, it all depended how long you were down. No, you wouldn't. You'd be busy doing other things. Getting ready with messages to hand to the wireless operator and where we were and what we were seeing and

31:30 like that Spanish trawler that we found one night. So we had to send a message back. You only broke radio silence if something happened. You sent a message. I had to work out the message, where we were, where the trawler was, etcetera, and give it to the radio operator to send it. So I, no if we came down low, I didn't do anything about that.

32:00 Noted where we went low and where we were.

You only sent messages if there was a situation?

Yep. Only if something happened. That's right. Otherwise you don't want to let anybody know that you're around. No, no. If you're on the radio sending messages, the Germans would pick you up and send out some fighters to have a go at you.

32:30 Didn't want to do that.

But no other code? To let the base know that you were there and still happening.

No. They assumed you were going alright. No, we didn't send any messages to say, "Still patrolling. Happy as a lark." You know, no way.

What did you wear?

Flying suits. We wore

33:00 flying jackets and pants and big boots. Woollen flying boots. And, what would you call it, just a flying suit? We wore them round the base too. You wore your jacket and ordinary sort of floppy pants and we didn't wear

33:30 the flying boots around because they were too awkward. But generally, you weren't in dress uniform, obviously. Just in normal every day wear apart from the boots. Quite comfortable.

And warm? Insulated?

Oh yeah. Not warm enough in the Shetlands though. But yeah, we were warm

34:00 enough. Even with all the air rushing through.

Did you have a toilet on board?

Oh yes. Downstairs. When you went down between the pilots, it was on the right hand side, it was the toilet there. Pretty well equipped we were. It was a big aeroplane. And going out for long hours. They had to. We had a galley and a toilet and a lounge, shall we say, the wardroom.

34:30 Yeah. Not for the navigator, just for everybody else.

What was it like to land? What was the sensation?

Well, when you landed, everybody took the crash positions. Sometimes the skipper did a good landing, sometimes he bounced. But generally speaking they were pretty good, pretty good pilots that we had anyway. And the landing was always

35:00 a relief. We're home again.

Any bad landings that you can remember?

No, never a really bad landing. Just a little bit of a bounce. No, never, not once.

And so what was crash position?

We were behind the bulkhead. Got in behind the bulkhead and, same sort of thing as they do on an aeroplane

35:30 today. Took up a crash position with our heads down. In fact my position was in behind the bulkhead and down . Everybody had somewhere they had to squat, shall we say. Didn't ever need it. But I think it would be a very stupid thing to be standing up when you landed.

36:00 Could go straight out through the windscreen if you did that. No, never a bad landing as far as I'm concerned. A little bit bumpy but never a bad landing. There were some really good times where we were relaxed and had a lovely time. And I remember we went up one time,

36:30 up to Belfast. They sent three Sunderlands up to Belfast. And of course it's understandable that we were probably under a bit of pressure all the time. And when you're allowed off the leash, you played up. So, we went up to Belfast, three Sunderlands. We had to leave two there for maintenance and fly everybody back in the one Sunderland, which was ours.

37:00 When we got there, nobody wanted to go home back to Pembroke Dock. They all wanted to spend the night in Belfast. So we decided that there was something wrong with our aircraft and it would have to be looked at overnight. So we all went into Belfast. I think there were thirty-eight of us went into Belfast for the night to look for accommodation. And we all managed to get somewhere to sleep. And I remember there were five blokes in a double bed

37:30 in one hotel. And they played up. Everybody played up except three of us because we had to take the aircraft back. Georgie, my skipper was, he couldn't play up too much. One of the wireless operators said he'd be on duty on the way back and I had to do the navigation because you couldn't go anywhere without a navigator. So the three of us had a fairly easy night and all the rest really played

38:00 up hard. And the next day, imagine all these blokes with sore heads getting on board our aircraft. And we took off and Georgie did the best landing he ever did in his life when we got back to Pembroke Dock. Nobody knew we were down. Of course they were all suffering and they didn't know we'd landed. He just creased it in. And all the other blokes, we said, "Look we're down." "Oh, we can't be."

38:30 That was sort of a night off in the middle of everything. They really played up but three of us had to behave. One bloke came up and he tore up my chart. "Get us home without the chart. You're good enough." And somebody else pulled out the plugs in the radio. Oh, they really made a nuisance of themselves on the way back. All the noise coming from downstairs. And people wandering all over the aeroplane. Getting in the way and, oh,

39:00 somebody sitting in the second pilot seat half asleep. So that was a sort of a highlight, we all relaxed for 48 hours.

So you had 38 people on board?

Yeah. That wasn't any worry, having 38 people. Because we didn't have to have a full load of fuel for that short trip.

39:30 So we only had about half a load of fuel. The difference in the weight, no difference at all with 38 people on board. That was easy. Except they were wandering all over the place. That was a night to remember, I can tell you. All these Aussies wandering around Belfast trying to find somewhere to sleep. The five in the double bed, the answer was to get against the wall

40:00 and the bloke on the outside would fall out. So he'd get up and go over against the wall and gradually come across. And it didn't matter because they'd all had too much to drink anyway. So it didn't matter in the end. In the end I think somebody just decided he was going to sleep on the floor instead of being in this rotary thing.

So what was Belfast like at this time?

Oh, it was just an ordinary city with pubs and

40:30 just a very ordinary city at that stage. There was nothing exciting about it except our blokes going from one pub to another and making lots of noise and making a nuisance of themselves I reckon.

41:00 End of tape

Tape 7

00:30 **Your operations flights would be fifteen hours or so?**

Yes, not often fifteen hours. Generally about thirteen or fourteen. But occasionally we had to do fifteen. Which is a long time. Because we were woken three hours before we took off, which makes it eighteen. And then it was generally a couple of hours before it was possible to go to bed again. And we never

01:00 did that. We always went out. If it was in the evening, we'd go out to the pub or go out to a dance or something like that. So it was quite often more than twenty-four hours that we'd be up. They didn't put us on again for a couple of days after we'd had a long session like that. So for those couple of days, we'd enjoy ourselves. We played tennis. There were a few blokes on the squadron who were

01:30 reasonable tennis players. We played tennis. We went to dances over in Tenby, which is a fairly close little town. And we enjoyed ourselves as much as we could while we were off duty. Also towards the end we did a lot of training on our low level bombsight that I mentioned earlier. In the low level bombsight training

02:00 pavilion. Generally speaking we just relaxed when we could. Used to have pictures, most of them have gone anyway, of people just lying down in the sun and relaxing. We had, I know we, most of the blokes bought a car because we had the

02:30 opportunity to get petrol where nobody else could. And I remember we were talking about Georgie's car. Georgie was my last skipper. We were great friends. We still are. He lives in Adelaide and we're still great mates. And he was a, he was a funny fellow because a fellow named Roger Newton finished his tour and he said to Georgie, "What about buying my car? I've got a

03:00 1927 Austin 7." He said, "You can buy my car. I'll sell it to you for five quid [pounds] because I'm just going away." He was going away to be an instructor somewhere. So Jorgie said, "Right oh, where is it?" He said, "It's up at Llanion Barracks at the hangar up there." He said, "You can have it for five quid." So Jorgie passed him this five quid. We went up, after Roger left we went up to Llanion

03:30 Barracks and you couldn't open the door. This huge door that swung from the top and went up like a, oh from the bottom up on a hinge. And everything had broken and you couldn't lift it. You couldn't get it. And there was no other doorway you could get this car out. So we finished up, we got about fifty blokes from the squadron who all pushed on the bottom of this door, pushed it up high enough

04:00 so a few other fellows wheeled the car out. So we got the car out. Then we had a look in the, under the bonnet and all the leads were off. And nobody knew the firing order on an Austin 7. Which, if you think about it mathematically, it could be all sorts of different things. So I already had a car,

04:30 I'd bought a Ford 8, a '35 Ford 8. I paid a lot of money for that. I paid fifty pounds for it. And I had this Ford 8 so I towed it back to our, well, we weren't allowed to take to car to the officer's mess but there was a spot across the road. Towed it back then and then Georgie got the engineers from the aeroplane to try and make the car start. And they fiddled around

05:00 for ages and ages and ages and they had aeroplane fuel in it. And eventually it started with the greatest bang that everybody, it backfired and everybody within Pembroke Dock, or Pembroke, could hear it. You know, bang, bang and away she went. Anyway, from there on, Georgie's car would work but I had to tow it to start it. If I was going to tow Georgie's car in the morning

05:30 I'd, we'd get the rope out and we'd tie the two cars together and away I'd go and Georgie's 1927 Austin had hand controls. It didn't have an accelerator or anything like that. It had a hand brake and hand controls on the actual wheel, little levers on there to work everything. And the roof had disintegrated.

06:00 It was just a little box on wheels and the roof had all gone. So I'd tow Georgie along the street and, eventually, it would go bang and then back fire and then it made the most horrible banging noise. And Georgie'd stand up and wave to me that it was starting, it had started. He'd have his feet on the wheel and he'd stand up through the roof and say, "She's started." Well, everybody in Pembroke knew it had. So that was

06:30 our fun with Georgie's car. And then the two of us decided to go on leave together. And we said, "Now, the best way to do this is, we'll get our leave, our tickets for petrol coupons, because we're going on leave for fifteen days", and we planned to right round southern England. "And we'll take my car

07:00 and then we've got two lots of tickets for petrol coupons", and away we went. And the first day Georgie said, "Let's try and get some petrol without using a coupon. We'll see if we can con this next garage." So we pulled up at the garage, showed our Australia badges above the sill and said, "Look, could you please help us? We're a bit short of petrol and we haven't any tickets. Can you let us have a couple of gallons?" Well, the bloke did. For fifteen days

07:30 we didn't use a ticket. We conned free petrol all the way round through Southern England. We had a whale of a time and we didn't use the tickets for the whole fifteen days. But we were caught out once. We pulled up and give this bloke this long, long sad story about how we were running out of petrol. We

didn’t have any coupons left. And we had to get back to base. And he said, “Look, OK. “

08:00 He said, “I’ll fill you up.” And he went to fill us up and it only took about two gallons and he realised we had enough petrol in there anyway. Well, he went to market on us because we’d conned him but he couldn’t do anything about it, because the petrol was already in the car. It was the only time in fifteen days that we were caught out. All the rest of the time, we just botted petrol everywhere. And, of course, what happened was, when we got back, we had all

08:30 these tickets, all these coupons for petrol so we went to the local garage and said, “Here, look at all these tickets, all these coupons. You can fill us up any time we want.” He said, “Yeah, I will.” So we gave him all the coupons and from there on all we had to do was pull in and full up. But it was a terrible thing to do really. But we were so proud of being able to con our way around Southern England. We went, and we had a whale of a time for the fifteen

09:00 days. We went to all, I think we went to all the dances we could think off all the way around there. We stayed with an old colonel at a place called Taunton. Not Taunton, Massachusetts which I went to. A place called Taunton which is fairly near Bristol. And we had a terribly funny time with this old colonel in Taunton. But it was a memorable holiday an we got home ready to carry on.

09:30 **Can you tell me about that time in Taunton?**

Well, the old colonel used to go down the pub every afternoon. And he took us down to the pub and we met all the locals at the pub and they all thought it was marvellous having two Aussies there. Then we had to go to the church concert, which was a typical country church concert. It was very, very, very amateurish. But we went to that.

10:00 And the house that the colonel lived in, everywhere you went you had to bob because it was a very, very old house with low ceilings and low doors. And you had to duck your head everywhere you went in the colonel’s house. He used to just iron himself out every night this old colonel. We didn’t but we went along with him and everybody in the village loved him. And it was something I remember now,

10:30 our visit to the old colonel. I don’t know how we met him. We just, I think we were just passing through and we pulled in at the pub and there he was. And he said, “Well, why don’t you stay with me for while?” Thought, “Oh, we’ll do that.”

How was it converting from pots to pints?

From pots to pints?

I’m talking about the beer.

Well, of course, I didn’t drink when we were, when we got there.

11:00 The first beer I had was in Scotland. And the beer over there was warm and flat. And I wasn’t converting from pots to pints because I’d never had pots before. So I just went along with my mates and drank the pints with them. No, there was no conversation. That’s where I grew up on beer.

I was just trying to use some aviation terminology.

11:30 There were pints in the mess and it was all pints. We used to play shove halfpenny in the mess and darts and all the things they did in the Pommy pubs. And I remember quite distinctly that one of my mates said one night, he said, “Look, winter’s coming on.” He said, “Let’s go over to the dance over at Pembroke.”

12:00 It was a local place, Pembroke, with a dance on there. He said, “I’ve got a theory,” he said, “I’m going to get a girl who has a fireplace for the winter.” And he said, “I want to go home to her place and sit in front of the fire when I’m off duty” for the wintertime. So away we went to this dance and it finished up the other way round. I got one who had a fireplace and he didn’t.

12:30 And my girl’s father worked at the base. And every time I walked in his front door he called me Sir. I said, “Don’t do that.” I was very well behaved. We just had a good winter of a few cuddles in front of the fire and that was it. So I got the girl who had the fireplace and the friend didn’t

13:00 who set out to get one. That’s the sort of thing we did at night. We went out to dances and we just enjoyed ourselves. We played up a bit. Not much. You couldn’t afford to be hung over when you’re suddenly called to go out and do a job. Which occasionally happened. You got back to the mess and they’d say, “Right oh, you’re rostered for tonight.” You know, oh gosh.

13:30 **You did mention that there was one flight where the crew was.**

Oh that happened up at Durness when we were training. And that was Colin Grant’s fault. But that happened up there and we didn’t expect to go flying the next day but suddenly they said, “Right, you’re off.” Dreadful. I never did it again.

What about the functions, the dances and so on? What was the music of the

14:00 **time and what sort of dances?**

Oh it was the old cuddly music which was great. It's a pity it's gone away. We used to dance around. You'd go to the dance and all the girls would be around the outside sitting in seats on the outside. You'd pick out one and say, "Right, I'll go for her." And you'd head off for her and somebody would beat you to it. So then you'd be left stranded in the middle of the hall wondering where the heck you were going

14:30 to go next. But they were all very friendly dances and we just sort of mixed around amongst everybody. It was good. It was a relaxation. I remember later on during the war we had an influx of American Indian commando types into our area. And that was, there was

15:00 shenanigans there. We didn't like them moving in. They tried to take our girls away from us and they tried to take over the pubs. And they were these great big strong Indians. And, fortunately, they didn't stay very long. They were moved out. But that, that was the only thing that ever upset our home life, shall we say. These blooming Indians coming along. And I remember, I went along

15:30 to a pub one night shortly after they'd arrived with my mates. And I went up to the bar to get a drink and as I was getting the drink, I think I accidentally knocked this Indian's arm. And he turned round ready to flatten me. "What are you doing?" And he looked at me and said, "Oh." I had a broken nose and he said, "Oh, I don't know."

16:00 He said, "I'll let you off." I said, "Well, just as well you did too, mate." Sort of saying, well you're lucky you didn't pick on me. Which, of course, was an absolute lie. But you had to brave it out against these blokes. They were pretty aggressive, pinching our girls and pinching our pubs and getting aggressive with us.

What were they doing based there?

They were based there, this was

16:30 after the invasion. They were put in there because they were then going to go across to France. They were only there for a little while. They put them all together and said, "Right, away we go." It was after the invasion. We didn't like them.

Were they successful with the local lasses?

Some of them were. Fortunately mine lived a couple of miles away.

17:00 So I didn't lose her. Some of the blokes lost their girls temporarily. They weren't happy. Well you can't go over there for a couple of years or three years and not even talk to female company, can you?

Did any of the fellows get any of the girls into trouble?

Not that I know of.

17:30 But several of them married them. Several of them got married over there. I don't know of anybody who got anybody into trouble. Well, maybe the ones who got married got them into trouble. No, not that I know of. But there were three or four that I knew of that married English girls there. Some of them WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force], some of them locals.

18:00 Some of the WAAFs were fairly easy targets, shall we say. Not me of course. No. Some of them were that I knew of. But it was a fairly good life when we weren't flying. It was a pretty happy sort of a life.

Was there a problem understanding the Welsh accent,

18:30 **it can be pretty thick, can't it?**

Oh, we didn't have any problem. When I got home, eventually got home, apparently I had a Pommy accent. I think we all did. You can't live over there for a couple of years and not get it. If you're with everybody, with all the Poms. No, we didn't have any trouble with the Welsh accent. We had trouble pronouncing some of the names of their towns. There's a place called Llanelli

19:00 which we called Slash for Short because nobody could pronounce it probably. And I didn't pronounce it properly then. But all these double Ls. You're in trouble. But no trouble understanding what they were saying.

Is it possible for you to explain to us what the set up was at the base? There was 461 Squadron of course.

Yes.

There were other squadrons. Where did they come from?

There was 461 squadron.

19:30 There was 201 squadron and 281. 201 squadron were the Poms and 281 were the Canadians. I hope I'm right on those numbers. But there were the three squadrons there and we all mixed up together in the mess. The maintenance staff were all

20:00 Poms. All RAF maintenance for the whole three squadrons. Unlike 10 sSquadron who had their own

maintenance crew over there. As I mentioned, I haven't mentioned to you the formation of 461. 461 Squadron was formed on the,

20:30 on Anzac Day 1942 when the powers that be decided they needed another Australian Sunderland squadron. So they took several part crews from 10 Squadron, sent them across to form a new squadron and they had a new CO from outside. And then they recruited various members of

21:00 crews to come and join. So it was on Anzac 1942 that the formally formed 461 Squadron. And from there on we were named the Anzac Squadron, because that's the day it was formed. It started off at a place called Poole and they found that unsuitable, so then it was moved to Pembroke Dock and grew. And the squadron

21:30 finished up as a full sized, very, very good operational squadron. And had quite a few U-boat kills over the period. We'd skite that we were a better squadron than 10. And they say they were a better squadron than us. But that's because we, some blokes served on both.

22:00 But very few. 10 Squadron didn't send their captains to Durness to pick up a new crew. They simply imported more and more newly trained people to integrate into the crews they and gradually move up and take over. So they didn't, if you got to England, you could be immediately

22:30 sent to 10 Squadron. But if you were going to 461, it was a long route to get there. But there's no animosity between the two except on Anzac Day march in Melbourne, where both squadrons do their best to get the banner in front of the other one. It's just a friendly thing that happens. You start off in Flinders Street and as you're forming up ready to

23:00 go, somebody moves their banner in front of 10. And the next thing 10 moves theirs in front of ours. Actually last Anzac Day there were only two blokes in Victoria who were capable of marching from 461. I'm one of them. And the other bloke, I doubt if he'll be there next year. He's 87 now.

23:30 Of course it remains unsaid that I was the youngest navigator on 461. That's probably why the adjutant said, "What are you doing here, young fellow?" I don't think I can tell you much more about the activities on the ground there, Colin [interviewer].

That friendly rivalry, you say still exists.

It still exists. We have our reunions together.

24:00 We've got another one in May up in Queensland. The Sunderlanders reunion. That'll be our last, the third time it's been the last reunion. There was a last reunion in Sydney because we're all getting too old to have another reunion. Then Perth decided that they'd better have another one. So they said, "Look, we'll have the last reunion in Perth." So we went to that. And now Queensland

24:30 have come up and said, "No, no, we've got to have another one." Third one is the last one for ever.

How many make it to that?

We generally get around between 80 to 100 turn up. But they're not all the men. Everyone's got their partner or whatever. And there are quite a few widows go to the reunions who used to go and they've lost their husbands since. So, I suppose,

25:00 if you look at it, there are probably, nationwide there are probably about 35 to 40 of us go to the reunion. I don't think there's going to be that many in Brisbane because some of them have fallen by the wayside since. But we have a, we've had national reunions of Sunderlanders for a long time now. We started to have it once every four years and

25:30 then we decided that we better have it more often. And now it's, well it's going to be less than two years from Perth to Brisbane. It's good. It's good to meet them. We've got to know all the 10 Squadron blokes pretty well at the reunions. Not many 461 left unfortunately.

How well did you know the 10 Squadron back then?

During the war, not very well. Because it wasn't very often that we were

26:00 diverted to their place and it wasn't very often they were diverted to us. So we didn't know them very well back then. After the war all the reunions would be together and we know them all well now. No problem at all. Yeah, well, there's no, no messing around except that little bit of rivalry on the march. Just for fun. They say they were the senior squadron and we say, "Well, we're the better one."

26:30 **You said in the officers mess you're mixing with Canadians and Poms?**

Yes.

When you go out to your dances and you did your fifteen day adventure, were you sticking mainly with your Aussie mates?

Oh, yeah, we would have been. We'd take a car load. We'd probably take six in a little Ford 8, over to a dance. And it would

27:00 all be our crew. And Georgie and I went on our own for that fifteen days. Just the two of us and did our own thing on that trip. So, yes, we would. We really stuck with our crew. Which was fair enough.

What sort of reputation did the Aussies have

27:30 **amongst the English and the Canadians?**

I don't really know. I think we were pretty popular.

And in terms of doing the job?

Oh yes, we were rated very highly there because our navigation officer, who was in charge of everything, was very, very strict of our nav blokes. Oh, if you made a mistake you

28:00 copped it when you got home. If your log wasn't absolutely spot on and neat and everything else, you would answer for it. We were rated the best navigation for the month several times in Southern Command, which, best squadron for navigation several times. So it was a highly rated squadron. And the results showed. We got

28:30 a lot of good results overall.

Tell me about your nav officer?

The nav officer?

The sort of person he was and also the relationship and what you needed to be able to present to him?

Well, after your patrol you had to hand in your log. Which showed exactly what you did all the way. Everything you did went on the log. And

29:00 he'd go through your log with you. "Why did you do that? Why didn't you do this earlier?" You'd go right through the log and he'd say, "OK, that's fair enough". The, as I said, earlier, the proof of the pudding was your landfall. If you got a little bit out on your landfall, he'd really want to know and go through your log very carefully to see where it happened. "Where did you go wrong? Where did you make a mistake? Why didn't you take another drift there because it showed the

29:30 weather was doing this?" Because you had to sort of, by all your drifts and winds you could tell what was happening. It was a story that you could read. That's why we didn't take any notice of weather reports. Because we really did our own of what was happening. You could see what was going on. And he'd go through it and say, "Now look, you should have known that that's what the wind was going to do because of so and so and so and so."

30:00 That's probably why our standard was good because he was very strict and very helpful. Told you what you should have done. That's about all I can say about the nav officer.

And as you got better at the job…

You would. Certainly you would have got better as the job went on. Without knowing it you would have been better.

30:30 There was a special nav officer's course. That when you finished your tour on Sunderlands, if you were lucky enough, you'd be sent to this nav officers course. Which was a very specialised course to teach people how to be the head (UNCLEAR). And they were more highly trained that we were. And I was posted to the nav

31:00 officer's course just as the war finished and they cancelled the blooming course. The disappointment about it was, if you did a nav officer's course and you passed through that, there was an open job for you after the war with BOAC [British Overseas Air Company]. Just, they took every nav officer who wanted to go and be a naver on BOAC. So it could have made an enormous, or big difference to my life

31:30 if that course had gone on or if I'd been sent to it earlier. So they're very highly trained those nav officers.

So you think if the course had eventuated you might have hung around?

I would have. I would have stayed and worked with BOAC. Certainly. It was an opportunity. I didn't have any other qualifications. And it was something that I could have walked into a very good

32:00 job. But that didn't happen.

We've got the implication that you were promoted and you moved from sergeant's to officer's mess. Could you spell out that process?

Oh, just, they just wanted, they wanted me to be an officer because I was, as I said earlier, second in charge of the crew. And so they,

32:30 the CO had to fill in his report and what I was and what I was doing. And they had to go through my

history, etcetera, etcetera, and send that all down to the headquarters that were down in Plymouth. And then I got called to go down there and I had to on a train and go down to Plymouth and have an interview. And when the interview was over they said, “Right oh, go away again.” And eventually the promotion came through.

33:00 So I then had to go to London and get fitted for a new uniform and everything else. And that was about it. But it took a few months for everything to eventuate. Which wouldn’t have had to happen if I hadn’t have told the instructor he was wrong at Sale. Anyway, it hasn’t affected my life since.

33:30 **In terms of being at the base, did that have any impact there? Moving from sergeants to officers mess?**

No, nothing at all. No effect as far as the crew was concerned or as far as my mates were concerned. Except I just changed beds. And uniform. Changed bed and uniform. No other difference. Except the pay went up. I didn’t use all my pay anyway. I always had a, most of my pay went to an allotment bank

34:00 at home. Because when I left here I didn’t drink, didn’t smoke, I didn’t have any bad habits, shall we say. And so I didn’t need all the pay and so I put all the rest of it back there. I only need so much. And that happened all the way through. So when I got a promotion I just let the rest go and still drew what I was drawing.

So how often were you corresponding with home?

34:30 Oh, every ten days or a fortnight I wrote a letter. We wrote these aerograms which they took away and photographed and sent them out on a film, out to there. And the film was processed and printed and they sent them on.

Was that a microfilm sort of thing?

Yeah. That’s what they did. They just sent the film out. They didn’t send your letters. And the people here got a photocopy of

35:00 your letter. Same thing going back the other way. They didn’t want to send great parcels of mail. So I wrote to Peg regularly and she wrote to me. And she reckons that she used to wait for a month or so and then write a couple of them and date them differently. Oh dear. Very tricky girl.

You did mention earlier that she was writing to…

35:30 She was writing to David as well. I sort of had a suspicion that was happening. That’s why I told him we were getting married when I got home. “Get out of here.”

You were saying before that you met him in London.

Yeah, I did.

During the war? Can you tell us?

I went up and I met him in the Boomerang Club. Ran right into him in the Boomerang Club. And I said, “Well, come on, let’s go and have a beer together. We’re both old school friends.”

36:00 So we did. I generally didn’t stay in London for long. That was just for that night and off. So I fixed him up.

It was a bit of a turning point really, wasn’t it? What did you say to him?

I just said, “Look, remember Peg Maddon?” He said, “Yeah.” I said, “We’re getting married when I get home.” We weren’t, of course.

36:30 But we did. I think she’s forgiven me.

What was the look on his face when you told him that?

Oh, just blank. He’s a dill.

So what would you be telling the folks back home? Peg or your parents?

Well, you weren’t allowed to tell them too much. You just had to tell them you were healthy and everything was going

37:00 alright and we had a party the other night. But you couldn’t say what you were doing. Otherwise they would have been chopped up. So it was just a friendly letter saying that all’s well. I’m healthy and everything’s OK. Looking forward to seeing you when the war’s over and that was about it. You couldn’t reveal where you were

37:30 or what you were doing. If you did, you knew that was going to be chopped out by the censor. You could say, well, we flew yesterday and nothing happened. But you couldn’t say where you were and what you were doing. Although I don’t know, I suppose they might have guessed when they realised that I, when I was in Scotland, I’d say, “Scotland.

38:00 Been transferred to Wales." That's all you could say. Very restricted in letters.

And what sort of news were you hearing from home? Much happen while you were away?

Oh, whatever they wanted to say, that was OK. Of course they'd say, I don't know, the weather's good or whatever. Just hoping you're well and

38:30 everything's good. They were very bland letters. Necessarily so. You can't keep putting down that we saw a U-boat the other day. No, that's not on. I can't think of anything else that was exciting

39:00 in our squadron of what we did.

You brother had joined the navy?

Yes, I knew he had joined the navy. But that's another story for when we got home. I don't know if we're going to get up to that?

Oh, we will.

And that's another story about Brian. As I said earlier in the day, we were the greatest of mates all our lives. Which was good. Marvellous. He actually

39:30 was a great friend of Peg's. And they were very close, Brian and Peg. Same age the two of them. So they were in the same forms at school. Same ideas. Went swimming together. He introduced me to her down the beach.

40:00 Which was good. Because Brian wasn't a boarder, he knew all the girls down at the beach.

You've told us a bit about Shetland and the work you were doing. You were replacing a Norwegian ...?

Yes, that's right. We replaced a Norwegian squadron and they only sent four of us up there. So we had to work extra hard while we were there

40:30 to try to make up for the fact that they had eight in their squadron and we only had four. There was still some Norwegians there who were still flying with us. But only one or two crews. So that we were working harder to try and make up for the difference. And the Norwegians were the wildest men I ever met in my life. These were all people who'd escaped from Norway

41:00 to go and fight the enemy. And so they were all on their own, shall we say. Vikings. And in the mess at night, the officer's mess at night, they drank more beer than you can possibly imagine. And they were the wildest people. Quite understandable. Their country was occupied and they were going to do something

41:30 to fix it up. I don't know what happened to Norwegians who went down our way. Probably played up down there too.

Were you based in Shetland when the squadron was disbanded?

Oh no, we were only up there for about three months. Two or three months. I can't tell you exactly.

Tape 8

00:31 We went down to this place called St Ebel, well we weren't flying any more. And we'd go down to the beach or mess around, just spend a few days. And I got a call to the office to see the CO. And he said, "There's been a request from the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] tennis team in England for you to join them."

01:00 And I said, "That sounds pretty good." He said, "Well, you can go up to London and report to RAAF headquarters there in Kodak House. And you'll join the tennis team." He said, "They supply everything." So did that. I went up to London and I was inducted into the RAAF tennis team. There were five of us in the team. And we had a manager.

01:30 I wasn't the best player in the team because there were two very good players who were both rated in the top ten in Australia before we left. The fact that I was runner up in the Victorian under-19, they knew about me. So they got me. And then there were two South Australians there who were pretty good players. So there were five of us in the team with a manager. And we played, we practiced

02:00 in the Queen's Club courts. Three of us played in an all England junior tennis tournament out at Beckenham, where we started to get used to playing tennis again. And then the five of us and the manager went to Belgium and we played against the Belgian national team over there in Antwerp and in

02:30 Brussels. When we arrived in Belgium, in Brussels, they met us off the plane in two Cadillacs with chauffeurs. And we were treated like we were kings. And they put us into a magnificent hotel in the

middle of Brussels. And then they came and picked us up and took us out to the Royal Leopold Tennis Club where we had a big reception. And they had

03:00 this great reception with all the officials there and everything else, welcoming the Australian tennis team. Well, it wasn't the Australian tennis team. It was simply made up of RAAF blokes who were over in England at the time. And then they allocated a girl to each of us to look after us while were there. Not to sleep with us but to make sure we were right during the daytime and take us out to various places which they did.

03:30 So we got a girl each to look after us and we were given all the facilities we could get. They gave us tickets to go and buy grog at the bar and absolutely incredible. And we went up to Antwerp and we played their team up in Antwerp. We came back and we played them two days later, we played them in Brussels. And the paper had headlines about this great tennis match that was going

04:00 on. And I remember the headline was "Match Nul". Which meant all equal. Because we beat them in Antwerp and they beat us in Brussels. And then we got on a plane and we went back to England. And shortly after we got back to England, they said to me, "Now, your posting has come through to Australia. Do you want to go or do you want to stay with the tennis team." I said, "I want to go home." So I left them. I've got

04:30 pictures of the team, etcetera, etcetera. And an interesting little thing, this is just for interest's sake. Whilst we were in Brussels, there was an Australian lady who lived in Brussels. And she came out to the tennis club and she met us all and she said, "I'd love you to come to my place and have afternoon tea with me tomorrow afternoon." We said, "Well, OK, we'll do that." We went to her place

05:00 and it was upstairs in an attic over what used to be a, where they kept horses for the carriages and things like that, you know. And she was upstairs in this flat which was up above. Turns out she was part of the underground that got people out, who were shot down over Germany. And she was part of that system. You remember there was a system they had

05:30 in there where they hid everybody and moved them at night from various place to various place and got them out to go back to England. And she was part of that underground system. She had a part of a parachute that one of the people brought after having parachuted down. She had cut it into a

06:00 scarf. And on the scarf she had signatures of a lot of the blokes that had got out through the underground system. And she asked the six of us, the manager and the five players, to sign the scarf. Which we did because she said, "You're Australians and it's marvellous to have you here and I want you to sign the scarf." Well, some years after the war Peg's auntie by marriage,

06:30 in Sydney rang Peg and she said, "I know you're married to Don Roydhouse. Was he ever in Belgium?" Peg said, "Yes he was. He was over there with the tennis team." She said, "Well, my sister has got this scarf." And she was the girl who looked after us in Belgian. Her sister, Peg's aunt by marriage , her sister, and she said, "She's got this scarf here and it's all embroidered and the names, she's embroidered all the

07:00 names." She said, "I just want to know if it was Don who was actually there." Well, the sister died. So Peg's auntie sent me the scarf. I've got it in my den. I've got this scarf with all the signatures on it. I've got the photograph of the tennis team. I've got a photograph of the three of us playing at Beckenham junior tournament. And I've got a picture of the lady and a print of the

07:30 article that was in the paper, talking about this girl who was part of the underground. So that's an interesting relic.

What was her name?

Oh, I don't know. It's got it on the thing. So that's what happened to me in the tennis team, straight after the war. And I was sent home on the next boat which I wanted to do. And we came home through the Suez Canal on a beautiful

08:00 big boat. Oh, I've forgotten the name of it already. That's only fifty odd years ago. I should know that. So we came home on this boat through the Suez Canal and we stopped in Perth and they let all the Western Australians and the South Australians off. Gave us leave for the night but we had to be back first thing in the morning. And having been born in Perth,

08:30 I knew through a family association, a bloke named Alan Martin who had three beautiful daughters. So two of my mates and I went and rang up Alan Martin and he said his daughters would take us out for the night. Which they did. We had a great time. And then we sailed around to Sydney and they let off all the New South Wales blokes and they said, "Right oh, now the Queenslanders and the Victorians have got to stay

09:00 on board because you're getting a train tonight." And whilst we were stuck on the wharf, aboard up at the wharf, there was a call for me over the intercom, would I report to the purser's office. So I did. And when I went to the purser's office there was a fellow named Franz there that I'd heard of. And he was the New South Wales

09:30 manager of the Ford Motor Company. And he said, “I’ve been in touch with your father and he told me that you were on this boat.” He said, “I’ve spoken to your CO and if you can get your mates to put your luggage on the train tonight,” he said, “I will take you off the boat, take you home and entertain you and I’ll guarantee to put you on the train in time so you don’t go getting into trouble.” I said, “That’s fantastic.” So I tore back to

10:00 my mates and I said, “Can you put my luggage on the train? I’ve got leave to go.” “Oh, you lucky coot.” Anyway, we then walked down the gangplank and we started to walk along the wharf and a sailor saluted me. And I saluted him back and walked on a few yards. And Franz said, “Did you have a good look at the sailor?” I said, “No.” He said, “Well, have another look.” And it was Brian, my brother. He was in Sydney at the time and

10:30 Franz had got hold of him. So we went round to Rose Bay where Mr Franz lived and we rang Mum. And she burst into tears on the phone because both her sons were home whole. So that was my return. Then we got on the train that night at eight o’clock and came down to Melbourne. And we were taken to the exhibition

11:00 buildings and put on the stage. There were all these people who were going to meet us. There was my Mum, my Dad and Peg met me at the Exhibition Building. She didn’t want to go but they, her father and mother insisted she go up there with mine. So that was my return. It was very exciting.

So when you saw your brother there in Sydney, did you manage to spend time together?

11:30 Oh, we spent all the afternoon together and then when we rang Mum and she burst into tears, I remember Brian going on the phone and he said, “Yes, he certainly has. There’s no doubt about that.” And I said, “What the hell, what have I got?” He said, “You’ve got a Pommy accent.” Oh that was a great thrill, meeting Brian there. Well, I didn’t know. I hadn’t seen him since he joined the navy. He joined the navy after I went overseas.

12:00 So it was a great time.

Where had Brian been?

Well, he went up North. He went to the islands. He was an asdic operator in the islands on a corvette. He got the pins in the end and they sent him back to Sydney to recover. And that’s where he was when I came home.

12:30 So that was an exciting time in my life, coming home and finding my little brother there. And then I didn’t expect Peg to be up at the Exhibition Buildings to meet me with Mum and Dad either. But that was another surprise. So there we were. It was the day before Melbourne Cup in 1945.

Who won the Melbourne Cup?

I haven’t the foggiest notion. I couldn’t tell you anything about the Melbourne Cup either.

13:00 So there we are. Don’t know if you want to know any more?

Well, I’ve got a couple of questions? I do want to wrap up some of that time back in England. You’ve just come home, we’ll take that a little bit further if we can.

13:30 **Had you already been discharged?**

No. After I got home we had a couple of weeks leave and then we had to go and meet the blokes in St Kilda Road where we were interviewed. And, “What are you going to do in life now?” There were all sorts of things that, they were

14:00 offering courses to do this, to do that, to do something else. I said, “I don’t want to do any courses. I’ve had it.” “So what are you going to do?” I said, “I just want to get out of the air force and I’ll find my own way.” Being an independent coot. But I should have, of course, said, “Look I want to go and do engineering at the university. I’m qualified to do it.” But I didn’t. No, I wanted to get out. I didn’t want to study any more. I wanted to get married and I didn’t want to do all those things. They

14:30 argued the toss with me and said, “Well, you should do something.” And I said, “No, I’ll be right.” And so I missed a lot of things that I should have done. Another mistake. Anyway I came home after that and my leave was due to finish in February. I just kept on hammering Peg until she finally said, “Um.” And then I asked her father,

15:00 “Could I have her hand?” And eventually she said, “Um”, and we became engaged. We went up to Melbourne to buy some presents that people had given us some money, etcetera, and to have a day in Melbourne and buy some presents. And while we were up there I suddenly felt terribly sick. And we were sort of shopping for something or other and I said, “Look, I can’t go any further. I’m

15:30 sorry but I really feel dreadful.” And we still had this mate of mine up in the MCG Hotel. So we got a cab up there. He rang the local doctor and that night I was in hospital having my appendix out. A good day to be engaged and have your appendix out that night. So that was alright except

16:00 that the bad news was my leave had run out the day before and so the air force weren’t going to pay for

it. I had to pay for it out of my air force savings. That was a pretty bad start, wasn't it? I then bought a very small newsagency in West Geelong with the money I had saved and worked there for three and half

16:30 years, worked my head off. Very long hours working my body to pieces really and making very little money. In the end I got sick of it and said, "Look, I'm getting nowhere. This is not on. I'm just making a living." We were married and had a couple of kids by then. I said, "We're just getting through." And a friend of mine, who was a real estate agent, said, "Don, you want

17:00 to get out?" I said, "Yeah, I do. I want to buy another business." He said, "Well, Camera House is for sale." He said, "I reckon you can afford it." Because it's a very small business in town. I said, "I don't know anything about cameras." He said, "Don, it doesn't matter. They haven't got any cameras." You couldn't buy them. He said, "They're running a toy shop." He said, "You can certainly handle that and you can get cameras when they're available because you've got the name. And there's a dark room upstairs where they're processing films."

17:30 So I bought Camera House. And as cameras became available, I kicked the toys out gradually. I was selling Dinky Toys, Hornby Trains, Meccano sets and model aeroplanes. And they gradually went out the door while the cameras came in and that's where we started. So it was a good move to move into that. Even though I didn't know anything about cameras.

18:00 You could pick things up. Bought a couple of books on how things work and away we went. That was in 1950. Still own the business. Although our son, who's a pharmacist decided he didn't like pharmacy, he'd rather run our business and he does a very good job. So our pharmacist son is a camera operator.

18:30 So that's the story.

Thank you very much for that, Don. I hope we can just go back and wrap up on a couple of things. You told us the great story of the D-day, when you spotted the sub and you had the CO on board. I believe that was around the time of D-day?

It was the second night after D-day.

19:00 We took off on the 7th and it was actually eight o'clock in the morning of the 8th that we attacked the U-boat.

I'm wondering how the war that you were involved in, the Bay of Biscay and that part of the world, how that changed from the time you arrived until the end of the war. How the intensity of it changed.

Well, eventually, of course, the Germans were kicked out of France so we didn't have to go through the Bay any more.

19:30 But we had to try and protect England from U-boats coming up the Channel and coming up the Irish Sea and things like that. But gradually, as the war went on, our patrols got nearer and nearer and nearer to France. We used to go right straight down from, right out by Land's End, straight down to Spain. So we were out of

20:00 range of the, or nearly out of range of the fighters. And then, as the war went on, our patrols went further and further in towards France. And, of course, once the French were kicked out, we didn't have the problem, oh, the Germans were kicked out of France. We didn't have the problem of fighters coming out and having a go at us. So we could patrol without any worries about that except if we attacked a U-boat, they would fire at us. Which was a bit

20:30 uncomfortable. So it did change. Gradually changed. But we were still, even though that was changing there, we were still going out and doing convoy escort work west of Ireland. So that didn't change. The convoys were still coming and the U-boats were still trying to have a go at them. So there really wasn't any difference .

21:00 Patrols were still patrols even if they were in a different area. They can be awfully boring to the bloke sitting in the turret just watching the sea. I would have hated to have done that. But I was busy.

What did those guys do in order to remain focused and awake?

I don't know. But they only had one hour shifts in the turret. They'd switch around. They'd do a one hour shift and then they'd go off and maybe

21:30 even go to a different turret or maybe go down to the ward room while somebody else took over. They make go up and get on the radio. They moved around. Because you couldn't leave a bloke in the turret all day. No way in the world. He'd go to sleep.

You told us the story of your first operation and you had to tell everyone to shut up. Was that the way it always was on all the operations? The line was only to be used...

22:00 That's right. That was a very, very solid rule. The funny part about it was that on the ground air crew were undisciplined. You could say that, the Poms thought we were undisciplined on the ground. Because we all just mixed together, a whole lot of mates. But in the air, discipline was bang. You knew your place. You knew what you could do

22:30 and there it was. That's why , because we were in the air, I, as a junior officer, or a junior in rank to all the others, still had control of them and said, "This is it. No more mucking around" you know. And that was the discipline in the air. We were very, and once we took out a war correspondent to see what was happening. And he reported on that. He said amazing discipline in the air with this crew.

23:00 So there was a difference. Wasn't rank. It was position. I've nearly run out of information, haven't it?

I'll ask you more questions and see what happens. With D-day, obviously there was a lot of traffic across the Channel. Were you seeing?

23:30 We could see it. In the daytime we could see it. But you couldn't see it at night. Well, you could see splashes of gunfire, etcetera, when you were close to France. But when you were back over by England you couldn't see a thing. But during the daytime you could see all the fleet moving across. Because we were close enough in to see that in the distance. They didn't want us closer in because

24:00 the U-boats could create havoc if we let them through. I think, I'm not sure, but I think there were ships patrolling backwards and forwards also to try to stop them going up there. So it was a double whammy. But we got first go if we found them.

That time that you did get a shot and you said you actually received fire as well.

Yes, we did.

24:30 **Was there any damage done to the plane?**

No, fortunately it missed us. But this brief time with all this tracer coming up at us, wasn't very comfortable. You reckon the next one is going to go straight through you. Because it's going all the way around and going "Zoom" past. And you know it's generally one in five that's a tracer and all the rest are not. So you can imagine all

25:00 these bullets zooming past. But we didn't get anything. Very fortunately. And it's due to Jack Kenton in the nose, that he stopped it.

How well would a Sunderland fare with a that sort of thing? Were the fuel tanks in a vulnerable situation?

Oh, a very, very strong aeroplane. Very strong. Could take a heck of a lot of punishment.

25:30 But you didn't want it to hit you. Even if they hit the wing or that sort of thing it wouldn't down us. Wouldn't send us down but we could suffer casualties if they actually got the cockpit or that area. So I don't think it was ever a danger that we were going to be shot down because I don't think they had big enough guns. They just had machine guns that looked awfully dangerous.

26:00 **So what was the great threat to the Sunderlands?**

Fighters. JU-88s were the greatest threat. And up in the Shetlands, the weather.

What was the diciest meteorological condition that you were exposed to?

Oh it has to be in the Shetlands. We were flying

26:30 blind through great turbulence and rain and God knows what, for hours. Trying to navigate through that wasn't good. Trying to look down where you were all over the place and get your drifts and bumping everywhere. No, flying north from the Shetlands was probably the worst weather I ever struck.

Would that have been the greatest challenge?

27:00 To the pilots, it would be a tremendous challenge to the pilots to keep you up there. It was a challenge to me to keep us in the right place. And it was a challenge to them to keep us flying. With turbulence everywhere, you know. Jumping all over the place. And it's a big aeroplane. Big, solid, stable aeroplane. Not that would be the worst weather I ever went through.

27:30 **How does that affect what you're doing specifically and how do you manage to get your bearings with that sort of condition?**

With great difficulty. You had to, some of it was guesswork. Some of it was guesswork. So, you know, we're not actually, that was hard for the pilots to keep the course you'd set for them. They were all over the place and so you has sort of guess what the errors were and

28:00 what was happening with the wind. You knew it was very strong but was it changing direction. And it wasn't really. It was a storm coming from there most of the time. So, well, you really did use a bit of common sense and what happens, what happened and a bit of rule of thumb when you're in a position like that.

What about gut instinct? Is there

28:30 **such a thing?**

Gut instinct, yeah, that's right. This is what's happening. This is how we'll organise ourselves. And when we're coming back home you've got to make allowances for the fact that you could be in the wrong position and you've got to aim somewhere that's safe. Fortunately that didn't happen very often. The challenges

29:00 of being a navigator, hey? Fantastic. That's why I said that I was happy, but in the end I was very happy that's what I was made. The job I was put in.

So after the war there was no desire to get back in a plane?

Oh yeah, I got a license after the war just to prove I could do it. Bought a little aeroplane and travelled all over the place. When we

29:30 could afford it eventually. Because fortunately the business grew to the stage where I could afford to buy a little aeroplane and carry on from there. You probably know there are Camera Houses all over Australia but I don't own them. I own a couple of camera stores in Geelong but I was a director of a buying group in Sydney

30:00 and they were looking for a merchandising name so they could advertise together, etcetera, etcetera. And they couldn't find a suitable one. So I eventually said, "Well, look, you can have Camera House. I'll sign it over to you." And now it's Australia-wide in a big way. We're members of the group. We buy through them. But they've all got my name. No-one in Australia is a straight Camera House

30:30 except us. All the others are Bill's Camera House or Tom's Camera House or Wollongong Camera House. Or whatever tag. And we're the only real Camera House. That doesn't worry you a bit having everybody else because it actually is an advantage. Because I see people in Melbourne advertising Camera House have got this special. Geelong reads Camera House, "Well, go along and see them."

31:00 Suits me.

So with them putting the name, is that part of the franchising deal that they've got?

Yeah, it's part of the franchise. It's only just become a franchise. It was just a straight buying group. But now it's a franchise. And you've got to sign all sorts of things to be a member of the franchise and to take the good that the warehouse has and do the things that they say. It was never like that but it is. It's so big they

31:30 had to do it. I was a director there for about twenty years. Very much underpaid. But loved it.

We haven't got that much longer left on the tape. So some wrap up questions. We've been talking about the operations and about your career afterwards as well. I'm just

32:00 **wondering how you feel that your experience in the air force impacted on life afterwards and be it business life or personal life?**

I don't know if it had any impact at all. It taught me that if I want to do something I've got to study like mad and do it. I've got to try hard to succeed.

32:30 Which I had to do in the air force. Particularly when we were at Squire's Gate and I was threatened with being on torpedo bombers. I learnt a lesson that you've got to put your head down and work like mad. When I was in the newsagency, I was working something like 70 hours a week. When I bought Camera House I worked almost as long. I used to dress the window once a week at night. I used to do the books at night. I used to clean the floors at night.

33:00 And so I still worked 60 or 70 hours a week at Camera House to make it work. And I think that's what the air force taught me. By being in there, striving to be up the top, I learnt to work hard when I had an object in view. Apart from that, nothing. That's probably the plus that came out. We've had a

33:30 very comfortable, happy life. We've got a great family and no complaints.

Do people ask you much about your war time experiences?

No, and I'm not going to talk to them about it if they do. Except with you fellows because this is going into the archives and it's probably interesting in the archives. Btu I don't talk about it. Why would you?

34:00 I've heard blokes talk about their war time experience and I've though, "Oh yeah. Skite." Half of them are lying anyway.

But do you find that there is greater curiosity now?

What I do find, I think it's very interesting that I've been to Anzac Day or Anzac Morning dawn services in Adelaide and in Perth and in Sydney.

34:30 And in Melbourne. And it's astonishing the number of young people who are now interested in what it's all about. We went to an Anzac Day service in Perth and you couldn't park nearer than about two miles away to get to it. It was just so many people. And people were mostly young families and that's the

astonishing thing. And marching down St Kilda Road last April,

35:00 I was astonished at the people that were there. And there's a heck of a lot of Asians in that group too as we marked down there. Young people interested in what's, in history and what's happened. So that's an interesting part of the deal. That people are interested in history. I suppose I'm part of history.

35:30 **How important do you think it is for us to recognise that?**

Oh, I don't know. I don't think it's that important for you to recognise it. Except that we were proud to be in the air force, the Royal Australian Air Force. We were very proud of being members of it. Proud of the record of the RAAF. You're not proud of your own particular part because you were merely

36:00 a cog. But I wouldn't have missed it for the world. A wonderful experience for a young fellow. And our camaraderie amongst my mates was quite incredible. The camaraderie in Geelong in Legacy, because we're all ex-servicemen. You've probably found that out from David. We've all got the same attitude.

36:30 The world doesn't owe us a living. We've got to work for it. I'm not working any more.

You've worked hard enough. If you want we've got a couple of minutes left if there's anything else you'd like to say to put down on the record for posterity. But if you want to leave it there, that's

37:00 **fine.**

I don't know if there's anything else I want to say except that I've been blessed to have survived. Because I lost a lot of mates. And apparently our rate of casualty was pretty high. And I was just lucky to do what I did do and like what I was doing. And I've come home and

37:30 had a happy married life for a long time. It's been great. We can do what we want to do. Peg and I have been overseas so many times we've lost count. We've been around the world several times. I think in the last fifteen years we haven't missed a year when we've been overseas. We've run out of places to go. So we've had a very happy career.

38:00 And fortunately, we've made enough money to be comfortable. Not wealthy, just comfortable and do what you want to do. So it's all worked out pretty well. I think possibly thanks to my career in the air force, it's helped. That's about all I've got to say.

Thank you very much, Don.

INTERVIEW ENDS