Australians at War Film Archive

William Pearce (Bill) - Transcript of interview

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Tape 1

00:36 **We'll start with the overview we talked about. Take me through from the beginning: where you were, born where you grew up, when you joined up.**

That's pretty easy. I'm Brisbane born and bred. Where I was born is a funny one but it's on my Birth Certificate: I was born en route to Lady Bowen Hospital,

01:00 that's down at Brisbane General. Early childhood: we lived at Greenslopes. I started my schooling from there. My family were really nomadic, really. Working class people. We went to Manly and lived there up until my scholarship year; Grade 7. In those days only those whose daddy could afford it went on to

01:30 further education, so I went out to work. And got a job with the KR Darling Downs as the office boy. And I resigned from that job, as a Manager on the 19th of December 1982. One job. Oh, I had my 3 and a half years war service in the middle of it. But at that time we'd shifted and we were living in Carina, down in Creek

02:00 Road. Which in those days was a pretty rugged, rough old dirt track. It had bullock-resting paddocks all around it. But we had horses and so on: we had a lot of fun there. Didn't have neighbours to annoy or worry you. And I joined up from there. And I went to England and met Margery and her family early in the piece but I'll come to that later. And flew my operations, got shot down. Got repatriated to England. Married Margery.

02:30 Came home. Used my deferred pay to establish this house. We had it built and moved in August 1947. And we've lived here every since. That brings us up to now, really. Well there's a lot in between but you don't want every detail.

Tell me a bit more about being born en route to the hospital?

I don't know how it happened.

03:00 They used to tell me but I didn't realise at the time I should have got more detail. Because they used to say, "Oh, you were born in a car going over Victoria Bridge." And as I say, my family were working class people, we didn't have a motorcar. So whether it was a car or an ambulance I don't know. But it's there on the Birth Certificate. So I'm virtually stateless.

Was this a running joke in the

03:30 **family?**

Oh, no. Not really. I think they just accepted it. Because I'm the eldest of 8. And the only one old enough to be involved in World War II. I've got what? 5 boys and 3 girls.

What's it like being the eldest of 8?

It's no big deal I don't think, really. You get your share of having to look after the smaller ones as they come along.

04:00 Doing work around the house and all that sort of thing. We've been all good mates, the family. We still are. It was quite an easy, quite a pleasant childhood.

Being the oldest of 8 were you somewhat of a ringleader?

I suppose I was but nothing nasty about that.

04:30 I mean, we played our games together when we were kids I suppose. And I was the organiser of those. But of course as we grew older they got friends and spent time with them and so on like that. I did the same thing.

What sort of games would you all play together?

We were into cricket and football. We played that.

05:00 We had plenty of space at Carina to play that. But when we got to Carina we all had horses so we used to put a lot of time in riding horses. Doing some stupid things on them at times too but still we survived all that. See you could do it then: there was no traffic on the roads and you could ride them anywhere really.

What sort of stupid things?

Like trying to make them buck. And

05:30 I learnt to do the Indian Trick: jumping off and back on again while the horse was still galloping. Well that was easy really. You just pushed yourself off while you hung onto the pommel and then lift yourself to come back in and the momentum just put you back in the saddle. So there was no problem at all.

Do remember any injuries from these days?

Oh, no. No really, no. although I remember one could have been a nasty one: a friend of mine

06:00 he had a pretty wild mare and he was on her bareback one day, fidgeting around and she reared up and came right backwards. Luckily the curve of her wither went across him like that. If he'd have been a foot maybe, out of where he was he would have copped the wither right in the belly and that would have been nasty. But no, we never had anything like that. We used to use push-bikes of course

06:30 that was the mode of transport. We used to play Bike Hockey. A lot of wheels got damaged in that of course.

How do you play Bike Hockey?

There's no rules. You just pick sides and it's the same as hockey but you ride your bike and with sticks cut out of the bush. You belt a ball around and it was the same rules as hockey, yeah.

07:00 **Tell me a little bit about Manly?**

How old was I then? I must have been, oh I don't know, about 10 when we went there up until about 15. And went to Manly State School. And we put a lot of time in the water of course. In those days you could swim down where the marina is now. And a friend of my father's had a rowing boat.

07:30 And we use to use that out off where the marina and jetty is now: fishing and crabbing. In those days you could get a feed of fish and crabs no problem at all. And another friend of mine he had a little sailing dinghy, not a very modern one, just with the mainsail. No centreboard, we had what you call a leeboard. This was one you hooked on the side of the boat on the leeward side away from the wind.

08:00 And each time you tacked, you had to rip it out and put it over the other side. That was my job as the forward hand. But no, we had a good time at Manly all told. The other thing we did at Manly was spend a lot of time wandering in the bush out towards the [(UNCLEAR)] down towards the railway lines where they shanghai us.

What's a 'shanghai'?

08:30 A catapult. We called them shanghais in those days. We made them up out of car inner tube: they were rubber in those days and they'd stretch. Not like the neoprene of today. It hasn't got the inertia to stretch. A pocket half full of stones and off you'd go. And you spent time trying to shoot at things but you never ever hit anything of course. Other than that it was just school. Oh, another game we used to play at Manly

09:00 it was hockey. Cut out a stick in the bush. But we never had a ball so we used to use an empty jam tin or something like that: that was the ball. Had to belt it around all over the place. Nothing else significant happened down there.

What was you father working as at the time?

When he first came to Brisbane, this is after World War I, he was

09:30 married then and he got a job with the Brisbane Tramways. This was of a night, overhauling and greasing and that sort of thing, in the tram sheds. He worked for I don't know how many years, probably 20 or 30 years really. He was working at that when we were at Manly. He used to come up by train to Buranda and walk over to the tram shed; that's where the Coles supermarket complex is now on Commonwealth Street now, the corner of there. But

10:00 I remember on his pay night, when he'd get home in the morning, rushing down and meeting. If we were lucky were got a penny each. That was straight down to the shop down in Cambridge Parade. It was amazing how far you could make that penny go. The lollies [candy] that you bought. Everyone had their favourites.

What kind of lollies?

There was one that cost a penny. It was called the 'hoopla' it was round. It was a solid toffee thing with

10:30 chocolate coating. That was quite good. But the other one was a rum flavoured one. 'Chequers' I think it was. It was in a chequered wrap. You could get 4 of them for a penny too. That wasn't a bad deal. But other than that we used to collect bottles. Down along the Esplanade and in that, any elders that would be down the beach drinking and so on. And in those days the bottle-oh would come around and you could sell him a dozen beer bottles or something like that for threepence.

11:00 Get a bit of extra money out of it that way. And I also did a paper run. Worked for the local paper shop on the pushbike. That gave me some pocket money. You asked about Dad, well that's the only job he had at the time, was on the tramway.

What was your dad like?

Well in the first place he was a World War I

11:30 digger. Went overseas with the 1st Australian Machine-gun something. Came back badly wounded. He walked into a shell burst and it blew a lot of the flesh and muscle off his left leg. And he used to walk with a slap, you know. But he was an ordinary person. Joined in our games of, not football but cricket and that sort of thing. Rode our horses when we were at

12:00 Carina. And he was always the one that my mother would say, "You wait until your father gets home." You were in trouble. Well not often because we knew it hurt but when that happened he'd come home and get the belt to us. The belt across the legs and the backside, all that sort of thing. And the other thing about him: being a World War I digger he knew how to drink his tot of rum or glasses of beer. And the horse that I owned was a chestnut; called him Ginger

12:30 and he was pretty rough to ride. He didn't have an easy movement. Well Pop used to ride him from Carina up to the old Camp Hill Pub, it was an old bush pub back off the road in those days. He'd ride Ginger up there having his beer up there get a couple of bottles to come home with in his shirt. Well the horse had a hard mouth; you had to hang onto him pretty tight. Well one handed Pop couldn't and away the horse would go. And we'd be sitting on the verandah at the house,

13:00 or something like that. This would be in the evening on his days off and we'd hear the horses feet going down Stanley Road and I'd go, down stairs to meet him when he got in and the horse would be lathered to a sweat and I'd go crook and he'd say, "I walked all the way." Then he'd go crook because all his beer got shook up. Pop was all right. He used to tell us, not a lot, he told us stories of World War I but none of the blood and gutsy things you know.

13:30 Mostly the frivolous side, the funny side. I can't really remember much of it now, really.

What sort of stories?

Mainly on leave and that sort of thing. I can't remember much about it in detail. But you see he was my stumbling block when I enlisted. The Second War started and I thought, "Well all my mates are

14:00 joining up. I've got to join up." But it was Pop's firm thought that, "That war in Europe can go on as long as it likes. No son of mine is going to go what I went through in France." Because I had to be 21 in those days to make these sorts of decisions. Anyhow I kept arguing with him but the threat of conscription: we had conscription in those days and they were taking certain age groups and so on.

14:30 He loomed up towards me and one day I said, "Look, if I've got to go I'd rather go as a volunteer than a conscript." And he had a bit of a thought and he says, "You can join the air force if you like." Previously I'd only thought of joining with my mates in the army. And I think he had a bit of an ulterior motive: if something happened it would be over and done pretty quick, you know, no suffering or anything like that. So

15:00 I got his blessing to join the air force. He wasn't pleased about that even. He'd had enough of wars, which is understandable.

With the stories that he told you about World War I what sort of an impression did you form about war?

Well, I didn't regard it as exciting

15:30 or anything like that. But from what he used to say and what happened to him, well, the only impression I had at the time was it wasn't a nice thing to be involved in: you get yourself hurt. Well, that's the only impression I had. War's no good. Keep out of it if you can.

What did Anzac Day mean to you family?

It means quite a lot really.

16:00 Even up to the present time. We'd observe it. We'd turn out to the parades and that sort of thing. Pop never marched in any. But as far as Anzac Day goes, I believe in it because it was something we should have that generations don't forget what happened and when the fellas that were involved and so on and so on.

16:30 I always march at Anzac Day in town. And I'm amazed at the turn out of people you know. More so the younger people that are in it now. I remember the main one was the 50th Anniversary of the end of the war. There was a big parade in town that day. I can remember marching down Adelaide Street: it was just wall to wall people from the shopfronts out to the barriers that were there.

17:00 And here again there were lots of little kids being brought to it but lots of teenagers and that sort of thing. And even now some of my, my own grandchildren haven't done it but my sister's grandchildren (they're 20 year old or something like that: 2 or 3 of them) they

17:30 turn out at the dawn service and the big one and I thought, "Oh this is pretty good stuff." That they're doing it. Mates go with them and that sort of thing. Even my daughter Gail, she marches in Anzac Day. She's a member of the Redland's District Ladies Drum Corps. And they wear a slouch hat with the feather that's white and a red tunic and white skirt. And it's

18:00 all women. And sometimes she goes as the drum major and other times she plays a tenor drum or something like that. And I always get the wife to tape it because when you're marching you don't see it all. And on one occasion when she was drum major, I was watching it, and she comes down to Anzac Square to the saluting base there. Up she goes with this perfect military salute. I roared

18:30 with laughter. I said, "Where the blazes did she get that from?" Because she's never had any military training or anything like that. It seems that they had a fella who was interested in it and he used to teach them the marching drills and that sort of thing. That's where she got the salute from but it surprised me. She's still doing that, Gail is. She quite enjoys it. They go to all sorts of functions and things like that.

Why do you think your father never marched?

19:00 Well, I don't know. Never ever bothered to talk about that. So I don't know. I can't answer that. Maybe, I think in those days; in going back nearly 40 years or more than that, in the early years after it I think they were sick of it. And I don't think there was the same interest outside as there is these days.

19:30 But here again I can't really answer that. I don't really know. He just didn't bother.

Did you celebrate Empire Day?

Empire Day? No. No I don't think we celebrated that one, no.

What are your memories of you family living through the Depression?

Well here again we were fortunate. We were quite young then but Pop had this

20:00 job in the tramways. So we were all right. We had an income coming in. There was always food on the table and that sort of thing but we ran around bare-footed. I don't know how: otherwise I had my first pair of shoes but that didn't matter. We got through that all right as I say, because Pop had the job and we had the income.

Do you have any memories of your mother having to scrimp or save

20:30 **in any way?**

No, not really I don't but like I was saying: working people, working-class people. I can remember, scrimping and saving, well there was always food on the table. I've eaten bread and dripping and I've sat at the table with newspaper for the tablecloth. And we always had our clothes for our back but nothing flash or anything like that. And they were all handed

21:00 down of course. No we got through that all right, the Depression because of Pop having the job.

Do you have any memories of the way the Depression affected people around you?

No not really. I remember the people that didn't have regular jobs and them folk. We called them relief workers. They got small amounts of

21:30 work on the roads and that sort of thing. But no I don't really. I can't remember any of my mates or anything like that being in stressful situations or that sort of thing. They were the same as us I suppose.

During those days when you were growing up: teenage years, what was Brisbane like?

Brisbane was great in those days.

22:00 Going back to that time you had the tram to go to town. The terminus was then up at Camp Hill, the shops back that way. And to go to the [Woolon] Gabba cricket ground, that was the first big shopping centre, that cost you tuppence. To get into the city, that cost four pence. The tallest building in town of course that was the Town Hall. It was the tallest building

22:30 there. It was quite an occasion to go to town. Not that we really went often. I went to town more and stayed with an elderly aunt: actually my father's aunt, uncle and aunt. They lived out at Yeronga. I spent a lot of my early childhood with them: weekends and that sort of thing. Because uncle worked with Poppa on the tramways. They were better off than us.

23:00 You had to go down to Fortitude Valley to shop: McWhirter's, that's right. But they always stopped for morning tea and shouted me an ice-cream sundae. We never went into town often. Our Saturday night was to the pictures [the movies], the flicks, down at

23:30 Coorparoo, to the Roxy or the Alhambra at Stone's Corner. That was nearly every Saturday night, you shouted yourself that. Transport: well our mode of transport I've always said, if you were going by tram you walked from Carina to the tram other than that it was push-bikes. In those days I can remember my eldest sister, she's the next in line to me,

24:00 riding from Carina to a dance at Morningside and coming home in the middle of the night. On her own. Imagine that being done these days, could you? Oh I don't know anything else of interest.

What was your schooling like on the whole?

24:30 Average. Ordinary. I went through it and passed my scholarship. In those days in each school there was not enough students for one class in each grade and you sort of moved through the school together with the same people. I can't remember very much about my early times at Greenslopes but at Manly.

25:00 Most of us were bare-footed and were played our games that way. Played marbles a lot too. I know I learnt a lot in those days compared to today. We used to do reading and writing and arithmetic. Now you do…

25:30 Oh God I forget what you call it now. Anyhow I watch the telly [television] and listen to the presenters and most of the words that I learnt as a 10-year-old they can't say them proper now. It gets to me. One that's come up recently, Queensland Premier Peter Beattie was on the telly and he said, "We're gonna have an official

26:00 colour. This is it." And he held it up. "I think it's maroon." But I know it's not. It's maroon. You only have to go and look in the dictionary. There's no such word as 'maroon'. It's m-a-r-double o-n as in 'moon' but that's only one of them. There are other words, I think, "Gee whiz." We used to do this with our reading: you

26:30 would stand up in class, each one with a reading book. And I'd read a passage and sit down and you'd read a passage. But while you are reading I'm following it all. And you got to a word you stumbled on, the teacher would put you right. So we learnt how to pronounce words. That's an aside. That's today. I wince every time I hear it. But no, it was pretty straightforward. I got the cane at times.

27:00 Not often because that hurt. But if you misbehaved, then out and 'bang': you'd get 3 or 4 of the cane with this Rangoon bit of cane. It hurt but you'd think, "Jeez, that was a bit stupid, to go through this."

What would you have to do to get the cane?

You might talk in class. I know one time I must have been talking, I got hauled out and I got two and on the way back I'm grinning to a couple of the

27:30 others and he hauled me back again and gave me two more for doing that. I was mostly for doing something you shouldn't have been doing in class and talking would be the main thing, I suppose. But it didn't happen every day or every week. But the threat of the cane was always there. I remember in my scholarship year we use to do an extra hour's lesson before the school started; for that year. This is the

28:00 headmaster himself; to take that one and all sorts of subjects just to give you that little bit extra. And to sit for scholarship you had to go from Manly to Wynnum Central School. We rode in the train to do that. The four exams: arithmetic, English, history and geography.

How was the scholarship exam?

28:30 Well I passed with seventy-five per cent which wasn't too bad in those days. But a bit nerve-racking until you get started. It was over two days. You had two subjects on each day. But, no I didn't worry unduly about it. We got a question, if you can't handle it go to the next one and go back a bit later on: you'd do the ones you could quickly, especially with arithmetic.

29:00 **What was the plan after you'd done the scholarship exam?**

Well like I said before, it was out to work. And the headmaster of the school he'd been approached by the office manager of the factory (KR then was a Brisbane factory down at Doboy, between Murarrie and Hemmant on the Wynnum railway line – it doesn't exist any more).

29:30 It was big in its day: it employed 600 people. And the head office and factory was in Toowoomba. They had another 600 people. But this office manager he lived at Manly and they wanted an office boy and he talked to the headmaster about it and he nominated me. So I went along for the interview and got the job. Just like that. Like I say, I stayed there for 45 years.

Tell me a bit about what you were doing in the first

30:00 **little while in the job?**

Well it was office boy work. You ran all the messages. You didn't have such a thing as a PA [public address] system around the factory. You had a telephone: plug-in switchboard, you know. And when you rang somebody you turned the handle to operate that. But if someone of the manager types were wanted on the phone you ran out the factory, off you had to go to find them.

30:30 With orders being packed, with the despatch department you had to be dashing back and forth, back and forth to get the packing slips to bring to the office, making up the invoice and that sort of thing. You did filing. A lot of it was concerned with the payment for the pigs we processed. I got to this job later on

31:00 but early on we called them tally books (books about this long and that wide) and these were taken up onto the kill floor by the weigher and grader. Weigh the pig, grade it and enter it up against its brand. We got pigs from various centres around the country. And our agent out there, he'd brand it and get it sent down to us. But these pages: each group had to be extended, added

31:30 up and extended at its price and put over there. This is where I learnt to add up actually. And they had to be checked. Each page had to be checked. That was the harder part; you had to add up the whole page. And extend it at the bottom to balance with the total figures someone else had got. Sometimes they took a bit of balancing. But you got this going. Well I learnt to add up quite good really. Then they had to entered

32:00 onto what we call 'advanced notes': this was the advanced note that got sent out with the cheque., transcribed from the tally sheet and written onto that and on this advanced note. Then, to check them all off, these had to be called back. Being the office boy I had to have the clip with the batch of invoices or advanced notes for that book. And I'd have to call: name, address, number of pigs to so-and-so and then

32:30 call the weights down, while I'm doing it to the other fella who's checking it on the tally sheet. And then you'd get to the end of that and the total, if there was freight to be deducted or something like that, you'd do that. He'd do the same in the book. You'd say, "Well I got so-and-so." And he'd say; "Yeah, that's right." And you'd go onto the next one. That took a lot of time. Then the cheques would be written out. Then they had to be

33:00 folded and mailed out. That about covers it I think for the early times.

What was it like going from being at school and that sort of lifestyle to working lifestyle?

It was just a pretty ordinary transition I think. You're growing older all the time and you're

33:30 moving from one phase to another. I didn't worry I just went with the flow. But I advanced in my job. I moved from being office boy to this job up on the kill floor: weighing and grading. And I did that for many, many years. Quite an interesting one really. But then, this is post war of course, when I progressed there I became in time the office manager

34:00 and eventually the assistant manager, then manager. But I learnt all that by association with the goings and so on of the plant. But no, I didn't have any problem with it all. I just progressed one after the other. Fell into the groove and that was it.

What were the people like that you were working with?

I would say they were all pretty nice people really. I don't remember ever meeting any snags. Any

34:30 nasty people. No, even right through. Even when I got to supervisory positions. You see, as managers of this place you were not to sit at a desk all day you had to get out in the plant to see what was going on. Of course we had the foreman and so on and each department but we couldn't trust them to be perfect. You had to go along and make sure they were on the

35:00 job. Doing that, you became known to the people. As I walked through the department, a lot them I grew up with, and I'd stop and say a few words. Wouldn't hold them up just, "How are you going? What did you do on the weekend?" and things like that. But even through all that I never struck anybody who was nasty to you or awkward or anything like that. Of course we used to screen them pretty severely when we employed them. Because we had a good record of avoiding strikes and that sort of thing.

35:30 But that was only because we were careful. If anybody appeared to be, out in the factory that is, might be a bit of a stirrer or anything like that, we'd say; "Sorry mate. You've got to go." And get rid of them to keep the harmony for everybody else.

Being relatively young when you first started working, were there any lessons about life that you learned being in a work environment or with older people?

I don't know.

36:00 I just started at about 15 years of age so I learnt to obey orders, if I can put it that way. Do what I was told. Discovering discipline, I suppose and respect for these people. Because they were only showing me what to do and how to do it. Here again that just evolved and happened and I happened with it.

36:30 **What year did you start working there?**

I started in March 1938.

What was the situation with the money that you were earning? Did you take it home?

Well, early times yeah, when I was still living at home I took the pay packet home. I started on fourteen and sixpence a week, mind you. And paid

37:00 some of it to my mother as board. I kept some for pocket money, a small amount. I did that all the time while I was at home. As I grew older, with age you got more money. I got to a stage where I could buy clothes and things like that, my own entertainment. Even up to when I got married, I would bring the pay envelope

37:30 home to here. And we were very crafty with it. We allocated it all out: what our expenditure would be for the week so we didn't overdo it. And anything that was left over we could do other things with that. I was always pretty careful with the money side of it. And that went right from the start really.

You mentioned that living at Carina you had a good

38:00 **group of friend and this sort of thing. How did the dynamics of friendship change once you started working?**

That did change because we sort of went different ways. And got involved in different things, with different people. We didn't lose track completely but we never had the get-togethers at weekends like we had before. Because I'd got a girlfriend and I was occupied with that. So had the others and so on.

38:30 **How had you gotten a girlfriend?**

That's a bit tricky isn't it? She was a local girl and we just came to know each other. I forget how it first happened. But we just became friends first and decided, "Oh yeah, well we'll keep going" and went on. It actually went on up until I went to England. When I went over there,

39:00 I hadn't been there long, and she wrote me a 'Dear John Letter' [letter signifying a relationship has ended]. You know the 'Dear John Letter'? Well that upset me a bit. I was a bit furious about it all.

Why did she do that?

She didn't want to be bothered with somebody who was overseas and might not come back and so on. She got herself another boyfriend. Not prepared to wait, as simple as that. But anyhow, in the long run it didn't matter. Things turned out and turned

39:30 out all right. It might have been all right with her too but I've no regrets now as to what happened because like I say everything's O.K.

Tape 2

00:37 **You were just talking about your girlfriend? Where would you go with her? How would you develop your romance?**

She also had horses. We spent a lot of time riding together around the place. Saturday night at the

01:00 pictures. I wasn't much into dancing. I never have been so we never did any dancing. Other outings. I remember one in particular going back to the time of the old Cooper (the ship that used to run to Redcliffe and Bribie Island), an old steamer it was. An excursion on that. That's about all really. We put in a lot of time around home.

01:30 I can't recall anything else in particular. A lot of the time was spent on the horses or fooling around in the paddock.

Would you talk about the future together?

No. I don't think we ever talked about the future, no, not really.

Tell us about hearing the news that war was declared. Do you remember where you were?

02:00 I don't remember where I was but I remember it. I remember not feeling good about it because of what association with my father. I don't remember where I was. Other than we were living at Carina at the time. But just specifically where I don't know. But it was in Europe. It didn't have a lot impression on me at the time. I didn't really get

02:30 greatly concerned, I suppose, until the Japanese attack. That brought it closer to home. And that concerned me, it did.

Did you feel a connection to the Empire or not?

I don't know if I felt a connection to the Empire. I knew it was there and we were part of it. But as for

feeling anything about it, not really. I mean Britain was in the war, we were part of the Empire,

03:00 we were in it too.

How did you hear about it? Did you hear it on the radio or did someone tell you?

I don't remember. Must have been on the radio. No, I can't answer that one with a definite answer, no. That or a newspaper it might have been. But no, I don't have that.

03:30 **You mentioned that it wasn't until the Japanese that it really brought it home, so tell us about the first news of the Japanese attacking that affected you.**

When it happened and we found out how it happened and everything like that, it was a bit of a shock to the system. It was pretty sneaky. And like I say it brought it home to me. I was at the age, getting to where

04:00 I could be called up. That brought it closer to home. And I thought, "Well we're going to be involved in fighting here. Or in the Pacific." And I just kept talking to Pop to let me join up. But as I said before, he wouldn't let me be in it. I was 19 when I joined up. I didn't join up until 1942. It was a year, well near enough to a year after the Japanese attacked, well not quite.

04:30 But I never had any serious reaction or anything like that to it. It was just something's happened; I'm likely to be involved, it'll happen.

Tell us about the process of joining up. What did you do?

Well, when Pop said I could join the air force I immediately applied at the recruiting depot in Creek Street in Brisbane.

05:00 Had to go through a medical exam. And I got accepted to train as aircrew. But they didn't induct me straight away. I had to wait. You had to wait until there were positions available in the training areas. But in that time they gave us lessons to learn about, well mainly (I think this was in case you needed it as a navigator or pilot or something)

05:30 arithmetic, geometry that sort of thing. I was on that, I forget how many months, I was on that until I eventually got notification to report at Creek Street and be inducted in. You know, take the oath and that sort of thing. I joined up as what was called an aircrew guard.

06:00 Didn't go direct to aircrew training. This was some scheme that the air force had: I was in a batch of about 450 of us. We went into the air force and did about 6 weeks of basic training drills: rifle drills, armaments, armed defence. Got the inoculations and that sort of thing. There are various theories as to why it happened.

06:30 One theory was: it was to stop the army getting in. Anyhow, we were sent to Maryborough to do this initial training. That only took 6 weeks but it was enough to learn what a 303 rifle was all about. Bayonet and bayonet drills and things like that. Then I was posted to do the guard duty. We knew this

07:00 was temporary. That we'd be called up eventually. Posted to guard duty at Amberley. And that wasn't a bad posting because the Americans were there at the time. One of the interesting aspects of that was there were three guard beats around the WAAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force] quarters. They had a pretty high fence around the women. I could never work out to this day whether it was for us to keep the

07:30 Yanks [Americans] out or the girls in. Because you'd often come across a couple when you'd been in an air-raid shelter or slit trench or something like that and you'd have to chase them out of it. I was only there for a couple of months, I think. I got posted to 3 Stores Depot in Brisbane. That was in Victoria Park. But across the road from the old Museum building,

08:00 across from that they had a stores depot of rail sidings and things like that, you know on that railway line that runs through there. And that was a good one because I could commute from home to the job. You'd do day shift and night shift sort of thing but you had to work the transport to go home. Here again that wasn't for very long.

Before we move on, I'm interested in that day you first get into

08:30 **uniform and that. What was that feeling like?**

Pretty bewildering really because you wonder: what's this for? What's ahead of me? And they're handing stuff out to you and saying, "Well I hope this fits." and that sort of thing. But that was your first taste of what we were in for because you were ordered here, ordered there. You had sergeants yelling at you and things like that. Here again

09:00 you just one of a batch. You probably all had the same feelings: what are we in for if we do this? But you just went along with it.

What was the sergeant yelling at you?

The same as if he was training a batch of people that were always in there. He'd want you to march from here to here and try to get you to fell in and march in step and that sort of thing. Well we were rookies,

09:30 no he didn't think much of us really.

How did you get this feeling?

Well we hadn't done any of it before so it was, like I say, a bit bewildering and you just had to put up with the way he was carrying on. Keep doing what they were telling you to do: to get all your gear and where you were going after

10:00 that and so on and so on.

Was there a certain tone in the voice?

Not that I remember I don't think so. He mightn't have meant a lot of it he might have been geeing us up a bit.

What would be the purpose of geeing you up and ordering you around do you think?

I think it was to let you know you were in the services now and you can't do what you like and we'll do the thinking for you sort of thing. I think

10:30 that's what it all was.

Where did you want to be within the air force when you first joined up? What did you want to be?

Well everyone wants to be a pilot. But I knew from my basic education, only up to primary school, that that might be out of the question. And when

11:00 we eventually got to initial training I decided: well I'll try for the pilot but other than that I'll go for a wireless operator or gunner. Because I didn't think I could handle the navigator part of it, like I say, because of me education. Because a lot of that was doing sums and things like that and I thought, "No, I'll just be satisfied with the WOPAG [wireless operator/air gunner]."

Why does everyone want to be a pilot?

That's the glamour job in the air force

11:30 isn't it? I think everyone wants to be that. That's the job you get to fly the aeroplanes everybody else only gets to ride in them, that sort of thing. Oh, no everyone wanted to be a pilot.

How did you let the authorities know what you wanted to be?

You go to an initial training school;

12:00 this is only a 6 weeks one. We did it at Kingaroy. But here again it's only a series of lectures and lots of drills and that sort of thing, to introduce you to Air force procedures and so on. But I remember one of those that I wasn't real keen on, they used to have lectures on poison gas. It was still thought it might be used. And our

12:30 sergeant instructor there, we called him Phosgene, because phosgene was one of the potent gases. We had the lectures, but that was theory. And just to let you know what gas could do, they'd, give you a gas mask and you're all grouped around the walls of the gas chamber, and they'd release tear gas. And he's talking away there and all of a sudden he plants himself in front of the door and says, "Righto, take your masks off."

13:00 So you had to take your mask off and it doesn't take long before that stuff get your eyes running and coughing and wanting to get the hell out of it. But he's in front of the door. In the end he sees well we've probably had enough and he brings the door open and you stampede outside. Firstly they get you to just open the flap and sniff and you get a whiff of it from that, the mask not fitting properly. But it hammers home to you that a gas mask works

13:30 if you ever need it. And not so much here but when you got to England you had to carry that gas mask all the time. Even on leave you took it with you. But that's the one thing I do remember about ITS [Initial Training School]. And at the end of it you go before a sort of Review Board. They ask you, "What would you like to be?" and I said, "Well a pilot or a WOP

14:00 AG and they sort of assess you. From your record and what you had and what you were and so on like that. And you get posted accordingly.

What do you remember of Kingaroy as a place?

Yeah I remember Kingaroy as a place. Our dress uniforms in those days were dark blue; I'll show you one after. And

14:30 Kingaroy is red soil. And when the weather was dry your blue uniform if you had it on (if you had working dress and put your 'blues' on). You only had to go like that and up would come a cloud of dust. And when it rained it was red mud. That's my main recollections of Kingaroy really because it was just a country town then. You couldn't do much in you days off. Go into the town and have a

15:00 feed at the local café and that was about all. You spent most of the time, even your spare time, you spent back at the aerodrome just hanging around sort of thing.

You went on to Maryborough. What were you learning here?

The first time I went to Maryborough I was learning, training as a guard. We learnt handling weapons.

15:30 And how to use a rifle and bayonet: that sort of drill. How to stick it into somebody. Lots of PT [physical training] and lots of marching on the bullring. Well that's about all we did around there. 6 weeks of that, just to get you familiar with the weapon you were going to carry. You learnt a lot about the 303 rifle and

16:00 as I said, they got rid of the inoculation and things like that so that when you went to air force training you moved straight into it. No, that's all it was really.

Do you remember what inoculations you did have?

No. I think the main one was the smallpox one: a patch on the arm. Well there were two or three others. You'd line up and

16:30 bare your arm and you'd file through in alphabetical order. It used to make you think a bit when you'd come out and someone would have blood trickling down because I think the needles they used were pretty primitive in those days. No, I couldn't tell you what the others were. But I think they were to cover you if you went overseas.

What do remember of Maryborough as a place?

17:00 Here again not a lot. Maryborough was a country town. A quiet country town. I remember I used to, at weekends, we did a lot of study there, bookwork, taking books and going into the city park and sitting there under a tree just to get away from the base. But other than that, no I don't remember that much about what we did. I can't remember much

17:30 going into town at that place at all. Here again you spent most of your time just hanging around on your days off.

Were you making friends along the way?

Of course. Well you do. Yeah, sure. You become friendly with most of your unit: you live in a hut. And there was

18:00 about 24 in a hut. And you became pretty matey with them particularly. You got to know quite a few of the blokes really and you sort of followed through. Actually, I went back to Maryborough to do the wireless course. Well a lot of them were with you as well. Well they weren't all there, everybody gets scattered to different postings. But some that started with me went overseas with me.

18:30 Even then, when we got to England of course they went all different ways. Different to an army unit where you all move together. Army mates sort of stay together.

When you were on guard at Amberley you mentioned the WAAAFs. Were they a source of much attention there?

Not really.

19:00 Not to me they weren't. When I say attention and all that, we knew that they were there, we knew what they did. They were a very valuable section, part of the air force. But I never became involved with any one of them really.

Would the men chat about them though?

I don't know. I never bothered to, I know that. Some of them may. They may have had associations with them but I don't know that.

19:30 **You told us the funny story of chasing around…**

Oh that was some of the more adventurous ones lured out by the Yanks or whatever.

Did you catch any of them on guard duty in a slit trench?

Oh, occasionally, yeah.

What were they up to?

Well I never caught anyone up to anything serious. I said, "Look, you're not supposed to be here. Off you go." Because

20:00 those things were out around the perimeters and that sort of thing. Most of the guard beats were around perimeters. But even then, going back to the guard duty one: when I was at Store Depot it bordered a section of Victoria Park and here again, the Yanks, they had quite an influence on the girls. Pretty uniforms, a lot more money than we did.

20:30 And here again the beats were around the perimeter, which bordered the Park. And I kept chasing them away, “You shouldn’t be this close to us. Go somewhere else.” But one Yank one day he says, “Hey buddy, I’ll do you a bit. Give me your rifle and you can have her for a while.” He offered me the woman. Well I said, “No thank you. I’m on duty. Off you go.”

21:00 **What did you think of the Yanks?**

We accepted them but they were so different to us really. Both as people and their service attitude and so on. I never thought of them

21:30 in derogatory terms or anything like that. I just, “Oh they’re in the war too, so are we.” And just accepted them for what they were.

But did you like them?

Well I never ever got close to any, really. Until I was a prisoner of war because there were a lot in the camp. The ones I knew then were pretty

22:00 nice guys. I even slept with one. Don’t get that wrong! I slept with this guy and his buddies. And this time I’m sleeping on the ground in a big tent with just a blanket and a greatcoat and had to sleep with somebody else: the body warmth is what we were after. There was no jiggery-pokery, not in a prisoner of war camp, no. The ones I met there, they were pretty good really.

You mentioned about the Americans

22:30 **being in slit trenches in parks. Did they like a lot of outdoor activities? Is that the kind of place they’d take some of the women?**

Well I suppose that was all that was available to them really. They were out on the night, on leave. They couldn’t take them home or anything like that. So I suppose the nearest convenient secluded spot was necessary.

23:00 **A romantic slit trench?**

Well, if you like. I don’t know how much romance was in it. I think it was more lust.

Interesting use of parks.

Well yes. Quite. You don’t go to view a park at night time do you? So it’s got to have some other use.

Tell us

23:30 **where you were posted to after this guard duty.**

When I got posted from that I was posted, like I say to the ITS school at Kingaroy. And from there I went to the real aircrew training. And that was to Maryborough. To what they call 3 WAGS school: Wireless Air Gunners School. And there I learnt a lot of theory on radios.

24:00 No, they weren’t radios then they were wirelesses. We didn’t have radio. And the basic function of them not that you could do much about the theory, not in the air you can’t anyway. And how to operate the sets. And Morse code. And we sat for hours every day, Morse code earphones plugged here, learning Morse code. In the beginning we sang it.

24:30 Da da: ‘a’, da di di dit: ‘b’, da de da dit: ‘c’ sort of thing. But then you progressed to listening to it on a key. And then you progressed so your instructor, he sent it on the key and you had to receive it and write it all down and it would be checked. You progressed rapidly, oh not rapidly I suppose because it was a 3 month course, on your speed. You progressed in speed. You’d start off,

25:00 like I say, singing it and doing nothing but you gradually would be able to take 5 words a minute, 8 words a minute, 10 words a minute. And at the end we got to about 20, 25 words a minute. The word consists of 5 letters, in code and the same split up in plain language. But we did this in classrooms initially. But also, while you were doing that, we were still doing drills and square bashing. PT a lot of that. The fittest

25:30 I ever was, was my air force training. Not so much when I got to squadrons: more debauchery then. But then you get to doing it in the air. And this is where the, “Gee I’m really getting somewhere now.” The aircraft we flew in was one called a Wackett. It was a low-winged monoplane, single engine. And it just took 2 people. Pilot in front and the wireless operator in the back. The canopy

26:00 slid over you and locked you in. And you had the wireless set, transmitter and receiver in front of you. You had your pencil tied on a string because if you dropped it on the floor you didn’t have enough room to pick the damn thing up. But they flew around and around Maryborough. And you competed with everybody else that was in the air, getting back to ground station and sending a fake or dummy

message. And they'd send something back to

26:30 you. And we also did, here again you'd do that as you progressed in skill and speed. Another exercise was learning the DF loop, a direction-finding loop. We had a DF loop in the early days: this was just a round loop on the top of the aeroplane. You get the same thing with your radio. You turn it and you get a louder signal. Well, you

27:00 tune it in to a local broadcasting station. To tune that in you had a compass dial in front you hooked to this thing up on top of the aeroplane. And once you got the heavy signal, you knew you got, say, something in Maryborough, the local Maryborough station and you were out over Hervey Bay or something. And this gave you a bearing

27:30 on Maryborough, which in practice you could then give to a navigator and he could use that to check with his own plot or whatever. But we did this firstly in vans on the ground with the DF [Direction Finding] loop up above. But it was a bit more awkward because to get here over to there on the ground you've got to go by road. You couldn't go in a straight line.

28:00 That was a bit more tricky. But still that's what we had to do. But the vans took two and while 1 was working the direction-finding loop the other was still banging away with the Morse code key, training on that. That was a 3-month course really. To get us to the standard they wanted. But having said that, to get the 20 to 25 words but in actual fact in operations we never used that many. We always used 8 or 10, slow and steady to

28:30 make sure that the message got over. And you could pick it up.

Was this your first time flying?

Yep. First time ever in an aeroplane. I didn't like it much. I mean I've been sick on the land, sick on the sea and sick in the aeroplane. I never got violently ill on the aeroplanes. I soon got used to it I suppose. But no, at first I was quite apprehensive. Didn't know what was going to happen: are these things

29:00 good? I watched one take-off one day. We were flying what we call the dawn patrol; my group were taking off early. And some of them were out in the flight office, waiting to board our aircraft and one took off down the runway like this. It got airborne and then he's peeling around to port, to the left, about 10 feet above the ground. And I thought, "God, he's in trouble." but he was over like this,

29:30 you know. But he straightened out eventually and climbed away but I thought, " Gee this can be nasty if something happens." But no, I got used to the flying and I didn't worry about it because I was concentrating on what I was supposed to be doing really. Let the pilot worry about the aeroplane. But it wasn't as if we were doing anything violent in it. That came later. That was a worry.

30:00 No, the flying at Maryborough that was fairly straightforward. It was when we got further along it changed.

How good were you at picking up all these new skills in Maryborough? How did you find it?

Well here again, I'd class myself as average, probably. Never anything outstanding or anything like that. But

30:30 you progress slowly so that it came naturally, I suppose. You did the easy bits and then it got a bit harder and a bit harder. You only did it in steps so it was absorbed pretty simply in the long run.

What kind of messages would you practise sending?

Oh, you'd make up any sort of a thing. I can't remember exactly what I used.

31:00 I can't remember what I did, what I used but it was nothing serious. It was just to send word to them. They'd send the same back to you or similar things back to you. I can't remember what I used, not really.

Then where were you sent to after this?

Well after Maryborough:

31:30 we passed out there. The passing-out parade and all that rubbish with the splendid rank of leading aircraftsmen. We had a propeller on our sleeve. It's equal to what? Lance-corporal in the army. We were posted to our number one BAGS: Bombing and Air Gunnery School at Evans Head NSW. And here we learned to,

32:00 well, we did our firing, in what was called an old Vickers Go-gun. GO stands for gas-operated. It was one that used a drum. And you'd put the drum on top and it had a spade grip and you had to get your chin on this and the distance from your chin to the rear-sight that had to be right over the spade grip. But we learnt to pull those things to pieces on the ground. We learnt to pull the .303,

32:30 Browning, which is what we used later on, to pieces on the ground. In the air we had to firstly: at the Armoury get our drum, dip the bullets in paint, put it back in the drum. And the air-to-air firing was at a

drogue put behind another aeroplane and when you hit it the paint marked it. Because you had 2 gunners in each aircraft

33:00 each time, so your colour might be red or blue or whatever so they could tell how many hits you made. And near the ground firing was firing over the sand hills into squares of sand. There were about 6 of them I think. I'd numbers 1 and 4 and you might get 2 and 6 or something like that. And you could then count the hits in each one. But here again, I was only an average

33:30 air-gunner. I think we all were. Because I reckon the old Vickers Go-guns they were pretty ancient stuff and I think their cone of fire was about as big as the side of a house. And you'd be firing at the drogue in the middle and your bullets would be going all around it. You never registered a drum full of hits on it at the time really. But this was where deflection came into it. Now deflection was very important in air gunnery both

34:00 to a bomber being chased and a fighter probably chasing it. So if you're flying here and you're firing at a target going that way you've got to estimate the speed. And the ring-sight that we had, everywhere had a ring at the back and a dot at the front. And that radius represented 50 mile an hour. So if you estimated a target going at 150 mile an hour you had to be ahead of it by 3 radii so that when your

34:30 bullets got there, he'd fly into them. That's the theory. But that was all right flying like that but coming at angles and that sort of thing it was a lot more tricky. But that's how we had to do it. And like I say, that was more important later in life and we'll get to that. But no, that was another, how long were we there? That was another 6 weeks I think doing that.

35:00 I don't think there was much in groundwork then. Mainly the pulling the guns to bits and so on like that. We did guard duty then. You took your turn at guard duty at Evans Head. This was in August, I think I was. It was pretty cold down there really. I remember tramping around the perimeter beat there in the cold sand and not enjoying it. And pyrotechnics was another one: flares and rockets. And they'd take us over onto the beach to demonstrate them so they wouldn't do anybody any

35:30 harm and fire off rockets. Because pyrotechnics was part of our function as gunners that is. After 6 weeks we graduated from that, passed out there with the rank of sergeant. So the pay's gone up a bit too.

36:00 From then on we, I don't know if I'm getting too far ahead, but from there I was posted overseas.

Tell us about the passing-out parades. What were they like?

Oh, they were just bull-dust type things really. Nothing different or spectacular. At Maryborough the different flights, as we were called, the different groups were marched on, lined up. Did a bit of figure marching. Marched

36:30 off. Took a salute from the Base Commander. And that's about it. It was nothing spectacular. Wait on, prior to that we were all called forward, one at a time, where we received our wireless operator's badge. I've got one in there I can show you. It was a fistful of lightening streaks to represent sparks. And it was a blue

37:00 badge and it was worn up here just in the vee of the sergeant's stripes. That's right. You got that on the passing-out parade. Then you marched off and that was it. Oh, we had a Passing Out party in town. Here again each course they went their own way. We went our way to Bluebird Café in Maryborough but nothing exciting there.

37:30 No grog or anything like that but a meal to remember it by. Oh, you had a photograph taken: a group photograph. I've still got that. Seems I lost track of them all. I don't know them many of them survived. But no, it wasn't anything spectacular. Just a parade on the bullring and that was it.

At Gunnery, apart from drogues, was there anything else you practised target shooting on?

38:00 No. Only the drogue or the sand square on the ground. That's all we needed to know really. In the air you'd be shooting at another aeroplane, on the ground you'd be strafing whatever.

How were you hearing about what was happening in the war at this stage, just before you left?

38:30 Well we were kept up to date with it of course but I can't remember anything specific about what I heard and how I reacted to it.

Was it at a worrying stage?

Apprehensive, yes, it was. Because I knew what I was in for and I knew that anything could happen. I was apprehensive. But here again, that's the thing, you

39:00 have the thought but you don't dwell on it. You can't. You just push it aside. And the worst part of that was we were sent home on leave from Gunnery School, we were posted overseas from that gunnery school, and I went home on embarkation leave. That was a little bit difficult. Just walking away from the family, that sort of thing. Knowing that I was going to something

39:30 unknown. They were back home just living the normal life.

Tape 3

00:37 **How did you say goodbye to your girlfriend?**

I don't remember. I wouldn't have seen her on the actual day I left, I'm sure of that. No, I don't know.

01:00 I can't answer that. I don't think there was anything dramatic about it. Probably just said, "I'm going." She probably said, "O.K." that sort of thing. But I can't remember any tearful parting or anything like that. No.

Where did you head after this Leave?

Well, we went by train from Brisbane to Sydney. Then went to a RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force]

01:30 Depot at Bradfield Park. We weren't there for long. And then we were loaded on board the USS Mount Vernon, an American troop carrier-come hospital ship. I wouldn't say hospital ship but we were taking a lot of wounded back with us.

What was the train from Brisbane to Sydney like? Was it a troop train?

Yes it was a troop train. I don't

02:00 know if you'd remember but the old carriages we had, before you had alleyways and toilets and things, were just rows and rows of seats. Like facing seats with about 5 on each side. And we had to pile into that with our gear, with our kitbags and everything. And go to Sydney like that. And I'll tell you it wasn't a very comfortable trip. Then we stopped at a place called

02:30 Gloucester, in New South Wales. We stopped there for breakfast. Had breakfast on the platform, that sort of thing. But that's all I remember about that. It wasn't a good trip I know because it was slow in those days and cramped: the bodies and the bags and so on.

What was the atmosphere like on the train?

I think there was a

03:00 bit of, oh I wouldn't say excitement, but a bit of sort of thinking: oh well, we're off and this is the start of it all. But nothing real emotional.

The people you were travelling with, were they good mates by this stage?

I can't remember who was actually in the carriage with me. But some of them would have been,

03:30 yes. I can't remember names now either. But they were people in your squad previously. And people that you knew. But there wasn't buddies or anything like that. Never developed to that sort of thing really. I can't give you a proper answer to that one.

How long did you stay in Bradfield Park?

04:00 We were only there a couple of days. It wasn't long at all until we went down to Woolloomooloo Wharf and boarded the USS Mount Vernon.

Did you get to see anything of Sydney?

Nope. Not then, no. I don't think we had any Leave or anything like that. We didn't have time, no.

And how busy was Woolloomooloo?

Well I don't know. I know our wharf was busy because there were people everywhere. Like I say there were a lot of

04:30 Americans going aboard and our air force draft. It was more than my lot from Maryborough then or from Evans Heads. It was people from all categories like pilots, wireless ops [operators], navigators, and so on. It was pretty busy. But I can't remember whether I was actually billeted on there. Mount Vernon. I can't remember that.

05:00 It would have been, well, typical troop ship stuff. Cabin space taken up with bunks up walls and so on like that. But I don't know how busy Woolloomooloo would have been. Busy enough, "We're on board, let's go" type of stuff.

How did the different sections of the air force draft

05:30 **interact together initially?**

You didn't know a lot of these others but you're all, to coin a phrase, you're all in the same boat. You're all in the air force, you're all going overseas. So yeah, you were quite cordial with everybody, matey sort of thing. Yeah.

What was the Mount Vernon like as a ship?

It was all right as a ship. But this was our introduction to American army food. We'd

06:00 never seen anything like it in our lives: turkey, ice-cream that sort of thing. Of course now and then you had duties to carry out to help things go, you know. The crew couldn't do it all. And one of the duties I got was, not actually working in the cookhouse but from the cookhouse down into the chillers and freezers below to help cart food upstairs. I can remember going down into the freezers and bringing out

06:30 frozen turkeys to eat. You used to get your meal in a tray with about 6 indentations on it. They were various sizes and various shapes. I for one, I could never work out what to eat with the meat part of it or what was sweets because they used to go for so much sweet type of thing, you know.

07:00 And I had to sort that one out. But we gobbled it all up for sure. And we lived pretty well on the Mount Vernon that was for sure. But I re another part of it, and this happened to me on all my boat trips, both going and coming home. I was O.K. for 24 hours and then the next 24 hours I just wanted to die. You know the continual roll, roll, roll. The

07:30 motion sickness. And it really got to me. And I'd be as sick as a dog for 24 hours and then I'd come good. I'd be O.K. I'd miss meals for that. But when I got over it, was used to it I was quite normal.

What does seasickness feel like?

Bloody awful. Oh, it's a horrible feeling you know. You don't know whether you want to sick all the time. There comes a time when you've got rid of everything of course and there's only bile left. But

08:00 no, it's not pleasant at all really. All I wanted to do was lie there, like I say. I couldn't have cared if I died.

And were you allowed to just lie there?

Oh yeah. Unless you were rostered for some of these duties you were just free to do nothing. Well, there's nothing to do anyway.

What if you were this sick and you were rostered on work?

That didn't happen. I think you'd be excused. You'd have to be.

08:30 Yeah.

So aside from the time you were working, what sorts of things would you do to fill in time?

I can't remember. I know there was nothing much to do. We probably read books and played cards. That's about all. No, that's all. I don't think there was anything else. Well nothing you could do on a troop ship. Nothing in the way of entertainment or anything like that.

What were some popular card games?

09:00 Straight out: poker. For matches. Although, having said that, this is skipping a bit, playing poker coming home we played for pennies. I don't know where we got them all but the winner each night had to hang onto the bag of pennies until the next day. No, on the Mount Vernon, it was heading from Sydney to San Francisco. But not by direct route. It

09:30 went way down south of New Zealand and down into that colder climes, up to San Francisco that way. This was to keep out of the range of Japanese submarines.

Was there much of a fear of that on board?

Not really. No. Not when we knew where we were and why we were doing it. I mean we knew enough about war in general to know that a submarine had limited range. Same thing applied in the Atlantic of course. I'll

10:00 get to that. No, no, no. I wasn't worried about being torpedoed or anything like that. Not there on that trip, no.

What was the interaction like, at this stage, between the Americans and the Australians on the ship?

Well here again, I never had much contact with any of them. Only time would have been in the mess getting our food. They were quite normal, the same as us. A different language of course, "Buddy, this is your sort of thing." Yeah.

10:30 But no problems. No problems in getting along with them. But actual interaction, apart from that you were with your own group to fill in the day. Like I say, most of the Americans on board were wounded. A

lot stretcher cases, not all of them. But they'd be occupied themselves in other areas of the boat.

Do you remember any particular people

11:00 **that you spent time with on the boat?**

Well only one and he was my mate right through, particularly. A fella named Peter Brett. We nicknamed Kelly Brett. And he joined up with me here. He was two years younger than me because he joined straight from school actually. His parents were

11:30 on the land. His father was actually the manager of the Dagworth Sheep Station out at Winton. Dagworth was the Waltzing Matilda station. And we were buddies right through. We got split up when we got to England. He went to a different squadron than me. Both ended up as prisoners of war and came home together. But not any of the others I can't remember really. But here again, they would have been the people that were in the hut with me, that you knew

12:00 and that sort of thing. But I can't remember names now that's too far back.

How long did the trip take?

That was three weeks I think. I think that's what that one was. Yeah, it would have been three weeks to San Francisco. Or something like that anyway.

Who was in charge of you?

Oh we had

12:30 administrative officers and so on travelling with the group. They were in charge of us. We had our own officers in charge. We were an independent unit, if you like, on the ship. Anything they had to tell us, these people would have told us.

What sort of general things did you have to do during the day? You spoke of the work but in terms of air force

13:00 **duties or PT?**

Nothing. We didn't do anything. Nothing official. Well the PT, you were told, we didn't have any actual classes I don't think. It was just walking the decks. That was the PT. No I don't think we'd go and do it as a class really. No there was virtually nothing to do, as I've said.

Was there a

13:30 **change when you headed out of the colder areas and into more warmer seas?**

A change in what?

In terms of were people able to sleep on the decks?

Oh, yeah, it could have been but we didn't bother to do that. No, I did that later on. But no, I stayed in whatever quarters I was on, on that boat. No, I don't know of anything else.

Was there any sort of

14:00 **fuss made of crossing the Equator?**

Oh yeah. We had all that business, yeah.

What happened?

It was the usual thing. Not everybody got dunked and christened and so on. But somebody was dressed up as King Neptune and so on like that. I never had any personal involvement in any of the ceremony type of thing. Just as a group you were told, "We're crossing the Equator."

14:30 No, hang on, not the Equator. We didn't cross the Equator. No, we crossed the International Date Line. Yeah, no, we never crossed the Equator. We were never high enough up for that. Or did we? Is 'Frisco north of the Equator?

I'm actually not sure.

I'm not sure either. It is, is it?

15:00 Oh well, we must have had that ceremony but the other one, when we crossed the International Date Line we were just told. It was a Sunday I think and they said, "Well you went to church yesterday now you've got to go again today." sort of thing. No, I don't remember the other. I can't remember where 'Frisco is. It could be north of the Equator. Yeah, because Central America is the Equator. It's got to be north of the Equator. Ecuador and so on that's on the Equator.

15:30 So we must have had that ceremony but I don't remember anything about it anyway. But I know I wasn't involved personally in the actual ceremony part, just an onlooker.

Tell me about when you first arrived in America. What you saw?

Well we didn't see much. We went into San Francisco Bay under the San Francisco Bridge. We anchored midstream, sort of thing. We were loaded into lighters: boats, shipped across the Bay to Oakland,

16:00 marched from that to a loading platform and put on a train. And this was no ordinary troop train because it still had all the Pullman coaches and things like that. Even the Negro porters. It was a luxury troop train. And that took us right across the States. We didn't actually see anything in 'Frisco at all. We were just straight through and gone. And we crossed

16:30 the States and I remember the train track goes along the Grand Canyon, to Colorado. And then we were going through Reno at night time: seeing all the bright lights. Through Salt Lake City. Then we went up to the Great Lakes and detoured a bit into Canada. Came down past Niagara Falls and entered the States from the north to

17:00 a city called Providence in Rhode Island, which was not too far from Boston. And this is where we pulled into a siding. We got out of the train and we were marched into a section of an American camp: Camp Miles Standish, which was a huge place. When I say a section of the camp, it was done up in a north, south, east and west sections. I forget which one we were in. It won't

17:30 matter. But each of these sections had its own canteen. But in the middle of it all was the Base PX [Post Exchange – American canteen unit] store, they used to call it. And it was bigger than any department store I'd ever seen. This allowed us to load up with chocolates, cigarettes. Those that wanted to bother with using it for ulterior motives later on took stockings. They were handy when you got to England.

18:00 But most of the kit bags of the smokers were crammed full of American cigarettes. I didn't bother because I didn't smoke. But I had plenty of sweets and that sort of thing. When we were there one of our draft went down with scarlet fever, which quarantined us and we couldn't move. And we were all tested and those that were O.K., were

18:30 negative, didn't have it were let out on Leave. Well I chose to go to New York for four days. And the four days in the big city: we went to the various service clubs and things like that for food and sleep. But I remember going to Radio City and seeing television for the first time in my life. Madison Square Garden and saw the Ice Follies of,

19:00 what would they be, 1943. And walking down Broadway one night, early morning I think it was, a civilian (I was with my mate Kelly) tapped us on the shoulder and said, "Hello Aussies. Where are you from?" And I said, "Brisbane." And Kelly said, "Brisbane." And he said, "I come from Brisbane too. From Pinkenba." So I thought even then, "The world's shrinking a bit." But in

19:30 New York, as you know, it's an amazing place, even in those days. We went to see movies at two o'clock in the morning and that sort of thing. Apart from that we did go into Boston. We went into Boston a few times. And here again, through their Non Service Organisation that looked after troops and so on, you could visit here, there and everywhere. We did that and got friendly with a family. In the brief

20:00 time we were there that was all. But here again, the food, American food, we had to help in the mess and that sort of thing. Well I can remember in the mess if you got to the serving out part, one day as I was serving out this breakfast, serving out the milk for the cereal. It was in the days of bottles with a cardboard top on it. And in those days milk was milk. It wasn't separated.

20:30 And the cream would be at the top and the bottom would be the thinner milk, the skim milk. And these Yanks, they were crafty, they'd say, "Don't shake the bottle Aussie. I want the top bit." But we knew what it was all about. We'd shake it and mix it up to give it them all. But they'd try for it, to get the creamy stuff. Then we had a military band. Well, it was as good as

21:00 Glenn Miller or any of those. And they spent the day marching around the camp to various sections and giving a half hour concert or something like that. Of course every time they came to us they had to play Waltzing Matilda to start with. That haunted us. It followed us all around the world. But you know, they were good. They were top musicians. It was a beautiful band. But you know, that occupied a bit of time. But other than that we didn't do much at all.

And just on the

21:30 **train trip across America, how long did that take?**

Well I'm going to have to have a guess here. I think it was about two days. I can't remember exactly but I know it wasn't just a sort of overnight hop.

And where would you sleep?

Oh, in the Pullman carriages. In beds. We had, like I say, the Negro porter was there to pull them down and make them, and sheets.

22:00 Oh yeah, no, we had all the service there that's true. I can't remember where we ate. Whether we went to dining cars? We must have. I can remember the Negro porter in ours: tall, thin Negro. And we'd talk, where we were going and so on and he, with his American language says, "New York's a honey but Boston's better." That's what he warned us about, yeah.

22:30 Not a good time to go to Boston.

Did you make any observations about any racial differences in America?

No. Although I suppose I did. Because I knew that in their army the Negroes had the menial tasks. They did have

23:00 some all Negro battalions. But other than that they did the menial tasks. Not a lot of them were combat troops really. They were the cooks and cleaner-uppers and the truck drivers and so on. That sort of thing registered with me. But they didn't get to be anything of consequence at that

23:30 time. I know it's different now, they're equal over there. But no, I didn't notice that part of it. They were sort of separate. But I never saw anything going as far as race hatred or anything like that. I'm not saying it didn't exist but I never saw any of it, no.

And did you stop anywhere during that train trip?

No. No, we kept going. We did everything on board. Oh we had some stops at times.

What did you do?

I don't know. We couldn't have done much on that could we?

24:00 But just sit there and gape out the window. No. Didn't do anything else I'm sure. Were might have read magazines, that's about all. Oh and gape at outside. Especially going through the towns and so on. No, nothing else. I don't remember doing anything else anyway.

You mentioned that the porter had told you that Boston was better what were your impressions of Boston?

Well,

24:30 nothing very great or different. See, in those days I was a tender age not a man of the world or anything like that. I wasn't into boozing, I'd have a drink but that was all. Or nightclubbing or those sorts of things. So I think that's what he meant. If you're into the nightlife, it's the place to be. But I wasn't into it. Not at that point in my air force career.

25:00 I was the shy, reserved country boy type, you know? But no, I was quite content. We got invited to a family, a house. And we'd pop in and see them and just knock around with them. There were a couple of girls in the family and they showed us around the place but that was all.

Tell me a bit more about the family.

A bit more? I don't know what

25:30 you can tell. They were an ordinary Boston family, like a man and wife. I know there were a couple of girls. I don't know if there was any more than that. They just showed us around or had us at their place for meals. That sort of thing.

What was your impression of the way America was dealing with being at war?

Oh I don't know. I didn't have any impression really.

26:00 I mean, all I knew was: well, they're in the war. They're doing this and that and we're going do it to some of it too. But no, I wasn't impressed in any special way by her. I knew that they were in it, forced into it and that they were coping. But no, I never had any real impressions about it. No.

When you were with the family in Boston was there discussion about the war?

I don't

26:30 think so. I don't remember, no. No, nothing serious I'm sure of that, no. We just chit chatted about day to day affairs that's about all.

You mentioned the Ice Follies in New York. Can you tell me what they're like?

Oh yeah. I can't tell you the detail now, I know but it impressed me. It was a fantastic, colourful display. Oh, yeah.

27:00 But I mean it was a blown up version of the things we've seen here, out at the Entertainment Centre. But on a much grander scale and so on. Yeah. Well the other thing I did in New York: my mate Kelly and I we went to a picture show to see Gone With the Wind. We only saw the first part because we had to get out and leave because we had to be somewhere. Catch a train or something. But I had to wait until I

27:30 got to England to see the second part of Gone With the Wind. That was all free because you got passes to this, that and the other from the various organisations helping service people.

What was the general reactions say, walking around the streets of New York in a uniform?

What were people's reaction to you.

Oh, nothing really. I suppose they looked at us a bit odd, being Australian. Because a lot of Americans had never

28:00 heard of Australia. But I don't think there was any reaction to us really. I don't think so. I suppose they were more concerned with their own worries or whatever to indulge with us too much. But, you know, it was always friendly. Whenever we had to interact with people it was always friendly.

And what was the camp at Miles

28:30 **Standish like to spend six weeks in?**

Oh, it was a fantastic place really. Didn't actually do a lot. Not important stuff. But they kept us busy with a bit of drilling and marching around, that's about all. Other than that we were left to our own devices. We'd go up and drool at the canteen. But no, nothing specific

29:00 that I can remember that we did. I mean there was no official stuff, I know that. We used to have to fill in the time. Because you got out as often as you could on leave while we were there for the 6 weeks.

Tell me about when you left America?

29:30 When I left America, yeah. That's when things really started to happen. We were loaded into a train at Camp Miles Standish and went to New York. At New York we went to, I don't know what pier or anything, and we boarded the Queen Mary. And the Queen Mary she was a super troop ship at the time. We were luck, we got into cabins and lower decks

30:00 actually. Which probably wasn't a good idea. But I was in a what would have been a single berth cabin in peace time. We had threer bunks against one wall and just enough room to move around. At night time a fourth guy slept on a palliasse. You know what a palliasse is? A straw mattress with a hessian bag. He slept on the floor on that. And we had the bunks, but she carried about

30:30 15,000 troops all told. And all of these except for our draft were American troops heading for England. And apart from those that could fit in the cabin the same as us, those that slept on the covered decks, they slept: I had the space for 12 hours then I vacated that space and you had it for the next 12 hours. And that's how it was for the five days going across.

31:00 **What was that scene like leaving New York with all of those troops getting on the ship?**

The scene? I can't remember the scene really. It wasn't a case of lining the rail or anything like that really. You could never get near it with the press of bodies. No, I can't remember anything much there. No, not really. No, I can't remember things like

31:30 passing the Statue of Liberty or anything like that. I can't, no. I do remember the next bit. My first 24 hours of seasickness. Well this was twice as horrible as on the Mount Vernon. See, she could do about 30 knots and she went unescorted so she was fair game for German U-boats but here again she did a north Atlantic route

32:00 heading for Scotland. But as she did it she zigzagged. The idea of that was, I forget the time slot on the zig and zag, but the time slot was if she did happen to encounter a U-boat (I mean she could outrun them in speed) but if they came across her, the zigzag made it, not impossible but more difficult for the U-boat

32:30 commander to lay a torpedo on her. By changing the deflection, once again. But getting back to me, she was armed pretty heavily: she had some big guns up on top and at the stern. I think you could nearly call her a light cruiser, if you like. Anti-aircraft guns everywhere: any space outside there was an anti-aircraft gun of some size. And I

33:00 think they'd taken ballast and so on out of below because she went like this: she'd go down that way and she'd shudder , she'd come back to the vertical over about 10 degrees of heel and then she'd come down this side and shudder. Well she did that all the way across the Atlantic. And here's me trying to keep my belly in order. But the same thing happened, only a bit more so I think, because

33:30 I remember when we had a pay parade; they give us money when we got to England. And I thought, well I've got to go on that. I'm there lined up and one of my mates looked at me and he says, "God, you're green." Anyhow, I got my pay and then I went back to my bunk. But to get a breath of fresh air out on the open decks, you're standing like this in the press. It was impossible to avoid that. You got two meals a day.

34:00 And the messes were going actually all day, 24 hours a day. Here again, the Negroes come into that: they served the meals. You sat at a table, I don't know, about 20 guys, 10 each side of the table. Plates and that were there and they brought the big bowls of food. And you sort of took your share sort of thing. And I can still remember one of them, the Negroes. They were always a happy lot. They were. This one day, I remember the

34:30 one (this is just something that's stuck in my mind) saying, "Look out! Hot stuff coming through." I

mean: get out of me way or you'll get it all over you. But you didn't need any more food because you weren't using it up anyway and I don't think I was too keen on it. But I did have some meals, yeah. The Atlantic, it was as rough as blazes too. And she's rolling like this all the time. The times I did get out anywhere near an open

35:00 deck it was just grey skies and pretty heavy running seas and things like that. Typical of the Atlantic. And she took a real northerly loop to up near Iceland and into Greenock in Scotland.

With that many troops on a ship was it a bit rowdy?

Oh, I don't remember that particularly. I suppose it must have been. The mess would have been. With the Negroes

35:30 looking for space and so on. And everybody'd be talking with their mouth full. But other than that, well I don't know. Noise, well I didn't particularly remember anything about noise, no.

Did you meet up with anyone in this time that you'd later fly with?

No. No I didn't. I didn't fly with anybody that I did anything in Australia, any training at all. No.

What

36:00 **was your feeling of anticipation?**

Well here again, it was apprehension, "What's ahead of me?" Especially when I got to Scotland. I thought, "God, I'm getting close to the war." But here again I didn't dwell on it. I knew it was there. I was coming here to do something and I had to go out and do it. That sort of thing. I'll tell you more about that later when we get to ops. But at

36:30 the time of reaching Scotland, yeah I was a bit concerned, yeah. Because I thought, "Oh, this is where the war is" sort of thing.

What were your feelings about leaving Australia in terms of the Japanese threat?

Oh I was upset about that. Because, well I'd thought about it right through until I went into the air force and did

37:00 that training, and I knew it would change then, was fighting in the Pacific, yeah. I wasn't keen on that: going over to fight in Europe when there was a war on in the Pacific. But there was reasons for that of course. I mean England was in trouble in the war and half way through it she was still in trouble. Bomber Command was only getting going and they needed aircrew. And we appreciated this, well our governments appreciated

37:30 a need for this. I mean, Bomber Command flew people from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Rhodesia oh, lots of other sundry countries of the British Empire. But no, I didn't like the idea at first but I knew I had to accept it. So I did. I just forgot about it then and went on with what I had to do.

What was your awareness as

38:00 **you were arriving or at any stage, of the attrition rate amongst Bomber Command?**

Yeah. We knew about that early and knew it wasn't good. We knew you had a bout one chance in four of surviving. We knew a tour of ops [operations] was 30 and you were lucky if you got to six. We knew all this. That improved later in the war of course. When the aircraft

38:30 became better and better armed and so on. But no, that was the frightening thought, yeah. You knew, am I going to be the lucky one to survive it?

How did you know about these statistics?

Oh, well that just drifted through air force areas. It's just, "You know this?" "Oh, yeah." And we knew what we were going for, going to.

How do you prepare yourself for that?

Well,

39:00 you can't prepare yourself for it. Like I said, you just accept it. But you're involved, you're going to do this, you've got to do it so… I couldn't prepare. I don't think I prepared myself for it. Because dwelling on it wouldn't have helped you at all really. I think you had to get a bit more positive outlook on it and say, "O.K. I'm going to do it. Let's go and do it." sort of thing.

In a sense, what were you doing it

39:30 **for?**

What were we doing it for? Yeah, that's a broad question isn't it? Well we were doing it because we were over there as part of the British Empire, to help Old Mother England who was forced into a war by Adolph Hitler, by what he did. He started it and for us to survive and be able to live the lifestyle we'd

40:00 like to continue with we've got to do this. I think that's it. Here again, it's something that, I didn't dwell on that either. I knew we were in it, were forced into it. Didn't want it but well, when you look at what he did to all Europe, as he marched all over Europe and the way he did it all, you think "Well, I don't want that to happen if we can help it." And oh, I didn't dwell on it,

40:30 no. But the thought was there, yeah.

Tape 4

00:36 **Tell us about arriving in Scotland. What were your first impressions?**

First impressions. It was a bit cold. And we steamed up the estuary of the River Clyde. No real

01:00 impression with it. Another land, O.K. we've made it this far. But here again, it happened quick after that. We were taken ashore in lighters and more or less put straight on a train. And taken down into England. So there was nothing that impressed me at all about it because we didn't see much.

Was there a sense of relief?

Oh yeah, having survived the Atlantic trip,

01:30 yeah. There was. Getting rid of that one because you knew what the Queen Mary was doing to avoid U-boats but you never knew when one might bob up sort of thing. For that to get hit too, would have been a disaster. But no, there was relief to be back on land, yeah.

Take us through this train journey. What was that like?

That wasn't too bad. It was only more or less, an overnight thing

02:00 really. This was in just ordinary passenger seat type things. Nothing untoward there. Didn't stop anywhere. We went straight through. Right through to the RAF [Royal Air Force] Depot at Brighton. What was it called? Number 11 PDRC: Personnel Distributing and Reception Centre. They'd

02:30 taken over two hotels on the sea-front at Brighton: the Grand and the Metropole, anyway multi-storeyed ones. I can remember arriving at Brighton. We get out of the train. We've got all our gear. You see we took a lot of gear over that we wouldn't use: they gave us webbing equipment and all that. I think they just used us as a means of transporting it over there because they took it all off us. And I was getting out of the train and on the platform and I could hear

03:00 this "bang, bang, bang" and I thought, "Good heavens what's all this?" It appears there was a bit of an air raid going on. And I looked around and all the locals, it couldn't have been too close, all the locals were just carrying on as normal, you know, the staff in the station. And then went out in the street forming up to march down. The civvies [civilians] run around, they weren't taking much notice at all. So I said, "All right. Bully to you. You've arrived at the war. You've got to be brave like the rest of

03:30 them." So it was a real reminder that this is where the war is sort of thing. Anyhow, we marched down to the Promenade. Like I say my first home was in the Grand Hotel. We just were allotted rooms in the Grand. And I went up, I don't know it was one of those higher floors. And the rooms were stripped out of course.

04:00 And bunks and that put in. As many as would fit in a room. I don't know how many was in mine, I don't know. But my mate Kelly Brett was still with me. And I remember, ours was a room at the front. With a great big window like that facing the English Channel. And I stood looking at that and I said, "Ooh, Le Havre. That's only just across there." I remembered that the border commando raid on Le

04:30 Havre. I said, "Gee, that's just across there. We're getting closer." And we'd also heard of the German sneak raiders, that's what they'd call them, that would come into coastal towns in Southern England and do a bit of strafing and then head for home. "Well gee," I thought, "if one comes in and there's only that window between me and him that'll be nasty." We also knew that Lord Haw Haw [prpoganda broadcaster], you know the British traitor, the propaganda minister for the Nazis, he knew

05:00 we were there. He used to call us what? "Those yellow-bellied blue orchids at Brighton". So I thought. "Well they know all about us and if they want to do something they could." Yeah, it was a bit scary, you know. Arriving with the guns going off and then getting into this room facing the Channel and things like that. But we settled down all right.

What did you think of this Lord Haw Haw knowing this stuff?

Oh, that didn't worry us. I didn't

05:30 worry about it, no.

But did it make you think that he knows?

Oh, well no, not really. England was a garrison wasn't it? So everything was vulnerable really. No I didn't dwell on that one either. I mean if something would have happened well, you would have just had to take what action was necessary at the time. Nothing happened really.

Tell us what the first

06:00 **few instructions at Brighton were to you?**

Well here again, I don't know about the first instructions.

Well, like your first day when you went in?

Well I think we must have just spent that day settling into the room sort of thing. I don't think we did anything special. And finding our way to the mess. That was down the bottom somewhere.

06:30 But that's about all. I don't remember anything particular on the first day.

Maybe not the first day there but the time you went in to be given orders?

Oh well, after that, yeah. Well we had to go to lessons, if you like, again. Lectures. And we used to form up in the streets beside and in the rear of the Metropole Hotel.

07:00 A lot of our instructors were RAF people. Here again, you fell in, in 3's, the whistles went that sort of thing. And we'd have to march to various building that they had schools in, all around Brighton. This was, for my lot, we didn't do any wireless work, we did a lot of aircraft recognition. Looking at silhouettes in the dark room.

07:30 And we did a lot of gunnery. They'd taken over a part on the Promenade, firing out to sea. And we fired the Vickers gun and also the Browning: that was the main gun that was used. If there was a stoppage we had to learn how to undo it blindfolded. How to cock it and get it going again, if it was going to go. We also did a lot of rifle drill there.

08:00 And this is firing on 25 Yard Range, firing out to sea. And I think at this time the idea was for anybody in any service in England had to be able to handle these weapons in case of invasion. Anyway, we did a lot that targets. You know I could handle it all right because we did a lot with rifles and shot guns when we lived on Creek Road. PT rifles they were. And we did a lot of clay pigeon shooting

08:30 with the shot gun. Here again this was to give us the deflection training and so on. Well I did well at that because I could handle a shot gun no problem. And the other one they taught us was, oh two more, was the Smith & Wesson 38 Revolver: that was the British Army revolver. That's different to the American Colt pistol. And learning to shoot with that, that was something different. We had

09:00 a screen, about as big as a door with a silhouette of a man on it. This was on the 25 Yard Range, about half way up. And we had to shoot at this. Well, I'd never used a revolver before; this was real tricky you know. You had to stand side-on and go like this. But I don't think I even hit the screen let alone the silhouette because you'd pull the trigger and the thing would kick out. Well I got the idea to pull the trigger before it was right up.

09:30 I got a few on that. But that was just by-the-by. But they also taught us to use the Sten gun. That was the equivalent to our automatic, our Owen gun out here. You know that all steel, submarine machine gun type of thing. Here again they're hard to learn because as you pull the trigger it would go like that. So you had to learn to hold it down otherwise it would go da-da-da-da-da-da

10:00 up into the air. But we did some of that but that was just in case sort of thing. We had more lectures on gas, being there and the possibility of it being used was very real. Like I say we were issued with gas masks and we had to live with them. But other than that, oh I forget what the other lectures were about. No.

10:30 **And what about this night vision recognition test? Describe that for us in detail.**

Well you're in a darkened room, like you had here. And there were various models, like those, hanging up at various distance away. Even while they were still you had to be able to look at them and identify them. Some of it was

11:00 camera work, the moving ones. Darkened of course. But you were taught not to look at a thing direct at night but to look at it slightly sideward. They reckoned that would give you the better view of it rather than staring straight ahead. Well you did that. Nearly every where you went there were models hanging up to keep them in front of you all the time. The models that were put in front of us we had to remember were the

11:30 German ones.

Was it better looking out of the side of your eyes?

Oh yeah. It is. Not right at the side but slightly sidewards, yeah.

Did they give you a reason for this?

Only that's the way to look at night time, that's all they said.

Were you doing your wireless operation?

No, we didn't do any. I don't think we did any wireless work

12:00 there at all because we weren't there for long. I can't remember doing any wireless work there.

Where were you taken to after Brighton?

After Brighton we went to an AFU: Advanced Flying Unit. This was a navigational thing really.

12:30 Where navigators started to do it properly. We flew in Ansons, that was one of the early Avro machines, the same people that built the Lancaster. Twin engine monoplane. It was used as a bomber for a while, over there, until it became obsolete. We used them in training. But it was mainly navigational exercises for navigators and while there were doing that the WOPs [wireless operators] did what we did out here.

13:00 We sent signals to various places on the ground. But there we could do a bit better, do something sensible. We used to get bearings or fixes and give these to the navigator. Now a bearing was and you were flying around and you'd get 4KQ in Brisbane, not 4KQ, no I'm wrong there. You'd get a service station in Brisbane on the ground,

13:30 an aerodrome or something like that. You knew where it was. And you'd ring up and you'd ask for, they were Q-signals. They meant certain things. I've forgotten them actually. I remember one was QDM and I think that was for a bearing. Doesn't matter. Anyway, you'd then hold your key down for a bit, they could take a bearing on you and they'd send this to you. And you'd receive it and give it to the navigator. He could then compare it to his own plot and see

14:00 if it fitted. The other one was a 'fix'. You did the same thing. You called up a station, held a key down and there were three satellites that could take bearings on you. And where they crossed, that was the fix, that was your position. They could give you that then and here again that went to the navigator to help him out. Granted, these things were only limited because it didn't apply over the Continent or anything like that. They didn't have the range for it of course.

14:30 But it did help in navigating around England on our navigational exercises. But that's what it was all about out at AFU. Mainly navigation because from here on in navigation was the whole thing really. While I say that, it was for the navigators but for the wireless ops we were banging away on our wireless sets.

While you talk about this being good for England (FAULTY TAPE)

15:00 **without it in Europe then?**

Oh no, well that's it. They had other methods of navigating. They had, the first one was 'dead reckoning': at your briefing you got, "This is your track," and the Met [meteorological] people could tell the wind, as they knew, because wind was important. The wind as they knew it and various aiming points and the weather as they knew it. And you used to take off

15:30 and navigate this way. Well, in the early days when they used that it was lucky if you got within 25 mile of the designated target area. And I'm not joking, that's real. You know a lot of it was more or less waste. But then, later on, we advanced to radar and that made a lot of difference. There was one called Oboe [ground radar navigational system].

16:00 That was carried by Mosquito aircraft. And the idea of that was the Oboe Mosquito would take off and fly on a certain track, like that, a designated track at a designated speed. And he would be being plotted from back, this is briefly, plotted from back in England. And when he got to a certain point he would be told to drop the bomb or flare or whatever it was then. It was pretty accurate really.

16:30 The other one was radar, airborne radar. That was the one with the radar screen that showed you the ground you were flying over. It did help a lot because, especially over coasts, over rivers, over towns. They all came up on the screen. And you know, you'd relate this to the track you already plotted on your chart. Oh, there was another one. What did it do? Oh, an extension of GLA, later called a RANE but an

17:00 extension of G… No but we flew, whenever I got to ops radar had been in use for a while so we flew with that.

So it was in place when you were?

Oh yeah, whenever that was.

Tell us about teaming up.

Well that gets to Operational Training Unit. We went from the AFU to OTU: Operational Training Unit. And

17:30 here the same thing applied. Pilots, navigators and bomb aimers and all came together at OTU. And you

teamed up. You were all put in a room, if you like, a gym of whatever and said, “O.K. form yourself up into crews.” You sorted yourselves out. And there was nothing official about it. Nothing, “you go with you” and so on.

18:00 And I was sort of standing around there, just looking around, wondering where to go and who to have and I looked up and an English pilot officer navigator come up and said, “You crewed up yet?” And I said, “No.” He says, “Oh, I’ve got a pilot here. We’re looking for a WOP.” And that was it. I went with them. The same thing applied to get our bomb aimer and the two gunners. So there was no actual “you go with you, go with you”. You sorted yourselves

18:30 out, yeah.

And how could you tell who was who?

Oh, we had our wings. See, after we graduated from gunnery school we got our air gunner’s wing. A pilot would have graduated and got his pilot’s wings a navigator would have his navigator’s wings. So that’s how you knew who everybody was, yeah. The bomber had a ‘b’ over their wing and the gunners had air gunner wings. That’s how you could identify everybody, yeah. By the time you’d reached that stage you’d finished your basic training.

19:00 **Was it like a school dance or something like that?**

Oh no, not really. You just stood around talking for a bit. Someone came and claimed you or you thought, “I like the look of that pilot I’ll go and talk to him.” Or something like that. That’s all it was. There was no turmoil, just a gradual sorting out.

Had you had any leave time in England?

Yeah.

19:30 I had leave when we first got to Brighton because you had to wait there until they could find a position for you. And with that I went through one of these organisations who do these things for service people. It was a scheme run by a lady writer of the Isles. And I went and applied to them for somewhere to go. And they give you lots of options but like I said, I wasn’t keen on

20:00 messing around in London. I opted to go into the country. So I went to, oh I forget the name of the place now. and I went out into the country a bit. And it did turn out to be, it was the local country brewery, not that that mattered much but I could have a beer when I wanted it. I just spent a lot of time doing not much really. Wandering around the village, wandering around the countryside. And the people I stayed with, the fellow of the house, the man of the house,

20:30 he was actually the chemist in the brewery. He offered me a 4.10 shotgun and said, “Oh, if you like to take this its O.K. to have pot-shots at pigeons but don’t try to shoot pheasants.” They might have been out of season or something. He might have owned them. Well I didn’t bother with that. No, that was just quiet. Getting away from everything. And only for a few days anyway.

21:00 But then, not so much leave we just had days off. Because in Brighton I learned to ice skate in an ice rink. My mate Kelly and I. We thought, “Oh we’ll have a go at this.” And we went to the local ice rink. You used to hire skates of course. And they used to have it in sessions: the beginners first and then the more skilled, then the figure skaters and then

21:30 the speed skaters would go to the ring like that. Well we didn’t mind because we’d go with the beginners at the beginning. And the ice rink, like most places of entertainment in England, had a bar. So we’d spend a bit of time at the bar in between sessions. And I’ll tell you, by the time it came to 10 o’clock we could skate real good. But that was quite good. I enjoyed that. We met a few people there. There were always people willing to, mainly the women that we got

22:00 friendly with a couple of them. They helped us in the very beginning. It’s amazing how just hanging onto your arm gives you a bit more confidence to get going sort of thing. But we did that a lot. But apart from that we didn’t do much else. Oh, we went to picture shows, yeah. And we put in a fair bit of time at Hennakie’s Beer Garden. That was just a beer garden. Well we put more time in there

22:30 when we came back after the war but that’ll come later. Oh we had to parade every morning, in Brighton. This was more or less for roll call and to see if you had a draft to go anywhere. You’d be advised of that. But that didn’t take long. You just formed up in the park near the hotels and in a half hour that was over. But then the rest of the time,

23:00 apart from if you’re going to lectures and things like that, you had to yourself. But the days were pretty full really. What with the lectures and with the time off you had, like I say you could do what we did. But that was the only leave: I went out of Brighton and went on up to this place in the country. And from AFU,

23:30 hang on, AFU? Yeah, I’m getting ahead of myself here. That was at Morton Valance. That’s where I met Margery’s family. And Morton Valance was about 5 miles out of Gloucester. And we were there over the Christmas and New Year. What, to see in the New Year in 1943.

24:00 ‘43 or ‘44? ‘44. 1944. It don’t matter. And we didn’t do anything ourselves but Marge’s sister Sibyl, she was involved with a women’s organisation that did organise things for troops. And they had issued an invitation to a hut full of Canadians on the station to attend their

24:30 New Year’s Eve function. But the Canadians had already accepted another invite so the girls then said, “Oh, well then we’ll have those Aussies.” A hut full of Aussies went there. And I met, like I say, Sibyl and some friends. I don’t know particularly Marge at that time. But it grew from that. I’d spend the time off that I had with them in Gloucester. I even bought a pushbike,

25:00 which I carted all around England with me. And I’d go into Gloucester on my days off and we’d stay at the house or maybe go to a movie, something like that. I can remember being there one day and her Dad, who always went out for his pipe to the local like most of them do over there. And he came home, I don’t remember what time it was when he had his Burberry raincoat on and his trilby hat, and he stood in the doorway. And he’s got white stuff all over his shoulders and all

25:30 over his hat. And I gaped at him and he said, “Yeah, it’s snowing out there.” I’d never seen snow before. And he said, “I don’t think you better go home tonight. Leave it until the morning.” Because my pass was all right until early morning. And I said, “Oh, I’ll be guided by what you say.” He said, “The roads will be icy, you’ll be in trouble.” So I bunked down in a chair or something for the night. Come morning I’m ready to take off and he says, “You be careful on the roads. They’ll be icy.” And, “No trouble.

26:00 I can ride a bike.” And pff, off I went. The first curve I came to I went down in an ungainly heap, slid about 20 yards into the gutter landing at the feet of a elderly English gentleman who just looked down at me and probably thought, “Stupid bloody Australian” or something like that. Anyhow I survived that. But after that I did spend time off with Marge and her people.

And how did you get to know Marge in particular?

Well

26:30 that was only through the association. Like I say the invite came from the group Sibyl was in but then invited to home and met them. Oh, originally Sibyl was the one I used to take out. But later on I sort of changed and went on from there with Marge.

Why the change?

I thought I had the wrong girl. When I got

27:00 to know them a bit. Nothing dramatic about it. Just a change of affection, if you like. And it blossomed from there on in because from there on in I spent all my leave down in Gloucester with the family, which was good.

And what was it about Marge that attracted you?

At the time, I don’t know. Probably a better looking sort. Oh, no. I don’t know if it was anything outstanding or anything like that

27:30 but we were just attracted to each other I suppose.

Was it a good help in reflection to receiving a ‘Dear John Letter’?

Oh well, I’d forgotten that. And I suppose it was. I now had another contact with a girlfriend, yeah.

And was it important for you when you were going on your missions to have someone?

Important, well that’s a yes and a

28:00 no, because on missions it was a good idea not to be too involved. And we didn’t get too involved either because we both knew that we were treading on pretty dangerous ground. But the good part about it was having the family, the family life to go to, to spend my leave instead of going to London and boozing and knocking yourself around. And that was a good part of it. But having to walk away from that after 5 or 6 day of leave and go back again

28:30 that wasn’t very good.

Tell us about after teaming up with your crew. Tell us about the crew, starting with the pilot.

Well the crew, he was a very tall Englishman and that suited me because the pilot I wanted either an Englishman or an Australian. And I was quite happy with

29:00 him. His name was Pelly, P-E-L-L-Y, Andy Pelly. The navigator that came and claimed me was, the skipper was a flying officer, the navigator was a pilot officer, and he was a rather portly Englishman named David Sinfield but we called him Tubby of course. The engineer, when we got him, we didn’t get him,

29:30 oh yes we did we got him at OTU, he was an Englishman. My bomber aimer was a Canadian pilot officer. And the two gunners were both English. So that made up the crew of seven.

Why did you want an English pilot?

Oh well, on reputation and so on. I think they had a better reputation. They'd been through so much of it early time. I mean the skipper hadn't,

30:00 mine hadn't but still it was the same blood, if you like. So I thought, no I don't want to mess around with Canadians or any of these other strange ones. I'm not saying they weren't good pilots or aircrew but I didn't know. "Oh. I think I'd like and Englishman or an Australian to fly me around."

What was the talk about Canadians?

No, no, nothing like that. It was just me. This is what I thought. What I would like

30:30 that was all. Actually I flew my first op with Canadians. More about that later.

Tell us what you were training on at this stage. What plane?

We flew a Wellington. That was a Vicars Wellington. A twin engine, high wing monoplane. A good aircraft in its day. It was one of the main bombers in its day. It was still used on bombing raids too, to make up numbers at times but it was a good aircraft.

31:00 And here again, it got more intense, but it was down to navigation again. We had to do a lot. At daytime first. The skipper had to learn to fly the aeroplane. And he had an instructor with him originally and he would do circuits and bumps, circuits and bumps. We call them now 'touch and go' I think. But with them the crew didn't have the time off. But in a Bomber Command aircraft you couldn't

31:30 take off without the wireless operator in case the pilot got lost. You could ring up base and get a bearing and say, "Here fly on this until we get home." So I had to sit there and listen to the BBC [British Broadcasting Corporation] or read a book while he did circuits and bumps to learn to fly the aeroplane. And you'd do that at daytime and then you'd do it at night time. We did the navigational exercises at daytime and then did them at night time. And we did this, oh I forget how long we were there. Oh, gunnery exercises as well

32:00 with a fighter aircraft. And we did all the evasion and him doing the attacking etcetera. But this was done with a camera gun so they could look at the film later and assess whether they were shooting at him or not sort of thing. A lot of bombing with the bomb aimer. He had to be trained of course, with how to operate the bombs. And for me, more for me just banging away on the Morse code key.

32:30 At the end of this. I forget how long we were at OTU, it doesn't matter. At the end of that we had to fly what we called a 'nickel raid' [propaganda leaflets raid]. This was a name for a leaflet raid. You were dropping propaganda leaflets over. We used to do this dropping them over the Occupied Countries, we didn't go flying into Germany. Well we flew a nickel raid to Chateau Dun, which is just

33:00 outside Paris. Bright moon light night. And we survived it but one of the others got shot down. So I thought, "God, that's not a good start to things." After that, well, we just moved on again.

What was it like going on this first nickel raid?

I was a bit scared about it because I thought: Oh well, even if it's only to

33:30 France. But we also knew that the German fighter airfields were gathered around France. So, you know, you could have been intercepted no problem at all. But at least it was only short. You could get in and get out sort of thing. It was just to introduce you to it. To give the idea of what it was all about.

How was the team developing as a team?

I thought we were developing pretty good. Everybody seemed to be getting faith in everybody else.

34:00 Everybody seemed to be handling their job quite O.K. Like from there on in we were a band of brothers if you like to coin that American phrase. But we were bonded together. And we did everything together after that. Your days off you went out with the crew to various hostelries and things like that. But no, I was quite happy with our progress.

Where would you go out to bond together?

34:30 Mainly it was to, the mid upper gunner could play a piano and all the pubs in England, all the little local ones, had a piano. So we'd sort one out that suited us. And the skipper had a car. The skipper came from a middle class English family. His father was titled. They were Sir Kenneth and Lady Pelly. He was into shipping lines and coal mines and

35:00 Lord knows what. They had a rather stately home in Sussex. But that's later on. Anyway, we'd sort out a pub and we'd go to that. And Dusty, Dusty was his nickname. Dusty Ayres, obviously dusty air. And he'd play the piano. He didn't mind that because around the bar the people listening always shouted the pianist a

35:30 drink. So he'd be playing away with 2 or 3 glasses of grog sitting on the piano. But that and you went on this but you didn't get rotten drunk or anything like that. I only drunk half-pints because I couldn't handle too many full pints. And you'd play darts, for one thing. You sang around a piano, you'd talk to

other people that were there.

36:00 And you drank but you didn't drink heavily. You still went home from that fairly sober. But the heavier drinking came later when there was more pain to kill.

What would you sing? What were the songs?

Oh all the songs of the day. All the air force songs. We had ditties made up to lots of songs. The WAAFs [Women's Auxiliary Air Force] had a few good ones.

36:30 They had a good ditty to 'Melody', 'Jealousy', 'Jealousy' it was. And 'Roll me Over in the Clover Lay me Down and do it Again'. There's a few verses to that one. But no, we would just sing 'Bless 'em All' and things like that. Things we could bellow out. Off-hand it's a bit difficult to remember their

37:00 names quickly. But when we got to the squadron we had a ditty to 'McNamara's Band'. That's the squadron song and we'd open up with that. No we'd just have a night and drink to satisfy us. Because you had to fly the next day you didn't overdo it. The skipper had a car. Originally it was an MG car and he could fit 2 in the

37:30 bucket seats, 2 sitting on the folded down hood and 2 each out on each front mudguard. And he was good, he could get it going on 2 wheels going around a bend. Because he'd done a bit of early, before he joined up, where's the race track there? Sandown? Anyway he'd done a little bit driving on tracks anyway. But no, his was the transport to get us there and get us home.

38:00 But the mid uppers gunner, the one who played the piano, his wife her people owned the pub in Bury St Edmonds. But that was a fair way away but once we had leave long enough we could go over there and spend the night. We'd drink and sleep where ever we could fit, after closing time sort of thing. And come home the next morning.

Overall was this really important to developing your skills together for actually fighting together?

Oh yes.

38:30 Yeah. Oh it was, yeah. I mean anything we did together was important because we got to know more about each other and this was all necessary.

You mentioned some nicknames. Did you have one?

No, I was just plain Bill. Dusty, his surname was Ayres: he was dusty airs. And Tubby, David was Tubby because that's what he was. But the

39:00 others had their ordinary names. Like the bomb aimer was Archie McLeod. The engineer was, oh I'll think of it later. The rear gunner was Stan Carr. The bomb aimer was Archie McLeod, the mid upper gunner was Dusty Ayres.

39:30 Only 3 of them had a nickname, yeah.

What was Dusty for?

Well, air. Clean air, dusty air. So that's how he got Dusty Ayres. We didn't invent it he came to us with it.

Tape 5

00:37 **Can you take me through the first proper operation that you went on? From when they briefed you and that sort of thing.**

We can lead up to that in just a few sentences. From OTU we went to a Heavy Conversion Unit were the skipper had to learn to fly a Halifax, the four-engine bomber. From there we went to a Lancaster finishing school where he learnt to fly the

01:00 Lancaster. And from there we were posted to a squadron.

Just a question on that. You talked earlier about what you job was while the pilot was learning. Did this change on the Lancasters?

No. We used to same wireless gear. We were just keeping in practice, that's all it was.

When you were at the Lancaster finishing school, how many flights up would you do with the entire crew in?

01:30 Oh, we didn't do many there because we'd had the entire crew since OTU. This was more or less for the skipper's benefit. We were only there for about half a dozen flights. And then we moved on. We went to the Main Force Bomber Command Squad, the 100 Squad near Grimsby. And for a briefing, you look in

the morning at the board with the battle order on it, we used to call it.

02:00 And your crew is listed under your pilot's name. But for my first one, being a rookie crew, we were obliged to go to a briefing, to learn what goes on in a briefing room. But if a crewmember is missing from any other crews they'd pinch the one from the spare crew to go. Well it happened on this time, this night, there were two wireless operators wanted. I went

02:30 with one and our deputy seniors leader went with the other. And my first op wasn't with my own crew it was with crew of Canadians. And the target was to Kiel, you know on the Baltic Sea. And I said to the Canuck [Canadian] skip, I said, "Look, I haven't done this thing before, you know. First time etcetera." "Don't worry about it," he said, "Just look after the wireless gear and you'll be all right." So we got into the target all right and coming back home

03:00 across the North Sea we were faced by a huge storm front. So quick calculations between the pilot, engineer (I think controls the fuel) and the navigator. But we couldn't get underneath it. Too high to fly over. The only option was to fly around. "Have we got enough fuel to do it?" "Oh, yeah. I think we might have." "That's all right." And then he scared the life out of me, remember this is still my first trip. He comes up, "Hey WOP," he says, " you better get tuned

03:30 on the SOS frequency in case we've got to ditch this thing." You know that rather frightened me but anyway, obviously we made it all right with a little bit to spare. But I thought, "Well this is a good opening to it" with my being in the North Sea the first time. But the next op was with my own crew. And here again, we got the briefing. And here again, it's mainly the navigation. There's a big map on the wall with the

04:00 lines of the route. And the navigators had a previous, independent briefing where they've drawn these all in on their charts and everything. But the bigger one's a general briefing. But they know all about it. And we get information from the navigation officer, the gunnery officer, Met man and that's about all that talks to us then. Gunnery doesn't have much to say. And

04:30 from that you know what's ahead of you. You know where you're going and what they say the weather is, which is quite often not right. Because they're doing it from England to know what's going on in Europe. They had no information coming out. Anyhow, that was all right. You got used to that. Then after the briefing you have the last meal. You get a very good meal for wartime England. It was usually

05:00 steak and eggs and that type of thing. Well, your ration for an egg was one a week and so on. But seeing as you're going to do what you're doing you have to be "full-belly fit" and that sort of thing. We have the meal. Then you make your way to the crew to pick up Mae Wests [inflatable life jackets], parachutes and headphone gear and so on. Helmets and headphone gear. And they're taken out to the aircraft then

05:30 in crew trucks, two buses, whatever you like. Usually driven by WAAFs. And they take you out to dispersal for your aircraft. The ground crew are there. They've already got her all tuned up for you. And you hang around until it's time to get in. I'll tell you this You're a broad-minded woman aren't you? There was always a last ritual before we boarded the aeroplane. And that was to go and pee on the rear of the tail wheel

06:00 of the aeroplane. I don't know who invented that one but anyhow we all did it.

Who first introduced it?

I don't know, that's why I say, "I don't know who invented that." But it became a tradition for our Bomber Command. And you just load up then. And everybody goes to their position. The skipper gets the word to move. Wireless silence of course then. And everything's done by

06:30 Aldis lamp. Onto the taxiway. Out to the end of runway and it's controlled by a control van at the end of the runway with an Aldis lamp you know, one that flicks on and off. But this was either a red or a green. And you're on red until he tells you to go. Then skipper opens everything up but the breaks are on and the old kite shudders. And you think, "Ooh, here we go again." Anyhow away he goes. You take off.

07:00 And usually there are a whole heap of people lined up on the runway just to see you off sort of thing. A lot of these would be WAAFs that had got an interest in some of the crew. Anyhow, you'd tear down the runway as fast you could and get airborne hand over fist. You'd circle over the 'drome. The navigator would set course and away you'd go, gradually climbing to height. But that one, that took us to Stettin,

07:30 which was another Baltic Sea port. But further in. It was about nine hours trip along on that one. But this took us over Sweden, a neutral country. We weren't supposed to fly over neutral country. We'd fly over neutral country and they'd put up a terrific light display of searchlights and trails of flak, you know. This flak coming up in streams but always about a mile away from the bomber's stream. The whole purpose, I think,

08:00 was just to impress the German Consul. Just that, "Oh no. We don't like these people flying over our territory" sort of thing. Very pretty, the display. Yeah, that one was quite uneventful really: running out and home again. So we got that one under our belt, the first one with our crew and it was, well, easy in the long run.

08:30 When I say easy, you got shot at every time. I mean if there was something in Germany worthwhile us

bombing it, it was worthwhile the Germans defending it. You had to run the, night fighters was one thing but you always had flak over the target. And once they knew you were there they could, on their radar, get your track, your height, your speed and so

09:00 they could gear everything up and they'd just put up what we called a 'box barrage' over the target. Looking ahead, approaching your target, all you see is this sky covered with black smoke puffs; floating flak shells. And you know you've got to fly through that. You can't go around it or anything like that. You've got to stay on course and you've got to stay level until the bomb aimer drops the bomb. This, "Left, left, steady" sort of thing, you've heard of that? It's straight and level,

09:30 you drop the bombs. The bomb's gone but you still had to stay straight and level because we'd take a photo with a camera that's fixed to the fuselage. It's all synchronised. We'd drop a photoflash. Drop the bombs, a photoflash and the camera: everything's synchronised for the camera to fire when the bombs hit the ground. It'd illuminated by the flare you drop. But being fixed, you've

10:00 got to stay straight and level. No evasive action no matter what's going on around you. Because if you went like that you'd take a photograph over there. And when they analysed that back at base tomorrow they could say, "Where the hell did you go to last night?" So you just had to be straight and level and dead straight. Now that was agony that was. About 20 seconds it was but it seemed like 20 minutes. And you'd hear the gunner mutter, "Let's get the hell out of here." Or something like that. But once you did that you'd put the

10:30 nose down a bit, pick up a bit of speed and get out of it. But you know, that was nerve-racking. It wasn't good. And that would happen on every target.

No matter what?

Yeah. Like I say, if there was something worth bombing, they'd defend it.

So there's no circumstance in which a pilot will sort of not fly?

Oh, yes. Oh, there is but not over a target. You'd take evasive action if you were attacked by a fighter.

11:00 As long as your gunner see it in time etcetera. And it's in a position, not like ours, sneaking underneath. And they do what they call a Lancaster Corkscrew. The idea is the gunners will watch it. As soon as it gets to a range where they think it's due to open up they'll yell, "Corkscrew port or starboard." Well the corkscrew was like that. Here again it's altering the deflection of the fire because his guns are fixed in his

11:30 wings and to aim them he's got to aim his aeroplane. So if you keep doing this for long enough he'll get sick of it and clear off and find somebody who might be asleep sort of thing. But I tell you what, while that's going on you're sitting, hanging on like this. As it's going up and down and your stomach's going down here, up to the top it's coming up there. The parachute pack come up off the floor beside me and goes back down again. You can hear the guns: tic, tic, tic, tic, tic over the intercom. Smell the cordite

12:00 coming down through the fuselage. I tell you, it's a rather nasty feeling. You think: when's it going to happen sort of thing. But we didn't have too much of that. When we got our attacks. The worst one was a trip to Frankfurt. Coming back from Frankfurt that night we had to fight off four separate combats. We had to do it 4 separate times. But we made it. Thanks to the gunner and the skipper.

So what happened 4 times?

12:30 Four combats. Fighters attacked us 4 times. Not just the once but 4 times. And well, they didn't get us obviously. Thanks to the gunners' alertness and the skipper's skill in doing all this we got away with it.

What's the first warning you get when a fighter's coming?

There's 2 ways. I had a radar gadget in front of me that was called 'Fish-pond'. And it was a

13:00 signal device, like a radar screen, it would pick up blips as the scan's going around. And the blips and then a bomber stream represented aircraft. But it only worked from about 5 or 10 degrees above the horizontal. You can see the big blister under my Lancaster it's in the bottom. And you see this. Naturally it's got a lot of blips on it because that's other aircraft in the bomber stream but if you see

13:30 one coming in and sort of closing on an angle you know; hey, there's something wrong here. You warn the gunners to watch at so-and-so, there's something out there. If it is, well and good, they can call the shots to get away from it. If it turns out to be just a bomber dog-legging you or something to kill time that's' O.K. But other than that it's purely visual for a gunner. A lot depends on their alertness.

14:00 **You mentioned on that first flight that it took 9 hours. What do you do for those 9 hours?**

You sit very uncomfortably in your parachute harness. Usually there's a buckle under here that you're sitting on. And when it's fastened properly you sit bent over like this. And I tell you, you don't think about that. We rode

14:30 with fear on our shoulder. It was real. It was there. But it wasn't the kind of fear that had you hiding under the table. You knew there was something out there trying to stop you from what we were going to

do. And while it was there you just got on with what you were doing. Well the skipper's got to fly the plane. The navigator, he's busy all the time. With me: it's looking at the Fish-pond or we used to get a broadcast every

15:00 quarter of an hour from base in case they had something to tell us. Other than that they just broadcast the figure that you had to record in your log otherwise they'd say, "What were you doing? Did you go to sleep, did you?" And the gunners are rotating turrets looking for whatever. The engineer helping the pilot. So everybody had their job and you just did that. You didn't think about anything else. Didn't think about time. You didn't think about the

15:30 discomfort. You just had to put up with it. But that sort of thing didn't -- you just concentrated on what you had to do.

What kept you alert?

We used to get "wakey-wakey pills". But we only used to use them when we went out at night to keep us awake. But there was no way in the world you'd go to sleep like that on a bombing operation. Oh no. It was never a worry.

What were the

16:00 **pills like?**

Oh I don't know. They were wakey-wakey pills. I never ever used them. So I don't know. I think they were just designed to stop you from going to sleep. That was the main thing. I think some of the gunners used to use them. But what you've got to do and knowing what it's all about, you don't go to sleep, no. That's the furthest thing from your mind.

Describe for me, you mentioned that you all get into the

16:30 **trucks and they drive you towards the plane. What sort of things are you feeling as you head towards?**

Let me see. You feel, "O.K. this is it. We're off again". What I used to feel is once I got, at the dispersal point, got out of the truck. There was a little man out there. He used to shove his hand into my belly, grab a handful and twist it tight. And he'd never let

17:00 go until I got out of that plane and stood on the ground again. That was the tension if you like or the whatever. But it was just that sort of feeling I had. But that was when I got into the aeroplane and it's in your stomach and your feeling it there.

What's the physical, what are your senses experiencing in the plane? Temperature, sounds, smell?

17:30 Well temperature to start with. That didn't worry me. It worried the gunners of course. They were out exposed in the turrets while they had their heavy suits, electric operated suits and so on. Heavy gloves and what have you. They had the cold to worry them. In the cockpit was where I sat, with the navigator and the pilot and the engineer in front. I had control of the heating apparatus. That was off the exhausts of the engine and it just kept hot air into it.

18:00 Well, cold wasn't a worry but now and then the others would scream for more heat and if I turned it up too much I'd be too hot. But no, that wasn't a worry. No other sensations other than the concentration on the job, was all.

What are the sounds like in the Lancaster?

The sound? Bear in mind that we've got the helmet on, earphones,

18:30 oxygen mask over here. At night time we used oxygen from the ground up. At daytime from 10,000 feet. The main thing here is four Rolls-Royce Merlin engines thundering just out there. You can't hear much at all. Oh, you can on your intercom because that goes into here and that's all right. But to talk in the fuselage, you'd have to get down near an ear and really yell. But we didn't have to do that of course. We did all our talking on the

19:00 intercom. But that was the main noise, the thunder of the engines.

How about when there's flak and all that sort of stuff? Does that have a sound?

If it's close enough you'll hear it, yeah. If it's close enough you'll feel it. We came back enough times with holes in the fuselage or a wing. And on one trip, I think it was to

19:30 Carlsberg, that's in the Ruhr Valley, we had a decent number of flak, shrapnel from flak. It took the port outer engine and just knocked it right out. It didn't catch on fire, luckily. But the skipper had to, they call it feather the engine, feather the propeller: turn it straight on so like that so it don't windmill. If it's still like that it will windmill madly and upset the aeroplane.

20:00 And it shudders and everything. It's bad enough flying with two on one side and just the one on the other. That looked very ominous. I used to stand at times in the Astrodome, this was for the navigator:

never used it much they didn't. It was above me. Just a Perspex dome where they could hang their, what did they call that camera? Astro-camera, that's right, and take star shot or things like that. But there

20:30 were times when I would stand in that and be an extra pair of eyes, let them know if something was wrong with the equipment or something like that. Well this time I stood there for a while and looked at that propeller that wasn't doing anything and thought, "Oh, it looked very ominous." I thought, "Ooh, that's one down. We've got 3 left. We don't want to lose any more." But they had to be real close before you'd hear anything. But the real one I heard

21:00 we'll come to that later. It was when we got shot down.

Just going back a little bit. You mentioned the first time you flew up was as a spare. Is there a stigma attached to being a spare?

Oh no. No. This is part of the learning process. You're the rookie crew, you haven't flown an op. So come along to the briefing and know what's going on there. Like I say then if someone wants an aircrew they're

21:30 chosen out. There's no stigma attached. No. You're just the rookie crew, you're learning and that's part of it. You'll be taking off with your ops, yeah. No, that's quite normal.

Describe your job as wireless operator during the actual bomb drop section.

Well you haven't got anything to do really.

22:00 While you're on the bomb run, well you're sitting there waiting for it to happen. But as a wireless op what I'm sitting on in the bomb bay is a 4,000 pound 'cookie', as we'd call it. A 4,000 pound block-buster bomb. And yeah, a healthy place to be. And one of my functions over the target, and that's about the only thing, was to stand over the bomb bay with a

22:30 sort of a hook thing in my hand. If the cookie didn't release automatically I was to hook down into an apparatus and let it go. I only ever had to do that once. But that's all I virtually ever did on the bomb run. Because the bomb run that was the forte of the bomb aimer and the pilot.

What do you see when the bomb..?

Oh, when you look down at

23:00 a target it's just horrendous really. You see the target indicators, we'll come to them later, dropped by Pathfinder Force on the ground. You see the flashes of the exploding bombs, the cookies. You see the flashes of the anti-aircraft guns around it. You'll see smoke and God knows what. All this is going on, on the ground. It looks pretty bad really. You think, "Thank God

23:30 I'm not in the middle of that but that doesn't help the feeling in your stomach either. You think, "Oh, let's get away from this" yeah.

How about when the bomb doors open and you're standing over it?

Oh, I've got a floor. I'm on a floor. There's no danger of falling through it or anything like that. The floor runs right through and the bomb bay is right underneath this floor. And the doors just open out like that

24:00 underneath. I think I've got one up there that might have the bomb doors open. Oh no, no danger of falling out or anything like that. But we could carry about, normal bomb loads for Bomber Command, main course and main flights was a cookie: a 4,000 pounder and incendiaries. A cookie was to knock it down and the incendiaries was to burn it up.

24:30 But in Pathfinder Force we only used high explosive because we didn't want to start fires to obliterate the flares that we dropped.

Was there ever any occasions when you'd have to abort and not be able to drop the bomb?

No. We never flew one abortion. No, if that happened you were obliged to go through and go back around and do it again. But I don't think we ever had to do that.

25:00 I can't remember doing it, no.

What would have happened if you tried to land with the bomb still on?

You could do it. We actually did it once. But the idea was we had certain designated areas in the English Channel or the sea. And we were to jettison the bombs there on the way back if we hadn't dropped them. But we never ever used them.

25:30 **What was the occasion when you had to land with the bomb still?**

Oh, I forget what raid it was on but it was a normal raid and a couple of them wouldn't dislodge. So we couldn't do much about it. We just took them back, see. They're primed but the priming mechanism doesn't really start to function until it falls away. It's usually a propeller on the front and a pin through it attached to a wire.

26:00 Well as the bomb falls away it pulls the pin out, allows the propeller, that triggers the firing mechanism in the bomb. If that's still in it's quite safe. We had one once, the Lancaster fully loaded with bomb load and all on and tearing down the runway to take off. The next thing it's on its belly. And we heard later that the engineer, he's the one who did it, said, " I thought the

26:30 skipper said wheels up." He pulled the wheels up before they had flying speed. And we skidded. But they all walked away from it. Nothing went off. I think they got away in a hurry, just the same.

Your position as wireless operator, was that also air gunner?

Yeah. The wireless operator is a bit of a Jack of all trades. I done the gunnery course, I could man a turret

27:00 if necessary. Now if anything else was wanting to be done down in the fuselage, like the navigator he couldn't leave his position, had to keep with the plot and the engineer couldn't, obviously the gunners couldn't, there was always the WOP. If there was something wanting looking out of whatever, you picked up a portable oxygen bottle and clipped that on and did it. But I could man a turret. I used to practise on practice exercises, training exercises over

27:30 England. I would go and sit in the turret for a while and just manoeuvre it around and so on and keep familiar with it. But never had to do it on ops. No. But available to do so if necessary, yes.

You mentioned when you'd look down over a target and you'd think I don't want to be down there. What sort of thoughts did you have about...?

No. I didn't have any. I've been asked this before. I had no feelings what so ever about that.

28:00 I knew we were doing a lot of damage. Killing a lot of people and so on and so forth. But my thought was, "Hitler started this". And you think of Warsaw and Poland he devastated it, without warning. He just razed most of it. He did the same to Rotterdam. He belted the hell out of London. He devastated Coventry. I mean, we were just paying him back. No, I wasn't worried.

28:30 I still am not worried or concerned about that. No conscience feeling at all because we were getting the upper hand.

Do you know primarily what most of your targets were?

What names of them?

What sort of facilities they were?

Yeah, well we were always given an aiming point. We weren't just sent, "Go and bomb Cologne" or something like that. It could be an oil refinery, they were popular

29:00 ones. Oil storage areas, they were popular. Railway marshalling yards, they were popular too. Docks on the coast. Oh, the canals. On the canals you did what damage you could in them because they used them a lot. Oh, what else? Oh, Krupp in Essen. Krupp munitions factory. It was their big munitions opo. We could go to Essen and bomb

29:30 Krupp. Knock a bit of it down but they'd build it up again so we'd go back in a month's time and do it again. But Krupp was always the aiming point in Essen. Airfields. We bombed airfields. A lot of the fighter ones in France. We'd go and tickle them up now and again. But shortly after the invasion, D-Day, we were flying then. We did a lot of

30:00 supporting the ground troops. We went to Calais three times, I think it was, Le Havre twice. We bombed 2 airfields, oh I forget their names: in France and one in Holland, that were kind of close to the Western Front. And Walsoorden, that's off the coast of Holland. We went there when the main Front line had by-passed it and there were still a lot of

30:30 Germans holding it up there causing a bit of a nuisance of themselves. We were sent there to quieten them down a bit. And that's where I saw something that gave me an awful feeling in my stomach. It was a daylight operation, we didn't do too many of them but these were close, after the Germans had been pushed back. And we were acting in the roll of supporters to master bomber. A master bomber,

31:00 he was supplied by Pathfinder Force. And he'd go over and he'd drop his flares, he'd circle in the area, see where the flares were located in relation to the aiming point and direct main force, over the radio, which flares to bomb so on and so on. So he kept it concentrated as near as possible on the aiming point. Well while he's doing that, he was on his own, he could be easily sorted out by the radar. So some of the following path

31:30 Pathfinder Force of people drops your flares and we act what is called a supporter. That's fly around with him. At night time it was just as well you couldn't see what was going on because there'd be bombs falling all around and so on and things like that. And that happened on a Walsoorden end trip. we dropped our bombs and flares and we were supporter. And I stood in the astrodome and I could see these others up here and see the bombs coming down like this here and here. And all of a sudden, I watched one, a big

32:00 cookie came down and it went right on top of a Lancaster. It exploded in a great big pall of black smoke. It just hung through the rest of the attack. That made me sick in the stomach that one. But you know, that was the danger at night time. We were staggered generally at 3 different heights at 1,000 feet apart. Everybody cribbed some of course to get further away from the ack-ack [anti-aircraft fire]. But, you know

32:30 the bombers were streamed. You could have 800 aircraft on a target in maybe half an hour. In the middle of the night. Not flying in formation or anything like that. You were all supposed to be on the same course aiming for the same place. And it used to get a bit hairy. We came back several times, luckily it was with incendiaries, they were 4 pounders, they were packed in crates or canisters. But were come back several times with

33:00 one of these sticking in the wind that didn't explode when it hit. And I got photographs in there, I didn't get them out. And one where a bigger bomb went right through a wing and tore a dirty great hole in it and didn't go off and the plane got back. But how many must have happened. That and collisions at night time. There must have been you know, dozens of them but you'd never hear of them because all you'd hear was "So-and-so's crew missing." So that would be it. You wouldn't know how of course. But that one

33:30 in daylight that shook me a bit yeah.

Did you witness any other planes get shot or blown up?

Well, not so much me but the rest of the crew, up front and the gunners they could see all around. And they would report to the navigator, "A plane on fire at So-and-so." He used to have to log these so they could use it, tell it to intelligence when we got back. But no, I

34:00 can't remember seeing that myself for the reason that I was busy inside. But it did happen, yeah. If it was getting too many you'd hear the skipper say to navigator, "Make a note Tubby." He wouldn't say why. But you knew something had happened and he wasn't going to tell us the rest in case it frightened us more.

What sort of thing would it be?

Oh, an aircraft being shot up or exploding or chased by fire, something like that.

34:30 He'd be a bit discreet, if you like and keep the real result to himself and tell them when we got back.

You spoke about the master bomber and we'll talk about being a Pathfinder in a moment but before you were a Pathfinder was there much sort of radio noise? Could you hear the master bombers?

Yeah.

What sort of things would you hear?

You'd hear him. He wouldn't say anything

35:00 until he wanted a correction on where to bomb. Normally if you didn't have that the attack tended to creep forward. Aircraft getting rid of their bombs early so they could get out of it. But that's all you'd hear of him. You might hear his deputy. But other than that, I can still remember one set of call-signs. The master bomber was "strong man" and main force was "bomb load". And I remember him coming up on the radio on one occasion:

35:30 "Strong man one to bomb load, strong man one to bomb load. Bomb the centre of red T-I." That's the sort of thing he would tell you. He'd correct you. He'd tell you what to bomb. That was all he had to say really. Or, occasionally, we only had this happen once on one of the daylight raid after the Invasion [D-Day]. If you were with those supporting the troops you had to have good visibility. If there was

36:00 cloud and something you didn't want to drop it on them. He might get there, looking around and come up and say, "Well, too much cloud. Let's go home." Or something like that. And you'd have to abort and go back but we only did that once. But he was a very, very important part of getting an attack concentrated but he had a pretty dangerous job really. They were generally higher ranking, long serving, highly skilled crews.

36:30 If you lost one of them it would be a blow.

Talking about the fear and the tension. What other superstitions or lucky charms existed?

Yeah, well I've got, it's inside that jacket hanging in my bedroom, a little kangaroo, cut out of a piece of kangaroo hide really. And I had it attached inside my battle jacket there. I had a

37:00 boomerang of course. I wanted to go back with it.

Tell me about the boomerang.

That was given to me by my mother when I was leaving to go overseas. And of course the sentiment behind it is: well, boomerangs come back, so we'll see what this one can do. That's what it was. Like I

said before, I never moved without it. And luckily got it back in Germany and it kept doing its thing, yeah.

37:30 The white scarf, to a degree but I also used it to shove up the back, under the back of my helmet. Because above the collar, there was always a breeze on that. So I used to shove it up there. But I got them to send it over for me anyway. And a bit of a mug there with a white scarf but it was the thing too. No, that's all I had in the way of lucky charms

38:00 or anything like that.

How about superstitions?

Well the only one was the ritual of the tyre wheel, that's about all. I never had any others, I don't think. No, I don't think I had any other superstitions.

How about amongst the rest of your crew?

I don't know. No, I can't answer for them. I don't know. It wasn't a thing we talked about I suppose. I mean I never went to talk and say, "Oh, I've got a boomerang. It's going to bring me back." No.

Was

38:30 **there any sort of, do you want to..?**

Yeah, well it's fairly worn out now. But that's all it was. It's got a RAAF badge and a pair of wings in the middle and "good luck" written on the sides. But that's all it is. And it did its job. Did it nicely.

39:00 And that thing, the silk scarf. We used to have them in my day. And when you went out at night in your [(UNCLEAR)]. And I used to put it around and shove it up the back, up here and it kept me neck warm. That's all it was for. I wasn't wearing it the night we got shot down or I wouldn't have had it now. But the boomerang, I think that was the main thing I was concerned about.

39:30 I had to have him. Well mainly because Mum gave him to me anyway.

Did you ever tell her that you carried it with you all the time?

Oh, yeah. She, they knew what I did with it. And in my dress uniform it went into the breast pocket and in my battle dress jacket it went in there too.

What would have happened if you'd forgotten it one day?

I suppose that would have worried me. But I never did. No,

40:00 I think it would have. Well with a thing like that you have your feelings about it. If it's not there well you, I probably would have worried a bit about it, yeah. But we're talking about something that didn't happen so I didn't have to deal with any emotions about it anyway.

Tape 6

00:37 **What were you going to tell me?**

There was another thing I've just remembered. A talisman of some sort. I got my family to send me over a couple of pairs of lady's silk stockings because I've always had cold feet and even with the thick socks in my flying boots they were never real warm. But others had done this. And used the silk stocking on

01:00 first and then the others over the top.

And you saw this as perhaps a bit of luck?

I don't know. I didn't look at the luck side I was just looking at the comfort side really when I asked for them.

What was the sight like, being inside a bomber raid of, say, 800 planes?

Well it was night time. You didn't see them. There was no sight. You knew they were there but you didn't see them.

01:30 Even right from back in England at Base. We didn't do what the Americans did: get up and circle and circle and get all their planes in formation and then take off. We just had it all timed so that we could get airborne, circle the base to set course and take off at the time we were set to take off. But each plane flying individually. So at night time the only time you might see 1 or 2 was in bright moonlight. If you were above the cloud in bright moonlight you'd see one over there and over there.

02:00 Other than that you wouldn't see them. Nope.

Was there any chance of mistaking, well not bombers but some of your own planes for

German?

Yeah. That happens, yeah. Oh yeah. Often crews would come back and say they'd been shot at. "It was one of ours. We were along side of him but he just blasted us." Yeah, that happened, yeah. Not every night or all the time but on

02:30 occasions it did. You know, you had a gunner who was a bit nervous and trigger happy and would see a bit of a blur out there and he would let's fly at it. Yeah.

Tell us about coming back from a raid.

Well coming back was the same as going in. Your track was always routed so you went around flak belts we knew and cities where there'd

03:00 be flak guns and things like that. And searchlights and so on. We still had to dodge all them coming home. You still had to dodge the night fighters because once they knew where you were and they could still fly, they had fuel, they'd keep following a bomber stream and shoot you down on the way home. So you still had to stay alert and on the job. Even early times, even when you got back to base and were

03:30 circling to land in the dark aircraft had been shot down by what they call an 'intruder'. We used to do the same to them you know, go over. That's when you're really vulnerable. You're just concentrating on landing and suddenly you cop a burst of something. But that wasn't an everyday occurrence. No way. But it was always there. Like I say, dodging going in, the same coming home. And you couldn't

04:00 really let down, stop relaxing even when you flew over the French coast because a lot of the German night fighter fields were in France. And they'd go up early to meet them coming home. But some could still be airborne to chase you over the Channel. And I mean there would be a heck of a lot of bombers and other stuff lying in the bottom of the English Channel.

When could you relax?

Like I said before, once I stepped out of the aeroplane and that little man who had a

04:30 grip of my gut let go. Maybe a little bit longer. When the crew bus took us to the Interrogation Room. This was where each group went to their section leaders. Like WOPs, we went to signals leader, navigators went to the nav leader and so on. And they'd all give their version of what happened. And then you'd sit as a crew all together and talk to an interrogation officer. But

05:00 while you were doing this, the padre used to be wandering around with cups of coffee and a flagon of rum. We were that well laced I think that's when I used to be able to relax. That used to get rid of the knot in my stomach, yeah. After that it was all right because you went and had another meal. An elaborate one: eggs and bacon or something like that. And then you could go off to bed. And strange as it may seem, after going through all that I could always go to sleep.

05:30 Didn't haunt me or anything like that. Just went off to sleep. But I didn't relax until I got back on the ground. You couldn't.

How often would the raids be? How much time would you have off?

Well that depended a lot on what raids you'd been doing, the weather, whether they

06:00 wanted to rest this crew, to use this one and that sort of thing. Like at one stage, we flew 6 raids in 7 nights. Then we had about 2 weeks spell because that was pretty hectic. They didn't like you to go too often one after the other. They'd give you a bit of a break. I'd have to look at the log book. I suppose in there I've got maybe,

06:30 10 or a dozen operational flights per month. Something like that. But over Christmas New Year, Winter '44, '45 was a bad winter in Europe and in England too. We never flew for 2 weeks. Then we flew once. Then we never flew for another 2 weeks because of the weather. Runways just piled up with snow. And we

07:00 couldn't do it. The Mosquitoes could get off but every Pathfinder squadron had a squadron of Lancasters and Mosquitoes. The Mosquitoes could get off but we couldn't. That brought another chore that we had to do. We had to shovel snow off runways in case we could use them. And it was split 3 ways. The Lancaster squadron the Mosquito squadron and the

07:30 Head Quarter's squadron. 4 hours on, 8 hours off over 24 hours. There's nothing I liked better than getting out of my warm pit, at midnight, to go and shovel snow off runways. I didn't like doing that at all. But then not use the runways but still. That was the longest break we had really.

Was there some relief in having a break like this?

Oh yeah. There was relief. You knew,

08:00 Oh well, we're not doing it for a while so we've got a few more days. Oh, no. There was a feeling of relief, yeah. But when you went to the crew room for the battle order and you weren't on it you'd breath a sigh of relief really.

Did you feel they were pushing you too hard?

No. No, I never felt that. Like I keep saying, we were there to do something. You just had to keep doing it. We didn't like

08:30 what we were doing. Not the result of it but we didn't like having to do it, because of what was there and what might happen. But, oh no, we just kept going.

Before you went to Pathfinder describe what was perhaps one of your most dangerous raids.

Well I think that one I mentioned, to Frankfurt. Where we had the 4 combats. That was

09:00 before I went to Pathfinder. But no, none of the others would have been. Oh, other that what I say were usual: flak over the target would have been the worst thing. If you got away without having to fire your guns, well you reckoned it was a good trip. We often did that yeah. You know the ones that got shot down like we did, you're just in the wrong place at the wrong

09:30 time. We didn't fly a lot, we weren't operating at the time: there was a massive raid on Nuremberg and Bomber Command lost 97 bombers on that raid. Each bomber had 7 men in it. So put it down in round figures: 100 by 7 overseas that's 700 aircrew taken out of the war in one

10:00 night. That's what makes me smile in these skirmishes we've had recently. They lose a dozen men and "Ooh, it's sad" sort of thing. Bomber Command lost 55,000 dead, all the time it was operating. But that would be the only one that was a worry: that 4 combat one. The one where we lost the port outer engine, that was

10:30 later. So we were going pretty well up until then.

Hoe did you cope with things like the news that 700 odd men died?

Yeah, well I can tell you that. You'd think about it. You'd be in the mess having your meal after getting back and you'd hear, "Oh, So-and-so's gone." Because in the Interrogation Room they write up the names as they land and so on. You'd

11:00 be watching that. And when it was past the time we could have stayed airborne because of the fuel and the name wasn't there, well then you know that they weren't coming back. And you didn't feel good about it because, you couldn't afford to have any feelings really. Just because of what might happen to you tomorrow night. But the thing about that that really affected me once, were

11:30 the WAAFs. And they did all the cooking and serving of meals and that sort of thing in the mess. And they'd have to be there when we'd get back. It might be 3 or 5 o'clock in the morning but they had to be there to get us a meal. And you'd sit there with your crew and eat your meal and if one of the crew didn't come home, I've seen the women, you've got to remember they were women thrown into a man's world.

12:00 It hadn't happened much before. And we needed them too to relieve manpower. I've seen the girls in the mess, they get friendly with the crew, one or two of them and so on. And this crew goes missing. I've seen the girls just crying their eyes out. But the thing that made me think, well other than that they were thrown into a man's world, they were pretty tough characters. We used to give a lot of cheek. They'd give it back and so on. But when this sort of thing happened and

12:30 I saw that and I'd think, "Well God you're really women after all, you know." But I think they showed more emotion than we did really. I can't say any more on that one because I don't know any other feelings really.

Did you lose any crew directly on your flying?

Yes.

13:00 **Tell us about that.**

Well that happens when we got shot down.

I mean before. We'll get to that story later.

Not before, no. No we stayed intact and all together until the final run. Except the original mid upper gunner. He opted out after 30 ops. We kept going but he was a married man, an Englishman and he said, "No, this is a tour. I've done enough." He opted

13:30 out and we got another mid upper gunner. That's the only one of the original crew we lost. Other than the shooting down.

Tell us what treatment you'd give the WAAFs?

Oh this was just chitchat, sport. Talk between fellas and girls, that was all. I can't remember exact things we'd say. You'd gee them up a bit for something or other.

14:00 And they'd come back at you and put on the tough, brave face sort of thing. As much to say, "Well

anything you can do I can do better." sort of thing. And give it back to you. That's all it was. Just having a go at each other. Nothing serious.

What did women in general think of the aircrew?

I don't know. I never ever asked any of them.

14:30 Oh I think they had, I don't know about thinking, I think they had feelings for us. Knowing what we were doing. And some of them would come out to see the planes taking off. Well they'd be ones that were involved with individually, with the aircrew. No, I think they were happy to serve with us and so on. Put up with us.

15:00 **You mentioned about after an operation, you'd have an interrogation. What would go on here?**

The interrogation officer, he was an intelligence officer. He'd want to know about anything that happened. If you experienced anything at all coming over the target, if you saw anything at all unusual he'd just want a bit of a

15:30 resume of what everyone saw on the trip, that was about all. I don't know what they used to use it for. I suppose calculating it to see overall what sort of a trip we all had. But the signals man he just wanted to see how I got on with the equipment O.K. Did you miss any broadcasts or anything like that. The navigator, the navigating officer he'd want to know how the navigating went

16:00 with each individual, you know, did you get to your turning points on time and so on and so on. That's all it was really. Just to find out what had happened, what you saw, what you did on the trip.

Have you told us about your radio equipment that you were using?

No. It was Marconi equipment. Some photos of it there and one up on the wall. It was a

16:30 separate receiver and transmitter. They were quite bulky things. The machine was about that long and that high and that deep. The transmitter was about that by that by that deep. Primitive by today's equipment, you know but still very effective. The Morse code key, it was fully enclosed. To stop the arcing flash firing the petrol fumes or anything like that.

17:00 The one you needed on the ground, that's quite open. Easier to handle too. But this one was fully enclosed. It was called a Marconi R10-82-83. But that was just the serial numbers of it. The R10-82 was the receiver of it. The R10-83 was the transmitter. But that's all it was. It was just sitting in front of you there. Valves of course, in those days.

17:30 But if anything went wrong you couldn't do much about it.

And you mentioned how many words a minute?

In operations it would come over slow: about 8 to 10 words a minute. Because, you see, once you got well, the further away you got the weaker the signal. And you'd often have your signal for the box in with 2 or 3 others. So you'd sit there with

18:00 this, pressing the earphone close to try to keep the engine noise out. And you'd have this one free to write in the log. But even though you had 3 signals there you could always concentrate on your own. Well you knew you had to. Something might depend on you getting this message. But it would be sometimes a pretty faint Morse signal. They trained you, when you tuned it in, to

18:30 have the volume low so if you started to lose it you had the chance of increasing the volume to hear it.

Take us through the process of how you became selected for the Pathfinder?

We didn't get selected. There was various ways but in our instance, my pilot had a blazing row with a squadron

19:00 commander. And he took umbrage apparently and said, "I'll get rid of you lot. I'll post you to Pathfinder Force." But that didn't worry me. I don't think it worried anybody. We just looked on it as another posting. We were going to be doing the same thing albeit a bit more intense and so on. Still flying the same aeroplane. So when the skipper told us all this I didn't have any feeling. I don't remember anything anyway. It didn't worry me,

19:30 no. We just went on with it. What Pathfinder Force used to like to do, and they had an officer scouting the various squadrons and asking them to release their top crews for this training, you know. But of course some of the squadrons didn't want to lose their top crews they wanted to keep them sort of thing. But they did what they could. But in hindsight, even though ours was a bit more controversial, it turned out

20:00 all right. We ended up with a pretty fair Pathfinder crew and, well most of us survived it anyway. If I had of stayed on the first squadron what would have happened then? We don't know it would have been down a path we don't know of course.

So the Pathfinders were particularly dangerous?

Oh yes. It was. Yeah. Because with us we'd open the attack

20:30 anything around, I'd say, 5 or 6 minutes before H hour. That's zero hour. We'd be there and drop flares. Well while you were doing that main force was still coming. You were pretty vulnerable over the target area because you're the only aircraft there. Coming in as we would I don't know, in ones and twos ahead of main force. But then we were scattered through the bomber

21:00 stream and this was to back up the flares on the ground when the smoke and dust obliterated other flares. Then there was the dangerous job that I talked of before of supporter. Circling the target area with him. But no, people didn't like the early bit. We were pretty well exposed. And often your height had something to do with it. You were

21:30 operating from a height that was a dangerous one, a bit closer down or something like that. But I didn't mind going in early. If you got away with it you were on your way home before it was all stirred up. Before main force got there and the flak really got thick. And I didn't mind that we were on target early. Even though, as I say, you were more exposed and probably more likely for something to happen.

Who was

22:00 **this commanding officer who assigned you to this?**

I forget his name. He was an Englishman. No, I don't remember his name. The skipper would.

Wasn't that a kind of vindictive act?

Oh yeah. Oh, but they did this. A crew that they didn't like, they'd try to get rid of them. Because it would affect the reputation of their squadron. Oh, yeah. It would be that. You'd call it that.

22:30 **And how do you feel about this affecting your lives?**

I don't feel about it at all really. No, it doesn't upset me or anything like that. It just happened and we got away with it, well I got away with it.

I guess I'm pointing towards that idea that if your skipper has a fight then you as a wireless operator is affected.

Oh yeah. Oh, I see. Well yeah, that's right. Yeah,

23:00 the skipper and the whole crew are affected. But I don't know. Nobody had anything to say about it. I'm sure we never had any argument or discussion we just went: oh, well we're going there. Let's go and do it.

Did you have to do some training for this?

Yeah. Well here again, once we were posted down to Pathfinder Force we went firstly

23:30 to a PFF, navigational training squadron for more navigational training. Because navigation and bomb training are really intense there. And because before you would be allowed to carry flares and drop them at the TIs, target indicators, you had to prove that you were skilled enough to do it. So you needed to train. And even when we joined the squadron, if we weren't flying ops you were flying in training.

24:00 So you were flying all the time that was flyable really.

What were you learning about path finding?

What, me personally?

Yes.

Oh, well I was learning nothing new. What I was still doing was operating the wireless gear, you know. That was all. It was all back to navigation really.

Well take us through your first operation as a Pathfinder.

24:30 Well our first operation would have been as what they call a 'backer-up'. I think we flew, I don't know how many we flew, not a lot, with no flares. Just to see if we could get there properly and back again. To get your aiming point photographs. And after a bit we were allowed to carry flares in the roll of

25:00 a stand-by backer up: we backed up flares on the ground. Well we graduated from that to, we were actual blind markers in the end that means we could drop our bombs using radar. See the skill of your navigators, this is what they had to do. When you joined Pathfinder Force you were allowed to wear the gold eagle Pathfinder badge temporarily.

25:30 To wear it permanently, your crew had to bring back 5 consecutive aiming point photographs. That means you had to be on the ball, get it right 5 times in a row. If you got to 4 and you blew it next time, you started again. But we only did it the once and I think that says a lot for the navigator because we did it once and we were on the way.

26:00 **Tell us about some of the communication that would be going on the radio in this new roll?**

What do you mean? To me or to the crew in general?

Yeah. To the crew in general.

There'd be no change there because, like I say, you're flying a course and you get to the bomb run, you're over the bomb run and you're home sort of thing. That part was the same. But you had to have more accuracy, more timing

26:30 and here again it would come back to navigation. That was the only change but for everybody else, I mean, it didn't affect the gunners, it didn't affect the engineer, it didn't affect me. The bomber aimer he was involved, until we did the blind bombing. That was done by the navigator using radar. He could drop bombs on the aiming point through 10/10th cloud, if you were skilled enough.

Tell us about this change: dropping bombs by radar.

27:00 Oh, that was necessary if the target was obliterated. Mostly with that we'd know about it before hand if there was cloud there and we'd carry a certain type of flare: a parachute flare. And it would be dropped on a direct line to the aiming point so that it would drift over it, above the cloud.

27:30 Then other aircraft would come along, aim their bombs at the flare, go through the flare and onto the target. But here again it was navigation that came into it. he had to be dead on track. If he got over here and everybody bombed it well he wouldn't hitting the target. But with the radar, bombing on the radar screen you could do this, yes.

And take us through the method you used of using flares,

28:00 **the formation and how they came in and what flares you used.**

Well the flare was actually a bomb. But it was a flare instead of high explosive or anything. It just burst, like a firework really. It burst and this threw, oh the main colour in the middle was fire rd or green but then it had all the cascading around it. That's for the one that went to the

28:30 ground. But that was the main one used. It just, as I say, it just looked like pyrotechnics, fireworks if you like. But you dropped it the same as a bomb. There was nothing different there.

And then the other aircraft, what would they do?

Well they would come in. Their navigator didn't have to worry where they were , they'd see the flares going down ahead of them and

29:00 they'd just alter course if they were off course, to get over those flares and bomb on our flares. See that's why we had to be accurate. If we dropped flares wrongly well then the target wouldn't get bombed properly.

This was mainly done on timing?

Oh yes. I mean we had our time to be there to drop our bomb. You had to be there on time yeah.

29:30 And if it was before H hour or on Zero hour or through it you were spaced and timed. Oh, no. You had to keep your time schedule, yeah. Down to the minute.

Who would monitor the time?

The navigator. He'd know how he was going from his different turning points and checkpoints along the way. No, he monitored that. If he wanted to slow up a bit he'd tell the skipper.

30:00 If they got ahead of time one way of losing time was to fly a dogleg. That was very dangerous at night time when the bomber stream. Nobody liked doing it. But put the wheels down you could, lower the flaps to slow you down if you were ahead of time. If you were behind well you just had to fly faster. But that's it. You were always given the speed to fly at. That would

30:30 coincide with the timing, in between the various turning points and so on like that.

What was the communication as you'd open the bomb hatch to drop a bomb? What was said?

As you'd approach the bomb run the bomb aimer would ask for, "Bomb doors open." The skipper would

31:00 press the button for that and he'd say, "Bomb doors open." Then the bomb aimer would take over. He'd be looking through the bombsight and he'd direct the pilot, you know corrections on course to get to where he's aiming. And he would call these directions and you've heard that. It was, "left, steady, steady" and so on. And he'd press the bomb tip and he'd just call, "Bomb's gone. Bomb doors closed

31:30 and get the hell out of here." That would be all really. But when I say that would be all, that would be all would be said and done but it was still an agonising time over a target. Always flying straight and level and no evasive action, that wasn't helping.

How long was this straight line for?

Oh the actual bomb run up was only about a minute or so. And it was straight and level after the bombs

32:00 went to take the photograph, for about 20 seconds. But it felt like an hour.

And then what was the feeling like after?

Oh you felt good once you'd got rid of that. Oh, not good. You felt better once you got rid of the bomb load and you were heading for home. By then you were through the flak and you so you have to worry about that any more. Only if you run into some off course and run into some

32:30 on the way home. But that helped you feeling good: well we got this far and got rid of it.

Apart from the time that you were shot down was there any times where your gunners had to open fire?

Oh yes, yes. I don't remember the occasions. A few occasions, I can only say that. Not every time of course. But a few occasions they would sight something out there and call the

33:00 skipper to do his corkscrewing and they'd open up. That's the bit I didn't like. You know, the corkscrewing and you'd hear the guns going and I've got my knees jammed under my desk there and it's going up and down and, you know, waiting for something to happen.

In your roll you must have had to put your trust quite strongly in other people?

Oh, yeah.

Did you ever feel like you couldn't actually get your

33:30 **hands on?**

No. I didn't. No, no, no. I just knew what I had to do and I was satisfied with that. And they were out there and I had every faith in them doing what they ought to do. Oh, we couldn't do anything else really.

Tell us about just before you took your last flight before you were shot down. Was there anything that you remember particularly about going to the

34:00 **plane that day?**

No, everything was the same as usual really on that one. The raid before, it was the controversial Dresden raid. The night before but we didn't fly on that. We flew on a secondary target, an oil refinery at [(UNCLEAR)] so I was spared the controversy of Dresden. But

34:30 I won't speak on Dresden because men more expert than me know all about it. But I know the facts now I've read it so often.

Apart from the facts that you've read, did you hear anything about it at the time?

No. But no, on our last flight, well, we were just briefed another flight. That was all. I had no worries. This was our forty-second flight and we just went

35:00 and did everything as normal. Everything went as normal until we were running up on the target.

And so, any superstitions were the same? The routines were kept the same?

No, everything was the same until it happened. When it happened things altered.

Take us through.

Well we were running up onto the target area.

35:30 And everything was quiet, nobody's disturbed about anything. And the next second there's this horrible explosion noise, I can't tell you. Just a great big vvrump! on the starboard inner engine. And it's a noise that we heard of course. And when were heard it, speaking for me of course, knew exactly what it was. We were in trouble.

36:00 The feeling changed then. My stomach dropped to the boots, my heart starts pounding. And the thing's on fire, burning like crazy. And the skipper immediately told us to bail out. To do that my exit point was at the rear door, which is down the back about five feet in front of the tailplane. And to move, your oxygen mask's fitted to your helmet and to a fixed point and

36:30 you've got a little tube and you slip it in. Well you can't do much but rip the lot off. Well we'd hit 18,000 feet and we'd been on oxygen from the ground up, so I forget how many hours the flight was then. Well immediately you have a faulty oxygen supply or a lack of oxygen you start to feel the effects of it. And in hindsight, this is what took a lot of the

37:00 terror out of what was happening. I took mine off, picked up my parachute pack, which used to lie on the floor there and started to go aft. I had to climb over a main wing spar that fitted through, it was about that high, the aircraft. I had to climb over it to get to the back. And I remember sitting on that

fumbling with the ‘chute to get it on, the clips on my chest and getting light-headed already.

37:30 Well I’d had this experience in a decompression chamber doing training. And I’ll tell you about that just so you know what happened afterwards. Six of the crew were in this decompression chamber. We were taken up to a simulated 25,000 feet. There happened to be three sitting on each side. The instructor’s outside looking through a window, he’s on intercom. He points to me and says, “Take your mask off.” Well I take the mask off.

38:00 And he said, “Write your name on that paper there.” So I write ‘W Pearce, W Pearce, W Pearce’. And he said, “That’s good. Now count that deck of cards.” So I counted: ‘one’ ‘two’ ‘three’ ‘four’ ‘five’ bumpf. I just flaked out. Well they put the mask back over and I recovered. Of course if you didn’t you’d just pass on into oblivion. But now he said, “Have a look at your signature.” The first one wasn’t bad but the next were just squiggles. And he said, “When you counted you got to

38:30 ‘one’.” After that it was ‘one’ ‘fourteen’ ‘twenty-six’ and something like that before I passed out. So lack of oxygen, firstly I can describe it as (and 18,000 feet wasn’t as severe as 25) happy drunk. You get light-headed. Anyhow I sat on the main spar and I put this on and thought, “Oh I better get moving.” So I found my way down to the

39:00 rear door just in time to tap my rear upper gunner. He’s standing in the rear doorway. And like I said, this is just near the tailplane and I see he’s clutching white to his chest. He’s obviously, well panicked I suppose, I don’t know. And picked his parachute up by the ripcord, he had it clipped on. He was found dead on the ground, you know, with the ‘chute collapsed beside him. But what I think I saw in my happy drunk

39:30 lack of oxygen state, I think I saw his body go under the tailplane and the canopy over the top. Well this would have ripped him back around and well, did what? Bashed his head in, broke his neck and things like that. Anyhow, he died. So I knelt on the doorsill

Tape 7

00:38 Well, I was kneeling over the doorsill, and looked out at the fire in the wing. And I thought, happy thought, “Gee that’s burning a bit.” And I stuck my head out a bit further and the slipstream just tore me out. I didn’t jump, I wasn’t pushed, it just tore me out. And I went under the

01:00 tailplane, obviously. And I know I was tumbling head over heels. And I don’t know how far I fell. But I next had another happy thought, “Oh, I better pull this thing.” So I pulled the ripcord, obviously it opened. And I’d got down a bit in height and out in the cold air and I’m coming back to my senses when I had a real fright. I could hear the aeroplane engines. They seemed to all around me: this is the rest of the bomber stream. And I

01:30 thought, “By God, if one of them hits me I’m in trouble.” But they didn’t. I’d fallen through them probably when I was just free falling. And I floated: that’s the loneliest feeling I’ve ever had. It was a pretty dark night and I’m flat out, just seeing the canopy above me and I just felt that I was just suspended in nothing, in this great, dark, black void, you know. I couldn’t do anything about it of course. But it was an awful feeling of loneliness, all on your own.

02:00 I looked down and there’s a bank of cloud below me. And underneath the cloud there was a single searchlight running around on it like that. I thought, “Oh, if I break that cloud and that searchlight picks me up I’m going to be target practice for an ack-ack gun.” And that used to happen on both sides. And luckily they switched it off. And I broke the cloud. I couldn’t see the ground below the cloud it was darker still. And

02:30 suddenly realised that I was drifting slightly backwards and I started to do the drill to straighten it so I was going forward but I didn’t do it in time. Next thing I hit the ground fairly hard. It ripped me over onto my left shoulder. Made a bit of a mess of it really, it’s still bad to this day. But there wasn’t much wind, the ‘chute just collapsed easy. So with this left arm, it was disabled straight away, I just shoved it inside my battle jacket, oh no,

03:00 I hit the buckle of the parachute harness took it off. Then undid the Mae West, which is underneath it. And shoved my hand in here and gathered up the parachute and Mae West. I was lucky; I landed right in the middle of an open field. Didn’t land on a rooftop or in a tree or a canal or anything like that. And I tried to hide them as best I could, in a hedge. And then

03:30 I thought, “Oh, what do I do now? I’m in Germany. I’m on my own. I can’t go and knock on doors asking for help!” Anyhow, we have an escape pack. The one I carried in my battledress jacket, shoved in there. It had some Horlicks tablets, a few concentrated tins of something or other and a compass, map of the area and some currency too. So I got the compass out and

04:00 found out where northwest was. Because I knew in that direction, somewhere was the Allied lines: a long way away. I’d have never made it because I’d have had to cross the River Rhine: I thought, “Oh, I’ll try it a bit.” Anyway I took off. The only thing I could do was just walk. And I walked, stumbled. Every

time I stumbled it hurt the shoulder like crazy. And

04:30 come daylight I was in a pine forest and the pine trees there, the bottom branches were real umbrellas. And I crawled under one of these and sat the day out there. I'll go back now to the other part of the bailing out. I'll come back to how I'm going. My navigator, I told you was a

05:00 portly Englishman. Every time he boarded the aircraft I let him go in front of me because his position was in front of mine. He didn't have to clamber over my gear. I'd say; "Tubby, do up your leg loops." That's on the parachute harness. You hang down the back, pull them through your legs, through and clip them in here. Without it it's useless. Tubby was picked up dead on the ground. His famous reply to me was, "We won't need that." Tubby was found on the ground dead with his 'chute

05:30 unopened, tangled up in the harness beside him. Another case of not wanting to survive or stupidity, call it what you will but that's what he did. I used to tell him every time and every time he said, "Nup, we won't need that." because it was more comfortable. Anyway, back to me. I was on the loose in Germany on my own for five days. And I wasn't game to move in daylight.

06:00 Because we couldn't knock on doors and ask for help because we were the "terror fliegers' [terror fliers] of Bomber Command. And luckily there was a lot of open country or forest country and that sort of thing. And I used to keep to this. Try to keep going the way I wanted to but it was a bit difficult. You'd hear a dog barking there, you'd have to get around that or you'd see a village in the distance. You wouldn't see lights but you'd see dim buildings and that and you'd have to around that. So I didn't know where I was going in

06:30 the end. And I had one exciting incident under one of these trees, in about the middle of my time on the loose. I was sitting against the bole of the tree just dozing, half a sleep sort of thing. When I heard the sound of something running through the forest, you know on the fallen pine needles. And I looked, peered out through the branches and it

07:00 was a deer. About 50 yards away. And that's all right. But not many minutes later there was another sound. I looked again and it was a great hound dog, after the deer. Well, that's all right. He wouldn't worry me. But about five minutes later I hear it again. It's footsteps this time. And I watched: it's a man with a rifle under his arm following the deer and the dog. He must have been hunting. And that got the old heart

07:30 going a bit though he was too far away to have seen me. Anyway, I settled down and it must have been, oh I don't know, a half hour an hour later when I heard something on the ground on the pine needles behind me. You know how a dog snuffles up along the ground? I heard that. And I thought, "Oh God. What's this?" And I heard the snuffle right at the other side. I'm here and it's right at the other side, behind the tree. And anyhow,

08:00 next minute the dog took off and I could see it. It was the hound dog going back but my body mustn't have been of any interest to it so it took off. So my heart settles down again from that. And about 10 minutes later I heard feet again on the pine needles. And the guy with the rifle walks past the tree I'm hiding under about four feet from my feet. I tell you, I think I stopped breathing and the heart's doing about

08:30 100 miles an hour but he wasn't looking or anything like that. Not expecting anything. But that frightened me a bit. And another time I broke cover out of the forest during the night and walked right under a dirty, great gun barrel. And I stopped and realised what it was: there was a tank on the other end of the gun barrel. I'd been travelling parallel with a road and I'd seen an armoured column moving on it for most of

09:00 the night and they must have bivouacked. So I stood still, never made a sound, then backed off slowly and then went for my life. In the end I got mixed up on the outskirts of Cologne. Cologne's a pretty big city. And there was no chance of getting around it, so I ended up in what I'd call a suburban paddock and I flopped down in amongst some shrubs, really, not big trees or anything and just went to sleep, which I could do. I was

09:30 pretty well buggered, hungry, wet, miserable. I only had my battledress on and it was raining most of the time. Sore shoulder. Anyhow, about 10 o'clock, I think it was, in the morning I woke up being shaken. I looked up and it was a man. He looked at me and I looked at him and he just says, "Kommen." And I was in no fit condition to do anything else. And he was actually a hunchback, so that's why he was there. He was unfit for military service, I reckon. And he

10:00 just said, "Kommen." And we walked together. We didn't talk because I had no German and he mightn't have had any English. And we eventually got in to the real outskirts of Cologne and we passed through Luftwaffe [German air force] airmen. And he handed me over to them. This turned out to be a good thing. Because as we got in further, on the other side of the road I could see a bunch of about five or six civilian men.

10:30 One of them was really on the air, shouting and gesticulating and pointing at me and so on and so on. And I knew what he was on about. He wanted my guts for chewing gum. Wanted to see me hanging up from the nearest lamp post sort of thing. Which, unfortunately did happen. But the soldiers, they were awake to the situation. They just kept me moving. But if I'd been with the civvies I'd have been, well I

wouldn't be here today. Anyhow, they took me into a Luftwaffe barracks in

11:00 Cologne. And from there on in I passed through the various channels to a prisoner of war camp.

Tell me about these channels.

Well firstly, I was kept in a guardroom at Cologne. No one was very interested in me. They fed me of course but with black bread and soup and so on. It gave me some dysentery to start with, which it would with nothing in my stomach. I ended up

11:30 eating at the head of a table with about five or six German army defaulters. They gave me the seat of honour. They were quite matey. Anyhow they shifted me from that guardroom. A guard would come over and take me to somewhere else. He was an elderly soldier. Just the one to escort me. He brings his gun up here to the high port, undoes the breech, gets into his bandolier and pulls out a clip of bullets and

12:00 they wouldn't go in. Puts them back and gets another clip and they wouldn't go in either. And I'm grinning to myself. I thought, 'Good. I could be a hundred yards away by the time he gets it rammed up the spout.' Anyhow he got the gun loaded and off we went. We just walked through Cologne. And that made my heart glad because Cologne was in ruins. All there was down the middle of the streets was a traffic way for a vehicle and the rest was just rubble. And I thought, "Oh well,

12:30 you've got some of your own back here." But you know I was careful. I didn't give any indication or anything like that in case it upset the guy. He might have got nasty. And then I went to this other guardroom. I was held there a couple of days. And from that I had another escort. He was a sergeant. And his sidearm was a pistol. And he was to escort me down to, near

13:00 Nuremberg. And believe it or not, we walk out to an autobahn and he's trying to hitch a ride. I thought, "Jeez, this is hilarious. A man with a prisoner and he's trying to hitch a ride as transport!" Well that didn't work. But we end up getting on a train. It went so far. And it took us about four days to get from there down to the interrogation camp for shot-down aircrew:

13:30 Oberursel, just near Nuremberg. Here I was put into a cell: solitary confinement. Small cell, just enough for a bunk and enough room to stand up, a bare cot, two blankets, bare electric light bulb that burnt 24 hours a day, a small grille high up on the wall (that was all you could see of outside). I was there for five days. They took me out now and then and asked me questions.

14:00 But I couldn't tell them anything because they told me more than I knew about myself really. My squadron and my crew. I think I was the last to be picked up but where they got the information from. They told me my crew, my squadron, my aircraft letters, squadron commander so on and so on. We weren't supposed to tell anything anyway. Just name, rank and number. And that's all I ever said. But

14:30 that was the guy that had me empty my pockets and gave me back the boomerang.

Tell me about that story.

Well you had to empty your pockets but in Bomber Command you weren't supposed to fly with anything. Not even an old picture or ticket butt or anything at all: you emptied your pockets. But that didn't apply to my souvenir. I had it. And I took it out and put it on the table. He picks it up,

15:00 looks at it and gave me a funny sort of a grin. And I told him, I said, "It's harmless. It's a souvenir boomerang. A keepsake type of thing." And he handed it back. I was glad to get it back I tell you. I think that would have dampened my morale a bit if I'd lost that. Anyhow, we were there for five days. Then they gathered the group. They had a group of about 25 to forward on to real

15:30 POW [prisoner-of-war] camps. And while they were doing this these 25 guys are standing around in a room. And somebody had a German synthetic cigarette. I don't know what they were made out of: awful smell. He lit it up and take a suck, you know a puff or a draw and passed it onto the next guy. And I said, "Oh, God. Thank God I don't smoke." You know their lives depended on this one draw of a cigarette. More on

16:00 cigarettes later. Anyhow we were then, no we went in a tram sort of thing, to the actual start of the real prison camps. To one they called Dulag Luft. But it was more or less a staging camp. We were only there two days I think it was. But here I was given, through the International Red Cross, clothing. Mainly American Army clothing:

16:30 some shirts, some underclothing, a pair of boots because I was still trying to walk in my flying boots, a great-coat, American Army blanket (which I've still got in the cupboard out there) and a few other bits and pieces. But you know, just enough essentials to see you through. And from there we were loaded into a train, a whole group of us, to go to the main prison camp at Nuremberg. We were in the train four days.

17:00 And it couldn't move at daylight because anything that moved on the ground in daylight was being strafed by the RAF [Royal Air Force] or the United States Air Force. It was a box car we were in. The door was shut so we can't jump out. A lot of blokes got sick. They were even vomiting. You'd just had enough room to sit. You don't have enough room to lie down. Just enough to stand or sit because there were guards in there as well and they made sure they had plenty of room. But

17:30 no real incident. Oh, there was one incident. We'd stopped for the day at a siding. We were all just hanging around and we saw a couple of boxes of American Mitchell bombers coming over here. And we thought, "Oh God, is this rail junction going to be a target?" We started to scatter and dive under things but it wasn't. It kept going somewhere else. Lucky for us. Anyhow we ended up getting to Nuremberg. Were marched out to the camp

18:00 and went into a compound. You know the usual barbed wire fences around and guards running around with Alsatian dogs. My home was a huge marquee tent. And we didn't have the luxury of the long-term prisoners in the huts. And you had enough room to lie down. That's all you had. This was when I slept with my, I won't say slept, slept beside, it might sound better,

18:30 my American friend for the body warmth. And through all that miserable. The place was covered in mud. We might have had a shower there. I only had about three or four showers in the three months I was in Germany. Never took my battledress jacket clothes off. You know you slept hat and all and everything. Anyhow we settled down to the routine there. We got food from the Red Cross parcels. A bit from the Germans but not much. They,

19:00 mainly some soup and some sauerkraut and not much else. Potatoes, that's right. A few potatoes. Some black bread. The main thing that kept us going was the food supply through the International Red Cross. That's why I've supported the Red Cross quite freely ever since. Anyway, we could start to hear the land front arriving. Hear the heavy artillery. And particularly at night you could hear the shells

19:30 overhead, you know. And the rumours started to fly; well we're going to move from here. And in the end that's what we did. We left; I don't know how many was in the camp, but a column of us. And we marched about three abreast down a German country road. Two hours out on the road we were strafed by four American Thunderbolt fighters. And I'll tell you, I'd had my thrills if you like, flying ops

20:00 but this was one time, oh I was really scared. Because this was more personal. They were shooting at me, sort of thing, whereas in the others they were shooting at the aeroplane and I just happened to be sitting inside it. I took off from that road like a real startled rabbit and dived behind the first big tree I could find. Hoping I was at the right angle that if they got as far as me they'd miss. And I was grovelling in the dirt, I don't know,

20:30 probably could have dug down three foot deep if I'd been there long enough. Anyhow I'd seen them ahead of us in line abreast and I saw one peel off and then another. That's when I took off. I knew that we were in trouble. They hit the head of the column. We were about 10 flights back or squads, whatever you'd like to call it. They hit the head of the column. They killed four and wounded about 20. And this is what they call 'friendly fire'. But it can

21:00 kill you just as dead and hurt you just as much as the same ordnance fired by the enemy. Anyhow, we straggled back to the road to reform after the planes took off and home to a nice warm bed and a meal. And we had to march through the area. Dead and wounded lying around and blood and guts everywhere sort of thing. And after that we were told, "Stand your ground." Because what was happening then was the American fighters were escorting their bombers

21:30 during the daytime. When they'd done that job, coming down to ground level on the way home and looking for something to strafe. But we made a POW sign with empty food cartons, tins, paper, anything. POW and an arrow pointing the way we were going. So they must have got the word, this happened to other columns as well. They must have got the word and they'd come a waggle the wings like this and you'd stand down there thinking, "My God is this for real? Are they going to

22:00 keep going or what?" But it didn't happen again, luckily. We were 19 days on this march and this was good because it was better than being behind the barbed wire. When I say march, we weren't marching 120 paces per minute, we were just walking. Which wasn't good because my feet hurt in the boots. My shoulder was sore. And we had a 10 minute break every hour. Our guards were mainly old people,

22:30 too old to go to the Russian Front but a few of them had dogs. But we were told by our senior officers, "Don't bother trying to escape. Don't walk away from the column. You'll get home soon if you stay with us." That was the state of the war. And on the way we could barter with the locals. And when I say barter, about all you could barter for were a couple of slices of bread or potatoes. That's where cigarettes come in handy. In Germany

23:00 at that time, currency was cigarettes, schokolata [chocolate] or even soap. And in our Red Cross food parcels we got packets of cigarettes: American ones and the British Players. But the American cigarettes, the Camels and the Chesterfields and so on, they had more value than the British one. But you know, for a couple of fags you'd get a couple of potatoes or a slice of bread and so on from them. Well we did this.

23:30 And one day we were camped: we stopped at night sometimes they'd get into a village or it might be a hall or something and they'd get a few in but the rest of you, you just camped wherever you could around the place. And this one time we were camped around a farm and I was sort of half buried under a haystack for warmth and protection and that. And I found a nest with 12 eggs in it. So I was elated. They turned out to be rotten. Yes, that was a bit of a

24:00 let-down. Anyhow we got down, we found out we were heading for a camp at Moosburg, which was in Bavaria near Munich. And we marched into that. Same thing, into a compound, a big marquee tent and all sorts in it. Like, when I say all sorts not all nationalities, like the Russians for instance they were kept separate, the French -

24:30 oh, there might have been some French. But it was mainly British and American because at this time they were taking a lot of American soldiers, prisoner at the front, you know. And the place was always wet and muddy. And I had battledress and that and you couldn't keep it clean, you were just caked in mud. We had a head count twice a day. A parade and head count. And the British Tommies, this is where I first had a

25:00 good sight of the English Army discipline. They came out on parade with all the British programmed bull dust sort of thing: polished buttons, Blanco belts and gaiters and all that. And us air force guys, we beside them looked like a real rabble. Didn't matter, we were only counting heads anyway. But we led the boring life of a POW camp. I found that two of my crew

25:30 were with me in the same compound. And two of the crew, the two officers, the skipper and the bomb aimer were over in the one next door. So we had communication there.

What sort of things did you talk about?

Food. Honest. I used to catch the skipper's eye and walk up and down the fence. That is short of the warning wire. This is a single strand of wire on posts about that high and about 10 feet from the

26:00 barbed wire. If you stepped over that the guys in the white tower were just as likely to shoot you. If you kicked a football into it you had to make sure that you had their attention, "Can I go and get me ball?" Sort of thing. Anyhow, I'd walk up and down there with the skipper and, honestly, about all we'd ever talk about was food. And when we got home we'd never waste a crumb and so on like this. We didn't have much else to talk about anyway.

Did you talk about the crash?

Oh yeah, yeah

26:30 we did. We did. We'd swap what each one knew about that. Yeah we did that. That's right yeah. I think it was the skipper actually told me Tubby was dead. I don't think the Germans told me that. They probably told the skipper that. No, we did. We talked about that. Our rotten luck sort of thing. But here again, the

27:00 food was Red Cross food parcels and a bit from the Germans. But here it was mainly bread and potatoes. This was German black bread; about the size of a house brick and just as hard. And it was always given to an odd number of men. We might get a loaf for seven men or nine men. Well if it's even you can cut it in halves, that's two, halves again, that's 4four halves again that's eight and that. But

27:30 not when it's odd. So you had to measure it out. And you'd get a knife going through it and the crust was that hard you go crooked. You couldn't straighten the damn thing, you know. Anyhow we overcame that.

You mentioned that you had a football?

Yeah. Well Red Cross they supplied that. They even supplied musical instruments for those who could play musical instruments. And of course we had padres and that with us that

28:00 also decided to stay with the troops when they were captured. And they organised church services and so on. We had books to read and board games they brought in too. Just things to occupy us. We had footballs. The Americans, they used to spend hours flinging a baseball, you know what I mean? We used to love watching that because of the chatter from the catcher. Oh no, they gave us these things but most of the time you were just bored stiff, walking up and

28:30 down sort of thing.

What kind of football?

Soccer. Yeah. They didn't know anything about Rugby or League or anything like that. But soccer was the universal game then, as it is now.

And who would play?

Oh, any of us would. Someone would produce the ball and you'd just end up kicking it around. You weren't actually playing you were just kicking it to each other, that sort of thing.

Tell me about what would happen if it went over the wire?

Well if it went over the

29:00 wire against the fence, oh it couldn't go through that it was big, not chain wire but square wire. Barbed wire everywhere around it, on top of it and between there were two sets of fences and it was all barbed wire in between. But it would go to the fence. And like I said you'd have to make sure that you caught the sentry's eye in the guard tower, "O.K. can I go and get it?" And you'd hope that you got through

when you thought he said, “Yeah, go get it.”

29:30 But I’m not sure but I might have had another shower there. Anyhow, in the end, I mean towards the end we again could hear the Front approaching, hear the artillery firing over us and so on. But we were told this time, “We’re not going to move. We’re going to stay here until the front over runs us.”

What did you sense was the German guards

30:00 **attitude towards the front?**

At that time they used to get nasty if you asked for it. But here again my theory was, play it cool Bill. I behaved myself, stayed cool, kept quiet and nothing happened. But having said that, they knew the situation of the war and their attitudes softened quite a lot. Because they knew if they

30:30 continued the brutality that they’d be taken to task after the war was over. They knew it was coming to and end and they were going to lose it. It wasn’t too bad that way. Oh now and then one of them would get a rush of blood to the end and let his dog go in the compound. There’d be a great scatter of blokes to get into the huts and get away from the damn things. But anyhow, eventually the war came to Moosburg.

31:00 And like I say we could hear it coming closer all the time. And the day it arrived I’d swapped some cigarettes over the compound fence to a Ruski [Russian] next door for a fish, about this big. I don’t know where the hell he got it because there was no stream or lake or anything in Moosburg. It was a fresh fish. He indicated, oh I forget how many cigarettes; it might have been a pack or something like that. So I hurled that over the fence to him and he hurled the fish over to me. Well

31:30 when the war arrived at Moosburg, we started to hear small arms fire in the township, I was cooking my fish. We had little forge-type burners that were made out of empty food tins from Red Cross. Some were quite skilled at making them. You just needed a handful of chips because the wood was scarce. You couldn’t get enough wood to build a real fire, just one of these. You could cook on it and the tin flattened out for the

32:00 pan sort of thing. I started to cook it and I heard this. And I’m outside the tent in the drain around it, you know to drain it. And I thought, “Oh well, to hell with this. I’m not going diving for cover.” There wasn’t anywhere you could go. We didn’t have slit trenches or anything like that. “I’m staying here with my fish.” So I lent on my belly and finished cooking my fish. And ate the thing and waited for something to happen. I’m looking at the village from the higher buildings and so on. And you could see gun flashes and that sort of thing. There

32:30 was a bit going on. There was a bit of small arms fire over and around the camp. But a deal had been made, that’s another story, with the camp commander and the Gestapo [German secret police] officer in charge of the troops defending it. They’d come to an arrangement. A bit of trickery was involved so there’d be no fighting around the camp actually.

Tell me about this arrangement.

Oh, it’s a long story. But they sent an SS

33:00 man to negotiate with the camp commander and our senior officers. To see what could be done. But we said, “No, you’re not going back. We’re keeping you here so we can sort it out.” sort of thing. But it’s a long story. I’ve got the story here. I got it from Moosburg post-war actually. But no, that would take too long. Anyhow, there was trickery. But the camp commander, he was definitely not going to try

33:30 to defend the camp. If he had of done that well it would have been just a slaughter. There would have been a battle of any description going on with all of us in there. By this time the German guards were running back in amongst us saying, “Here you take this.” We couldn’t say this in English, “You take the gun. You’re the boss now.” We had told them in rather uncouth English to clear out we weren’t interested in them, which we weren’t. We didn’t want to get involved. But a couple of ‘Old Blood and Guts Patton’, heave you heard of him? An

34:00 American general: General George Patton. We were on his front and a couple of his spearhead tanks rolled up to the gate, cut themselves into the guardroom, just crashed the gate down and that was it: we were liberated. That’s where I first sighted American hysteria. High-strung they are. They just went hysterical, they did. When more of them arrived to

34:30 settle the camp down we were told, “Leave the American troops alone, they’ve got a job to do. Keep out of their way.” But you’d see a mass of humanity moving through the camp with a gun barrel sticking out of it. This would be a mass of American prisoners having a ride on a tank. But we Brits, we were made of different stuff. We thought, “Oh well, we’re liberated. What’s next?” We kept out of the way. Anyhow they separated us into nationalities. And I went with the British

35:00 of course. And we were still in the big tent. But one of the British Army Recovery Team, a Sergeant Major East, I can still remember his name, he walked into my tent, counted off what turned out to be 63 men, looked at the warrant officer badge on my sleeve and said, “You’re the senior NCO [Non Commissioned Officer] amongst this lot. You’re in charge of them.” So that was my one and only command of World War II. But it gave me something to do because you had to

35:30 know in triplicate who they were, where they'd come from and so on and so on like that. And I was the liaison between the authorities through him to me to the troops while that happened. The American fed us and I can remember, apart from the stew, they brought in big cook pots of creamed rice. White bread, I mean that was nectar. Cake. Hadn't had this for months, you

36:00 know. And they issued instructions over the PA [public address] system of the camp. And it was done by a woman. An Englishwoman. And I said, "Oh, this is good." I hadn't heard an Englishwoman's voice in three months either. But when they sorted us out like that we still had to wait to go further. Eventually, we were trucked out from

36:30 Moosburg, in American army trucks, in truckloads to a Luftwaffe airfield at Ingolstadt, which was about an hour's drive away I think. And we were to wait there. The American DC-3s, the Dakotas, the supply ones, they were flying to the front. Taking supplies to the front and on the way back they were dropping into Ingolstadt, loading up with POWs and flying to France. That was a bit agonising:

37:00 waiting for this to happen. Waiting until it was your turn. You're in the queue, you know, your group and you gradually got closer. We were there about three or four days just watching the sky for these Dakotas. Anyhow we eventually had our turn, loaded up. They flew us straight to France, to Rheims. From Rheims we were put in trucks again and driven across to an airfield that the RAF had taken over after it had been over-run and used as an emergency field. Well they were still

37:30 operating. If someone was in trouble, couldn't get back to England, they could land there sort of thing. And this was G Avian Corps. When we got there here's row after row of Lancasters. Terrific. We're going home at last. And this was it. We were to load up in the Lancasters. I think they got about 25 bods in. Pretty cramped because it wasn't a transport plane. But I still remember

38:00 When we were at this German airfield we did a bit of scrounging. That's where those few things over there, the German water bottle and the bayonet and the few badges and this came from. Wasn't much left for us. But one thing I did have was a German coal-scuttle helmet. You know, the tin hats? Anyhow we walked to our aeroplane and the skipper stood at the door and looked at it. He said, "Look, if you guys

38:30 don't get rid of half that stuff I wont get this bloody plane off the ground." So that was the heaviest thing I has so I diced the helmet but I kept a few souvenirs. Anyhow we took off heading for a 'drome at Tangmere in Sussex. That's on the south coast. And this is where the emotion took over. I still feel emotion now, talking about it. Not so much for me but

39:00 we had British Tommies with us. Taken at Dunkirk and early in the Middle East and so on. Oh that reminds me too, when I was given my command and had to interview these people and you got various things. The British Tommy, this was another thing where I experienced British Army discipline, these soldiers they'd stand in front of me and call me "Sir" or "Sergeant Major". I mean they'd never have seen an aircrew warrant officer in their lives before. And in the air force

39:30 an aircrew warrant officer, he don't rate for anything really, just an increase in pay. But it's the same badge as their sergeant major. And in the British Army, the sergeant major, he rates next to God. You don't mess with him. Anyhow at first they'd stand there stiff like this. I thought they were having a shot at me at first but the penny quickly dropped. And I didn't want to let them down or disappoint them or ridicule them or anything like that. So I'd say, "Stand easy." or something like that.

40:00 But anyhow, these Brits, we had some of them in the plane I was in and when they saw the White Cliffs of Dover, you know you can just imagine it, I get emotional too. I am now. But for those they couldn't help it. Give us a minute. Because this is when you knew

40:30 you were at last home or nearly home. Anyhow we landed at Tangmere and unloaded. We had to go into, oh it was a big gym or something like that, you know just to fill in more forms. I've got my recovery form still. Your name, rank and blood group. Where you'd been, how did you get there and so on and so forth. And the table's just groaning with food. Oh boy! You know? All I can do is take a bite out of a sandwich and

41:00 drink a cup of coffee because there's this dirty great lump in my throat. No I couldn't eat food. I was starving and couldn't even eat it.

Tape 8

00:39 I'll back track a bit to when we landed at Tangmere and taxied around the dispersal. The rear door of the Lancaster's thrown open, a ladder put down and I stood there because I let all my command go out first. But standing around at the bottom was a whole group of

01:00 English servicewomen. Navy, army, air force girls. All spick and span. All smiles. As each guy got down the ladder he was grabbed by one of the women and escorted off to the bus and I thought, 'Oh, you know, welcome home sort of thing.' I can't for the life of me today remember who was the one that

grabbed me. I don't remember what she was. But I thought it was a good thing really. Especially with the British boys who'd been there a long while. They'd

01:30 never had any contact with a woman of any sort for a long while. Well the girls knew what they were doing. They were quite good. I've wracked my brain but I can't remember who it was. Whether it was an air force or navy or an army girl that grabbed me. Doesn't matter, that's just an aside. Where did we get to? I couldn't eat anything.

02:00 Yeah, I think that was about it.

Well I've got a couple more questions about your whole experience. First of all, about when you were captured. What did they ask you about when they interrogated you?

They wanted to know things like, even though they know. They wanted to know what squadron you were on, where you've come from, who was your crew, what

02:30 bomb load were you carrying, where were going, did you have any radar gear, what wireless gear? And so on like that. But of course when I say they knew it all they'd had enough crashed Lancaster bombers since they'd started operating to know all about things. Si it was nearly them telling me what we had sort of thing. But that's what it was really. Your equipment, your

03:00 squadron and so on like that.

Was it threatening?

Oh no. Nothing like that. Oh, I suppose it was in a way. Well not severely so. Oh more or less what would they say? It was slightly threatening put it that way. To the effect, "You'll be in solitary confinement until you tell us more."

03:30 Something like that but nothing you'd take umbrage to really. Well like I said, near the end of the war they knew the score and wouldn't want to be too brutal at that stage. But no, nothing specific that I can remember other than the gear, the equipment, the aeroplane and so on like that. Which they knew all about anyway.

And did you talk or were you silent?

No I just listened. I gave my name, my

04:00 rank and number. That only caused them to smile you know. And then I just listened.

They just threatened you with solitary?

That was about all. There was nothing traumatic that they threatened me with. No otherwise I'd remember it.

Did they say anything that you really remember?

Not really.

A turn of phrase?

No. Not really no. as I say, there wasn't much in it really.

04:30 Because all my crew had gone before me. Whether they'd have gathered some information from them or what they already knew anyway.

So what had happened to all your crew? You've mentioned your skipper, you've mentioned Tubby and you've mentioned the upper gunner. But what about the rest of the crew?

Well the rest of it: my pilot, my engineer, my bomber aimer,

05:00 myself. Oh wait a minute, I've forgotten to tell you: the rear gunner, he was killed in the attack. A burst of 20 mill cannon took the rear turret before the starboard inner engine. Yeah, so that just left the pilot, the engineer, bomber aimer, myself

05:30 that's only four. Who else was there? Oh I've forgotten. I'm going blank on this.

Well Tubby, the mid upper gunner and the rear gunner, they died.

They died yes.

So that would be seven.

Wait a minute. We had a crew of five. Oh, that's right: the extra bomber aimer. When we joined Pathfinder, the original bomb aimer

06:00 then came up to help the navigator. He worked the radar again and we got another bomb aimer. That's right. That's who it was. The five of us survived, yeah. And like I've already said, I met up with the three NCOs in the camp at Nuremberg. And the skipper and the second navigator were in the compound next door.

Did you have any weapons when you were on the run?

06:30 I did yeah. I carried it was a sort of standard issue. Two ranks up from a warrant officer in England, I carried a Smith & Wesson 38 revolver. But when I got on the ground I thought, well this is a bit stupid if I'm taken prisoner. And I couldn't do much about it with my busted shoulder. Taken prisoner by someone who is under no authority,

07:00 they could use this on me. So I buried the belt and buried the gun, yeah the gun and the ammunition and just hid the belt and holster. Got rid of it.

And you had some emergency rations. What were they?

Yeah. Not very much. It was only a small pack about that by that by about an inch. There was some concentrated chocolate, some

07:30 Horlicks tablets and, oh what else was there? I'm a bit vague on the rest. There was a map of the area and some currency. There might have been…there was a tin of concentrated cheese. That's about all

08:00 really. There wasn't that much. Oh, there was a sort of plastic type, it wouldn't have been plastic then it must have been rubber, bag to carry water in. I could always find water anyway. And I remember one time, drinking out of wheel tracks on the ground but you'd always get some water. Well that's what I mostly for the five days I was on the land. Was water.

You mentioned wheel tracks. Where else would you get the water?

Oh a stream or a

08:30 little creek or something like that. There were enough of them around yeah.

So what do you think about the five days in the middle of nature on the run?

Well I don't know. I don't think I thought about anything in particular. Just my predicament. No, I didn't make any real plans just because I didn't know where I was going to end up.

09:00 I knew I couldn't wander around for ever. No, I didn't have any real thinking I just didn't.

Does any funny memories come into your mind when you were in that situation?

No, nothing like that, no. No, nothing funny.

What kind of health were you in when you were

09:30 **finally captured after five days?**

Oh, I wasn't real good. I mean I had the bad shoulder and I had, I think it was arthritis or rheumatism or something like that, in both knees. I was hungry, tired, miserable. But not in good shape really.

10:00 But you know, I wasn't dying or anything like that. I lost a fair amount of weight.

And what about your health immediately after your capture?

Well it was all right. I was able to eat food once I'd settled down. Eat food and drink. And I gradually recovered and I started to feel good enough to be normal. That didn't take long really.

10:30 **You hadn't picked up any bugs?**

No.

Or colds?

No, nothing like that. No.

You mentioned this strange situation of being with the others Germans under capture. How was the interaction?

Oh it was quite good. I mean, we could make ourselves understood but that was about all. But no, they were happy

11:00 souls. They weren't worried about they were defaulters in jail sort of thing. No, they used to laugh and say, "Flak." And I didn't know then and I used to say, "Oh, yeah flak." That would please them and give them a giggle. But no, we behaved like mates really. As much as we could. The language was a bit of a barrier of course.

Was this

11:30 **quite a bizarre situation?**

Oh well. I suppose yeah, you could call it bizarre. It wasn't normal that's for sure. Yeah, I suppose you were call it bizarre. I don't know what else could have happened. They were just holding me in the jail

room until somebody decided to do something else with me. And they were there, they had to fed and they were feeding me so. But like

12:00 you say it was the enemy and here we are carrying on as if we'd known each other for years.

Also, I was curious to know the state of the Germans who captured you. Were they strong kind of fighting Germans?

No, no they weren't. Because anything capable of fighting properly between 16 and 60 were on the Russian or the Western Fronts. But having

12:30 said that, I'd say the people that were looking after me in the guard room they were more or less, well administrative people if you like. None of them were carrying any weapons or anything like that. They looked, well, healthy enough under the conditions I suppose.

Do you think they became friendlier and friendlier towards you as the

13:00 **war…?**

Oh yeah, yeah.

How would you notice this exactly?

Oh in actions and those who'd talk to us. They would. Somebody was telling us, "Oh, I went to university in Cambridge." Or "I was in the United States for a few years. And my name's So-and-so. You'll remember that later on won't you?" Things like that. But no, their attitude changed quite dramatically. Because they knew what would happen if they were still

13:30 brutal. And a lot of them that were brutal right through, they paid for it at the end because the prisoners involved they remembered them. And once they were liberated and these guys were captured they could report on them and they got their just dues.

And would the men talk about how they were doing this?

Oh no. Not really. I never heard that sort of thing

14:00 discussed or talked about. No.

Being on the road for 19 days, it would have taken quite a lot of effort.

Well it did yeah. But we weren't as I said, marching at 120 paces per minute, we were walking but it was an effort. Because I think a lot of the guys were sick. A lot dropped out. And the only thing to pick them up was a horse and cart

14:30 because they never had vehicles, they never had petrol to run vehicles anyway. But there was, there was a lot dropped out. A lot of sickness on the way. What happened to them I'll never know. But I had the sore feet from these American army boots, weren't properly broken in, so that made it hard work walking. And my sore shoulder. I'd made a kitbag into a haversack to carry the few goods and chattels that I owned.

15:00 That wasn't much. But the rope on it, I'd made that so it would be shoulder straps but it just cut into my shoulders and that didn't help me. No it wasn't easy. It wasn't, no.

How to you think physically you were able to cope with all these strains?

How do I think I physically coped? Oh, well I didn't make any particular effort to do

15:30 anything. I just rolled with the blow and went along with it. I mean, you took it day by day or hour by hour and just trudged along, no, no, no. Nothing particular there really, no.

I guess you've kind of answered this in a way, but how did you mentally get through such physical pain and hardship?

Well it does prey on your mind.

16:00 But the other thought there of course, I want to stay with this column. I don't want to go adrift from it. But here again it's nothing that had me in any sort of panic about it or anything like that. I was just in a bad way but I could move and that's all you could do anyway.

How did you feel towards the

16:30 **Americans which would strafe you?**

Oh we didn't take kindly to that, no. We sort of said, "Trigger happy Yanks. Why don't they check before they shoot?" And things like that. But well, that's about all you could think. You couldn't do a thing about it: it was done. But that was the most comments, "Trigger happy Yanks." And

17:00 well, that's it. You couldn't say, "Well we'll get those buggers when we get back to England." It was over

and done with. No. The RAF used to do this too. They used to do the strafing and so on. And a story told me by somebody else: these prisoners had got back to England and one of the men meeting them was an England squadron leader fighter pilot.

17:30 And these guys started telling him about, “Oh yeah. We got strafed by RAF fighters one day in such-and-such a place at such-and-such a time.” They said they saw the guy go white. He said, “I was leading that flight.”

Being on the ground what did you think of the tactic?

Oh this was,

18:00 on their part do you mean? Well it was just a case of mistaken identity. They thought we were a column of German troops, or something, moving up. We were on the ground in Germany; we looked like troops so we got shot at. The thing about it is, so close to a front line and so on as we were really, troops moving up don’t walk down the road in a column of

18:30 threes in the middle of the road. They go each side, spread out. So that was one of the criticisms I directed at them. It didn’t do any good of course. No. Mistaken identity, trigger happy, you know that was definitely it but you’re in Germany, you’re moving on the ground so you’re fair game.

Would you feel that the intelligence wasn’t spread very well?

19:00 Oh well, this was. It did. But after these things happened. I mean they didn’t know before hand that we were on the move. So no, oh that part of it was sort of an equal thing. They couldn’t have got word before we were on the move to know, “Hey, look on that road for a column of prisoners.” That couldn’t have happened.

In the POW camp,

19:30 **were you good friend with any of the Americans?**

Oh, I don’t know about good friends. Just sort of buddies with them here again you were all in this tent together and you knew a few of them by name and that was about all. You’d talk with them but I wouldn’t say, not that you didn’t want to but you just didn’t bother to go that far with it.

And how was the structure,

20:00 **like rank-wise and this? Was it operated like an army?**

Oh yes. We were still an army unit. We had a chain of command: we had our senior allied officer, whatever he was and whichever army. He was the man in charge and it came down. No, we had a chain of rank, a chain of command. No, we were still regarded as a service unit. We had a chain of command. We got a lot of

20:30 commands, if you like, advice in the form of commands from these people.

What about dealing with people wanting to do their own thing? Was there punishment? Was there ways to enforce order?

Doing your own thing in so far as what? Trying to get out?

Not doing orders of the commanding POWs.

I can’t answer that. I haven’t got an answer to it. I never struck that sort of thing really. Not that I was

21:00 aware of. I don’t remember anybody you know, sort of countermanding an order or doing what they were told to do. They could have but I never witnessed it.

What about the humour in the camp? Do remember some of the humour that would go on?

Well the only humour that I can remember was watching when the Yanks were throwing a baseball around. You know, the catchers in baseball carry on shouting this, that and the other. There was one guy, he was expert at it. it would tickle us

21:30 Brits because we didn’t know much about baseball. But apart from that, no, I can’t say there was actual humour.

What about banter about different nationalities? Like between the Australians and the Brits for example?

Well there might have been that but I couldn’t recall that happening really. No.

Do you know if this camp was anywhere near Dachau Concentration Camp?

Yep.

22:00 It was near Dachau. I seem to think that we might have been billeted in Dachau. When we were taken on the way to the German airfield to be flown out. We were taken to what they told us was a political

prison, all empty by then. They said, “You can sleep here and use the kitchen and cook meals.” Well my buddy at the time, he was an English lad, we walked in and

22:30 ugh, it had the smell of death. But it was more or less not so much underground but overgrown by grass and trees and things like that. So we just climbed our way on top and got into a hollow and we camped there. Since, I’m pretty sure that it was Dachau but I’ve no real proof. Other things that I’ve picked up and read and got the geography of the place and found out where Dachau

23:00 was in relation to it, I’m pretty sure it was Dachau.

Describe this smell of death.

Oh, I don’t know how you describe it really. But it’s a smell, not like a dead kangaroo, just this horrible smell that we associated with death. We couldn’t stand it. There was no way in the world we would’ve slept there. We got out of it.

So you were just there for a day?

Oh, only the one night I think

23:30 it was, yeah. We moved on. It was just while we were waiting to take our place on the airfield.

Was it a restless night?

I can’t remember that but I dare say it was. I don’t remember.

You didn’t have any experiences like ghosts?

Nope. Oh no, no, no, no. Nothing like that no. No, I mean, I and most of those with me were quite rational really,

24:00 at that time. It was just another thing that happened. We were liberated we were going home. So we were waiting for the next thing to happen.

You mentioned the White Cliffs of Dover but what was it like to get out of Germany itself?

Oh that was good because to get out of it we knew, “We’re definitely on the way home now. We’ve seen the last of Germany that’s good.” Oh no, we felt quite elated about that.

24:30 **Just one more question on the POW camp. Were you aware of any torture going on?**

No. We were asked this question when we got back and interrogated back a Brighton. I filled out a questionnaire, I’ve got a copy of it here, and that’s about four or five pages of it and that’s one of the questions but I never witness anything. Like I say I was there for the last three months. We knew the war was coming to an end. We knew we were winning.

25:00 The Germans knew the same. Unless you misbehaved it was all right.

What was it like to see Margery again after all this?

Well we’ve got to get to that.

Oh, O.K. Tell us what happened then.

From when we landed at Tangmere and got in this bit of interrogation, knocked back the food. When they gathered about 20, oh 25 Australians together

25:30 they loaded us onto a truck to take us across to Brighton, which was still the reception centre there that we arrived at. You went there afterwards. And on the way through a village the truck’s acting up so the driver pulls up and he and his mate have got their heads in the bonnet. They’d pulled up right in front of a pub. And mine host comes out and sees us just hanging around there and says, “What are you lot?” And we told him and he says, “Well come on in and

26:00 have a beer.” We says, “We can’t. We’ve got no money.” He said, “This one’s on me.” So we went in and had our first beer, free of charge. But then we ended up getting to Brighton to the, I don’t know I think I went to the Metropole Hotel. But firstly we were issued with kit. And then a bath. Oh, that was really something. Steaming hot bath. Then a proper

26:30 meal, which I could eat at this time. And then to our room and to bed. And this time we had sheets. Sheets my God, albeit army sheets which were as stiff as sailcloth. But that’s when I really knew I was home, after that. And the next thing I had to do after that was let people know because my family back here and Marge in Gloucester all they knew of was that I was missing. I mean I knew I was on the ground,

27:00 alive out of the shooting war so I’d get home if I behaved. So I went to the post office. Like they’d paid us so I had money. And I sent a cable out home just telling them that I’d been a prisoner and that I’m O.K. I’ll soon see you etcetera. Sent a telegram with the same sort of thing to Marge. I’ve got a copy of the one that I sent home and Marge’s was the same. Not a copy, I’ve got the

27:30 original of that. And I also rang my skipper's home, in Sussex. He's an officer, you see, I was a Non-Com [Non Commissioned Officer]. I rang at his home and a man's voice answers it and I just say quite bright and cheerful, "Oh can I speak to Andy please?" And there's the sound of a man spluttering and trying to talk and couldn't quite get

28:00 anything out. But they were the same: they didn't know that he was alive. And the penny dropped. I'd assumed he'd get home earlier being an officer but I'd beat him back. And me asking for him, this was the first they knew that he was alive. So I did a bit of quick talking then, telling him all about it. That the skipper was O.K. and he'd be home in a day or two. But we sorted that out later when I spent time with them. After that

28:30 it was just hanging around in Brighton waiting to get on a draft to come home. Of we had leave. I went down to Gloucester of course. I got married on the 30th of June down there.

Well tell us about that. Seeing Margery again.

Oh well that was great. That was pretty amazing. But here again there was a hiccup. When my telegram arrived at Gloucester, at her home, she's not there.

29:00 She's out with three air force guys. This was platonic thing. She worked for Huxley Aircraft Company and they had a lot of contact with RAF depots and that kind of thing. And she was friendly with people. She was a switchboard operator. And she got friendly with some of them in these places that she used to ring up for this that and the other. Apparently she must have told them somewhere along the line that she knew me so

29:30 they knew that and that I was missing. So they did their best to gee her up a bit and say, "Oh look, don't worry. He might be O.K." and so on and so on. And they were watching lists of prisoners that were coming back and that sort of thing. And they kept saying, "Oh look, he'll be right. How about you come out to the flicks" or something, I can't remember what it was, with the three of them. And she didn't know about it. And when she got home, when she got back to the house, all the lights were ablaze.

30:00 They were all still awake waiting for her to come home to give her the telegram. They'd read it of course. I've never let her live this down really. But after that it was just reunion all around. A pretty emotional one of course. Glad to be back sort of thing. And I could cheer them up a bit because we were issued with a coupon down there, each of

30:30 the prisoners. We called it Kriegy's corner, that's ex-Kriegsgefangener, that's German for prisoner of war. 'Kriegy' they called this canteen thing they had for us: Kriegy's corner. And with this thing from the Red Cross it was just like a ration ticket, you'd buy all sorts of stuff that they'd never seen in England. Tinned fruit, tea and coffee, tinned meats and all this sort of stuff. Soap.

31:00 And I used to fill a kitbag up with these and take them down with me. I couldn't lift the damn thing onto my shoulder. I had to drag it across London when I changed trains to get down to Gloucester. So that was a good thing because they'd done a lot for me and I was only too pleased to be able to do this in return. But, oh no, we just went quietly about things. Arranged to be married on the 30th of June and we went ahead and did

31:30 that. We had a honeymoon down at Weston-super-Mare. We got quite a lot of odd looks walking around together. Me in RAAF uniform, Marge in civvies. Marge was saying, "I bet they're all saying that's not his wife." But after that it was just waiting around until I was put on a draft.

32:00 Went to Southampton, loaded on board the Orion. A British Orient Line boat as a troop ship. Came home through Panama Canal and into Sydney and back home. And that completed the round trip.

How had you been treating your left shoulder through this whole..?

I didn't tell them about it because I'd,

32:30 the Germans they'd ask, "Are you ill or anything like that?" and I'd seen samples of some of their surgery and that sort of thing. Arms and things still crooked and a bit short and things like this. And I thought, "Oh I'm getting by." It was all right as if I didn't misuse it. I mean I couldn't get it up here, down low it was all right. And as long as I didn't jolt it or jar it, it was O.K. so I put up with it really.

33:00 But I knew what to do to look after it, as long as it didn't cause me pain. Normally like just sitting here, I couldn't feel anything. But I reported it to them when I got back, back to the medical officers who examined us and that went on my record. But I'd injured myself in bailing out, which was a good thing for later on because it got me a Disability Pension. And, oh I had another train of

33:30 thought but I've forgotten it.

In England with your shoulder?

In England. Yeah. No, well that's what I wanted to tell you: that I reported it. But no, other than that I just looked after it. And there was nothing that they could do apparently because when I had a further examination here, when I got home, they said, "Well nothing you can do about it. you've just got to put up with it." But it came good, not 100

34:00 per cent by no means but in as far as I could play cricket. I could play football or Rugby. I played a bit but I was too skinny to take it seriously. I could chop wood down at Carina, for the stove. Use a cross cut saw, ride the horse O.K. and that sort of thing. I could do most normal things except the lifting and getting it up here. And it's still like that.

And do you

34:30 **remember VE [Victory in Europe] Day?**

Yes. Distinctly. On VE Day I was sitting on my bum on this German airfield waiting to be lifted out. So I missed the VE Day celebration. I vaguely knew they were going on. Knew that the war was over and finished with and that celebrated VE Day. And to add salt to that wound, on VP

35:00 Day [Victory in the Pacific] I was in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean coming home. So we couldn't celebrate that one either on a troop ship. So I missed both of those functions.

And how was Margery about the idea of coming to Australia?

Oh, she was all right with that. She was quite prepared to come out. As I mentioned to Naomi [interviewer] before, she mentioned this, I'd been honest with her and explained as much as I could of what was there, what she'd walk into

35:30 and so on and so on. So she didn't get any horrible surprises because I'd tried to brief her as much as possible. But no, she was O.K. Like early times she had a bit of homesickness but not great enough to lead to depression or anything like that. She'd have a burst of it and get over it sort of thing. But she's been quite good with it. She's been back home to visit about 7 times. And likewise, lots of

36:00 her family have been out here. Her two sisters and one brother, they've been out here to visit her on occasions. And some of the family: Sibyl's daughter, she's been out here a few times. Well my daughter Gail, she went to England when she turned 21 and stayed there for 18 months. Stayed with the family and got a job in Gloucester and so on. So we've had enough interaction but nowadays, with telephones

36:30 particularly, the cost of them you know, it's no problem to. She does it, she has a turn this week and Sibyl rings over the next sort of thing. The distance doesn't amount to much any more.

Tell us about arriving back on Australian soil.

Here again that was pretty straightforward stuff really. We arrived in

37:00 daylight, which was good because we could see the boat heading straight for the coast. But we couldn't see any opening in the coast at first and then we saw the Heads. And we came into Woolloomooloo. Oh, excitement yeah, to be back in Aussie. Loaded into buses and taken out to Bradfield Park again. I think we were there for a day or so before we got on the

37:30 train to come up here. But not over-excited. We weren't running around whooping with joy or anything like that. We'd sort of grown to accept this sort of thing. We're back, we're home so what's next? Sort of thing. Eventually we were put on a troop train to come home. Being ex-POW the troop train was a good one. Not like the one we went down on. It was a carriage that had been stripped and bunks

38:00 put up and down each side of it so we had a good ride back from Sydney. You could go and spread yourself on a bunk. And we unloaded out at Clapham Junction Railway Station [since 1887 suburb and station known as Banyo]. We were met by a convoy of civilian cars. This was what they were doing apparently. And they drove us through Queen Street. Well, the people lining Creek Street, Queen Street rather. We were heading for Sandgate; that was the reception depot then, down at Sandgate.

38:30 And through Queen Street they must have shut shops and things because there out there waving and yelling and all that sort of thing. And I saw one of my brothers and one of my sisters. They were there. And we also saw the girlfriend of a mate of mine. I'd actually worked with him but he went overseas as well but he wasn't back there then. He didn't get shot down or anything. So we grabbed her and pushed her into the car and I talked

39:00 to her up the rest of Queen Street before we pushed her out again. And then we went down to Sandgate for the well, not actually discharged, sent on leave from there. And we had to go back, I forget how long a leave I had, back afterwards to get formally discharged. That was up to Redbank. This was just signing forms going here, there and every where. Giving back some of your gear and kept what they let you keep sort of thing.

Tape 9

00:37 **So we were talking about coming home and what happened after you got to Sandgate?**

Well the family were there to meet me. One of my other brothers there had a car. We were well, not discharged but went on leave. I think we were given pay. And I just went home

01:00 with them. And I had to go back, I forget how long, probably a couple of weeks to get formally discharged up at Redbank.

What had your parents been told when you had been shot down?

Well they knew that I was posted missing. It's one of the magazines there, a flight magazine where I'm in a list for people that are missing. They didn't even say presumed dead. That was

01:30 often used if somebody knew what happened to you sort of thing. But no, mine was just 'missing', 'missing in action' that was all. And they had to sweat it out, which was more traumatic for them, I think, than for me. I knew I was all right.

Did you talk to them about how that had felt for them?

02:00 I don't know what I talked to the family about. I haven't given this a lot of thought. They must have asked questions and I must have told them things but I don't think we dwelt on much really. I can't remember anything no, not specifically talked about. Here again; oh well, you're home.

02:30 Let's get on with it.

Did you want to tell them about your experiences?

At the time I never thought much about that. But: O.K. I should tell them what's happened to me. They would have got bits in dribs and drabs, that sort of thing. But no I never had any feeling of, I'm going to sit you guys down and tell you what happened to me. I never had that feeling at all.

What about a general interest from your father or your brothers?

03:00 Oh yeah, they were interested but they couldn't understand a lot really, of course. But here again it's something that I don't remember so it couldn't have been very intense.

And what did you tell them about Margery?

Of course they knew about her because I'd told them all about it in letters. And I'd been writing to them and telling them all about it

03:30 ever since I'd met her so they knew I intended to marry. And that was O.K. And that was about all. Just told them what I knew of her, I was going to marry her and they'd find out more about her when we got her out here.

Tell me about the scheme that Margery came over?

Oh, it was I think

04:00 a Government sponsored thing because they didn't pay anything. but they had to travel, some didn't but Margery's lot was one of the early ships, they had to travel virtually as troops. In those conditions really. And there were 600 and something on board. She came in the Athlone Castle. But no, it wasn't a pleasure trip for them. Here again, same as with

04:30 me, there wasn't much to do on the ship. She made friends on it. But I think she was glad to step ashore actually. She disembarked at Melbourne. Melbourne to Sydney by train. Sydney to Brisbane by train. We met her at the old South Brisbane Interstate Station. In my brother's car again. Got her in the car and drove

05:00 out to Creek Road. So we lived there for about a year, while we were getting this built and so on.

And what was it like to see her?

Oh it was great. Sure, after that time. It wasn't that long but oh no, that was good. We had a lot of catching up to do. And we did. I'm not going to go into details for you.

05:30 **That's O.K. Bill.**

No, we had a room in the house at Creek Road and I'd already got in a bedroom suite, which was all we needed because we used the other furniture there. And we were lucky; she got on very well with my mother. Two women using the same kitchen, there was no worry there. But my mother is very placid anyway. They got on all right. We lived there

06:00 until August of 1947.

What was it like settling back into civilian life?

No trouble at all. Not like today. No counselling or anything. We just got discharged as I did. I got two weeks off and went back to work. Picked up the threads and never had any bad thoughts. I had my nightmares mind you, for about two years.

06:30 I had them yeah. Some of them were pretty vivid. I remember one of them was I was strafed by a Lancaster aeroplane, running for my life. But other than that, oh I'd wake up at night. She'd wake up, digging me in the ribs you know. I'd be singing out and so on. But that passed in time.

Would you talk about the nightmares to Margery?

Oh yeah, she knew what was going on. That

07:00 it was happening again. But I wouldn't tell her in detail what was happening. She didn't want to know that. She just knew. But no, I actually took two weeks before I went back to work. I went out with my mate Kelly Brett, out to Dagworth Station with him and had two weeks out there, in the bush you know. And then came back home from there and went down and saw them at the office and said, "Yeah, O.K."

07:30 And I went straight back into work.

Jus another question about nightmares. What do you think had caused them?

Oh, well I'd been through some experiences hadn't I? I mean it wasn't all fun and games, what with the bombing raid, the shooting down, the POW camp. It was, even though it didn't show or you couldn't say it was haunting me. It obviously was.

08:00 **Tell me more about the dream with the..?**

That's about the only one I remember vividly. I'm running for my life with a Lancaster chasing me at ground level trying to strafe me. Which is something they didn't do I know, that's why it was a stupid dream. No I can't remember what others were particularly. I know she used to dig me in the ribs and I'd wake up. Calm me down and back to sleep again. They weren't every night.

08:30 But they did last.

Did it worry you that you were having..?

No. Oh, no, no. I didn't do anything to try and overcome them or anything like that. You know the next morning, that was a new day sort of thing. Over and done with, if it happens again, well so be it. We'll cope with that when it does.

Did you think about your wartime often?

09:00 Not really. No, not really. No, I don't say I thought about it often. If anybody was there or family, as I've already said to Kieran, I didn't talk about it a lot but if somebody mentioned something, well you talked about it then. But no,

09:30 I didn't dwell on it or talk about it at all. I think that was because, how can I put it? I probably never felt the impact of it properly or something like that. But it wasn't a thing I walked about thinking "Oh, God, that was awful that day or anything like that." Never had any thoughts like that.

With the amount of research that you've done later in life.

10:00 **Did this start to, I guess, bring it home a bit more?**

It brought it home a bit more but not dramatically or anything like that. It just brought it home and you know, I've accepted it and done what I had to do with it. But, no, it hasn't caused me trauma or drama or anything like that. No. Oh, I mean, I was sort of pleased in a way to be able to get all this sort of stuff,

10:30 actually. So that I can, well, put it in a book so that my family and friends know. And so on like that. We must have been made of sterner stuff I think. More or less just went back to work and got on with life really.

In later years, was there ever any sorts of sounds or smells that would bring back any memories?

No.

11:00 The only time that that's happened was on a couple of trips back to England. One of them was the 50th Anniversary of the first flight of Pathfinder Force. And the RAF over there did the things for it. one of the things was that at the RAF station called Watton, that was our headquarters. We were

11:30 there. Had lunch and everything and sat us all out of the tarmac. And they brought in the Memorial Flight, the Memorial Lancaster flight. Oh. Now that was just great you know. We used to reckon there's no aircraft engine noise like four Rolls-Royce Merlins, you know. See this thing doing its stuff up and down there. We thought that was great. And then they also had the Spitfire and the Hurricane and that completed the flight but oh, yeah, they're O.K. but what about the big one?

12:00 But that stirs a memory and a feeling. An emotion if you like. And it still does, if I see them on the telly and things like that, yes. We still brag about it. These swish planes that go like this and make a thundering row. I said, "That's not a decent.." We tell the boys at Amberley this, "You ought to listen to 4 Rolls Royce Merlins. That's a real aircraft engine noise." Yeah. But no, other than that

12:30 I've never had anything I don't think, that's been enough to really stir an emotion up. Nope, I can't think of anything like that. If I had, it's in the book. But I don't think it is.

Tell me a little bit about some of the amazing research that you've done when you managed to

discover..?

Well, that

13:00 started, the starting point of that was answering these queries from other writers, researchers over there. If you were involved in x, y, z part of World War II we'd like to hear from you. Well there's the two there but there's a couple more that I applied to. But mainly, the story that I've given them is not the whole thing but the story of what actually happened the night I got shot down. And it's sort of gone from that.

13:30 The one with 'Nacht Jang' [Nacht Jagd – night fighter] on it, that's the German side of it and it had an article on the night fighters. And comes to the night I was shot down, this Hoffman Breves he took off and does a little bap-bap-bap. Shot down so many planes. One of them could possibly be a Lancaster. Well it had to be. It was the only Lancaster to be shot down on the raid.

14:00 He was the only German been credited with a Lancaster. And from that I started asking questions. I'd a contact in England too, someone who was very keen on things and he's got direct contacts in Germany. Well I went through the bloke in England. He went to his friend in Germany, who's since died really. But I'm very obliged to him for the stuff he sent me. And he could eventually dig up the names of this crew. And he found

14:30 out that 2 of them were still alive. The pilot died post war but two of them had died but one of them has died since. There's still only one in Salzburg that I'm in contact with, alive. He gathered this information, the fellow in Germany, and he also was able to gather the information, the

15:00 copies of the records of Bomber Command as well as the Nacht Jang. And the various reports from the night fighter people. The various bits and pieces, letters and things that are in the book. Hard to read them because they're all in German. But what he did then, an envelope containing these things just arrived in the letterbox one day. There was no covering letter or anything. Just a name and an address sticker.

15:30 From an Ursula Guttman, from Adelaide. And I've since found out that she's a German lady. Migrated out here, married and had been here many years. But on a trip back home she's talking to this fellow, this German researcher and he says, "Oh, take this envelope back with you." And he must have thought that she lived next door sort of thing. So

16:00 she brought it home. I found out more detail on that afterwards. But she sent this up to me and that started the whole thing rolling. With those records and names of that night I've been able to compile everything else that I've got. You know in the end it all fell into place real well. And the fact that there was only the one Lancaster shot down, out of 5, puts it in no doubt that it was this crew.

16:30 **What did it feel like to be able to have some kind of communication with the crew that..?**

Oh, I felt good about that. I was elated really, to be able to get in touch with them. There were others who had done this and made contact and you know, swapped notes and things like that. This is what I did at first. I explained who I was in my first letter and what happened on that night, all about it.

17:00 And he acknowledged that and says, "Well, yeah it does look like we're the ones that" he said "hit you down." He didn't say "shot you down". So that started it off. I then got back to him and asked lots of questions about the aeroplane; colour of it, armament. I knew it was a 'Schrage Musik' this twin cannon. The Germans call it Schrage Musik, which is German slang for 'Jazz Music'. But I know this, there's nothing musical about it when it hits you.

17:30 Far from it. But, oh, that's put me off. What was I on?

The questions that you asked him?

Oh, yeah that's right, yeah. And got all this so that I could build up the exact picture of the aircraft that shot us down. You know, other than that we just communicated on normal things. Normal post-corps things: I'm Bill, he's Walter. And we're good mates. He says, "Oh, if you ever come to

18:00 Germany I can show you around and so on." But the money tree up the back prevents me from doing that. I'm too old now anyway. But we swapped family photographs and all that sort of thing. He's got quite an extensive family. And, no, it is, it's turned out, I suppose I'd have to call it a sort of a friendship or a pen-ship, if you like. Pen pal that I was very pleased to get.

18:30 Because 55 years ago we were trying to shoot each other down, kill each other but now we can talk to each other as normal people. This is good I think. But I was pleased to get all that, to be able to compile that second one with all that detail in it. once I had all the papers I wanted to get them in order and filed and

19:00 into a book so they're all there and recorded sort of thing. No, no, I felt good about that. If I could have done this earlier in my life I would have made the effort to go to Germany to see him but unfortunately it came too late because I'm getting old. Margery's a bit disabled, she's not good on her feet any more. She's had her hips done sort of thing. And we've let our

19:30 passport run out anyway. I don't want to go through that again so I'm satisfied with what we are now really.

When you look back over the time that you spent during the war, what would you say the main lessons that it taught you are?

I don't know about lessons. I suppose in a way, it

20:00 taught me a lot about self-discipline. And service discipline as well. But self-discipline too. You had to self-disciplined to help yourself survive. Very definitely taught me that war is hell. And it's a circumstance that nobody should ever have to be involved in. but having said that, since World War II we've had smaller wars

20:30 all over the globe since then and they're still going on. I don't know what else it taught me. Lessons? No, I don't know that I had a lesson from it. Love thy neighbour, if you can.

What do you mean by that?

Like I say, Walter and myself, wanting to kill each other and now we're friends.

21:00 So if that had've been possible, if we hadn't met through a war. It would be a different thing if I'd have taken a trip to Germany and met him like that. Different circumstances I know. But I don't know if I learnt any lessons from it. Other than all the discipline part of it. That's helped me I think in life because

21:30 I expect my superiors, my seniors, I realise that they're what they are, this is in my work for instance, they're there because of what they are and I'm here because of what I am. So if they tell me to do something or whatever, you just do it.

And you progressed fairly highly in your work. Do you think that your

22:00 **experience in the armed forces gave you skills to…?**

No. No skills. Not really.

I mean, well you talked about discipline, but any sorts of more character building skills?

Oh, I think it would have given me that because having been through it and survived the war, I think you feel more

22:30 confident in yourself. And prepared to have your say, as long as it's nicely done. But, oh, I don't know if it taught me much else. It taught me all the wrong things really.

Like?

Oh, like how to fire guns and shoot people and drop bombs on people and all that sort of thing.

23:00 **When you went back to work, were there any sorts of things that got on your nerves about the way people worked?**

No. Not really, because of the simple reason I was a married man. Had a wife to support and wanted to go on with that. I had a house, a family and that sort of thing. I had a job. I knew that

23:30 if I did all right at that job it was pretty secure. Well, in those days jobs were more secure than they are now really. And that's what I aimed to do. Like I say, do the right thing by people above me and work to my capacity, not just fill in the day and hope that that would advance me. Because it wasn't very long anyway,

24:00 before I was back at work. In those days we in the old [(UNCLEAR)] clerks' awards sort of thing. In those days once you reached a certain amount above the award wage you didn't have to be in the Union. Well, I suppose because of the way I worked, I very soon was on over the award wages. And just between you and me, I don't know what you're feelings are but on mine I couldn't get out of the Union quick enough. Because they could get me an award

24:30 wage but that was all. And the boss was the one that filled my pay envelope, not the Union. And I use this to people, it's a tongue in cheek thing, if my boss had ever said to me, "Bill you stand on your head in that corner and do your work today." I'd have done it. And that's and exaggeration but just trying to make a point. Well there's so many people that if that had happened to them only milder, they would

25:00 immediately want to fight with the boss. Argue with him and so on. I didn't want to do any of that. And people might have looked on this as crawling to the boss and that sort of thing but I came back to the point: He was filling the pay envelope, I pleased him, more chance of getting more money. That's how it worked through my working life really.

Having come from a situation where life and death

25:30 **were so right in front of you, did things that might have bothered you in everyday life seem more petty?**

I think it conditioned you to be able to cope with things a bit better.

26:00 That's a hard one again. Like I say I just got on with doing things. I never had much in the way of dramatic or traumatic things happening or worrying me.

When you look back at the wartime, what would you say your best memory is?

26:30 Well the best memory wouldn't be anything really relating to direct service because that was all well, pretty dramatic really, even though I didn't consider it drama. But it was all not nice stuff that we were doing and not nice stuff that was happening to me. So I think the only real good thing

27:00 or the happiest thing that came out of the war for me was meeting Margery. Everything else was just pretty rotten stuff really. I see something over there: do you want to hear the story of the policeman's helmet?

Yes, very much.

That's a war story. We had a night off one night. A few of us piled into the skipper's car and we went to a local

27:30 Village, to a dance hall and had our drinks as well. We're on the way home, in his car, and we stopped at a railway level crossing, in the village, a little village, you know the gates were shut for the train to come through. And while we were waiting the local bobby, and they did this; they like to know who was on their patch as they'd say, especially in wartime you know, he stuck his head in at the window. And saw our uniforms and so, "Oh, evening gents." You

28:00 know, "How are you" and so on. And I'd had enough drink to make me cheeky. And I said, "Hey, how about I swap you hats?" I was going to swap him my forage cap one, not the other cap. And he said, "NO, look sir, I'm sorry. I can't do that." But he says, "If you are fortunate enough to be off next Saturday night and come to our local dance, I'll see what I can do." So we were off. We went back and during the night this fella

28:30 in civvies comes up to me. Taps me shoulder and says, "I've put that in the car." And it's a genuine English Bobby's helmet from the Isle of Ely constabulary. So it's a treasured souvenir really. A very unique one. I was amazed, hmm. He might have thought I was a bit cheeky but that's all right yeah. When I got it I couldn't get the damn thing to

29:00 Gloucester quick enough because I didn't want it on the station if I went missing, which I did. Even then I lost a couple of things. I turned 21 over there and the crew, we had our birthday session at the pub. They also gave me a birthday present of a half-pint bottle of beer and I still had a half a cake that my Mum had sent over to me.

29:30 They used to send over fruitcakes. Make the fruitcake, seal it in a cake tin with white calico sewn over it, you name and so on, on that. Well, anyway there was half of that and a bottle of beer in my kitbag when I was shot down, you know and they come and recover it. I keep thinking about that; I bet the guys that collected my gear didn't hand in the fruitcake or the beer. No, I'd have done the same thing. But that's

30:00 another rotten thing we used to do. Upwood, the station I was on was a permanent station in wartime. We were living in what was the married quarters actually. Or billeted in them not living as you would in them. And we drew a ration of coal for the coal fire. But when a crew went missing there was a mad scramble to go and pinch their coal ration. Yeah, you had to be

30:30 first in to get the extra coal. Well that wasn't nasty. They couldn't use it any more anyway.

What would be one of the worst memories that you'd take away?

Well I think the worst memory would have to be the shooting down. Like, the losing of

31:00 the 3 crew. Even though, like I say what was actually happening then, the terror was taken out by this lack of oxygen bit. But I would say that would be, you know when you thought about it later on you didn't feel too good about that. So I would say that was the worst thought or the worst thing that happened to me. Or that I was involved in during my wartime service.

31:30 **When you march on Anzac Day do you think about those crewmen?**

Yes. I do. Every time I hear a bugle playing 'The Last Post' I think I deliberately have a thought for them. But I do, yes. And at other rimes too. When we go to Amberley each year we have a sort of Remembrance Service

32:00 there. There's an area at Amberley outside the main gate, there's the guard aeroplane as they call it: the Gloucester or the Meteor, one of the two. And built around it there's a remembrance wall where anybody that served at Amberley and died they can have their ashes interred there. But there are also some stones with plaques on them. We've got ours there. And the

32:30 padres, they run the service and we lay a wreath. It's a wreath that I make because we're pretty poor.

But I make my wreath, it's a symbolic wreath, not just a bunch of flowers that don't mean anything. Mine's symbolic: the ring part is of green mainly fir tree branches, green branches that I nick from the neighbour's tree. He says I can have them.

33:00 That's green. And then I got synthetic, red flowers around it. That's symbolic of the flares we used to drop. The colours of the flares we used to drop were reds and greens. So when I tell anybody about that I tell them what it is: it's a symbolic wreath.

What sort of thoughts do you have about them?

Oh, I don't have any more thoughts

33:30 really. I just sort of say another good bye to them all that's all. Say it all to myself. But I do remember them at those occasions. Which I think is fitting. In part of those albums too I've got, they're buried in the cemetery at

34:00 oh, I forget the name of the place. It's just in Germany. Inside the German boarder near Holland. It's a British Army cemetery. You know a lot have been re-interred there and so on and so on. With that I've got a photo of the separate headstones and more or less, you can't call it a certificate,

34:30 a record of their death and so on like that. That's another thing, many times after the war my navigator's father used to keep in touch with me. He was a draughtsman with British Rail because this was

35:00 Tubby's, Tubby that died, his father. And he used to write. Oh, he'd write beautiful letters. You'd almost think you were there beside him, you know? I've kept a lot of them really. But he wrote me once: he'd paid a visit to the cemetery and he's written me about 4 or 5 pages of (being a draughtsman he wrote with a very fine pen and very small) detail, day by day of his trip

35:30 to the cemetery. How he was treated there and so on. Looked after, what have you. And that meant a bit too, you know. I'm not going to go over and see it. At least I've had a detailed description of it all from Mr Sinfield, who was, he's passed on actually. I've also got there

36:00 photographs of the German's burial service for shot down RAF crew. I knew this happened. That they'd give them full military honours, firing party. And I think it goes back to Field-Marshal Hermann Göring because he flew in World War I. And in that it was an honourable air-war really. I thinks that's

36:30 rubbed off from him: honour these guys even though they're your enemy. And I've got 3 separate photographs there. There's about 20 coffins so there must have been a few aircraft shot down in the one area. And you see them digging the grave. And the Luftwaffe padre, whatever they called him, he's placing the wreath. And then the firing party firing that.

37:00 Walter sent these out to me. And I thought, oh well that's worth having because what happened to 3 of my crew, they didn't get that sort of burial, I don't know. They were buried in different places at first and then exhumed and taken to the cemetery.

Do you have any final words that you'd like to add or anything that you think we've missed?

37:30 I don't think so. We've covered it all really. Oh, no. I don't know what I can say sort of wrapping it up. I wasn't pleased to have to go. I went in the end because I had to. I survived it. So, end of story. Oh

38:00 well, other than that I got on with life. My house here, family. I've told you about the children and that. They're all good mates together. The first great grandchild, even that. No, life's pretty good at the moment despite having to participate in a war. That was the 'un-good' part of it all.

38:30 No, I can't add anything more that would be worthwhile.

INTERVIEW ENDS