Australians at War Film Archive

Allan Stafford (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **Okay so Bill if you'd like to introduce yourself and give us your life summary.**

Yes, Kylie [interviewer], well my real name is Allan Stafford but they call me Bill. I was born in Rainbow Bay Coolangatta on the 29th of December 1923. I did my primary schooling at the Coolangatta State School, and,

01:00 my Dad then asked me did I want to go on to further my education by going to secondary school, but I said, "No, I would join him in the business." So I did that, that was alright for the first six months. When I didn't appear back from lunch on time he went looking for me, he found me playing snooker in a pool room for money, with a cigarette in my face. So he said,

01:30 "Off to boarding school for you." So, he packed me off, mid year, to the Brisbane Boys College Toowong. He tried Churchy, he tried all the schools, that was the only one that had any…so it was a bit difficult for me to catch up on six months work in my grade, in my class. However we overcame and I eventually got my state junior pass and went onto senior. And, I had

02:00 had to repeat a year in primary school because I'd severely lacerated both wrists including tendons, so they put me back a year, so I was a year older than most of the kids in the class. So I finished school at the end of year 1941, three weeks before the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor. Three weeks after that I turned 18,

02:30 that made me eligible to join up, so I went down to the council office, got some enlistment forms and filled them out and gave them to my Dad to sign. Well he was reluctant, he jibed, he was a World War I veteran. He'd seen the horrors of war. He's won a Military Medal at Villiers Bretonneux and he held off. But I made sure that every time he sat down to eat breakfast,

03:00 lunch or dinner, that the application forms and a pen was between his knife and fork. After three weeks he relented, he signed the document, and I put it express delivery to the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] recruiting centre in Brisbane. Within days I got the document, Kylie that I showed you in the kitchen, that you're going to photograph, I believe. Which called me up for interview,

03:30 and medical examination, at 8:30 am sharp on the ninth of March, 1942. Came home, oh, and within a couple of weeks, the second letter came, saying that, advising me that I'd been successful in my medical and that I'd been enlisted as a

04:00 reservist, pending call up. Well at that time, as I said, the Japs had just come into the war and the first Americans started to arrive with General MacArthur on the 19th of February. And Yanks were all about the place, particularly Coolangatta which they took over as a rest and R and R [Rest and Recreation] base. So I saw a little bit of the American invasion,

04:30 before I myself was called up and went into uniform at, oh firstly we assembled in Brisbane, those that were going to go through with me, about 250, at Roma Street Station where we boarded a troop station to Kingaroy, the slowest most arduous, nauseating train journey ever.

05:00 For the short distance it took probably 12 hours, pulling up at every whistle stop and cow bell, and we had no other baggage but the clothes that we stood up in. There were no beds, it was a night time journey, we slept as best we could. Some in the aisles between the, from one end of the carriage to the other, others up on luggage racks.

05:30 And the place was smoked filled, and when we got out at Kingaroy we were dishevelled. Collars were sweaty and blackened with soot, and so forth. Anyway that started the initial training, but you want a run down on my life, what happened? Well, basically I had to get to, served in the air force came home, rejoined my

06:00 dad in the firm which he formed into a company. His health was bad and in my absence my mother, I

adored my parents, my mother who'd never smoke or drank, I came home after the war three years later to find her alcoholic. I was an only child and I feel that my being away and the dangers that we faced, had turned her to drink. So I had a heck

06:30 of a settling in period after the war coming home because naturally you've got away from civilian life, you've been regimented, you've seen danger, you've seen mates killed, and settling back into civilian life was very difficult. I got engaged to a girl that I'd fallen in love with by mail, at home, well I knew her before I left

07:00 but not greatly, and, we got engaged. That was a disaster, followed with two more engagements, they were both disaster. Finally there was no more engagements. I married Gwendolyn Jones and together we've had, we had seven children of which six survive. In the post war period I, apart from managing the business, I became involved in

07:30 the Chamber of Commerce, formed a tennis club, I took on lawn bowls, I played for the state. I was a founding member of the Gold Coast Troppo Carnival and I'm a foundation member of the local Lion's Club. And, in fact, four, five years ago, 1996, I was given the Queensland

08:00 State Premier's award for Public Service, for community service. I formed the, what is now Surfing Australia, which is the body that controls board riding throughout the country. And, I was the first state President of the ASAQ, Australian Surf Riders Association. Held that position for five years until it was on it's feet.

08:30 And next year, in February, there's going to be a celebration, 40th celebration of that founding, at the Twin Towns. There'll be 250 attend, all the world's champions surfers, Rabbit Bartholomew, Luke Egan all that, those, Nick Fanning, Parkinson, Petersen,

09:00 all of those, Peter Townsend. 100 dollars a head and I'm the number one invitee. So, I think in brief, that's about it Kylie.

Okay, well let's go back now and have a find out about your childhood, if you could start off by telling us a little bit about your parents.

09:30 Well I had two of the most marvellous people you'd ever know as my Mum and Dad. My Dad was born in Ireland, south of Ireland but a Protestant and he married Mum here, a Catholic, and they married in a neutral church, baptised me an Anglican and sent me off to the convent. But things went

10:00 horribly wrong in the first year, so I was taken out and was sent, and did all my primary schooling at Coolangatta State School. Dad was very much a man's man. He was a strict father but a good one. He, as I told you, served in World War I. He was a military medal winner for,

10:30 and his citation's on the wall behind us, for 'conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty'. After the war he was employed by T. C. Burns in the valley in Brisbane, in the Manchester department. He became manager of that department, and then a man from Rockhampton named Bremner came and asked him

11:00 would he come and open a business for his sons and stock it and gave him the money to do so. So he, by the time he left that, it employed 28 people, he then met Mum on the beach at Yeppoon. They married in Brisbane and their honeymoon, they came to Coolangatta to Paddy Fagan's guest house. That was on St Patrick's day in

11:30 1923. I was born on the 29th of December and if you do your mathematics, I reckon I was conceived in Paddy Fagan's Greenmount Guesthouse. They didn't leave. A friend of Dad's a solicitor knew about the forced sale of a drapery business, …

And I think you just said

12:00 **that you, if you did the sums right you were conceived at the, at Paddy's..**

Paddy Fagan's Greenmount Guesthouse.

Yeah.

Alright, well he bought the business. He was remarkable this way. He had his life savings, which was 250 pounds, and a new wife, and he decided to buy this business. Could be bought, it was going to go to auction

12:30 but could be bought. He bought it for 1000 pounds, of which he only had 250, so he put down 200 pounds deposit. With the 50 pounds he had left, he went down to the police station, in those days you could get a temporary auctioneers licence, and he took out a temporary auctioneers licence. He advertised an auction sale, he himself held the auction sale, standing on the counter. At the

13:00 end of the week, he paid back the balance 800 pounds and he still had enough stock to carry on a business. So then it traded on. Oh he got very sick, he was gassed in the first war, was sent off to the sanatorium to die in Stanthorpe. That left Mum pregnant with me and she had to take over the business and employ one staff, and,

13:30 things weren't all that great. So when he was at Stanthorpe, they couldn't do much for him, he said to the, his doctor he said, "What's the prognosis?" And he said, "Well Stafford," he said, "well I'm afraid there's nothing we can do for you. You will die." "Well," he said, "does it matter to you whether I die here or in Coolangatta?" And the doctor said, "No." "Well," he said, "I'm going back to Coolangatta."

14:00 So he came back to Coolangatta and he, to assist his breathing, he had pneumonia, friends used to carry him down to lie on the beach in the sun, near the water's edge while they went for a swim. And one day while they were swimming and he was lying in the sun, an extra large wave came in and rolled him into the surf,

14:30 filled his lungs with salt water, they dragged him out and he retched, and he retched and he retched until he cleared his lungs and he never looked back. That freak happening saved his life and he lived another 40 years. Came the depression, he went broke. We had a one room flat with no bathroom, wood stove.

15:00 We bathed in a round washing tub in the middle of the kitchen floor, surrounded by towels. And he had to go and meet his creditors in Brisbane. There was, in those days, Thomas Brown, D & W Murray's, Walter Reeds, all those companies and they were going to send him bankrupt, but the biggest creditor

15:30 said, "No I've got enough faith in Stafford that he'll get out of this. We'll give him, we'll give him seven years to pay it back at three percent interest." And he carried that debt right up to World War II, they extended the terms and of course the advent of the war and the numbers of people that came to Coolangatta

16:00 plus the Yanks turned the whole business around and put it on it's feet. Meanwhile my mother, who was a beautiful woman, good looking, very good looking, she didn't give me this broken nose, that was in the fighting ring. She was a marvellous singer and in those days gave live singing performances on the ABC [Australian Broadcasting Corporation].

16:30 She was interested in charity work, as was my Dad. I had a marvellous pair of parents, set of parents, she was a marvellous cook and I'm so happy to have been born in Coolangatta and lived in Coolangatta and to still be

17:00 in the area where I've got so many life long friends. The only pleasure I get about going overseas is coming home. I think that's about it, as far as the parents are concerned, Kylie.

What did your dad tell you about World War I?

Many things, about they would go

17:30 into the front line against the Germans and they'd only be some hundred yards apart in their trenches and sodden battle fields, mud and, horrible death rates and, no bathing facilities and they'd say when they came back for a rest period after three weeks in the front line, under the arms and in their crotch would be green with gang, not gangrene,

18:00 sweat that had gone stale and smelly. And food, of course, was dog biscuits and water, not much. And, together with the fighting it was a tragic scene.

Was he, how realistic was he, in his descriptions, it sounds like he was quite..

Oh he was, he wouldn't…

18:30 In lighting cigarettes, it used to be that you'd light, pass a match around, three people would light off the one match, their cigarettes. Of course everybody smoked those days; it was mainly promoted by the cigarette companies through the movies, which was the place to go. Nearly all the screen actors smoked and it was peer pressure and it's the movies that I think made everybody smoked or led people to smoking. He

19:00 wouldn't let anybody take a third light of a match and I said, "Why?" He said, "If we did that in the war, it would give the enemy snipers long enough to draw a bead and the third bloke would go, as the match went to the end, would get shot." The other thing he wouldn't do, if he was drinking tea, or a beer or a scotch which he loved dearly,

19:30 he never finished the glass or the cup, he always left a quarter inch in the bottle or the cup, and I said, "Why?" He said, "If I drink it that's the end of me. If I never finish the drink," was one his things. Yes he did tell me about raining and,

20:00 in Salisbury in England, when they went over there and when the war did finish he took a rehabilitation course and, studied at the, one of the big cotton mills in Manchester which led him to the trade that he took up in the manchester department of T. C. Burns.

20:30 He was a wit, he was a natural born advertising man. He left school at 11, but in the depression the Coolangatta Hotel burnt down, and the only two guests, both male, jumped into, there was no town water supply, they had water tanks, they jumped into a water tank to save their lives, in their altogether, they

21:00 hadn't, you know, no pyjamas, that was a Saturday night. The following morning, the local police sergeant came and with the fellow, they were dressed out in police clothes, six o'clock, to Dad who was going for his morning swim. He always did a morning swim after that episode that I spoke about, and took a mouth full of salt water, because he believed it was beneficial. Anyway he was on his way for a swim and the police

21:30 sergeant said, "Bill, we've got these two fellows here, they lost all their clothes and money in the fire last night." And he said, "They're quite honest and they have the money at home, they don't have it here. Will you fit them out, dress them, so that they can continue their holiday?" So Dad took them into the shop early on Sunday morning and as they were going out with their shorts and shirts

22:00 and swimmers and towels, and what all, he said, "There you are. Come naked to Coolangatta and let Bill dress you." Now that advertisement continued for years and years and years in the press and on calendars. It came so well known throughout Queensland that all he had to do in later years in the Telegraph newspaper and the Courier Mail in those days,

22:30 was put, 'Come naked. Enough said'. That was the ad, everyone knew what that is. And to this day, and it's 40 more years, nearly 50, no it'd be 40 years since I sold the business, people are still come to me and still say, "Are you Bill Stafford of 'Come Naked to Coolangatta' fame?" He had another good slogan,

23:00 'Nobody calls Bill dear'. That's clever. He also tied a goat in the shop, so right in front of the door of the shop, at the time he was having a trouser sale. He'd marked down a whole heap of overstocked trousers, so he tied the goat in the front of the shop and he took, what do you call them, those fliers, handbills, advertising fliers,

23:30 took them up to the school and gave them to the kids to hand out around town. Thruppence, three pence, two cents to deliver them to deliver them to their parents and wherever and what do you think the flier said? "Bill's trousers are down, come and see his goat." He was just a natural at advertising; he'd have made a fortune in that business these days. So, you know a fair bit about my Dad now.

24:00 **What kind of, were there any specific Irish things that he bought into his family household?**

No, no, he only, he came out at the age of two but he knew all, he had a good voice, as I told you Mum had a magnificent voice, he had a good man's voice, but he couldn't be serious about it. He'd purposely go out of tune when he was singing in chorus.

24:30 But those were the days when there was no TV, and wireless was pretty new and you had to run big aerials outside in order to get reception which was often crackly and staticky and, so the piano was the main piece in the home and, crowds of friends used to come and gather around the piano for a singalongs, you know, to get together and Dad's voice was always booming away as was Mum's. But I was brought up

25:00 in that environment that music plays a great part of my life. I've got beside my bed my own radio and earphones so I don't wake my wife, and, if I wake up through the night I just tune in. And I'm very catholic in the true sense of the word, meaning universally, very catholic in my musical tastes. I range from Bach, Beethoven and Brahm's, Mozart, down to

25:30 Benny Goodman, boogie woogie, jump and jive and swing. I find it hard, I don't like rock music or what do they call it, hard rock. Mostly sounds like an explosion in a guitar factory.

So did you have a very religious upbringing?

No, no I learnt my catechism, my creed, at the Anglican school, was confirmed

26:00 in the Anglican religion, but no. We got a lot of it when we were in boarding school, that was the Methodist Presbyterian side of things. Pardon me, but no, I never got deeply into religion. I believe in the Christian faith, in the teachings of

26:30 Christianity, very much, without that or what my concern is the fragmentation of the Christian religions over, spread over so many different… We have Anglican, Catholic, Methodist, Uniting Church, we have Church of Christ, such a fragmentation. And we're facing now, the greatest threat to world peace of all time,

27:00 in my opinion, is the Muslim religion and they're pretty united. And I think the sooner it is that the leaders of our various churches get together to form one Christian church the better, because unity is strength.

Did you see much of the kind of Catholic and Protestant divide growing up as a child?

Oh early yes,

27:30 there was that, religious difference, that was apparent. The Catholic kids didn't play with the Protestant kids, or where they were taken home, there was that stand off business, which never got to the state it is in Northern Ireland of course. But,

28:00 since World War II, those differences don't exist any more. I have very good Roman Catholic mates, as I

have Protestant mates.

What about your school life, can you tell us a little bit about your early school years?

Yes I can, the best thing that ever happened to me, as far as my military life was concerned, was the fact that my Dad sent me to the boarding school.

28:30 For the very good reason, as I was an only child, it was the first time I had been away from home. I had to learn to stand on my own two feet, if I got into trouble I had to get out of it on my own. I had nobody to back me up, I had come then under a discipline, school discipline and

29:00 regulated hours, drill parades, church parades, making our own beds, standing, and getting them ready and our dorm ready for inspections. The best dorm would get a weekend off per term. It provided

29:30 a great foundation for my transition into military life. When I went into the air force it seemed as though nothing changed. The headmaster was the station commander, the house masters became the squadron commanders. The NCO's, non commissioned officers, were the prefects. Lights out was the same.

30:00 We were at church parade, similar, physical training similar, instead of going to the dining room I went to the mess. I had to line up on Friday nights for a weekend leave pass, same thing in the air force. We used to get the dole of one and six pence, that was 15 cents, to do us pocket money for the week, on a Friday night, we had payday in the air force.

30:30 A lot of the new trainees found it hard to hack with discipline and regimentation, for just it came to me as though I'd not left school, so it was great.

What about the transition from leaving home to when you first entered boarding school?

31:00 Well I think I explained that it was rough, as I said, because I had to fend for myself and I had to make new friends, I knew nobody, there was 140 boarders. But fortunately I made friends easily. I always found that the best way to make friends is to be one. And friends that I had at boarding school I still have, to this day, and I'm in

31:30 e-mail contact with several of them and speak regularly to others on the phone.

Were there times when you missed your parents?

Oh firstly yes, always, always. I'll tell you once we get further into the thing what happened in America on one of the leaves I took, but it comes back to that.

What about at school, what sort of things were you learning, and teachers?

32:00 Well, as I said, it was very hard for me to pick up because I'd come mid year. But I did a commercial course, bookeeping, art, history, geography, maths and English. I didn't do any languages and I didn't do any of the sciences. I didn't do physics and chemistry and those that were taking Latin or they didn't like it either but that's the last thing I ever I wanted.

32:30 But I was only ever average as a student, maybe below average. I was always happy if I could get 60 percent or 63 percent in my subjects. But I found that the fellows that did best in business after they left school, weren't necessarily the scholars, they were mostly the fellows that were personable,

33:00 bit of common sense, average in class, played most sports, and when they left school their personality, their common sense would get them through. Pardon me, some of them became millionaires.

What sort of things did you do on your weekends at boarding school?

At boarding school or at home?

At boarding school?

At boarding school, well,

33:30 weekends, or Saturday of course, naturally was always sports day. We played inter school sports, I represented the school in rowing, and won the Head of the River. Represented the school in first football, and in swimming, and in athletics, which I've still got my colours and blazer here.

34:00 In fact I've just destroyed the blazer but kept the pockets. That was Saturday, Sunday was always church parade. After church parade, back to the common room to get whatever part of the Sunday Mail, that you could get because it had to be in the comic section, and there was a radio show on called, in Brisbane, Low's Melody Hour, which played the 10 top hits of the week, and of course it was the start

34:30 of the big band era, Glenn Miller and the Tommy Dorsey and Artie Shaw, and Benny Goodman, all of those, and we'd, Andrew's Sisters, and we'd crowd around the radio to hear the top ten, Sunday afternoon, leisure. Read, walk around the building, bunk school and go down to Toowong Village and get some

35:00 battered savs and scallops, potato scallops. Oh, and the son of the temporary Prime Minister, Artie

Fadden, he went to the school and his home was at Toowong. We bunked school one day and Pud was a, Pudding Fadden was the son, a day boy, he invited us over to his house where his sister had got a great big new

35:30 radiogram and the latest recording was, Woody Herman's, 'At The Wood Chopper's Ball', and we had to go and hear it over there. Well now we've got into the Prime Ministers home, which wasn't bad, the parents weren't home, we've got the radiogram turned up full blast, and Romeo Roberts, who's been mayor of Murgon for

36:00 about 30 years and has won the OAM [Order of Australia Medal], he got one of Artie Fadden's cigars, got into Artie's easy chair put his feet up on the table, lit the cigar, and as he ashed it like this, he said, "What do you think of the international situation?" So there we were.

Were the boarding mistresses or masters, were they very strict?

36:30 Very. We had one, J. S. Edwards, nicknamed Teddy, he was very, he had a face as though it was carved out of stone. Expressionless and if he spoke to you, barked an order, you'd freeze. But he was a marvellous man and it fell upon me that when we sailed for Australia, from Australia to Canada to train,

37:00 that he was the escorting officer, aboard. Yeah, I had a great love of the teachers that we did have, the masters that we did have. I'm still in touch with the school by e-mail and phone, and I go to the school's Anzac commemoration every year which is,

37:30 in my book, the most touching of all. Our school lost 84 of its students in World War II. Some good mates. And at the service, 84 of the students line the pool,

38:00 they's seated around the pool, and as each name is read, they put their hand across their heart. Two of my mates, were shot down over Germany in the same aircraft. Roger Chandler, who is the son of the Brisbane

38:30 Lord Mayor and Ross McMaster who was the son of Fergus McMaster. Beautiful, sorry to break up. Okay.

Do you want to take a break or anything?

Pardon, yeah, take a break.

39:00 Yeah, they were only, they were only two; there was our winger, Bergy Bergman and many others. Snow White Walters shot down on the last day of the war, unfortunately. Like a, oh ten to ten, like a cuppa?

Tape 2

00:34 **Before you mentioned really briefly that you had to move house and that your father nearly went bankrupt in the depression, what other ways did the depression impact on your family?**

Well there was only me. I was the only family. Well naturally spending was cut to the minimum. I had to beg my Dad for a penny

01:00 even to buy an apple, to buy a lolly, no he wouldn't give me a penny to buy a lolly but if it was to buy two a penny apples, that's okay, as long as I had fruit. Food was reduced to the cheapest cuts of meat, tripe, liver and bacon, rabbit casserole. You could buy a pair of rabbits for one and six,

01:30 what's that 15 cents these days. Shin beef stews, casseroles. We could afford a chicken only once a year or twice a year, Easter and Christmas. Pork meat was very dear, and generally people of the day had to make do with clothing until it, they had to

02:00 darn their socks rather than buy new socks. And a lot of the kids at school, they had no raincoats, they'd use a sugar bag, folded as a, as a raincoat. Big thing about, the good thing about, or no good thing about the depression, but

02:30 we were able to go once a week to the Saturday afternoon matinee at the theatre and see our cowboy pictures or whatever, 'Tarzan of the Apes' pictures, because the admission was only nine pence, that's eight cents these days. And you could get an ice cream for a penny, a small one, one cent. Ah, otherwise we made our own

03:00 fun, made our own kites. We went for a little bit of added income; we'd collect empty soft drink bottles from the beach and sell them back to the manufacturers. Kerosene tins used to, we used to get two shillings for, that was a lot of money, if we could find any empty kerosene tins, sell them back to the butchers. We bowled hoops, we played cowboys and Indians, there never seemed,

03:30 when I, well not at school, in play times there was never enough, we'd go bird nesting and collect eggs and swap them, collect stamps, collect cigarette cards, there used to be cards come in cigarette

packets. Well to make a full set you'd have to get a hundred, so you'd be asking men that smoked did they have any spare cards, and then you'd swap any doubles. So we made our own fun,

04:00 played our own games, which didn't cost anything. And I wouldn't have swapped that life for anything, because kids these days get to drugs and dope and pot and stuff like that, we'd never heard of, and it was just an era that to me was so enjoyable part of coming, growing up in

04:30 Coolangatta.

So you finished school three weeks before…

The Japs bombed Pearl Harbour.

So where were you then, when they, when you heard that news?

Ah, well I go back before the Japs bombed Pearl Harbour. I started school the year that war was declared on Germany, in fact it was the Sunday the third

05:00 of September, in 1939 and we'd just finished the evening's prep, that's your homework and we were just about ready to put lights out, go to bed, when the announcement came over the school's broadcasting amplification system, Prime Minister Menzies, the famous, it's well documented, "Fellow Australians, it's

05:30 my melancholy duty to inform you that as Germany has invaded Poland," and so on, "that Australia is now at war with, that Australia is now at war." We heard that announcement. Well then, that was in my first year at school. The following

06:00 years, till the Japs came into the war two years later, two years and two months later, we got daily accounts in the newspaper of those killed, missing or taken prisoners of war, which all too often contained the names of school mates who had left and joined up. And it was everybody's resolve that as soon as they turned 18 and became eligible to join up that we too would join

06:30 up when we were old enough. Well then I left, just as I said, three years before, three weeks before the Japs bombed Pearl Harbour, and three weeks after that I turned 18 and eligible, and I think I told you the rest, that I had to beg my Dad to sign the application form.

So where were you that particular day?

What particular day?

07:00 **When Japan had bombed Pearl Harbour?**

I couldn't really recall, but it would have been in Coolangatta, yes.

So tell us about when you went and joined up, medicals and all of that kind of thing.

About, pardon?

About when you did go and join up, the medicals and things?

Yes, well I think I told you that too, that was on, the ninth of February, I think I made application and I think it was

07:30 the eighth of March that I was called up for interview and medical, and that subsequently I was advised that I'd passed the tests and all that and I was put on reserve, that document you'll be photographing I think.

What kind of, if you could talk a little bit more in detail, what kind of medicals they put you through?

Very intensive, it took

08:00 two days. Well there was quite a number going through, probably 200 to 250. And alright, it was eye tests to check for colour blindness; there were eyesight tests to see that you could read; your reflexes were checked; your pulse was taken; your blood pressure was taken.

08:30 You're walking around stark naked most of the time, oh and you had to pass urine. And that was a funny one because the bloke, Steadman, S T, the bloke immediately behind me, couldn't raise enough water, but he found out that the phials or the glasses that the blokes were piddling into and handed in were being

09:00 tipped into a bucket outside or a pail or a tin tub or something and he saw where it was going, so seeing he couldn't raise any, he got his, he went over and he took a dip of the mixture of everybody's, put it in, it passed, so he got through, Steady Steadman…

Stop now because of the aeroplane…

Yes, so Steady took a

09:30 dip of the mixture and that passed.

He didn't get caught?

No. So, oh unfortunately, it would have been better if he had not passed because he got killed. In fact my service number is 434037, Steady was 038 and the bloke in front of me was 036, both of them got killed.

10:00 Lou Stack was the bloke in front. Yeah, well the medical, as I said, oh there was an aptitude test in that and of course all those things that, you had to fit cogs together, and wheels go this way and go that way and you had to unsort all of that, unscramble it. So in all, it took two days at your own expense.

10:30 **Why did you pick the air force?**

Well my cousin had gone in, in 1938 but I had never, my Dad wanted me to join the navy when he did sign but, I said no, well, the air force was the new service, the navy was the senior service and there'd always been an army, but air force was a relatively new service and it was the exciting one from my point of view.

11:00 The other point of view was that it, you always, no matter where you were, you always came back to the same base, you knew where you were going to sleep and where you were going to eat. In the air force you, in the army you could be under a truck, you'd be out under rain in a tent. If you were at sea you were trapped within the confines of the ship so it was nothing else but the air force for me ever.

11:30 **So when was it between when you joined up to when you started your training, how long a period was that?**

That was the period I had to remain on reserve, it was from March to October.

So what were you doing during that period whilst you were on the reserves?

I was assisting my Dad in the shop. Shop assistant.

So when did your first training start then?

It started in, I think it was the 11th of October, 1942,

12:00 and, that's when we got this train journey to Kingaroy and that was for six weeks. After which we graduated, considering you passed with the rank LAC, Leading Aircraftsman. Kingaroy was a wartime airfield and barracks, which meant it was very

12:30 elementary. We did not have beds we had straw-filled hessian palliasses. They were laid out on the floor, then we had two army blankets which were grey with two blue stripes, and a pillow. And of course that had to be arranged neatly and tidily for inspection every day.

13:00 Meals weren't appetising at first, but hunger is the best source and as soon as we got hungry, of course the meals were alright. We had to do our own washing and ironing, and when we were issued with our dog tags, our dead meat tickets, they were plain metal which we had to hammer out with a hammer and die. I still got mine, with

13:30 our number, name, religion and then on the reverse side our blood group. Training was included - a range of subjects, theory of flight, basic navigation, aircraft recognition which was interesting because you had to recognise planes at sight,

14:00 what make what country and these were often just shown in a darkened blacked out room, and projected onto a screen in silhouette from different angles, from above, straight on, and from side on. And you had two seconds of viewing before it went away and you had to make up your mind what aircraft that was and you had to get a pass on that.

14:30 We had parade drill, that was marching, and we had arms drill, that is slope arms, present arms, and bayonet drill. Then rifle range shooting and short range pistol shooting.

15:00 Oh route march, five mile route march, and flies were a pestilence. In the route marches, with your sweaty shirts on, flies would congregate in masses on the backs of fellows, on the sweat soaked shirts of the fellows in front. And I remember one bloke went to swipe the flies off the bloke in front and of course the warrant officer disciplinary who was in charge

15:30 of the march, bellowed out, "Leave the bloody flies alone. You've had your breakfast, now let the flies have their's." So that was Warrant Officer Bliss, god bless him. What else can I tell you about there. No, well the passing out parade was held in Kingaroy

16:00 in a place called the Busy Bee Café, our squadron, and do you know it's still there and it's still in the family's hands and my wife and daughter called in there not long back and remembered that I'd told them that, and, that's what they found out. So then I came out on a… Oh, at the end of the course, and had

16:30 passed, we faced a categorisation board, this was to categorise you as to whether you were going to

become a pilot, or train for a pilot, train for a navigator, or train for wireless operator-air gunner. There were only the three categories at that stage, and you faced the categorisation board which was headed by the station commander, the chief instructor and the adjutant, and you were interviewed and

17:00 part of the interview they said, “Now do you want to train in Australia or overseas?” Well I knew that most training overseas went to Canada, and I said, “Canada.” “Overseas.” “Alright sir, overseas.” And I got my wish. I was posted to Canada, upon which they had the graduation banquet dinner at the Busy Bee.

17:30 And I had 14 days pre embarkation leave which, and I was to report at the end of that, to the RTO, the Rail Transport Officer, at South Brisbane where the 250 odd of us got the train through to Bradfield Park in Sydney which was number two embarkation depot,

18:00 RAAF at Bradfield Park. There, shipping was at a standstill, because of the fact that the Jap submarines had shelled the foreshores and had sunk the HMAS Kuttabul where 22 sailors were killed, so there was no movement in troops so there was a big back log

18:30 in troop movements out of Sydney, so we were, after a couple of weeks entrained to Melbourne to Ascot Vale, number one embarkation depot and that’s where we spent Christmas and I spent my 19th birthday.

19:00 Ascot Vale was a racecourse, well it had been and we were billeted in a horse stall, again on palliasses on the ground, it was a very hot summer and we’d all got, pre embarkation needles and vaccinations and, on CO’s [Commanding Officer] parade one day, the needle started to take effect as we were lined up

19:30 because it was about 108 degrees, and blokes were collapsing as they stood. However one night, midnight, oh, one day, the gates were closed to the embarkation depot, all telephone lines were cut, and total secrecy was employed. You couldn’t correspond or get in touch with anybody and at midnight that night, in

20:00 a blacked out troop train, 3000 of us were put on board a train which moved very silently through the night to Port Melbourne where the [SS] Westpoint was waiting and as soon as we got off the train we embarked and early the next morning,

20:30 the Westpoint took off for Canada. They called briefly at Auckland, and picked up some Yanks who had been repatriated from the Guadalcanal, and I’ll never forget one of them was about my age, this little Yank, and I said to him, “Hey Yank, did you kill any Japs?” And he said, “Well if I didn’t, I sure wasted a lot of ammunition.”

21:00 Anyway it was a 16 day crossing of the Pacific, non stop and it took a zigzag course, to discourage any attack by submarines and we arrived in San Francisco early one morning, glorious harbour, and we passed under the famous Golden Gate Bridge, and then the infamous Alcatraz prison,

21:30 which housed 300 of America’s worst criminals, and we disembarked at fisherman’s wharf, and immediately then entrained for Vancouver. And it was there that I found our Australian accent didn’t come across to Americans because one of the whistle stops, one of the stops, on the way up the coast, I spoke to the first American girl I’d ever spoken to,

22:00 who was behind a cafeteria counter and she said, “Yes please?” And I said, “A Coke.” She said, “Pardon?” I said, “A Coke.” “Pardon me?” I said, “Coca cola.” She shook her head, you mean, “Coca cola?” You know,

22:30 the O’s, our O goes across very badly, Coke, Coke. And, so the result of that was after we got to Canada and got amongst Yanks that, oh Canadians that, or Canucks as we called them, that spoke very much like Americans, there is some difference, we had to look after our O’s and our R’s, and our I,

23:00 I and A’s, so that we could converse and be understood. So that brought about a change. Funny thing when I got home to Australia and after the war, our language fell on my ears very harshly. Our spoken English, it’s pretty slovenly when you hear it. Although other people overseas now say that they like it. So we did arrive then,

23:30 up the coast at Vancouver, where we had a stop off which enabled us to have a look around the city of Vancouver, which is a very beautiful city. It’s on a beautiful harbour, number one, number two it’s got the backdrop of the Rocky Mountains which is snow covered at the top, and it was their winter, we’d arrived in January, and, they have a

24:00 magnificent park, Stanley Park, it’s about 700 hectares, which is really a feature of the city. It’s very cosmopolitan and we now, for the first time come into contact with using decimal currency, where we’d been on pounds, shillings and pence. So, and we now had, well we were soon to become part

24:30 attached to the RCAF, the Royal Canadian Air Force. So then when we got back, the train winding over the Rockies was magnificent, that’s one of the most spectacular sights ever you’ll see in winter time. And some of the pictures you’ll see later were taken on that trip. We then went to a holding unit in Edmonton, Alberta, temperature in the old Fahrenheit

25:00 scale, minus 42 degrees and we had no winter kit, no Canadian kit. So we stayed indoors because the huts were all centrally heated but then one of our fellows went down with scarlet fever, and that meant we were quarantined for a fortnight and had to go a whole series more needles. Once that was cleared up, well then a train to Winnipeg,

25:30 Manitoba where we entered number three wireless school, for six months training in wireless. Well, wireless training was a very hard grind. There was the technical side of having to learn the ins and outs of radio, the valves and the electrical systems. The most

26:00 nauseating or stressful part of it was to receive through earphones, three hours of Morse daily, that's Morse code which is dah, de, dah, dit, you know, dah, dit, dit, and copy that at a speed quicker than you could take in order to bring your speed on. Now some blokes found this so stressful, they asked, they got paraded before the CO and asked could they do away

26:30 with the wireless, part of the wireless air gunners course and become straight gunners. 10 of them did that, the result was that they went very quickly to England. They firstly did a gunner's course, six weeks, in Canada then they went to England, went straight on to operation unit and straight on to bomber squadrons, they all perished bar one.

27:00 So, the Morse code was first taught in classrooms then it was taught in the air, and what were called flying classrooms. They were Norsemen aircraft, took about 10 and we each had our own radio transmitter and receiver which we had to tune up and back tune to a base frequency and

27:30 send and receive our Morse messages. Then we went solo in the little aircraft called a Fleet Fort, which you'll see later in my album. And then finally we graduated there, with a slight rise in pay and we got two weeks leave before going back to gunnery school which was back in Alberta,

28:00 in a place called Lethbridge, it's about 100 miles, I think, south of Calgary and there we did a six week gunnery course. Well that was pretty intensive, we had to, our guns were, of course we went back to small arms pistol shooting on the range, but, we had to learn to strip

28:30 the machine gun, the 303 British made Browning, part by part, naming each part as we took it apart, and then reassemble it. Naming each part again as we put it back and by monotonous repetition, we had to do this within a couple of minutes. These guns, they could spit out about 100 rounds, 1000 rounds a minute each

29:00 and we had four to a turret. We had to learn turret manipulation and hydraulics of an aircraft as a defective, turret manipulation. There was tow turrets, there was the mid upper turrets carrying two guns, and a rear turret called, or tail-end Charlie, you know, tail gunners they had four guns

29:30 and we had to manipulate both. Of course the mid upper turret could rotate through 360 degrees, whereas the tail gun was only 180, but it was the loneliest place on the aircraft because you were facing the other way, you were a long way from the rest of your crew, and the little, the very cramped in space, especially when you got your heavy flying kit on.

30:00 The door to get into the turret was very small and you had to swing your legs through first and jump into the saddle, and then take your position and then latch the door behind you. Now you're facing dead aft, well if you rotated your turret beam-wise, either side, starboard or port, that meant

30:30 that the hatch that you got in was now out over the ocean or the land. Which was disconcerting because if that latch came undone you could spill out. And the roar of the engines and the roar of the slipstreams in the gaps between the turret and the fuselage, was deafening, except that we had our helmets on which carried our earphones, and at that stage

31:00 we, our microphone was in a sling which was to one side which had an oxygen tube attached to it too, that wasn't, we didn't get to oxygen level on training. Oxygen level was 10,000 feet after which it was mandatory to put your mask on too, and have the oxygen switched on. Oh there was another thing I didn't tell you about, I'm going to go back to joining up.

31:30 I did the air force medical, and I had a heart problem. I had what was known as a heart murmur. That's a, defect of the heart valve, and it wasn't discovered by the air force. My local doctor of course knew about it, it was the result of rheumatic fever when I was a child.

32:00 It's a mitral valve it is, one. Anyway the air force didn't pick it up so I passed, and while I was on that reserve list waiting from March to October, I got restive about not being called up I wanted to get into action. So, seeing my Dad had wanted me to join the navy,

32:30 I went up and made application to join the navy and they didn't pick up the heart complaint. So they passed me medically fit as an able seaman. Now I came back to Coolangatta having passed the air force medical and the navy with a faulty heart, and when I got home there was a letter for the call up for the army waiting for me, well you wouldn't want to know, the medical officer for the army was my home doctor.

33:00 Local. Well he knew I had the heart problem, so when I went to him he said, "Well I can't pass you Bill,"

he said, “you’re medically unfit. You’ve got a heart problem.” I said, “Well there’s my reservists badge, I’ve passed. The air force has passed me.” And I said, “Here’s the acceptance for the navy, they passed me.” He said, “If they passed you,” he said, “I’ll pass you.” So I passed the three medicals, but then when I got to Canada, to the wireless school, we had to undergo for some reason another medical,

33:30 and they picked up my heart murmur. They said, “Stafford, you’re unfit for flying. We will be packing you off to Australia. You will become ground staff.” I said, “One moment sir.” I said, “I’ve been passed by the three services in Australia, army, navy and air force, and that’s how I come to be here.” So he rubbed his chin and he said, “Well,” he said, “what I’ll do, I’ll send you to a cardio specialist

34:00 in Winnipeg.” So off I went to this cardio specialist, he was an elderly gent, a kindly old gent, and he checked me out and he said, “Stafford, I’ve got to agree with the medical officer at Winnipeg.” He said, “You’re unfit for flying.” So I told him the same story, I said, “I’ve been passed by the army, navy and air force in Australia. And I played football for my school. I’ve rowed for my school and swum and all those things.

34:30 Well he said, “I’ll tell you what LAC [Leading Aircraftsman] Stafford, you’re probably alright under 10,000 feet, where you don’t have to go on oxygen but,” he said, “you become breathless very quickly don’t you?” I said, “Yes.” “Well,” he said, “if you have to go on oxygen and fly above 10,000 feet, you’ll have difficulty sucking, you know, in the rarefied

35:00 air in the under oxygen conditions.” Especially over hours connected on oxygen. So he left the door open for me, he said, “Do you think you’ll be required to fly higher than 10,000 feet?” I said, “No sir, no Doc, no, no.” So he cleared me, and of course the first operation trip I did was 18,000 feet, it was trouble too, especially coming from changing

35:30 positions from mid upper turret. We used to alternate those positions. You used to have to unplug your oxygen to get to the next point which could be 12 feet down the fuselage, during which time you’re breathing practically no air at all. I nearly collapsed a couple of times and my mate had to connect my oxygen on for me. But, having said that, here I am still. So that’s another interesting

36:00 side light.

So what about other training that you did?

Well okay, well we’ve got to the gunnery school and that consisted, as I said, of dissembling and assembling the gun and the manipulation of the turrets. We then had to do flying exercises,

36:30 gunnery exercises, and, we flew in very antiquated aircraft, Blenheims and Beaufighters. And, they were very shaky; several of them crashed killing the occupants. We had air to air, air to ground, beam and under tail gunnery exercises,

37:00 mainly of what they called a drogue. So a drogue was a long sleeve about maybe 12 or 15 feet long towed by an aircraft flying about 100 or more feet, yards in front, so it would come on, it would join your level flight and fly past and as it flew past we had to line up on the drogue.

37:30 Well, there’s a lot of compensation in order to bring your guns to bear on the target. And the ammunition belts were made up of four different types of ammunition. Ball, which is the regular type of ammunition, incendiary, tracer, and armour piercing. So one in four rounds

38:00 going out was a tracer which you could see, well as it left the guns, you find beam. If you were aiming directly at the target you missed by many, many yards, because the stream went out, if you went along and appeared to do a curve away. So you had to take a hell of a long lead, in other words your sight was an illuminated ring sight and outside,

38:30 each ring within the sight counted for 50 yards of deflection, so you had to adjust accordingly, and of course equally if you fired up the stream, seemed to go, take a curve that way and down, they’d go out behind you, so it was a peculiar thing, and it was not easy. Five percent hits were considered good.

39:00 I didn’t know that because I was disappointed, my results came in about eight percent, 11 percent and 12 percent on the three exercises and I thought they would fail me but I was told it was way above average. So I got a good pass in gunnery.

By this stage had they made a decision on what are you were going to be in?

39:30 How do you mean love?

Like was it clear what position you were going to take up, in the crew?

No, no. Not at all you had to manipulate and fire from a mid upper turret and from the rear turret, and there were two makes of turret, both British made. There was the Fraser-Nash and the Bolton-Paul. Bolton-Paul was the rear turret, four gun, and

40:00 at the end of that course, we got our stripes and our wing. AG [Air Gunner] wing and three stripes, for some reason about two percent of every course received commissions. And I couldn’t understand why because my mate Tom Ward with whom we had made a pact, even in initial training, that we would stay

together through thick and thin.

40:30 If one was posted to a different posting, the other would apply for the same posting, and generally the personnel officers were sympathetic to such requests, and they would let you go together. so Tom and I stayed together right throughout the war, flew together and came home together. And he had a sort of a father influence on me because he was five years older

41:00 married with a baby boy, and, he had a great settling effect on me.

Tape 3

00:34 **What you were up to, the end of the gunnery course?**

The end of the gunnery course okay. We've now completed out training and get our stripes and wing.

So what rank are you here?

Sergeant. Sergeant Stafford, 434037 Stafford, RAAF. At which

01:00 we were told that we would go to operational training in the Bahamas in Nassau, but we were to have 18 days leave, pre embarkation leave before, after which we had to report back to Montreal. Well then we got this third off half price bus fair down to Los Angeles, well from the pictures you saw we enjoyed ourselves so much we overstayed our leave. Originally the

01:30 intention was to leave Los Angeles by bus, come up through the painted desert, Denver, Minneapolis, St Paul, by bus, then to back to Winnipeg, then get the train, Canadian Pacific across to Montreal. Well that's a pretty long hike, that's like going from Perth to Cooktown; we left ourselves two days only to do it. Well it was impossible and if you report back late

02:00 from a pre em leave, well you're up for a court martial, so we did have a problem. Luck followed us all the way, Tom and I, we met a major in the American air transport command who had us loaded onto a DC-2 Dakota as C class freight, bound for New York, via

02:30 Phoenix, Arizona; El Paso, Texas; San Antonio, Texas and then up to Buffalo, however, when we got to San Antonio, Texas, we were off loaded for A class freight. And we're running out of time, we're down to a day and a bit. We got a lift into town and I felt, I left my hat, cap in the car, we got the lift in, so we figured we got the number right,

03:00 so we went to the police station in San Antonio and reported it. I got the cap back, but we met the Chief of Police in San Antonio. So he wanted to know what we were doing and we told him we had a problem. "Well," he said, "you can't do anything about that," he said, "but seeing as you're stuck here in San Antonio, I better show you the town." So with the police chief he showed us San Antonio

03:30 inside and out, the river, the roses, the Alamo fortress at which Davy Crocket was killed and all that. And he said, "Well," he said, "that's it by day," he said. "Tonight we're going to do all the night clubs." So he rounded up a couple of Mexican girlfriends for us…Where'd we get to?

The police commissioner getting you some Mexican girlfriends.

04:00 Yes, and of course we did all the night clubs at his expense, it was a fantastic experience. Anyway the following morning, luck arrived we got a DC, a Dakota out, bound for Buffalo. Called at Shreveport, Tennessee, Cincinnati, and finally Buffalo. We are both broke, we had hocked our watches in San Antonio, so, that was the end of the

04:30 run for us and we still got a good way to go to get to Montreal from Buffalo. So, we went out on the highway and thumbed and this truckie pulled up. "Where you going fellows?" We said, "Montreal." He said, "Jump in, that's where we're headed." We got to Montreal, he said, "Whereabouts in Montreal?" I said, "Lachine Manning Depot." He said, "Oh, I'll take you there." I said, "You're not, you're joking?" He said, "No. I'll take you there." He dropped us at the gate, half an hour to spare.

05:00 I had two cents and Tom had nothing so I gave him one cent. So we reported in on time. Okay, well…

Can you back track and tell us a bit more about your trip from Winnipeg down to LA [Los Angeles] and what you did along the way and the hospitality that was?

Oh fantastic, yes well, the bus trip took in many sections and there were many stopovers and of course, different

05:30 buses and different passengers, and every one of them that saw our Australia patches on our shoulders wanted to know about Australia, and some of them with friends or relatives out in the South Pacific, how they'd be getting on. And one lady said she had a son in Sydney, would he be safe? And every one of them wanted us to sing Waltzing Matilda. We sung Waltzing Matilda until we were hoarse,

06:00 bus after bus. Oh, Aussies sing that again and you know it should be our national anthem, we are identified with that traditional song. We also sung them one you might have heard, “Is he an Aussie, is he a Lizzie, is he an Aussie Lizzie eh? Is it because he is an Aussie, that he makes you

06:30 dizzy Lizzie?” Do you know that song? Malcolm McKeclan. Oh well, anyway we’d sing that one too just to brighten it up a bit.

Do you know how the Americans came to know Waltzing Matilda?

That I can’t answer you no, no, but it holds a special place in my heart. We had a memorable stopover in Portland where we went to the

07:00 White Hospitality Centre where everything was free. And accommodated something like 600 people, you could get invitations to anything you wanted to see. It had showers, reading rooms, restaurant,

07:30 and it was quite fantastic. The stopover in San Francisco was a beauty. We went to the Pepsi Cola club for servicemen, and in that way we met a man named Carlos J Mars, but before we met him we started to write some letters home, Tom and I, in this

08:00 magnificent place. It was much like the place in Portland, everything free and everything laid on and, we’d written letters home and I’d just written the letter to my parents and addressed the envelope to Mr and Mrs Bill Stafford, Coolangatta, Queensland, Australia, when three American sailors walked in who had just arrived in San Francisco from the South Pacific. And the first fellow asked me where I came from in Australia, and I told

08:30 him Coolangatta, Queensland, and he said, “Goddamn,” he said, “we’ve just arrived here in San Francisco and we were tied up in Brisbane for three weeks, and spent all our shore leave and liberty on the beach at Kirra, so you wouldn’t happen to know a baldy headed old bastard by the name of Bill Stafford would you?” Which stunned me, you know, and I couldn’t speak, simply turned the envelope around for him to read it off and he read the name ‘Mr and Mrs Bill Stafford’. And he said, “Goddamn,

09:00 let’s go and get drunk.” Anyway, at the hospitality desk, through the hospitality desk, we met a man named Carlos J Mars who was a munitions millionaire manufacturer and he, and his limousine with driver took us and showed us around the city. We lunched

09:30 at an exclusive Italian restaurant on Tower Hill which overlooks the harbour. Julian Castle was the name of the restaurant. Everything the best, magnificent meal after which he said, “We’d like to treat you to dinner tonight, at a downtown restaurant.” So arrangements were made and they picked us

10:00 up, Mr and Mrs Mars and drove us, they were beautifully dressed, black tie and tails and she in pearl encrusted white evening gown and diamonds everywhere, to the St Francis Hotel which is the luxury hotel, still is, in San Francisco to the Palm Grove

10:30 Restaurant. Soft lighting, great music, and a cream of society all there and Mr Mar’s business associates and their wives were there, equally dressed. And I think the meals cost him something like

11:00 300 dollars which was out of, you know, unbelievable. We were on a pay rate of, from memory 18 and six a day, a dollar 85 a day. And he was handing around five, 10, 50 dollar tips. Which was so remarkable, but it goes to show just

11:30 how great the American people are as hosts. We voted Yanks the best hosts in the world. And we found out that Australians are held in very high regard.

Did you ever ponder that this man was making money from the war?

Well that wasn’t his fault, it just happened to be the industry that he was involved in. No it didn’t cross my mind. However the next part of the journey was down to Los Angeles.

12:00 Well again the unbelievable happened. A limousine drew up alongside with a glorious blonde lady at the wheel, and whether she knew our uniforms or not, I don’t know, but she asked us where we were from and whether we’d like to see the city. She turned out to be Katie Stevens who was the daughter of Sam Woods the Hollywood producer, film producer.

12:30 Well, she got us entry to everything, anything. We booked in at the united service, USO [United Service Organizations] club for servicemen, and next day we met Katie and she took us to Paramount Studios where we watched two of the scenes from two films being made. Double Indemnity

13:00 with Barbara Stanwick and Fred McMurray, and Rainbow Island with Dorothy Lamour and Eddie Brackham and Gil Liam, and while we were watching one, the Double Indemnity scene being shot, the little voice behind me said, whispered because sound was a, like here, “Australians,” and I looked around briefly and just nodded, and then I took a second look. It was the most beautiful brunette

13:30 I had ever seen, more importantly about my age, so I motioned towards the outside, and she came and I asked her what she was doing at Paramount after she asked me what we were doing. “Oh,” she said, “they pay me for acting.” Anyway we immediately struck up a rapport and it finished up,

14:00 she said, “Well do you want to come home to my place for lunch?” I said, “I’d love to.” So I went back and when the scene was shot, I said to Tom, “Anne here has asked me home to her mother’s place.” Anyway her mother was a, Mrs Howard was a very generous and lovely lady and provided a nice

14:30 meal and Anne then said, “Would you like to do a show tonight and have dinner?” So naturally I accepted that and stayed over at her place that night. Met Tom again the next day and, oh many things.

15:00 Oh, we met somebody whose daughter was graduating from university and would we go to their Hollywood, Beverley Hills home and, hills overlooking Hollywood. Unbelievable we were picked up in this limousine, wound up the road to the top, to the heights, pulled up in front of a, what appeared to be a stone wall

15:30 which slid open and in went the car and out of the car, into a lift, up through the cliff, to this magnificent, palatial home, and about 18 debutantes, or graduating uni students were there, for Tom and I to dine on, they were beautiful. Oh look, the hospitality over there was just unbelievable.

16:00 What else did we do in Hollywood? Oh yeah, we overstayed our leave and we’ve been through this have we not?

So if you want to get back to getting back just in the nick of time, half an hour to spare?

Yes, fine. One thing though, before we left Los Angeles, we of course met this air officer,

16:30 air transport commander who had got us booked on the Dakota, took us out to the Consolidated Aircraft Corporation hangar outside of Hollywood, outside of Los Angeles where the first ever Constellation aircraft was being constructed under strict secrecy. We were shown it and of course it became, it never became a war machine, but it became an international carrier. So

17:00 that was another feature. Oh in Hollywood too, we got, we met at the Hollywood canteen in the Hollywood Guild Canteen, many of the stars, and got their autographs which I’ve still got. So okay we’ll get back to...

Who were some of the people you met there?

Bette Davis, and of course the one’s I’ve already mentioned. Jack Benny, Rochester,

17:30 Dennis Day, to name some. However we got back to Montreal with half an hour to spare with two cents between us, or one cent each. The next thing was to get down to Florida to catch a boat out to Nassau. Well, I didn’t

18:00 say this before, but the Canadian and American trains were so big and so luxurious than we had, and still have, in Australia. It was unbelievable. So it was in luxury that we went by passenger train - I think about 84 of the original intake that went into initial training, of the 260, yeah.

Can you tell us a bit about the conditions on the trains there?

18:30 Well everything was available. Every half hour you’d have, usually a black porter come through with newspapers from last stop, with taking orders for drinks, taking orders for food. Oh they were beautiful dining rooms on the thing.

19:00 Music, comfortable chairs, everything, you know, faultless, every way. All the way down the coast to Florida which, Miami, which had become a major American training base and everywhere that we went there seemed to be Yank troops in training, marching, and they did something that we never did, they sang

19:30 music to their marching. I think this was brought about by Glenn Miller when he went into the army, air force, and he changed the traditional march music from Souza marches to St Louis Blues march, you know, and they’d march to that and Little Brown Jug, and they’d sing and the order would come from whoever is in charge of the

20:00 parade, “By the right, sing.” So they’d sing along, march along swinging along, which was good, first time we’d ever seen that. Anyway we got a Liberty ship out of Miami to Nassau, I forget just how long that took, from memory that was overnight. And where we went to our first base, now on

20:30 Nassau is the main town on an island called New Providence, one of the 3000 islands which constitute the islands and islets that constitute the British West Indies; New Providence about 15miles long, probably five wide.

So it’s still Commonwealth territories?

I think so. British West Indies I think still are, and the Duke of Windsor,

21:00 who was to be King Edward the eighth, who abdicated to marry Wallace Windsor, Wallace Simpson, he was the Governor and there’s a funny story around that. One day we were going out on leave from the camp, and a car came past and pulled up behind us. Tom and I and the driver got out and said, “Sergeants.” We looked around; this was a commissioned officer, “Yes sir.”

21:30 “You didn’t salute this car.” Then we notice the royal flag floating on the mudguard, so then we had to salute the car before we could go on, it was the Duke. Yeah, well on New Providence there were two airfields, there was Windsor Field named after his nibs,

22:00 and Oakes Field named after Sir Harry Oakes, who had just been murdered by Count DeMarigny who was exiled to Cuba and the court case was still going on while we were there. Anyway, at the first airfield was our first experience with multi-engined bombers, B-25 Mitchells. It’s an American aircraft

22:30 with a gull wing. Different kind of apparatus to what we’d been used to in Canada. In Canada we were trained on 10-82-83 radio transmitter and receiver, now we were on American Bendix 11-52-53’s completely, or very great difference, to our advantage, and different guns.

23:00 Instead of the 303 Brownings that we had, British manufacture, these were point 5 Brownings, American manufacture. And there was one vast difference, now the main component in a machine gun is what they called the breach block. It has a multi function purpose, it travels forward and back, forward and back and as it goes forward it carries a new round on the face and

23:30 that goes up the spout of the barrel or the firing chamber, then the firing pin’s released, it explodes, it’s thrown back by the explosion onto a compressed spring which sends it forward again. But as it goes back a pall drops down over the next round, pulls it back, drops it over the face and it repeats. In the British made 303, the breach block always finished, at the end of firing, it always finished in

24:00 the rear position with the spring compressed ready to send it forward again. In the American one you’d fire a burst or two or three from it and the breach block, instead of being retained by a retaining pall would finish up back with the breach, with a new round on the face. The result was the breach is hot and you’d get what they called a cooked round, which would fire.

24:30 You could shoot anybody or blow your tail off, or so you had to be very careful.

Was there a hang time for that?

Well there was an unknown quantity, you just didn’t know when it’d go off. It didn’t matter how hot the breach was. So anyway we got used to that, and flying these B-22 Mitchells, now they were a good aircraft except that they

25:00 would not maintain height on one engine. Oh, firstly, yeah, now I’ll tell you, that’s the first airfield, the second airfield we went to a bigger aircraft, the Liberator bomber, four engine, so we were going two to four, now, there was a multi-purpose about this first training. And it was unique to the Empire Air Training Scheme that we were in.

25:30 I can tell you about the Empire Air Training Scheme later too, it was a very good thing. The purpose was, naturally, to train in bigger aircraft, and to crew up, now of the six weeks we had on Mitchells followed by the six weeks on Liberators, we had the first six weeks

26:00 to choose with whom we were going to fly on operations. Now this is very important because the main thing you had to have in a crew was compatibility, you had to have mateship, you had to have unity. And whereas other countries, America or any of the other air forces in the world, you were put where you were put, it didn’t matter with whom.

26:30 We had the opportunity to, well Tom and I firstly, we had bound ourselves together, we had to find another wireless operator, we had to find a navigator and we had to find a pilot, we had to find an engineer. Well we found another Canuck, Jack Jude Reer as a wireless air gunner, Bill Pirie, a Scotsman as an engineer,

27:00 Jack Masters, an ex school master, English, as navigator. Now we needed a pilot, and of course, what we do outside of training we’d get down to the mess every night and we’d drink together and play pool together or whatever, to get to know one another, this was how we’d know, gathered our crew together, and we met a bloke named Arthur Ploughwright

27:30 who was a, who’d been on training command and had about 3000 hours up, faultless without accident. And we asked Arthur would he become our skipper. He said yes, so we had the unit which we lodged and which we got. Training involved quite a lot of things, compass swings for the pilots, radio exercises for the WAGs [Wireless Air Gunner].

28:00 Navigational exercises for the navigator, and of course, the engineer was an integral part of the whole thing. He had to watch air pressures, oil pressures, fuel consumption, transference of fuel from one to the other to maintain the balance. Night flying,

28:30 flare dropping, smoke flare dropping, dummy runs on bombing targets, water targets, air to air, air to ground and all the other gunnery exercises too, quite comprehensive. And having done our six weeks at Windsor Field, we then progressed to the larger aircraft at Oakes Field.

29:00 Now the larger aircraft required an extra crew, another pilot and, oh, a wireless operator mechanic. From here it was apparent that we were going to go on coastal command and not bomber command for the exercise we were doing, and actually we did our first couple of operational trips there escorting

29:30 American convoys. Now the Lib was a huge animal, four-engined and the inside of the fuselage compared to what we'd been in was like a ball room and it had waste guns besides the mid upper and the nose and tail guns. I think four, six, eight, ten, ten machine guns.

30:00 As I said to you before, the fire rate was about 1000 rounds per gun per minute so you could let go, in a minute, four thousand rounds from the, which might sound too short in duration but to the layman, but when you consider that a three minute burst, is a long burst, two and three seconds, or

30:30 five seconds was an exceptionally long burst, you had quite a bit of ammunition rounds, that was in drums beside the, each side of your leg. So yes, we got a fellow named Harry Coxhead was out WOM, wireless operator mechanic, and a fellow named Paddy Wilson became our second dickie, second pilot. And training there was much

31:00 the same as we'd done on the B-25 Mitchells. Oh back to the first field, at Windsor Field, we were out on a night exercise one night. We were 250 miles from base and the port motor packed up, and I said it wasn't a very good aircraft on one engine, it would lose height, well here we were out there, it was midnight, and, the port motor was the motor

31:30 which activated our hydraulic system. That meant the guns wouldn't turn but fortunately we could crank them, crank the turret back to get them aligned so you could get out of the turret. It affected the landing gear and the flaps and the variable pitch propellers, so we were in a bit of trouble. I was on the radio at the time and I didn't know what had happened, because I had the earphones on,

32:00 and Tom hurtled back with a message from the navigator giving our position. Giving our position coordinates for me to transmit back to base in the form of an AO message, that's high priority so I changed over to the frequency I needed, which had to be on

32:30 on FM frequency and there was some goose sitting on the ground trying to tune up to the same frequency and I couldn't get this priority message through. So I had to send S O S, dit, dit, dit, da, da, da, dit, dit, dit, dit, dit, dit, dah, dah, still couldn't get through but the radio officer on base, he heard it and then, now we've got three keys working, mine, the radio

33:00 operator on the base and the goose sitting on the ground. Anyway finally we shut him up and we were able to get my S O S message through. Meanwhile we're losing height and Tom keeps running back from the navigator with fresh co-ordinates, until finally we got back and just skimmed over the beach at zero level to do a wheels up landing, with the fire brigades and ambulances and

33:30 everything out there and the skipper got out and collapsed into the arms of those waiting and I sprinted across the radio shack to where I'd been transmitting the S O S and there was this poor irk, slumped in his chair, covered in sweat, because he felt the pressure. So that was one of two crashes that I survived.

That was wheels up that one?

Hm.

They couldn't crank them down?

No, for some reason. So there was one

34:00 aircraft that didn't see any more flying. And I was commended for my work on the radio and at that time my promotion to flight sergeant came through, so I got another small jump in pay.

What was that like, your first experience at a crash landing? It must have been pretty frightening stuff?

Oh worse was to come. That was pretty, you know, pretty straight forward. There was

34:30 the screaming, scraping of metal and earth and bitumen, tarmac.

What's the procedure in the aircraft when the pilot knows?

Take crash positions. That is you go into the central part of the aircraft to where the main spar for the wings is, and you sit with your back to the main spar with your hands capped behind your head and your elbows over your face and your knees drawn up.

35:00 Crash position. There was also the general procedure for take off and landing at any time.

Had you done parachute training at this stage at all?

Never, no we never ever did any. Never. Oh, didn't tell you, on the boat going over to the America, in the first place, they called for

35:30 competitors to take part in a boxing tournament. Well I'd leaned boxing at BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] our, our PT [Physical Training] master was an ex British champion heavy weight, Captain Rickets and I'd leaned the art of self defence. Anyway I did not put my name in for the boxing tournament, boxing whatever, wasn't a championship, it was just

36:00 you know, man on man, and to take the monotony out of the sea voyage, anyway when the list got called out my name and number was amongst it. So I said, “Hey, I didn’t put my name in.” They said, “Your name Stafford? Your number four three four oh three?” I said, “Yes.” They said, “Your name’s in here.” Tom had put me in. Anyway I fought a Yank boiler maker and won the bout and got the prize for the best bout of the day.

36:30 Also back in Canada the same thing happened at Winnipeg. Only this time it was for a championship of the services of the province of Manitoba, and out came my name again and I said, “I didn’t put it in.” They said, “Your name, your number?” “Yes.” “You’re in.” Well, I won through to the final and had to meet a fellow called Harry Varley, in the final. He

37:00 was a, he was a tradesman from Three River, Three Rivers in Canada. And it came down to the final and I got a TKO [Technical Knock Out] on him. The beautiful part about it was, my second in the corner was the MO [Medical Officer] who was going to ground me for the heart ailment,

37:30 so I justified my, being retained in aircrew. So, yeah, so there was another side like. Well then back to Nassau, we completed the course on Liberators, shipped back to Miami, and the train

38:00 journey back up to Montreal where we were to await posting to, on a ship to the United Kingdom. Well we were agreeably surprised when we got back to find that our crew had been selected to fly as supernumeraries on the delivery of a brand new Liberator off the production line, to England, to Scotland.

38:30 However it had to undergo checks and tests, flight tests, so we had a week or two to spend in Montreal to explore, we went up to Quebec where they’ve got their famous shadow Frontignac. And we took a weekend up to Santa Del Lodge, where although it was summertime it was a ski resort

39:00 for a nice relaxing weekend, and down to Toronto. So we had a fair look around eastern Canada, where it’s mainly French, in fact the newspaper there, the biggest circulating newspaper is one called Le Press, and, it’s printed in French and if you go to any of the restaurants the menus are in English

39:30 on one side, French on the other and when you get out at a railway station or bus terminal, “Attention please, attention please [French language],” so you got it both. Worst feature of it was in Montreal was that the French were conscientious objectors, they resisted call up, and they dressed in what were called zoot suits, have you ever heard of a zoot suit?

40:00 That was described as having a drape shape with a reet pleat, R double E T pleat. Very broad shoulders, square shoulders, long lapels to a one button double breasted coat, very roomy inside the jacket, the jacket hanging down to fingertip length. Voluminous trouser legs coming down to a very tight cuff

40:30 with a zipper on the inside to get your foot through. Highly polished pointed shoes, long collar peaks on the shirt, bow tie and a hat, felt hat sat squarely on the head, up at the back, down at the front and a long key chain that hang down, below the knee, they were called zoot suiters, and a lot of trouble. And enormous fisticuffs took place between men in the service and these conscientious objectors, especially after one night a Canadian sailor and his wife were beaten up.

I just get you to stop there.

Tape 4

00:33 Well, friction broke out between the armed services and the zoot suiters, who were mainly, lived in the east end of Montreal. At the east end of the main street is St Catherine Street, so down St Catherine Street, east, was out of bounds to us because of this situation. But the thing rose to a head when a Canadian sailor and his wife

01:00 were badly beaten up by a group of zoot suiters. The wife was pregnant and she lost her pregnancy. Well then the army and the navy and the air force went out searching for the zoot suiters, with the results that you could imagine. However, the time came for us to fly, so the crew was assembled at Dorval Airport, which is Montreal’s

01:30 main airport. And to give you some idea we were briefed for flight of two legs - the first from Dorval to Ganda Newfoundland, and from Newfoundland to Prestwick in Scotland. Prestwick is Glasgow’s airport. And to give you some idea how long this first leg followed the St Lawrence, Gulf of St Lawrence. How long that is, it was five and a half hours

02:00 flight to Ganda in Newfoundland where we refuelled and I think stayed overnight. No we didn’t because we continued on into the night. From Ganda to Prestwick, nine and a half hours, and then we were agreeably surprised when we got out, to find we’d broken the trans Atlantic record by 12 minutes, how about that.

02:30 So without any messing about, a train, the next day to Padgate, P A D G A T E, Padgate, was a personnel and dispatch unit at New Manchester. Now, we're all crewed up ready to go on squadron, on a Liberator squadron, we thought, air force doesn't work like that,

03:00 they change things. They decided we wouldn't fly in Liberators for which we'd been trained; we'd have to go across to Ireland, to Aldergrove, which is Belfast, to do a three week conversion course to Halifax bombers, RAF [Royal Air Force]. We're not attached to the RAF. So for me it was a big downgrading,

03:30 and the Halifax that we trained in and which we operated in were clapped out rejects from bomber command. Actually the Halifax had been delivered to Australia's most famous squadron, 460 Bomber Squadron, and they had so many accidental accidents with them. They lost more crews

04:00 in flying these and training these than they lost in operations over Germany. So they got rid of them from bomber command altogether, out of all units, and who got them? Coastal command, and there began our troubles - big, big troubles. So across to Aldergrove and these, as I said it was a downgrade, we had

04:30 the luxury of this inside, roomy, well appointed American Liberator to a very, very basic cramped Halifax and it resulted in a change back in radio transmitters and receivers. And okay that training was the same

05:00 virtually if we went through an operational training, compass swings, bombing runs, air to air and air to ground and so forth. There was one spectacular one we did. There was a sunken wreck off the north coast of Ireland which became our target for straddling with depth charges and after having done that exercise we were flying back along the beaches of northern

05:30 Ireland, so low that, along the beach, that a rail, a train above us, a train line and the passengers in it, were above us. We had to come up to look inside the carriages as we passed and I was in the mid upper turrets swinging it around like this madly waving to people in the train, and that was just one facet. We didn't get a chance to go down low

06:00 very much until we got on squadron, then we had to go down low, which was a very frightening thing.

Did you get any leave while you were there at all?

Oh yes, yes. In, oh yes.

What was the attitude of the Northern Irelanders towards...

Yeah well this is where the religious

06:30 animosity existed and was very, very clear there. In fact Falls Road area of Belfast was out of bounds to us in uniform, as was crossing into the Irish Free State in uniform, that was taboo, barred, the only way, we wanted to go down there, but without clothing coupons to buy civvy clothes, or the money, well it was beyond our means.

07:00 But we had a good chance to look around places like Ballykelly, and the north coast of Ireland, later on this came, but I can tell you now, a place called Giants Causeway which we have here at Fingal, did you know that? Well Fingal Head has got a, it's formed of basaltic rock which

07:30 is volcanic which when it hit the water, when it was spewed out, it formed into hexagonal columns, well these here were similar to those at Giants Causeway in Ireland. And it was John Oxley in 1822 that noted this and

08:00 made note of it in his diary. Legend has it that in Northern Ireland, a giant by the name of Fingal strode in one step from the Giant's Causeway to the Isle of Staffa, where Fingals Cave is and it's after that this Fingal is later named. Just a historical facet. Yeah well,

08:30 that religious hatred was there and still exists of course, as you know. So then after we'd finished the conversion course it was back to Padgate to await a posting to a squadron, well that came and we boarded a train for

09:00 Scotland to the port of Oban where we caught a small ship out to the small island of Tiree, T I R double E, in one of the Scotch Hebrides, and this was 518 Squadron RAF, a meteorological squadron, so we had to get another crew member, a met observer, we picked him up in the conversion unit

09:30 Fred Gee, with whom I'm on, still on e-mail contact.

Where was Fred From?

He was from Essex, Ilford Essex, he's now in Norfolk. We're now, as I said, we're in e-mail contact. I'm also in contact with our skipper who worked on the rocket program in Florida. He's Irish and he's now retired in Saratoga in California, so the three of us

10:00 are in e-mail contact and that's how come I'm able to put so much detail together in recalling things. It seems the more I typed up on my computer, recalling my war service for the school, the more recall I

got, it just kept mounting, still is. Yeah, so we took aboard a new crew member who was a beaut bloke, Fred Gee.

10:30 Now, Tiree, 21 miles long and about four miles wide, with not a tree on it, although somebody said there were four but the fellow who owned them took them in each night. Very sparsely populated, small village, Scarinish, which was their port.

11:00 The people were crofters, they lived in single storey, white painted, brick cottages, thatched rooves, half dug into the ground, three rooms, bedroom, kitchen and lounge and they took in their animals each night. It rained constantly,

11:30 almost horizontally. Winters were absolutely shocking weather conditions, unbelievable, and the lack of sunshine such that we were compelled once a week to go down to the ultra violet ray room, strip off and expose ourselves to ultra violet rays. Food had…

Do you know what the thinking behind that?

What?

The ultra violet ray room?

Well, to

12:00 replace sunlight. It was declared necessary, oh the other thing was, it was compulsory when we were in Nassau to take two salt tablets a day to replace perspiration. The we, fresh fruit, one orange a week ration or its equivalent in

12:30 canned juice, raw eggs, powdered egg, sort of made into a scramble, most stuff, except when we did ops flights, we had an ops meal out, going out, and on return, which included an egg and a steak of some kind of dubious quality.

13:00 Conditions horrendous really, and our Nissan hut, to warm it had a pot bellied stove in the middle, and the eight of us sharing the one Nissan hut used to draw our beds up to the pot bellied stove at night with our feet to the stove, we'd load it up with coke

13:30 in order to keep warm. You'd put on every bit of clothing you could find, and fortunately we used to get from Australia occasionally, in Australia we had a fund called the ACF, Australian Comforts Fund who worked tirelessly throughout the war to get funds to send us stuff like canned peaches, pears, fruit cake.

14:00 School kids knitted socks, big heavy ones for us, scarves, long scarves to wind around our neck and occasionally if you were lucky a sheep skin vest. You know, the fleece, which I had one and Harry Coxhead our WOM [Wireless Operator Mechanic] was a peace time sign writer and he put S T A double F across the back of mine 'Staff', which I was called.

14:30 There were films one night a week in what they called, on the airmen's mess, to which the local populace was invited. They spoke Gaelic generally, but they had English but their radio broadcasts were in Gaelic.

Could you converse with them?

We didn't get to mix much no,

15:00 they pretty much stuck to themselves. They were crofters, they sold homemade, from their sheep that they had, pullovers and scarves and stuff like that and they wove, they made, of course up in the northern ones they made a tweed cloth and

15:30 I don't doubt that they made tartans up in the other islands too. An awful happening while we were there, a tragic, the place was often fogged in and we suffered a lot of blizzards and driving rain and sleet.

16:00 Nil visibility much of the time and one of our crews returning to the squadron collided mid air above, right above the drome and we had to go amongst the wreckage and try to extricate the bodies, mutilated limbs and bloody flying boots with legs in them and god knows.

16:30 Eight in each aircraft, there were 16 mates went and those graves are still there today and they're kept pretty well. But our first operational trip gave us a taste of what was to follow. We took off at midnight one night, half past ten,

17:00 and it was in, we were known as the squadron that flies when even the birds walk, and twice we found that we were the only aircraft airborne in the United Kingdom and on one occasion they were out looking for us, or no they weren't out looking for us they were all on the alert to, if they could hear.

17:30 Anyway our first operational trip was much like that, we took off in shocking conditions and the program was we had two operational routes to take, one was called the Bismuth and the other one the, isn't that silly, Mercer.

18:00 One went across the north island out to about 500 miles over the Atlantic, north and then finished a triangle back and the Bismuth went due west out of Tiree, mid Atlantic, west almost to Reykjavik, and Scotland, and then back to base to complete the triangle. Now during this time it was

18:30 very heavy work for both the navigator, well for all concerned actually, the prime man we were taking of course was the met observer. Now the obvious reason for a met squadron was to get weather conditions out there over the Atlantic back to base which was relayed through to a bomber command so they'd know what to expect,

19:00 whether they could get off the ground or not, to get over to Germany and back or not before the weather closed in behind. Well that was the way they, it was the only way that they could work. We had to do, as a crew, air pressures and temperatures from sea level, zero height on the first leg then a

19:30 climbing leg to 21 thou, and then a descent leg, doing all of this stuff. I've detailed, I've got all the detail of this logged in the document I'm doing and I got it from Fred Gee by e-mail, it's very interesting reading. How it was done and with what instruments, and those sea level

20:00 temperatures and pressures over a turbulent Atlantic ocean where the troughs can be 30 feet wide and 120 feet across. We were often lapped by the spray from waves and being buffeted by winds and, conditions,

20:30 we sometimes were thrown around like we were riding a bucking horse. Then Fred would do all his calculations, he'd code those, and the codes came out in eight, eight numerals and then in blocks of eight numerals, and they'd come back two or three pages to the

21:00 radio operator, to the wireless operator, he'd have to transmit those back to base till we did the next level. And Fred did that and the same, kept repeating throughout the flight. We met a lot of strange things, not the least of which was St Elmo's Fire, which lit up the plane like a neon sign. It's an electrical happening that all the trailing

21:30 edges, that's the trailing edges of the wings, the fins, the propellers, you had this blue flame dancing all over the place. Now if your aircraft wasn't correctly electrically bonded, it'd explode, so that was frightening. Three times we were hit with lightening. And once particularly badly because it burnt the trailing aerial off back to the

22:00 jack and the transmitter into the sep which knocked it out, our magnetic compass, and with cloud above and cloud below and with winds blowing at what speed we didn't know because we couldn't take drifts. Navigator had not idea much where we were either and on one occasion we were hopelessly lost, hopelessly lost,

22:30 and we'd been airborne ten hours odd, we were fuelled up for 11, for ten and a half, we had no idea where base was, and this was one of the times when we were the only aircraft airborne. All the stations on the west coast of Scotland were on the listen out for us, but because our transmitter had gone we had no,

23:00 we couldn't transmit, we had voice radio but the range was limited that was our radio telephone. However, we knew we were over water and finally there was a chink in the clouds and, one of the boys said, "Take her down skip, I see waves down below." He took it down and the same voice said,

23:30 "Take her up skip, it's not waves it's not waves. It's snow on the mountains." Well we still didn't know where we were. Well finally we got to another hole in the clouds and would you believe there was an airfield below, and we didn't know which one, so on the RT [Radio Transmission] we called, Arthur called up, "Airfield below, who are you?" It turned out to be Banff in the north of Scotland. We were 300 miles

24:00 from base and, "Can you take a heavy aircraft?" Well they diverted us to Lossiemouth, and we got down with all the tanks showing the red light. Bill Pirie had done a magnificent job of transferring and conserving fuel, and we got down and headed straight for the mess, well I didn't have a gin, I didn't have a double gin I had a double, double gin with Jack Shoodery.

24:30 I went to sleep in the mess and the other boys were wherever. Anyway next day Lossiemouth was near a place called Huntly which was where Bill Pirie lived, his home was at Huntly, near Port Soy, so the station commander gave us a command car, Bill rang his parents,

25:00 and it was a Sunday, on which all Scottish hotels are closed. Anyway, Bill's, Mr and Mrs Pirie, were terrific hosts. They rang the local publican, he opened the bar for us and one of the biggest parties ever you saw took place. Here we were, Bill's parents

25:30 seeing us in full flying gear, we had no other gear with us, we had our big zip boots on and everything, and down to the publican and he opened the bar and he didn't pour a scotch, he poured scotch's that big, to open up proceedings and the door came ajar and a little head poked around and the publican looked and

26:00 nodded and the little girl came back with a violin. Well our navigator, Jack Masters, was a pianist, Jack

on the piano and the publican on the violin and we had a sing along and they put on a big repast for us, it was fantastic. So we were weathered in at Lossiemouth for two or three days until the weather cleared and we

26:30 were cleared for flight back to base. So Paddy took the opportunity to fly the whole length of the Loch Ness. Which is very long, we flew it at about 150 feet all the way, fantastic. Before we got back to base, well that's only one such trip, but there were many, many like it.

27:00 And just as bad.

Whose nerves were shot the most after that incident do you think?

Oh, everybody was effected, the pilots the navigator, Fred, see when the aerials burnt off we couldn't transmit Fred's calculations and to be hit by lightning

27:30 in the aircraft, you, well, you can't believe the sound, the noise, the explosion. You've been close to a lightning strike, you can imagine what'd happen right outside the aircraft, we didn't know what had happened. Anyway, cutting a long story short, Tom of course was

28:00 married with this baby, and he was concerned with the safety, after we'd done about 12 or 20 of these trips, he applied for… Oh, while we were on squadron, we had two promotions, one from flight sergeant to warrant officer class two, and one from class two to class one warrant officer. Tom applied for a transfer to a different squadron,

28:30 which was going to split us up, that was forwarded through to Australian headquarters, no it wasn't, it was approved, so he was flown down on what they call a milk run. Now a milk run is when a squadron needs supplies and parts,

29:00 they go and collect these at various points, and for this they had to go to Northern Ireland so they flew Tom down to the 281 Squadron, which was an air sea rescue squadron, which flew Warwicks. A Warwick aircraft was a an expanded Wimpy Wellington. They were the last of the fabric

29:30 covered aircraft, but very strong, geodetically constructed inside, very strong. And in fact after the war it was found that the Wimpy Wellington and its son if you like, the Warwick, had the biggest production run of any aircraft in World War II.

A few fellows have told us about the geodetic design, do you

30:00 **know enough to explain to me what it is?**

I can show it to you. Got a picture, got a picture outside.

Is it possible to explain it just for the sake of this?

Yes, let me think. Well the aircraft was constructed of duralumin, which is

30:30 what'll I say, however, a light but strong metal, colour of steel, softer than steel but very strong. Okay, the cross beams if you like, or it sort of looked like basket weave if I could explain it that way. Right through the interior of the fuselage, you'd see this basket weave of metal,

31:00 over which was stretched the skin. I don't think I can do it any better than that. And it was invented by the fellow who invented the skipping bomb for the dam busters, Barnes Wallis, it was his, another one of his successful inventions. And the expanded version of the

31:30 Wimpy that operated with 281 Squadron, had a modified bomb bay to stow a boat, a rescue boat. Now that boat was about, I guess about ten or twelve feet long and it carried all the provisions to save a crew. It had like a pedal radio,

32:00 it had fishing gear, life jackets, a cover, food and water, all the things to sustain life if you had to put up with being in the water, but it wasn't a very pleasant prospect because the Atlantic is notoriously wild. And in winter survival times, if you were to fall into the water, it was a matter of minutes, only

32:30 ten minutes and you're dead. But the Warwick carried, and this particular buoy was called a Lindholme buoy and those things turned out, that squadron based at Mullock Moor, covered our previous squadron in case of any crashes by it, apart from doing escort duties and things like that. Anyway, Tom got his posting

33:00 that left me back at Tiree, so I, honouring our bond, I put in for a transfer to his squadron and the RAF knocked it back. When I said, "Do you mind if I approach Australian headquarters at Kodak House in London?" Well that changed things around; they didn't want that to go back to Aussie headquarters, so I got my posting.

33:30 And on a milk run I went and joined Tom and my new crew, a fellow named Jack Greenslade and crew, terrific.

Can I just ask you there, Bill, a lot of fellows that we've spoken to who were on bomber command and stuff they had like this 30 operation sort of tour, what was the situation with

you guys?

Hours, number of hours in the air. It varied according to what squadron you were on.

34:00 And you know, you've asked me a question and I couldn't tell you exactly what constituted a met squadron's tour, but it was in the vicinity of 400 hours. Some of those trips, a minimum would be about eight hours to about 10 and a half hours and very, very exhaustive, exhausting. You were working all the time,

34:30 one way or another and you had to be on the alert, there was no going to sleep, no smoking inside an aircraft and apart from your intercom, one to another, that was your only conversation and that was always to be kept to a minimum. You flew under what they called, radio silence, so you did not communicate back to base

35:00 unless an emergency, and of course we had the access to base by broadcasting out coded met messages. And the call up sign, if you were calling base, you sent a Vic Eddy, V E, di, di, di, dah, dit, di, di, di, dah, dit,

35:30 and then at the end of your message it was Ak Are, A R, di, dah, di, dah, dit. So after you'd finished your message you'd send di, dah, di, dah, dit. And the bloke back at base would go dit, dit in acknowledgment. It was radio and Morse, those that were

36:00 selected to take Morse were usually musically inclined, because Morse, you see the letter c is dah, dit, dah, dit. Well you don't send it like that, you've got to dah, di, dah, dit, dah, di, dah, dit, R is E, dot dash dot, di, dah, dit, not dit, dah, dot, you see what I mean.

36:30 So, yes, next question.

It always fascinates me about that, how do you have the separation of letters? How do you know that one letter isn't part of another letter?

Well they came out in blocks like that, you see, when you hear dah, di, di, dit, you know that's B.

37:00 Then if there's a dit that's E, then if you hear di, di, di, that's S, then dah T, that's best, dah, di, di, di, dit, dit, di, di, dit, dah. Well you've got to learn, see that was the idea to pick up your speed you couldn't do this until you'd had several months, after which your speed could have increased to,

37:30 perhaps 12 or 15 words per minute. Well you didn't pass out in Morse until you'd achieved 25 words per minute, well when you were practising at say 16 or 17 words per minute, they were sending you 20. So you'd be, and you had, it wasn't in long hand either, you had to block each letter, so you learned to, you had to write

38:00 quickly and then you be intent listening.

How daunting was it at the start?

Very, as I said, it was stressful and the ten blokes that dipped out got the chop. Bar one.

Well I was just going to start..

Tape 5

00:42 **So you've got a song from the 281 Squadron?**

Well 281 as I told you was an air-sea rescue outfit and it covered the, apart from all calls for air-sea rescue

01:00 work, it covered our previous squadron, 518. As I've told you that 518 was a life and death situation, we lost a lot of crews on 518 due to weather, upper turbulence, aircraft just

01:30 disappeared without trace, without any call for help, and I think that I told you that two met in the air over the aerodrome, didn't I? We had 16 bodies to extricate.

No you haven't actually gone into detail about that?

We had to go and extricate the bodies and the limbs of those that were killed in it.

02:00 And the squadron was closed for two days while they cleared the wreckage from the tarmac and held a funeral service at which the whole squadron turned out and full military honours were given to the 16 mates.

How sobering was that?

Shocking. After the funeral

02:30 the mess was thrown open for, the airmen's mess was thrown open for everyone to go down for the wake. However at 281 they had this song that went like this, "We get our plots from the ops room clots as the takes, the Halifax takes the air.

03:00 We know full well from times before that they won't be long up there. They'll be up the creek with a glycol leak and the radio gives no joy. So it's off to sea in the Warwick 3 to drop a Lindholme buoy to drop a Lindholme buoy."

03:30 The tragic part of this was that we weren't on the squadron long and we were called out on a rescue mission for one of 518's aircraft that had disappeared somewhere overnight, and we went out early the next morning.

04:00 We searched until midday, came back to base, refuelled and went out, searched the whole day, found nothing and report same and about two days later we found out that the crew that was missing was our former crew, Jack Greenslade, and nothing

04:30 was heard and we didn't find anything. But it could've been us. So in retrospect it was due to Tom's timely request for a transfer that both of us are still alive today.

Did you and Tom talk about that?

05:00 Oh yes, yeah, yeah. The change in squadron brought about a new mode of living too, it was much more civilised. We had an established base with better amenities, we were close to towns and cities, Mullock Moor, it's a small village, and our base was called Mullock

05:30 Moor, it was situated on the south eastern extremity of Loch Foyle, which is near a place called Limavady and opposite Londonderry. We were close to farms and farmers so whenever we got leave from squadron

06:00 we had these places to visit, places with colourful names such as Coleraine, we pronounced it Collar-aine not the Irish Coalrein, and Castlerock and of course Fingal I've already mentioned, Giant's Causeway. And Tom formed a friendship with a couple of the local

06:30 residents at Scarinish, the port, went out fishing. To augment our diet Tom would go out and they'd come back with halibut or something of that nature and we'd have to cook them. "How are you going to cook them Tom?" He said "Watch me." So he went and got the coal shovel that we shovel the pot belly stove with

07:00 the coke, and put the fish on the coal shovel over the pot belly stove and we dined on grilled fish. Beautiful and fresh. Another time, I've got to explain, when you're on a squadron it's disbursed for the very good reason if it's ever bombed or the airfield's not taken out so you've got

07:30 station headquarters in one spot, you've got flying control over there, you've got airmen's mess here and down the other end of the field you've got officer's mess. You've got the officers quarters there and the WAAF's [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] quarters all segregated. And to get to ours we had to track to the mess over a fence and the across another paddock to our billet hut.

08:00 Little way down the road was an Irish farmer who we found had chickens, and of course eggs were something we couldn't get, all produce was supposed to go to a marketing board and they went under food regulations for rationing.

08:30 We tottered down to see this farmer to see if had any of his eggs and he sold them to us illicitly. 22 eggs he had, so we bought the lot. You may or may not believe this, but on the coal shovel we fried up 22 eggs and had 11 each. That was

09:00 good. The other thing that was good, there were many things, we didn't have to fly nighttimes because due to the nature of our work we were air-sea rescue, well you can't see at night. We didn't fly such journeys because we didn't have the range so our flights were shorter, we didn't fly high because of the nature of our work we had to be down low to

09:30 see what was in the water, so we didn't have to go on oxygen. We didn't carry heavy armament and we didn't carry depth charges, we carried Lindholme buoys. All round it was, for us, it was a haven it was safer, the war was still on of course, still going on and the Battle of Normandy and we were making

10:00 good progress there, of course we were getting the good reports on that. We were more accessible to taking leave in England. On one of these leaves we normally stayed, when we went to London, at a place called The ACF Hostel at Gloucester Road. Now ACF stands for Australian Comfort Funds, that's where they sent us parcels of food.

10:30 They had a hostel at Gloucester Road. Tom and I went down there and booked in and the following morning we came down to breakfast and we approached a table at which there were two airmen sitting, so we decided to sit with them. So we were approaching them from the back, we couldn't see who they were or what they looked like. We sat down and I was shocked.

11:00 The fellow I sat opposite was a burns victim, he had no hair, he had no eyebrows, he had no nose, he had no ears, and he just had two holes here and two holes there. His face was scarred as though it was some grotesque mask, a narrow opening for a mouth, scarred all down the neck, his fingers were welded

11:30 together just like claws and the mark of his flying helmet was etched into his forehead. I could hardly, I couldn't look at the menu or order breakfast. The shock must have shown on our faces, but he quickly put us at rest. He said he was only one of many that had been burnt this way. It had happened 12 months

12:00 before and they'd been working on him with skin grafts and he remained there for a long time after the war. He put us at rest by speaking freely about what had happened, that his plane had crashed and burnt and all his crew were burnt with it. He was the only survivor. I couldn't sleep that night. After I got home I did read

12:30 in one of the papers that this man had been repatriated home after five years skin grafts and surgery to try and put him back into civvy street. Then we went to the Lady Rider Foundation which was another charity organization in London for some place to go. What had happened was the Germans had started V-bombing in Britain. Now there were two kinds -

13:00 there was the V1 which was a rocket propelled bomb with about a one ton warhead, and it was visible and could be heard coming and seen. The bomb was carried below the jet engine and the jet exhaust and in

13:30 the air it sounded like a motorbike does sound and it continued on until its inbuilt timer stopped the motor, after which it would glide on for about a hundred feet or more and then point down and destroy whatever. We were, at a time like this

14:00 and they were, we got there on a Friday and it was the worst bombing that they'd ever had from these pilotless bombs. Which they were kind of an aircraft, they had a short wing and we had no answer to them because they were jet propelled and faster than any other aircraft. Tom and I booked into a, we decided we'd go out to friends we'd met in Devon,

14:30 to spend the rest of our leave after we'd had a look around London. We went to bed in this hotel and you could hear there was a continual wailing of air raid sirens and alert for these bombs and after a couple of hours tossing and turning I said, "Are you awake Tom?" He said, "My bloody oath I'm awake." I said,

15:00 "Well I can't sleep." He said, "Let's go up on the roof and we'll see these things." So we went up there and the air raid wardens were up the top, they wouldn't let us up there, so we came down. So that was fruitless. Suddenly there was an enormous explosion about a block or two away, took out an entire block, and Tom and I said, "Let's get out of here." So we went down to Euston Station out to these friends' place in

15:30 Devon, at this little village called East Buddleigh which is near Buddleigh Salterton which is near Exmouth. The most beautiful picture postcard village. Little white painted cottages, thatched rooves, one church, one stream coming through the middle, one little bridge over, one pub, the King's Arms and everybody knew everybody. Len Clemens, our host was the local insurance

16:00 agent, and of course in Devonshire they nearly all drink cider, which they pronounce "zoider", they've got that funny accent. Instead of saying, "I know what you're after," they'd say, "I know what he'd be after," like that. Anyway down to the pub each afternoon for some "zoider" and we'd play darts for drinks or a game called 'shove ha'penny'.

16:30 Mrs Clemens, of course rationing was not so severe down there because most of the people had their own sheep and they had their own apple orchards, they had plenty of cider, and geese and ducks and chickens, and Mrs Clemens looked after us with roast lamb and chickens, like we never got on squadron. We were welcomed there any time. In fact their

17:00 son who was in the merchant navy and who had three ships torpedoed under him, and he survived, we were invited to the his wedding. We pooled our resources and bought him a nice Staffordshire dinner set. That was on another leave. Later came the V2 bombs, they were the ones that launched from

17:30 Germany and France into the stratosphere and their sound came after they went off. In other words they were in the 3,000 kph bracket, I think, in speed once they reached their zenith then they'd plummet into the ground and they were a bigger bomb than the V1 and did a hell of a lot of damage.

18:00 The V1 that I said had short wings, they later developed air craft that would catch them and they were guided by gyroscopes, and in order to upset them the planes, fighter planes flew beside them and with their wings, tipped the wing of the bomb and spun it into earth. So then the Germans came up with this other one.

18:30 Then the launching sites became major targets for the RAF and all that were there. At this time Britain was overflowing with troops of all nations. There were Canadians by the thousands, Australian, New Zealanders, free French, Poles, Czechs, Norwegians and of course all with the one thing in mind of winning this Nazism.

19:00 Food in London was mundane at best, see Britain had been under food rationing for five years and with all the added troops there together even though food supplies were coming in, in great quantities from America the Germans had been on

19:30 top of the convoys bringing them with submarine warfare. It wasn't until the RAF got the planes and the technology to sink subs from the air that we won the Battle of the Atlantic, but foods started to flow more freely. In London I had

20:00 my 21st birthday, I had my 20th incidentally in the West Indies, celebrated with Tom in a nightclub called the Spider's Web, and my 21st, Tom wasn't with me for some reason. I found out that one of my mates from Coolangatta State School was in England and working at Kodak House, our headquarters, so

20:30 I got in touch with him and he and I had my 21st birthday together, that was my whole party. I've got a picture of he and me at it. What did we do? We went to some restaurant in Piccadilly. I think we had some sort of chicken, questionable, it could've quail or anything else, but it cost us 12 and 6, that was a lot

21:00 of money. I had with me the autograph of the Duchess of Windsor which I'd got from her. She did charity work in the Bahamas and she was Patroness of the Bahamas Club which in peace time was the only legalised gaming house in the British Empire. Anyway she hosted this and we lined up and got her autograph.

21:30 She signed, "To Bill, good luck and best wishes Wallace Windsor". And I'd run out of money in London so I sold it to a Yank for five pound sterling, which was a lot of money those days, be worth a lot more money now. I can't remember if that was where I got the 12 and 6 from for my 21st birthday, but we topped that

22:00 off with a few drinks, he and I, George Ricketts. Next question.

You were flying during the day, what other patrols did you have to do?

Regular buoy inspections, they were still called operational mission, and

22:30 general air-sea rescue work. That was all. The war was coming near to an end in Europe at that time. The pressure wasn't on us so much there except for those poor blokes that we left on 518, and another meteorological squadron, their work didn't cease and the dangers didn't cease either.

23:00 Especially with that aircraft, the Halifax. The early Marks, Mark II and Mark IV, the later Halifax Mark III. That's strange isn't it that the earlier Marks were II and IV and the later one was Mark III, it was a much better aircraft and it performed well in the Battle of the Ruhr, together with the Lancaster.

23:30 They were the two main strike force bombers.

When you had to do rescues, how did that work?

Well you were given an area to search which you had to box search, if you understand that. You had to take in that particular area and fly

24:00 it in a pattern so that you covered every inch of that designated search area. If nothing was found you reported back and you were probably given another search area to do the same kind of work. It was tedious because you had to keep your eyes peeled for the tiniest object that might be floating in the water,

24:30 whether it was a man in a raft, well it's not easily seen from a distance, you've nearly got to be over the top. Of course if there are waves and there were usually plenty in the Atlantic, it's a very turbulent ocean, you just couldn't take your eyes off the water for a second otherwise you might miss him. So it was demanding in that respect.

25:00 It was demanding from the pilots and navigators situation too because they had to be spot on, their search patrol area, and the wireless operators job was to get fixes on various radio beacons and transmit those or give them the by-voice to the navigator.

25:30 **How many rescues would you have done?**

We didn't rescue any, we searched and searched and searched, but we didn't find anything that had gone in. Yes some oil slicks and some flotsam but no, we didn't find anyone alive at all. That wasn't uncommon because those aircraft, particularly the Halifaxes, they

26:00 would not float, they'd go straight in. I did 39 operations, flights with 518 and 19 with 281.

Over what period of time?

Two years I was there.

With 281 or overall?

26:30 With 281 and 518 together.

So how were you receiving news about what was happening?

What? In the war?

Yes.

By radio and by, we didn't get many newspapers, mainly by radio and new bulletins in the mess. They'd be pinned up on the wall as would your daily routine orders and whether you were on duty or not on duty.

27:00 **We've had stories of the white feathers being sent to men over in…**

People back here felt that our men over there should be fighting back home. I believe that happened, but it didn't happen to us or anybody that I knew. It was sent by, obviously people who didn't appreciate the fact that once you join any of the services and you are posted to wherever it was,

27:30 that's where you got posted to. You couldn't do anything about that. If they said you're going to England, you're going to England, otherwise you are a traitor or, I don't know, but you'd wind up in gaol. You'd be a conscientious objector at least. The white feather didn't come to me; I don't think it was widespread.

28:00 **What kind of effect did it have when Tom had asked for the transfer and you followed and the tragedy of the two planes hitting, and having heard of your crew going down, what kind of effect did that have on your relationship with Tom?**

Well it welded us together even tighter, I suppose. We were thankful that we,

28:30 well I was thankful to Tom by having initiated the move and of course he was thankful that he had made the move. I suppose you just put it down to fate, what will be, will be. You're either going to go or you're not going to go. The other,

29:00 I said I survived two crashes, the other one was on 518. The aircraft Mark II or Mark IV Halifax had a design defect and they also had in-line Rolls Royce Merlin motors which gave trouble, which is unusual for Rolls Royce, but they did. They used to overheat in one

29:30 engine and the problem seemed to spread from one engine to another. On one occasion all four of our motors stopped together. We were going to plunge, but they picked up again. In flight the Halifax had a habit of yawing, if you know what I mean, the tail would fish tail. It was noticeable mainly if you were in the mid-upper turret

30:00 looking back or aft and you could see this weaving effect or waving effect of the tail. Now on some of the aircraft it was more pronounced than others, however we were lined up for an operation one night and shocking conditions, as was the norm,

30:30 horizontal winds with sleet and cloud and we started the run up for take off, plane control gave us the, so we started to mount air speed down the runway until the tail lifted and as the tail lifted it started to yaw, savagely.

31:00 So bad, Arthur cut the motors and we ran on and braked at the end of the runway, called plane control to tell them that we'd had this trouble and plane control said, "Taxi back and try again." Well we lined up on the end of the runway again and gave it throttle

31:30 and away we went. The thing started to yaw again, but this time we got airborne, we got about 50 feet airborne and the thing went crazy. We were all in our crash positions and the aircraft swerved to the port

32:00 side, dipped a wing, Arthur cut, the second pilot cut the throttles and we crashed port wing down which catapulted us, if you like, screwed around when we hit the ground, we were in marshy bog, very nearly took out flying control and we were hurled about the aircraft,

32:30 I couldn't believe how. I was flung against the main spar, damaged all my right side, a bruise, the rest all had contusions and bruising. No one was killed fortunately and first to get to the door was Jack Masters, the navigator, and one of the navigation lights, the amber one,

33:00 was on, and it looked as though it was thrown over the marsh and bogs, and it looked like the plane was on fire. He said, "Everybody out. She's on fire." You never saw eight blokes get out quicker in all your life. We looked back and it was only the lamp that was on. Now we crashed there with a full load of petrol and depth charges, so had it gone up we'd have been mince meat.

33:30 What happened is the ambulances picked us up, took us to the station hospital, we were checked over for breaks or anything like that and put under 36 hour supervision in the hospital and stood down for 10 days from flying before we were allowed up again. The aircraft was a write-off and in the last seven years I developed an arthritic

34:00 hip osteoarthritis and my doc said to me, “Did you ever injure this hip?” And I said, “Well yeah. Why?” And he said, “How badly?” And I told him about the crash and he said, “That could have damaged the cartilage in the joint and damaged the bone and the underlying cartilage.”

34:30 He said, “It could have triggered the onset of this osteo that you’ve got in the hip now.” He said, “If I was you I’d report that to the DVA [Department of Veterans’ Affairs] and claim that as a war inflicted injury.” I submitted it to the DVA and they accepted it as war incurred and I got a pension in respect of it. So that was crash

35:00 two, one in the Bahamas and one there on 518. Shocking aircraft.

Did you have any other close calls?

We did in the air, and as I told you the time we were lost that was only one of many times, and on other occasions we’d have to quit the operation due to bad weather and divert it to other airfields. One time to

35:30 Wick in northern Scotland, another time to Ballykelly in Northern Ireland, another time to Banff and it was a hellish time. You see if you are fighting an enemy aircraft attacking you at least you’ve got a weapon and you’ve got a chance of knocking him down, but if during weather, savage weather, you can do nothing.

36:00 **Were you ever shot at?**

No. We didn’t see any enemy aircraft; we were all up in the north and over the Atlantic. And, as I said, it was late in the war, it was ’44 and ’45 and the back of the German air force and army had been broken.

36:30 **Was there an occasion where you had dropped significantly up in the air?**

I’m going to tell you about one. We were out one night and we’d gone through these extreme conditions that I’ve mentioned so I’d be only reiterating if I went through them again. But in the darkness and the blackness you don’t know what’s ahead of you, and there is one savage storm cloud, cumuli nimbus, they come up mushroom like, billowing up, and they anvil out at the top when they

37:00 get to about 25,000 feet. Well without knowing it we flew into the top. It’s an upsurge of air and the inside is a vacuum and we were sucked into the cu-nim and the motors started to roar because they had no air to chew and we had a free-fall from 18,000 feet and came out at 4,000 feet.

37:30 In effect we had dropped 14,000 feet in a free-fall. We were held to the top, as the aircraft went down we rose out of our chairs, our seats, we sort of plastered against the roof of the fuselage with pencils and rulers and pads and harnesses and parachutes all over the place. It

38:00 was a very exhausted skipper who came out at the finish.

What kind of time period was that fall?

One couldn’t say it could’ve been five, 10, 15, I’ve got no idea, it’d be pretty quick.

What were you thinking?

Death. It’s hard to think of anything other than how the hell are we going to get out of this. Couldn’t talk

38:30 to anybody, so that was one of the horrifying things that happened. I’ve got that in my document.

You talked about fate being one of the things helped you mentally get through your experiences? Were there any other kind of coping mechanisms or beliefs?

No, there weren’t any.

39:00 What happened was, while we were on 281 on the air-sea rescue squadron, Germany surrendered. The news was received as you might imagine in England and United Kingdom, joyously, and everybody went absolutely berserk.

39:30 Effigies of Hitler were burnt. Crowds went out dancing in the street, hugging one another, kissing one another, bars opened, lights came on for the first time and the revelry was not just in the towns, in the cities and the villages, but in all the air force and army bases, it was all the same. The messes were thrown open and the drinks were on the house.

40:00 In short order we were pulled out of squadrons, all squadrons, all the Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians in particular, and sent to holding units to await shipping back home where we thought we’re going to have to now fight the Japs. Another co-incidence

40:30 happened

Tape 6

00:35 Well I did tell you earlier about the coincidence of the American sailor knowing my Dad. This coincidence was probably even more remarkable, but certainly as remarkable. I joined up with a fellow named Mick Windess who, after the war, came back, he founded the Twin Towns Services Club,

01:00 remained it's chairman of directors for 48 years. He was involved very much with life saving, with the ambulance, with Legacy, with the RSL [Returned and Services League] and many other things. Now Mick was two years older, he was a Coolangatta schoolboy but he was two years older than me, and he joined up before I did in ground staff, where he became a clerk

01:30 administrator, in administration. Anyway he decided to get out of ground staff and become a trainee aircrew, aircrew trainee, so we went in on the same aircrew intake, which was good, so there was some, I was aware that I knew somebody even before I met Tom. And,

02:00 the difference was when we graduated from initial training, that Mick was categorised to be a pilot, to train as a pilot whilst I, and he trained in Australia so I knew not where he went, and of course I went through Canada and the West Indies and England. So immediately war finished in Europe, VE [Victory in Europe] came and all the celebrations, we were pulled out of squadrons and sent to these holding units.

02:30 I was sent to a holding unit in Beckles in Suffolk, now that was awaiting accommodation at Brighton's embarkation depot where we were, had to wait for ships. So the whole thing was waiting on shipping to get home, and you could imagine what so many troops wanting to go back to Canada, New Zealand, Australia, that shipping was under pressure. Well I checked in, or got

03:00 my clearances in, to Beckles, now getting clearances in and getting clearances out might take explaining. To get posted from one unit to another you had to go down to the orderly room and get clearance forms which had to take to the various medical section, arms section, hand back any pistols that you had and everything, and get your clearances all signed and checked. Then when you arrived into your posting,

03:30 wherever that was, you had to get your clearances in, so you had to get your forms and clear in. So as soon as I cleared in, I went to bed that night, I went down to breakfast next morning and sat right opposite Mick, after all that time. So he'd been on an RAF Sunderland

04:00 squadron down in South Wales, and we came home together and it was there that we resolved that we wouldn't join any of the breakaway associations that were being formed, like Aircrew Europe or Aircrew Association, we'd just join the RSL, which we did. So that was the, now the situation at Beckles and the holding units was this, you had no duties, they

04:30 had no, nothing, no training facilities, so we were given permanent leave if you like, and sustenance. They didn't want us on the squadron, and we didn't want to be there but they knew if we went out it would cost us money, so apart from our pay, one which we got once a fortnight, on the alternate week we'd go back and collect sustenance. Now,

05:00 the situation of employment throughout the Commonwealth was, and the world, was the lack of applicant, of every place was short staffed, particularly breweries, and the J Arthur Rank organisation, movie, they wanted extras for their Cleopatra, 'Anthony and Cleopatra' movie. So a lot of our blokes took temporary jobs as

05:30 extras on Anthony and Cleopatra and a lot took jobs as sign on by the day, paid by the day at Watney's brewery. Well most of them started off with mops doing the walls, and all that, the tiles, and got sacked about two o'clock, all full. Full of the product but others went on leave to London and sight seeing throughout Britain. Tom and I

06:00 did a bit of that. The Tower of London we couldn't get into, it was locked off for the war and the art gallery the same thing. But Westminster Abbey was open and places like that, all full of interest. And so it was, oh, and there was some noted Australian cricketers and tennis players in the RAAF including Lindsay Hassett and Bill Brown

06:30 and a bowler named Cec Pepper. And an unofficial test match was played at Lords. To which we went, that was, you know, after five or six years, no test matches, and no sport, here was this happening, whilst there was an unofficial sort of an Australia versus England tennis tournament arranged at Wimbledon. But the cricket was terrific and it was a three match

07:00 tournament which wound up a draw because it was, one test each with one halved, so one drawn rather. So all that was good and finally we got a call that

07:30 a posting from the holding unit to Brighton in Suffolk. That was where we were billeted in the Grand Hotel on Brighton's beach front, still there. There were two hotels, the Grand, and I just can't think of the other, the name of the other, but they were close to Brighton pier. Anyway,

08:00 people in England don't know surf the way we know surf and their beach was pebbles not sand and what we didn't know was the temperature of the water. Anyway Tom and I, I don't know how we got swimmers but somehow we, whether we went in our shorts or not, but we were going to show these pommies that were sitting in beach chairs on the rocks, with their trouser legs rolled up how Australians would

08:30 enter the water - we'd sprint to the waters edge and plunge in. Well we started to sprint on these rocks and we found that we were going to get stone blisters, so we tippy toed down to the water's edge, so okay, now we'll show them how Aussies plunge into the water, god, we plunged in and lost our breath, it was like ice. Oh you could hardly breathe, so that was the end of our effort to display our Australian

09:00 surfing style and there was no surf of course. What else can I tell you? There was an assemblage of all sorts of blokes in Brighton and from there of course we could go back to London. Oh, by the way, the favourite watering hole of all of Australians was a place called the Codgers Club,

09:30 it was off Fleet Street and that was just around the corner from where Kodak and Australia House was and on VE day a bunch of the Australians were in the Codgers Club and they were drinking to anything they could drink to, but victory in Europe, and they staggered

10:00 out into Fleet Street, 50 or so of them. And the girls up in the Times Building were waving frantically and throwing tickertape and one or two of the girls threw out some coins, and one of the Aussies looked up and said, "Ten bob she heads them." Well, that started a gambling school, two-up game, in the middle of Fleet Street,

10:30 which attracted more Australians out, and suddenly there's about oh, 100 Australians and New Zealanders in a circle blocking the traffic in one of London's busiest thoroughfares, Fleet street. Well, then interested Londoners joined in and now you've got a herd of people with heads going up and heads looking down, and the coins going up and money changing hands, well suddenly a posse of police came in file,

11:00 with an inspector in the lead, and he's got there and he's come up and said, "'Ello, 'ello, what's going on here?" And when he saw what it was, he called his other troops over, they went into the middle of the ring, everybody thought they were going to be gaoled for obstructing traffic and causing public nuisance, what do you think he did, he got the other policeman to link hands in the

11:30 middle like this and said, "Stand back, stand back, give them room, let them go." That's how the thing was and the London bobbies right throughout were terrific to us. Asked them directions and they'd go out of their way to get you there, buses, on the buses, you usually had to pay the conductor or conductress, it was mainly women conductors because the men were all at war.

12:00 And we'd hold out the money for the fare like that they'd walk straight past us, would not take our money. You could get into a taxi and say I want to go to Soho, or I want to go wherever, and you'd get out and you'd say to the taxi driver, "How much?" "Don't worry mate, the last Yank paid for it." And the Australians were very well treated that way.

12:30 And, of course at the Codgers Club, you'd meet blokes you'd trained with who'd gone to other squadrons. It was a real get together place for Aussies, a little part of Australia away from Australia, and Australia House much the same. And Australian headquarters was great for a lot of reasons. Well they had always

13:00 displayed the casualty lists there; you could find out who went and who was missing, and so forth. Oh, and near Brighton was Eastbourne which is where horseracing took place, and of course that interested the Aussies. Another thing I didn't tell you about, leaving Australia, we're on the Westpoint, so I'm going back some, as things come into mind, that's quite in order.

13:30 **Yes that's fine, no worries.**

Yeah, well, you could imagine, 3000 blokes aboard who, apart from the occasional boxing bouts that we had, the boys formed a concert party and presented concerts and there were two escorting padres, one Catholic and one Protestant, who had us in fits. They sit together up on the yardarm on the foredeck and they'd tell some of the bawdiest gags

14:00 ever you heard and at night time what to do. Well on a crowded troop ship, now a troop ship carrying that many, all the state rooms had been converted into, if you like, dormitories with bunks four or five deep and not much passage way between and not much breadth in the bunks and especially getting near to and on the equator,

14:30 both sides of it, unbearably hot down below. But what the blokes did, down on the C deck, bottom deck, was the gambling casino or it had become the gambling casino. And Aussies, and don't mind that and in that smoke filled C deck you could get any bets you wanted on crown and anchor, two up,

15:00 dice, poker or a game called pontoon, which is a variant of black jack. And of course two up was the big go, and we had a fellow with us who was wearing a Military Medal, Smithy, we called him the Mad Barber, and I'll tell you why. Smithy had been in the 7th or 9th Division in the

15:30 African desert and had won the Military Medal, and when they came back to Australia he opted to transfer to the air force and train for aircrew. Well he was a daredevil and Smithy like all of us, we all wore kangaroo skin money belts, and Smithy was unbelievable in the gambling,

16:00 and you'd always know the next day whether he'd won or lost because the money belt would either be bulging with notes or flopping empty. Now if it was empty Smithy would be out on the fore deck with a butter box and a pair of scissors clipping hair for one and six a time to build up his bank for the night after. Now when we got to Canada, Smithy went on to train as a pilot, so we lost him, didn't know where he went. And,

16:30 when we went to Beckles, here's Smithy the newly promoted pilot officer, DFC [Distinguished Flying Cross], DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal], Military Medal, so he showed the same daring and dash in the air as he had done in the two up game. So I've always wondered what happened to Smithy but it was a great row of decorations, especially the DF, there were a lot of DFCs

17:00 handed out, not so many DFMs, and Military Medals were a very hard medal to win in the army. So there was one of the characters. Next question.

Was there any aspect on the celebrations of VE day that sort of personal celebrations that you had that you haven't sort of already?

Yes well I, everyone was hugging and kissing everybody,

17:30 dancing in the streets and everything. And I met a girl who's name I can't recall, who I spent that celebration in London, so late that I missed the last or she missed the last tube, underground railway out to Hammersmith where she lived. So I said I'd see her home, without knowing where Hammersmith was. Well I think we left the middle of London at about 12 or

18:00 12:30 at night, crossed the Thames Bridge I think it was, or one of the bridges, Waterloo, one of them and kept walking and walking and walking, and walking and I thought I'd never get this girl home until it was about four in the morning or something when we got to her door. So I thought, well now, I might be invited in and go to sleep, wrong. She said, "Thanks Bill,

18:30 good night." And boom. So now I'm in limbo where to go, I'm dog tired ready to go to sleep on the street, so as I said, a few of the lights had come on in London, not many, but the police lights had come on. Well I came across a police station and I went in and the sergeant was at the desk and he said, "What's the matter Aussie, got something to report?" And I said, "Yeah."

19:00 He said, "What?" I said, "I'm buggered." I told him about the night's celebration and the walk home and I said, "Do you have a spare cell with a bed in it that I could have a sleep?" Well I told you about the London bobbies they were terrific, he said, "Come around into the canteen son." Well there were other policemen there, and they made me coffee and gave me biscuits and they made up a special bed for me in one of the cells,

19:30 so I spent VE night in a cell with the door open. When I got up they made me bacon and eggs breakfast and on my way. So, oh, and I was in Brighton when VP [Victory in the Pacific] came, or VJ [Victory over Japan] if you want. Again, the same business, not as big

20:00 for the British as it was for us. We had been under the impression certainly that we were going to go home and fight the Japs and of course, the atom bomb attended to all that, two of them. Oh, and the Aussies and the New Zealanders did have a celebration. Of course letter writing home as a big part of then, and there was a thing I have to comment on,

20:30 and congratulate the postal authorities on, Australia Post and others that were involved. That our mail was good, not many of our letters were censored, we got our mail through in about eight or nine days which we thought pretty good, so a big commendation for the postal authorities. The next thing that

21:00 happened of course was the waiting for a ship, which duly arrived, the [SS] Stratheden into Portsmouth, which was a P & O [Pacific and Orient] boat, in peacetime and the [SS] Andes into Southampton and that took a lot of pressure off because that two and a half thousand of us went aboard the Stratheden, a similar amount amongst the, go onto the Andes.

21:30 And the long awaited home, with both boats sailing almost simultaneously and the rumour went around that this would be a boat race, and the Andes was behind us all the way, crossed the Bay of Biscay. I must say too, this way, on the voyage over to America and the flight across to England,

22:00 across the Atlantic on the voyage home, we had perfect weather all the way. Bay or Biscay, which can normally be rough, was smooth, and we rounded Spain and through the Straits of Gibraltar, which gave us a chance to have a look at the rock. First stop was Valetta in Malta. We could not enter the harbour because of the number of shipwrecks that were blocking

22:30 it. Of course Malta had been under terrific bombardment for years early in the war and there were so many masts and funnels protruding out of the water it looked like a burnt out forest. So I think we took aboard a few other airmen from there, from Malta, and before we left England, amongst us there was some

23:00 Dutch nationals that had been, found their way back to Britain from the Dutch East Indies when the Japs overran that, so we had a contingent of about 40 or 50 of those Dutchmen. Strangely they came to Coolangatta, after we landed. So next port was Port Said, at the head of the

23:30 Suez, same thing as Valetta. Oh the number of wrecked ships there was unbelievable; however we got through the docks and then into the Red Sea, pulled into Trincomalee, and then into the Gulf of Aden, and then all eyes at night were out looking for the Southern Cross. And then the long straight run from Aden to Fremantle.

24:00 And of course as soon as we knew that Fremantle was about to show up that morning, everybody was to the front of the ship, looking for the first sight of Aussie, you know. And the first thing that happened was that this great pole sticking out of the ocean, it happened to be the radio mast of one of Perth's radio stations which was on Rottnest Island.

24:30 Anyway we couldn't wait to get into Fremantle and as soon as the ship docked we were allowed off and two things.

Righto so you've seen the mast at Rottnest Island.

At Rottnest Island and of course that was our first glimpse of anything Australian since we'd ever left home and of course we knew that Fremantle wasn't much further on. So

25:00 I'm not sure what time it was, of day, that we docked at Fremantle, but naturally we were given leave straight away and a rush for two things. Number one was for a phone to phone home, number two was to order the biggest steak you could find in town. And the closest one, well you could imagine with two and a half thousand fellows, and the phones those days were manually

25:30 operated, hello girls, you know, just a moment I'll dial your number. And the queues to the phones were incredible and so it was hours before we got our line to ring home and of course you could imagine the joy at the other end, apart from our own joy at being back in Aussie. But still three thousand miles or something from home but still Aussie. Next thing, the nearest

26:00 café, where we went in and I'll never forget this, whether the steak was top quality or not, I could not recall, all I can remember is it was the best steak I've ever had in my life, and that it might have been mediocre. But it was a great whopping T bone, two eggs, fried onions, grilled tomatoes, the works, and

26:30 the price, four and six. That's 45 cents in today's terms. So, not much else to tell about Fremantle. We did not get into Perth, we sailed again.

What about the public reception?

No nothing big there. But that was to happen later, in two places.

27:00 From Fremantle around the west of Australia into the Great Australian Bight, and somewhere, before we got to Port Melbourne, the announcement came over the ship's loud speaker system that we were going to slow down and wait for the Andes to catch up because she was so many miles behind.

27:30 And the warning was given, do not rush to one side of the ship, as you might send it out. Well the warning went unheeded because as soon as the Andes did appear, everybody over onto the port side and the ship did heel, you know, it was quite a, quite a thing. So everybody realised what happened and took their places. And the Andes and the Stratheden sailed majestically into Port Melbourne, where we

28:00 unloaded the South Aussies and the Vics. We did not get off the ship so, but what that meant was that those that were on the Andes, the remnants were transferred onto the Stratheden so now we were one ship again and one compliment, and then around to Sydney, well, can't tell you the feeling as out of the morning mists loomed

28:30 Sydney Heads. And we sailed in through the heads, to an armada of waiting ships, all sizes, small craft, yachts, runabouts, launches, harbour ferries, even big ships down at the international wharf all sounding fog horns, whistles,

29:00 all sorts of sounds, a fly over of aircraft and the water fire brigade boats with their hoses putting up great big jets into the air. It was a magnificent entry into Sydney and cheering crowds on the wharf and there was no messing about in Sydney. Off got the New South Welshmen and

29:30 that left now only the Queenslanders, and over to Bradfield Park onto a train and then overnight journey through to Redbank near Ipswich, which was an army base. Well, unbeknownst to us, oh, wrong, on the train we were advised that at Redbank the

30:00 RACQ [Royal Automobile Club of Queensland] would have assembled about two or three hundred private vehicles with their owners, to take us on a motorcade. Well we were allotted three to a car, with the driver that made four. And from the south western suburbs in to the city, people lined the streets.

30:30 And waved flags, cheered, and then we got into Queens Street, chokablock, the office buildings, the girls were throwing ticker tape, and the crowds in the streets, clapping, cheering, waving flags. Tossing

in bunches of bananas, mangoes,

31:00 pineapples, stuff we hadn't seen in, you know, and that continued all the way Petrie Bight, down the valley the same out across Sandgate Road, and finally to Sandgate where it was that we were to grab out kit bags from the car, and form up into ranks to be addressed by the station commander.

31:30 Well, that all went out the window, because as soon as we saw our families, you know. It was embracing and tears of joy all over the place and there was no address by the CO. So then we were given leave, prior to discharge.

32:00 Firstly, after the leave we had to present ourself for a full medical because they didn't want to be, you know… So once we were medically cleared, okay we were free to go and we were no longer Pilot Officer Stafford, although I, with the others that you

32:30 saw in the picture, I rejoined as reserve air force and we retained our air force ranks, the ranks that we had, incidentally, during the war were temporary ranks, not permanent, but generally, anybody that stayed on kept that rank anyway. I had left home aged 18

33:00 and a bit, and my Dad anticipating me to have grown out of everything had got rid of all my clothes, given them away to the poor or anything that was pretty new he sold out of the shop because stock was hard. I had no clothes and he was desperately in need of staff. So I had no leave, I went straight in and started serving in my uniform until I got clothing together and a suit made. Oh that was one of the things

33:30 the was part of the repatriation deal, a free suit, was paid for by the Defence Department or DVA. What else, oh, then came in the final pay out, deferred pay and gratuity. Now deferred pay was paid to any serviceman serving outside of Australia

34:00 from the day he left, it amounted to two shillings and six pence a day, 25 cents a day, which at the time didn't sound too bad on top of our pay of five bob a day, six bob a day, and that and gratuity was a hand out I think from, well I'm not sure from where that was derived, gratuity, whether it was for, from the sale of

34:30 things that were plundered by the enemy, you know, artworks or anything like that, I don't know but there was a gratuity and together mine totalled in the vicinity of 380 pounds. Fair amount of money to get in one lump and that enabled me to make my first real estate purchase. I bought a, I got a bank loan, and bought a fully furnished house

35:00 in Coorparoo, Wiley Avenue, for 650 pounds, and I rented that, for a good rental per week and I soon paid that out. That was my first real estate investment, it turned out very good. At Amberley,

35:30 the Amberley reserve involvement incurred a weekend free travel and pay at our old rate to keep abreast of local, of improvements or anything in the RAAF. That

36:00 involved a couple of flights in the bigger version of the Lancaster called the Lincoln but after a couple of years of that, I thought oh, and I got married and kids were starting to arrive I gave up. So, broadly that's it.

Who was, were your mum and dad there at Sandgate to greet you?

Dad was, Mum wasn't, as I

36:30 told you, she suffered and they'd kept it from me, my Dad and relatives, that this had happened and it was a shock to me when I got home, but she was home waiting with a meal cooked and everything.

Can you remember seeing your dad that day?

Oh unbelievable, unbelievable yeah.

And what did you do, did you go back home to Coolangatta?

37:00 He'd got a taxi up because he didn't drive a taxi from Coolangatta to Brisbane and I went home by taxi with my kit bag.

That would have cost a small fortune wouldn't it?

Yeah, it would have. Well spent. But that reception in Brisbane was absolutely unbelievable, unbelievable, the whole route, which is quite a long one from Redbank to Sandgate, but there weren't many streets that didn't have people in it.

37:30 And we hadn't expected anything like it, what a welcome home, and I'm proud to be an Aussie.

Was Tom with you on the return journey?

Yep.

Where did you both part your ways?

There.

At Sandgate?

Yes, but it wasn't long before he came and spent a holiday down with us, with his wife and kid. But when he got home his child was now five

38:00 and didn't know his father and that took a bit of getting through.

How emotional was that saying goodbye after going through everything together?

Well, we kept in touch and we always did keep in touch, his funeral was about five years ago and I went to Gympie and I gave the eulogy.

38:30 Was a tough one. And worse than that, it wasn't a cremation it was an in ground burial and I had to watch him go down. I'm still in touch with a lot of my mates. We called ourselves the Winnipeg Wags, and about 20 years ago, I'll tell you something that happened.

39:00 One of them Billy Mudguts Samuels, gave me a phone call, and I had…

Tape 7

00:32 **Tell us about some of the blokes you've kept in contact with.**

Yes, well I'm still in touch with many of my, the surviving Winnipeg Wags, and I'll go back about 20 years which takes us back to what 1960 something, about the late '60's. I'd a phone call from a fellow called Bill Samuels, nicknamed Mudguts,

01:00 Sammy Samuels, and I said, "Gee, it's good to hear from you Sammy. It's you know, it's so long since I've seen you, where are you?" He said, "I'm here on the coast at Currumbin," he said, "I've got a Currumbin beach front." And I was living at Palm Beach at that time, which is just around the corner. I said, "You got a nice place?" He said, "Yeah," he said, "Bert Lewis owns it."

01:30 Well Bert was one of the blokes, he said, "Bert will be up next week." I said, "Terrific." So I said, "Come around to dinner." So he and his wife, Di came around to dinner that night, and we met Di for the first time, and Gwen met Sammy for the first time, and so we had a wonderful dinner. And, I said, "And you said Berty will be up next week." Battling Bert from Balmain, and he said, "Yes."

02:00 I said, "Well there you are," I said, "there's a nucleus of a get together, a reunion." He said, "Who do you know?" I said, "there's Shappy in Brisbane, there's Tom in Gympie, there's Terry Fleming in Innisfail, there's three, that I can get to straight away." I said, "There's Doctor Lesby out at St George," I said, "there's four." He said, "Well I'll have a ring around." Within a week

02:30 we had 12, two from, three from Victoria, a couple from Sydney and the one's that I mentioned. And we met in Bert's unit on Currumbin Beach front which was a big one, and of course there was 12 wives, well Bert's wife and Pat and Sammy's wife Di.

03:00 They looked after the catering, the boys looked after, Sammy and Bert looked after the grog and we met at six p.m. on a Friday night and drinks, there was never one out of our hands at any time. And at two in the morning we still had drinks in our hands, we were still drinking, but not one of us drunk, but the amazing point as each came into the room,

03:30 we'd say, "Who's that, which one, holy Moses, it's Maxy Symes," you know "Jesus, George Williamson," and we it was like… That it was fantastic, this get together so we decided we'd have one the following year and the Twin Towns would be the venue so each of those 12 blokes then knew more.

04:00 Well, with wives and all our first reunion at Twin Towns was 63. Oh and Twin Towns spoilt us they gave us the Anzac room they gave us the best menu, they printed souvenir menus of which I can show you. They usually charge 200 rental on the room, no charge, they usually have a charge on the amplification microphone system, no charge.

04:30 I took audio tapes of World War II music and of course a couple of the bawdy songs converted word wise for the women, the clean versions. And oh, we had a Winnipeg's Wags song, do you want to hear it?

Please.

"The CO gets his turkey,

05:00 the MO gets his duck, the officers get their poultry they always were in luck. The sergeants get their bread and cheese and mop up all they can, but all we poor old airmen get is bread and raspberry jam. So a little bit of bread for breakfast, a bit you can hardly see, a little bit of meat for dinner and sweet FA [Fuck All] for tea. And we are getting thinner and thinner

05:30 every day and one of these bright moonlight nights we'll simply fade away. So goodbye CO Mixton and WO Wiley too, since we have been in wireless school we've been F'd around by you. Your drilling is a failure your discipline is a farce, and you can shove your wireless right up the Khyber Pass." You like that? And we sing that at each.

06:00 The reunions were such a success, we ran it again every second year, but our numbers declined through natural attrition and some were getting feeble, until it got to a state where we were getting mainly wives of the blokes that had died come along. But we still held up

06:30 until last year and we had our last one with the sons and daughters making up the numbers. Tom's wife and son and daughter came, Peggy and a good friend of mine, Mick Byrne in Brisbane who's son Michael Byrne is a QC [Queen's Counsel],

07:00 he was the Deputy State Prosecutor, they've been very good attenders, dearly loves a bet, does Mick. And a son Michael is, he is, what is he, he's President of the Greyhounds Association of Australia in that way. So the reunions have been a great link

07:30 and with one or two of them I'm on e-mail contact. So, that's a little follow to the war. The other good thing is now that on the Anzac Day parades here, my daughter Sue, her husband Geoff, their two children, and my grandson Ben, march with me.

08:00 I was the proudest one in the march, oh, and my big son Bill, in all there was eight of us.

There's a lot of talk about kids and grandkids marching on Anzac Day, what's your opinion?

Oh to be encouraged. I've marched ever since I was in cub scouts, a scout cub, and I was always proud to line up because my Dad was a World War I veteran.

08:30 And the only march, marches that I missed were while I was away overseas on active service, and that's because there weren't any but we still honoured the day, the Aussies that were on squadron, in the traditional way, two up and drinks. Since I've come home I've joined the RSL, and the RAAF Association, who I think recommended me for this interview.

09:00 I have not missed a march here except one when I was in hospital with this hip operation, and what do you think happened there, this was at John Flynn Hospital, Tugun, marvellous hospital and I was three days out of the operations, I had drains in me

09:30 and all the things that you, following a big op, and the hospital chaplain came to see me and said, "Mr Stafford, you were a flying officer in World War II?" I said, "Yes." "Well the person who usually gives the, we have an Anzac service here in the hospital, and the person who usually gives the Anzac address can't make it this year.

10:00 Would you make that address?" "Well," I said, "that's only three days away." "And," I said, "here I've got a hip, I can't even get out of bed." She said, "Well you'll probably be able to make it in a wheelchair," she said, "we're really stuck." So Gwen was a stenographer, she was in civvy life, and she came in I said,

10:30 "They've asked me to do an Anzac Day address here in the hospital, will you take down some notes and we'll do a draft." So she took down a sketch and typed it up and brought it back to me, and I went to work for two days on that and knocked it into shape, gave it to her back and she ran it off, and on the computer. And

11:00 on the day, they came up and got me into a wheelchair, wheeled me down to the first floor level where they have this staff meeting room, it's a big one, holds about 200 people. Well there was about 120 people at this and patients, others in wheelchairs and when it came time for the address, they wheeled me up to the front, in front of the microphone, and I read my address

11:30 and when the service was over, the last post sounded and all that, they wheeled me out onto the balcony overlooking the reception area, nice airy place. Well along the wall they had beer of every description and all along the wall in ice buckets, in ice things,

12:00 and the man that wheeled me out was the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of the hospital who congratulated me, so he stood by, he said, "Bill can I get you a drink?" I said, "Is the pope a Catholic?" He said, "What'll you have?" I said, "Well I'm a scotch drinker, but," I said, "Anzac Day I go to the old traditional rum." So, he said, "I'll go and get some." Well a couple of other people came around,

12:30 including the Chaplain and a few other mates who were there in the hospital, and all congratulations, and the CEO came back and he said, "Bill I'm sorry there's no rum, here, but he said I think I know where there's some, hang on." So he's disappeared. More congratulations and people feeding me sandwiches and stuff and he came back, he said "Bill,

13:00 there's no rum," he said, "there as only this." Bacardi. "Well," I said, "that's white rum, that'll do, any port in a storm." So he got a glass and before I could say anything, it's about that deep with Bacardi. So this is the boss of the hospital, which was Wayne, what do they call it, what's the hospital crew, Nicholas.

Mayne Nicholas.

13:30 Mayne Nicholas hospital which was his employer, he said, “Now what do you have with it?” “Oh,” I said, “traditionally with coke, with rum you have coke.” So he said, “There isn’t any, wait a minute there is.” So he disappeared a third time, and he came back with a carton of it cold, so he’s topped that up, well went on talking and suddenly that’s all gone and before I could say anything it’s filled up

14:00 to the bloody, that much Bacardi again, sufficient to say it wasn’t long before that, two thirds of that bottle had disappeared down my gullet. By now I am starting to get chirpy and it’s time to go, and I wasn’t going to go without having Anzac Day. I had my ribbon bar, rather my miniature medals; I had my dog tags around my neck. And I had smuggled in two

14:30 hip flasks of scotch whisky in my travelling kit. And, so time came for the breaking up of the, of that session, and Paul the bloke that wheeled me down in the wheelchair, he said, “You want to be careful.” I said, “Why?” He said, “They’ve got a

15:00 breathalyser in the lift.” So the lift took me back up to the room, and I was plunked into bed and as I got in, I had the TV up there and there was the march, the Anzac march in Brisbane and I saw a couple of my mates on it, so I didn’t miss my Anzac Day after all. As I say, it’s the only one I didn’t march in, but I certainly had a big part in it.

15:30 And I thought, well I’ll continue on, so I broke open one the flasks of whisky and then the next one and felt no pain. So I had my Anzac Day, so that was good, and now to have the family marching with me, that’s fantastic, in answer to your question.

And what do you think about on Anzac Day?

I remember those I served with, and particularly remember

16:00 those that died and those that have died since, and that’s what it’s all about. And mateship. And of course memories, and when that last post is sounding that’s where the thoughts are.

And how do you see Anzac Day as travelling

16:30 **these days?**

Getting bigger and bigger and bigger, it’s an unfortunate thing that a lot of the Vietnam blokes got a chip on their shoulder, seem to, and haven’t taken part in RSL organised things, but gradually now they are. And when it comes down to it, they’re going to be the ones, the Korean blokes and the Vietnam blokes that are going to have to be the ones that take our places when we go.

17:00 So it’s important and then will come the Gulf War blokes and on and on it goes.

And how long were you involved in the CMF [Citizens’ Military Force] for after you got out?

It wasn’t the CMF it was the Citizens’ Air Force, CAF.

CAF yeah sorry.

Probably two years, I’m not sure.

Was there any thought when the Korean War started?

No, no, not with family, not at all.

17:30 And there was no call to do so. You see, compared to World War II, they were small events, you know on one night in March, 1944, the RAF lost, I think it’s 534 aircrew in an air raid on Nuremburg,

18:00 and it was a total disaster, it was the worst on one night. Now that’s more than was killed in the entire Vietnamese War. In one night, our most famous bomber squadron was 460 Squadron, they were based at Binbrook, and they lost over 1000 aircrew out of the one squadron.

18:30 In three years, nearly one a day, one man a day but every time a Lancaster was shot up, well seven men straight away, so if 10 aircraft went down, there’s 70.

Can you talk a little bit about the dynamic of an aircrew? How important that team?

19:00 Well, it can’t be stressed strongly enough that the teamwork and the camaraderie within a crew was a major factor in it’s success or not. That was the prime reason for the method that the Empire Air Training Scheme gave us, that six weeks

19:30 in operational training to crew up, to make our own, self select, they realised the importance of it. See when Japan, when war started, Australia didn’t have many training facilities and we were sending our, the first two years of the war were spent in the armies, fighting in

20:00 North Africa, Greece, Crete… Greece and Crete and the Middle East and that was on land, sea and air, and in the air, over Germany, France Belgium and Holland from England. That was our involvement until the Japs came into the war. Well in order to get the handle, the numbers that were applying for enlistment,

20:30 it required the… Empire Air Training Scheme was set up in agreement between Australia, England, Canada and South Africa or Kenya to train aircrew. Well Australia needed 49 airfields, now if you imagine the size of that project.

21:00 When an airfield's constructed it's got to have hospital, administrative quarters, mess halls, recreation halls, officers mess and quarters, airmen's mess and quarters. Enormous. 49 were required, so that brought about places like Kingaroy, Cootamundra, Temora

21:30 Narromine and Narrandera, those places, Parkes, Dubbo, Evans Head, Maryborough, to name some. So, and involved most of our fellows, such a lot of our fellows having to train firstly in Kenya but then in Canada as I did.

22:00 I don't know how many thousands went through Canada but there were many thousands. They were given initial training here in Australia and taken for the rest of their course to their graduation with wings in Canada before going to various operational training units. Canada's prairies were absolutely a sight. Travelling by bus once, I think we saw three RAF bases

22:30 at the one time from the one bus. It meant that their circuits interlocked which was a bit disastrous. That happened to us too in the Northern Ireland where we had two airfields interlocking circuits, it was Mullock Moor and Limavady. They had interlocking circuits but fortunately there were no prangs, no collisions. Next.

23:00 **Can you tell us about the Fleet Fort aircraft and aerobatics insane?**

Oh yes, that was, yeah. It was a very nifty little aircraft, smart looking and good performer, very stable and ideal for the purpose. I think it was built for training wireless operators because he had his own compartment in the cupola behind the

23:30 pilot and my pilot had returned from Malta with the DFC and he was a daredevil and the first thing we had to do when we were airborne was to wind out what they called the trailing aerial. Now that would trail behind the aircraft something like 30, 40 feet, something like that and had about four or five heavy sinkers on the end to, and of course you had to tune to that

24:00 to it's length, tune your set to that. You first tuned your receiver and then back tune your transmitter to that. This fellow would say to me, "You feel like a bit of a spin?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Oh do a few climbs and

24:30 loops." I said, "Alright by me." So I wound in the trailing aerial, I said, "The trailing aerial's now in." And he said, "Well here we go." And put it into a steep dive and then an enormous pull up until he did a stall turn at the top, then he corkscrewed down again. Oh it was like being on a roller coaster, only better, it got me up, you know.

25:00 Some blokes could get sick. I said, "You can go for your life, this is great." And I had several experiences like that with him, it was terrific.

How hard did he push it?

Oh to it's limits. Absolutely, god, he, whatever you could do with it, barrel roll, loop and corkscrew, all those type of things, side slip, yeah.

25:30 **About, like with the aircrew guys like at some point in training did you guys put up your hand for particular jobs in aircrew?**

No, we were already categorised. Our job was hard and fast. We were wireless, air gunners, that's what, you could if wished, applied for re-mustering and then undergo further training and you become a pilot, which was unlikely, or perhaps an observer or a navigator.

26:00 But, or a bomb aimer, there is, the original categories were pilot, observer, which was the navigator, and bomb aimer, and wireless air gunner, well eventually in about 1944, or it might have been '43, they broke those up. Then they had straight air gunners, straight wireless operators, who wore an S wing, as signals.

26:30 Of course the air gunner just the AG, the observer was broken down into N Navigator, and B bomb aimer and the flight engineer got an E wing, so you had those various categories.

Can you explain to us how your role on the aircraft, in operations changed, being a wireless air gunner, you kind of got two jobs there, can you explain to us how that rotates?

Well we did long trips and

27:00 to relieve the strain on the eyes and the boredom of being in one position, each few hours or whatever,

we'd change position of the, and from listening out on radio, the wireless operator air gunner at the radio would say, "Go to the rear gun." And they'd change. We'd disconnect oxygen if we were above 10,000 and plug into the new position and switch, we'd

27:30 switch positions.

So it was normally just the two wireless air gunners?

Three. But once we got into the meteorological squadron we carried a WOM, that was a Wireless Operator Mechanic and the extra met observer.

So in what way did you find your roles changing every time you changed aircraft?

How do you mean?

With the different aircraft you went onto?

28:00 From the Halifax to the Warwick? Nothing changed very much. We were only two air gunners on the Wimpies, Jack Judery stayed with the 518, and so did Harry Coxhead, the WOM, so there was only Tom and I as WAGs on the Warwicks. And we were the only Australians on squadron, and on 518,

28:30 we were one of about six Australians on squadron.

Did the Aussies tend to hang out together?

No, no in fact the only, apart from Tom, we didn't see the others very much because we were on these long flights and when you came back you'd sleep, and you were on different rosters, if you'd like to call it that. And some were in the air while some were in the air, and we didn't get to see them all that much.

29:00 **If there's such thing as a typical day, could you talk us through, like breakfast, pre flight, all that sort of stuff?**

Yeah, I'll do the best I can, on recall. Okay, on squadron, life was more relaxed than in a training school and we weren't so governed by times other than if we were on stand by or strike.

29:30 We'd wander down to the mess, yes, come back, scrub up, tidy the hut, make our beds, do any washing that needed to be done. Wander over to the mess and refer to, DRO's, Daily Routine Orders, they'd be there which would contain the next 24 hours,

30:00 who was flying, what crews were detailed and what times they were required to prepare. Now the preparation for an ops trip involved firstly a briefing, where you'd go to the ops room, the operations room and there you'd be shown a map of the area and the

30:30 the mission that you were to do. And you're given a time for take off, whether it's day time or night time and from there. After you'd been briefed, there wasn't much briefing for the WAGs, theirs was pretty straight forward but the navigator and the pilot had to get maps and rules and sextants

31:00 and all that sort of thing. We'd go to equipment and draw our parachutes and life, Mae Wests, and our parachute harness. Get out emergency rations, then we'd, if it was, whatever time, we'd go and sleep because you got a hard road to have.

31:30 At a given time we'd be picked up in a ute and oh, we'd normally do a pre flight check, so that involved getting picked up by motor transport section, taken to the aircraft, check, checks were done on the air,

32:00 compass swings, pilot would handle the controls, especially if it was an aircraft he hadn't flown. We'd go to the water and we'd test fire the guns and of course we'd tune up, then we'd come back and then rest until take off time. Oh, wrong, we'd then have an ops meal

32:30 before take off, then we'd be picked up by the transport, taken to the aircraft and then all ready for take off then. Then when you came back you were met by the motor transport section, you were taken to the ops room for a debriefing and from there to an ops meal again and then to bed.

33:00 **And how well did you sleep?**

Those trips were exhausting, and you needed no rocking. You just crash out, absolutely probably have a few drinks first at the mess. Then crash, and crash right out.

Couple of blokes we've talked to talk about the exhilaration of taking off and that sort of thing,

33:30 **Did you ever enjoy any part of the flight?**

Well I've enjoyed flying. I always got a bang out of the surge of power on take off and being pressed into the aircraft, you know. Well you get that in commercial aircraft. That's always exhilarating, but always glad to get down again. I tell you what was exhilarating, when we did get to height,

34:00 maximum height, which was 21,000 we'd be above cloud and often we'd be above weather, for a change and if we broke out into moonlight and you saw this sea of clouds below, all lit from above and you could see vapour trails from your motors going back. That was exhilarating and you felt that from the height there wasn't much else on this world any higher than you were, so yeah

34:30 that was a bit of a lift. The other thing was that apart from Elmo's Fire, sometimes we ran into what they call the Northern Lights or Aurora Borealis. That's fantastic, like a fireworks display, rolling sheets of colour you know, fantastic. So they were compensations.

Can you tell us about getting your wireless operators badge?

35:00 Well Peter [interviewer] I think I covered that in telling of the stress of the Morse taking.

Sorry I meant the actual badge, when you got the patch and what it is.

Oh okay. Well okay the patch was an insignia, it wasn't rank but it was a qualifying, that you'd qualified as a wireless

35:30 operator and it was a fist clenching a bundle of lightning strikes. It was worn on the right upper sleeve and if you got stripes, it was above the stripes.

How well do you still remember stripping the machine guns and the parts, can you still?

I, you know I was trying to recall the sequence and the names

36:00 because they were….There was the thing called the rear sear. There was the rear sear keeper, there was the rear sear retaining keeper and pin, and you had to go through them that way. There were the various cams and no, I couldn't, I can't recall, and I did ask the

36:30 Department of Defence did they have a handbook on it, and the answer was no, they, either they didn't or they wouldn't give it out.

Do you reckon if you had the MG [machine gun] in front of you it'd all come back?

I'd have to, I don't know. Well there was the breach block which was, it was the heart of the whole thing, and, there was the firing pin, the firing tip pin

37:00 retainer, there was the, there was the breach cover, there was, oh, the spring, no it's difficult.

Because you had a dual role, did you have a preference one over the other?

Oh radio I did not like.

37:30 I did not like, I did not like. I felt very much like quitting the course and doing what the other blokes did, went straight gunners, but I probably wouldn't be here to tell you about it.

Did you get a buzz out of giving the MG's a bit of a blast?

Oh yeah, oh yeah, very noisy, the compartment was you know, it was not pressurised, the aircraft was not pressurised and

38:00 you had to dress up to meet the cold conditions up there and the more you dressed up the less room you left in the compartment. But four guns are firing at the rate they did, even though you had earphones on it was very noisy. Very, oh it gave you a bit of a buzz. I can tell you this, that we were equipped with various radar,

38:30 early radar navigational devices including Gee and the RN [Radar Navigation] and these would pick up objects on the water of any size, submarines if they were there, you could home in. And at one time I could recall this that

39:00 there was a great patch of seagulls sitting on the water ahead and the pilot said this and he said, "Gunners do you want to have a go at these as a practice of air to ground firing?" So he called down the distances, you know, one mile, half a mile, some many yards, mid upper open fire. So the mid upper start firing and then as it came, as we came over the top, "Be ready tail gunner."

39:30 And as the flock on the water, we passed over, and I was firing four machine guns with about, this rapid fire, each gun and mid upper, the water under the seagulls was boiling and I never saw one seagull go down, never. So, but yeah that was exhilarating.

Tape 8

00:36 **You were saying there weren't too many RAAF fellows in the squadrons, how was the attitude from the, presumably the RAF hierarchy towards the colonials?**

Oh good, good. No there was not problem there, actually most of the Australians that went to the UK

served on RAF squadrons.

01:00 I'm not sure how many strictly RAAF squadrons there were. They numbered from 460 to about 468 I think, but then there were others, there may have been 15 or 20 strictly RAAF squadrons, but they weren't completely, they weren't 100 percent Australians. They were mainly, they'd have a sprinkling of RAF

01:30 ground crew and flying control and administrative staff. The rest were in what were mixtures of Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders, Canucks mainly, with a sprinkling of Poles, Czechs, Norwegians, and free French. These were all called 'bastard squadrons' and the crews were called

02:00 'bastard crews'. And they were great. They worked really first rate.

So there weren't too many crews that weren't bastard crews.

That's right, yeah.

What about did you meet any of the Polish fliers?

Only in training in Canada and they, oh gee, they were dedicated in their

02:30 enthusiasm to take the war against Germany. Once they got onto, they did have some Polish and Czech squadrons over there, you couldn't keep them on the ground. All they wanted to do was to get over Germany and knock down as many as they could, they were very daring. Some very gallant airmen amongst them.

And a few of the fellows have said that the Royal Australian Air Force uniform was quite distinctive from the RAF uniform.

03:00 It was and that stood us right out and we were proud to wear it. Unfortunately after the war they, the RAAF went into the grey uniforms. Now recently, over the last few years, they're reverting back to the navy blue which is good to see.

And did that help with the ladies?

Very much, yeah, it did.

Can you tell us a bit about that?

Well, in America,

Well actually first of all it'd probably be good if you told us about your uniform,

03:30 **because you got a special one tailored, didn't you?**

Yes, well I'm not sure whether on camera telling you this, but when I was commissioned, was on 281 Squadron, it involved a complete re-kit. That meant a flat hat, a cap, top coat, uniform, shoes,

04:00 travelling trunk, metal, for the main. And for that I was given travel passes to London, a pocket full of money and coupons to make the purchase. And, how they arrived a the figure, I don't know they must have known, and my uniform was tailored

04:30 by a Saville Row specialist who had set up a business in Australia House. Well it was a perfect fit, magnificently cut and tailored and I reckoned I had the best uniform in the whole RAAF. And the first experience I had wearing it was by stepping out,

05:00 when I changed into it, stepping out onto the street, and meeting some ground staff coming the other way and they immediately saluted. And got me off guard. To some extent I was embarrassed, but I managed to throw a salute back and took it from there. Then the next experience was getting back to squadron and instead of eating, going to the airmen's mess, and going to the airmen's barracks, I'm now in officers quarters,

05:30 and step up to the officers mess. Well, it's a little bit of a, what'll I say, sheepishness about going first time amongst all the higher ups, wing commanders and flight lieutenants and squadron leaders, etcetera, but you soon get over that. The best part about coming home was

06:00 that on the troop ship you got better quarters. Then my, when I was in embarkation depot, my promotion to flying officer came through. It was a rank I was never to wear because there was no time to. The wings changed so I came home dressed as a pilot officer but

06:30 was in fact a flying officer.

What about how people would address people on the aircraft?

Oh, all formality is dropped. Oh no, there was a set pattern, if rear gunner to pilot, navigator to rear gunner, that was mandatory.

What about

07:00 **amongst that crew on the ground?**

Oh well, one of the boys, in fact that was common in all operational squadrons that rank didn't count all that much, apart from station commander and the adjutant.

Was that ever frowned upon by the hierarchy or was that the norm?

No that was the norm. Oh the Poms were a bit, sticklers for regimentation and that sort

07:30 of thing, straightness, but, the Aussies invariably went their own way.

And you were just about to tell us earlier on about how the uniform worked with the ladies.

Oh the Australian uniform? Oh I suppose, well I suppose the one that attracted them the most by far was the Yanks, who had, you know, they were dressed to the nines, and they had twice the money we had.

08:00 But, oh yeah the girls were, very amenable to the Australians. I couldn't say it was any more so than the Canadians. No I couldn't say, couldn't stand it out in that way.

What about the nickname you gave the Canadians, the Canucks, do you know where that came from?

Canucks are, that was a generally accepted term for the Canadians, a Canuck,

08:30 There's an old song, "Tramp, tramp, trample on the highway…" Something, with something, and Canucks comes into the song. No it's an accepted pseudonym, is a Canuck, same as a Kiwi is for New Zealander.

You briefly touched on the Lady Rider?

09:00 The Lady Rider Foundation, yeah, I didn't know who Lady Rider was but she was, but she was a benefactor, and set up this foundation in England for looking after the troops, and provided a set up whereby home hospitality was available, addresses of people who would take you on leave and host you.

09:30 And I do think, I can't quite recall whether she had some hostels, I think so.

And did you take advantage of that?

No, Australian Comforts Fund was where we were quartered when we went to London.

And you spoke a little about Kodak House and Australia House, what things were there that really made you feel at home?

Well Australia house was a part of Australia in London. Kodak House became the headquarters where there was the APO, Australian Post Office.

10:00 And I suppose the, whoever was the highest ranking Australian had his offices there and I imagine they had a news department. And they kept records of who was in the country and who had gone home and who was on watch squadron. I think anything could be found out there.

Were there any nick knacks from home that

10:30 **made going there, special?**

Let me think. Pictures of home in Australia House, no, nothing that I can recall, greatly. Codgers Club was the watering hole, main watering hole.

And what sort of souvenirs might have graced the walls there that reminded you of home?

Ah, signed photographs,

11:00 you know, stuff like that. But mainly singalongs and ale and get together for the blokes.

Aussie beers?

No. Watneys, I think was, Watneys and Bass as I recall, were the two main beers.

What about Londoners themselves, what was your impression with what they'd had to go through?

Well nothing but

11:30 admiration for the people. When we first got to London and it was in the middle of this, V1 and V2 business, we were amazed that they didn't run for cover as the air raid they just went quietly about their business and if they did go for cover they weren't running all over the place, or jumping under trucks or anything like that whereas we were inclined to do the opposite. And what with

12:00 what they'd had to put up with over the early years with the bombing you know, of 1940 and '41 and '42, they, there were so many of them slept in the tubes, underground at night, they had no home to go

to, and they'd set up soup kitchens down there, the powers that be.

12:30 And there were kids, four years and five years old that had never been in a home, to sleep or couldn't remember being in a home to sleep, they simply went down there every night, with trains roaring through and what all. Vast areas of London were laid flat, particularly around the East End where Aldridge and the areas surrounding St Paul's Cathedral, it stood out untouched,

13:00 amongst all the devastation around it. And a little church in the middle of the Strand called St Clements in the Fields, that you've heard of Bells of St Clements, it was there, it had been bombed out, and it's still there. I think it's been restored. But the shell of it was there. But there were a lot of buildings in London that were, there was nothing inside, just the shell of the buildings, and these people had lived

13:30 through all that and carried on their days work and whatever. A lot of school children been evacuated to the country of course.

You've talked about some of the strange sights you've seen in the air with St Elmo's Fire and the…

Aurora Borealis, yes.

14:00 **What about in the ocean itself, did you ever see any, besides the seagulls, did you ever see any strange things in the ocean?**

No, no, except I've never seen waves like them, it would have been horrific to have been shot, to had to crash land and try to get in a life raft in it, apart from freezing, just to keep upright, but

14:30 no, we never saw anything I can comment on. Oh the only thing we did do, in the air sea rescue squadron, when VE came, I said we were quickly pulled out of squadron, well that's not quite correct. German U boats were surrendering all around the British Isles, and we were sent out to escort some of these back into our own harbours and

15:00 assist the navy in that way. They mainly had navy escorts bringing them in but we had to fly cover and we brought one into Loch Foyle, it was a special, I believe the most modern Germany had, was called the Black Panther. And after we'd accomplished that and got it safely docked, the next day, the navy commander that

15:30 brought their ship in, sent a message over inviting us to go and have a look over the sub. Of course the German crew was all aboard, well weren't too welcome by the looks on their faces, but they couldn't do anything about it. It had all the mod cons that Germany could put into it, including it had rubber skin, or a rubberised skin which they believed that

16:00 they thought could make it, make radar inoperable to spot it you know, whether it did or did not, that I couldn't say. And the crew were very youngish, towards the end of the war the Germans took virtually school boys into the army, 15, 16 year olds.

16:30 Aboard the ship they were older than that but they were still a young crew. Stood stiffly to attention as we went through, scowling.

Was that weird being aircrew, finally coming face to face with the enemy?

Yes. Some ways it was, you couldn't call it weird but it gave us a smug feeling of satisfaction that we had

17:00 in some small way played a part in the winning of the war. And to see the enemy, as prisoners, was a great feeling of satisfaction.

You spoke about when you were in the rescue squadron,

17:30 **spending those days looking for the aircraft and then finding out it was your old crew. Did you ever get any positive confirmation of, you know what?**

I can't recall any of the aircraft that we lost from 518 Squadron ever having been found or the

18:00 reason for their non return identified. They simply, that either engine over heating or being lost in fog and, absolutely lost and run out of fuel or whether it was a yawing, or lightning strikes or what all, no we never knew but it would be any one of those that put them down,

18:30 but absolutely nothing found.

Did you as an aircrew have a greater fear of crashing over sea than you had over land?

Never thought about that, I didn't want to crash anyway, no. Both were very distasteful.

And you said you had chutes, but you'd

19:00 **never been really trained how to use them, was that right?**

We'd never made a jump no, we had chutes and we wore harnesses, and we had the release clip, we had

the first, the toggle, or the, what would you call it, a grip to let it go, the first thing that would happen of course, we'd fly out, would be the

19:30 the pilot chute, which is a little fellow and it would pull the rest out, when it caught the slip stream. And you had to fall out backwards.

And how did you go getting your parachute into the turrets?

Left it outside.

How did that make you feel?

20:00 Well it meant that if you did have to, the emergency, that you had to bail, that you had to get out of, or firstly you had to align you turret, so you, the door you got in was in line with the end of the fuselage, and you'd have to clip it on and join the rest of the crew bailing out.

Did you ever fly above 21, 000?

No that was ceiling. That was ceiling.

What was, above 10,000 was oxygen wasn't it?

Yes.

20:30 **Did you ever fly above 10,000?**

Oh often, always.

Did you ever have problems with your oxygen?

I did, well not with the oxygen but in changing positions, yes. When I had to disengage from one oxygen point to get along the fuselage to clap into the next one, yes, with this micro valve.

What about, PTSD [Post Traumatic Stressed Disorder]?

21:00 **Have you ever been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stressed Disorder?**

I couldn't think of anybody that went through the war that didn't suffer from stress. But it was an unknown thing, it was never even talked about. Different to the Vietnam blokes, who are all wide awake to this claim, the result is there are more Vietnam ex Vietnam

21:30 TPIs [Totally and Permanently Incapacitated Pension] than there are World War II TPIs, and I think they were better educated in going about getting their TPI pension from, again from our experience. And a lot of us now feel that we World War II blokes suffered more stress than they did

22:00 and yet we can't get TPI. There's quite a feeling amongst fellows that I associate with here, all ex World War II, and these fellows are on a much bigger pension income that we have.

What sort of problems have you encountered since your war experience?

Oh flashbacks, wakefulness.

22:30 **Sorry what's that?**

Wakefulness, sleeplessness if you like. Disturbed sleep accordingly, bad dreams, that sort of thing. And, there's always, it's hard to explain what goes on within.

23:00 **How have you approached it yourself?**

Well fortunately I've had a loving family and a lot of them; I've been very, very involved in the community. I have kept myself busy with my cooking, my gardening, my computer, and I think the secret to

23:30 keeping good health is to keep the mind active. Always have so much on your plate that for the following day that it's impossible to get through. I can't go along with anybody that says they're bored; to me bored is another word for lazy. There's always

24:00 something to be done or something that you can get to do. Something that you've put in the back of your mind you might do it, well do it, do it now and it's done. And I think that's the secret to keeping good health and long life.

What about we all know about PTSD and the effects war has on soldiers and so forth, what happened to your mum

24:30 **must have happened to a lot of mums, the stress …**

I have no doubt, I have no doubt. See, while I was away, we lived on Kirra Hill, and above us lived a family named Powells, who had five boys in the armed service, and below us was a family named Skelton who had their eldest son Clarrie in the, they were all in army, bar Lance he was in the air force. Laurie Powell

25:00 was the pride and joy of the Powell family. They were a wealthy family, but their boys were all good looking, tall, physically well built, well educated. They'd all been boarded at Southport School, they'd all been captains of the school, captains of their sports, and Laurie stood at six foot seven in his stockinged feet. And went into the army as a major or became a major

25:30 and Clarrie Skelton was in the same outfit in New Guinea and both were killed in the one action, in Milne Bay. And the telegrams came through, one to the house above and one to the house below my mother, and of course the screams of the parents and the sobbing got to my mother because she could hear both. And of course I was overseas, well that didn't do Mum any good either. So you know it was a tragic

26:00 time.

Can you go into what you know of how your mum ended up, like did she go into that, did he know what was going on?

Well, he at the time of the war, was an alderman of the city council, the town council. He was involved with the RSL, first war. He was

26:30 put in charge of what was called the VDC Voluntary Defence Corps for the area stretching from Burleigh Heads to Tweed Heads, and he was made Captain Stafford, Military Medal, and that took him on bivouacs at weekends. He had the business to run, I was away, staff was short and his time was very much taken up. So, that

27:00 was even more loneliness for Mum.

How did she go with that once you got home?

How did?

Your mum go with the problems she had once you got home?

She wound up in a mental asylum in Goodna and died there. Aged 60. The result of the

27:30 post mortem was alcoholic poisoning.

And do you blame the war for what happened to her?

Yes, yes. And it could, I could also include that in my post distress. Yeah I could include that there.

28:00 **How much have you talked about your experiences to your own family?**

My boys and, oh Gwen knows all about it because the things on the computer here, and the kids.

But that's only fairly recent isn't it, what about in the years immediately sort of preceding?

I think yes, from the time that I met these mates and we had the reunions at Twin Towns, a lot of it came out.

So from sort of '45 to '60 not much?

Well they weren't very inquiring, so it was only when it came up

28:30 that we discussed it.

How have you seen the war affecting your life since?

I went away a boy and came home a mature person. I had experiences that you couldn't buy with money. I suppose you could put that down as a credit. I saw countries that I would never have visited. Met people that I would never

29:00 have met, made friends that I'd have never made, this is all on the good, on the plus side. As I say, with all I did and saw I gained a lot of maturity that would have taken years to have happened in the normal course of events. Fortunately being married

29:30 then having the children, and becoming involved so much in the community, it was a great help to settle back.

Some blokes say they had a good war, do you feel like you had a good war, or?

God no, jeez, how could you say that? I don't know what a good war would be. I really don't know what a good war would be. I'd like to hear them describe that.

30:00 I shouldn't be, I certainly couldn't.

Some of them also say that they felt like they'd lost those years that they spent in the service.

Well you see I spent the years, the age, 18, 19 and 20 and 21 away from my home. Now they're the

years when a kid's at state school and secondary school, they're the years they

30:30 really say that's when I, you know make my maturity and have my 21st birthday and that part of growing up. Well, yeah, that was taken from us. The reward that we have is and I can't praise the department enough, is the DVA, the way they look after us now.

31:00 And any queries we have or anything we want, we need, is a simple cost free phone call to get through to them and they do everything they can to assist. Really marvellous set up DVA.

Was there ever a time when you felt there wasn't that support?

31:30 No never, no they've been first class all the way. I think that's pretty general amongst the blokes I associate with.

Stop it there.

INTERVIEW ENDS